

## CONTRIBUTOR BIO

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## **AN ASSESSMENT OF ISRAEL'S MILITARY CAPABILITY**

*Joi Sullivan*

Oil and Islam. When juxtaposed, these words scream the Middle East, more than any other region in the world. Because these aspects of Middle Eastern culture and politics are entrenched into modern day life and are consistently interacting, they continuously and relatively overtly play a part in the stability of the region. In the northwest side of the region that makes up the Middle East, one can find the crux of religious clashes. Amidst the primarily Islamic countries in that area, lies one outlier, Israel. The country of Israel, with its Jewish heritage and narrow landscape, wedged between Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt and the Mediterranean Sea, seems to be a David in the midst of a collective Goliath. During decades of violence with nearby countries, the small country of Israel has proven to be capable militarily to not only force ceasefires, but also dominate in terms of military prowess in a region marked by economic prosperity allowed by oil monopolies in Islamic countries. Events such as the War of 1948 and the Six Day War in 1967 have shown Israel, when completely outnumbered and seemingly headed into total decimation, managing to not only scrape by, but thrive and succeed in their military engagements.

In a time where military technology is developing at supersonic rate and the Middle East is ravaged by conflict, Israel continues to display superior

military aptitude. This coupled with continuous technological developments demands a further assessment of Israel's military capability as it relates to the region around them. The remaining discussion will posit that while using comprehensive definitions of power, due to technological developments, manpower, economic strength and external support, Israel's current military capability is exceptional and has a consequential impact on the world at large.

### **Military Capability**

The conceptualization of military capability is extensive at the least. It mandates a thorough definition of power and an analysis of relative power in order to be an all encompassing concept. The theoretical paradigm of realism defines states' main interests as power, and further divides power into two categories: hard power and soft power. Hard power is that which is tangible, primarily military artillery and number of soldiers. Conversely, soft power is epitomized in monetary value and influence in various realms.<sup>1</sup> One invaluable resource concerning indicators of power is the Correlates of War project (COW) which was created in 1963, to provide an "accumulation of scientific knowledge" concerning war through the conceptualization of a "state" and a "war".<sup>2</sup>

Power is often defined as "control over resources, control over actors, and control over events and outcomes."<sup>3</sup> In this project specifically, indicators of military power primarily included factors such as "material resources and industrial capacity" but wrongfully excluded things such as potential to mobilize people and "geo-strategic bargaining leverage".<sup>4</sup> While COW includes some factors that are non-conventional, military power as defined solely by resource numbers and capacity is misleading. It fails to address key aspects of military prowess. A country can have millions of soldiers but have less advanced technology, thereby putting them at a lower ranking in terms of world military power. One of the fundamental indicators of military capability is latent power, the ability to turn assets of the population into military power particularly

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph S. Wang Jisi Nye Jr., "Hard Decisions on Soft Power," *Harvard International Review* 31, no. 2 (Summer 2009): 18–22.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel S. Geller and J. David Singer, *Nations at War: A Scientific Study of International Conflict* (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey Hart, "Three Approaches to the Measurement of Power in International Relations," *International Organization* 30, no. 02 (1976): 289–305, doi:10.1017/S0020818300018282.

<sup>4</sup> Nye Jr., "Hard Decisions on Soft Power."

because military power is impossible to possess without wealth.<sup>5</sup> Also, the percent of GDP per capita spent on the military is indicative of how high of a priority military development is.<sup>6</sup> It is rather logical and clear that those with military development as a high priority generally have the most military power. Additionally, while COW chooses to ignore military power in terms of ability to mobilize, with Israel in particular, it is necessary to address the complexity of its compulsory draft and how the ability to mobilize thousands of people affects their capability to succeed in military engagements.

Measuring military power must be executed through a means of comparison. The relative gains of one country compared to another country can reveal a great deal about the increase, decrease or stagnation of any one country's military capability.<sup>7</sup> Also, the ability for a state to carry out its military intentions even with resistance contributes to the total military capability of a country.<sup>8</sup> These factors, though seemingly unconventional and rather abstract, do play a rather large role in not only the level of military capability a state has, but also the way in which the world perceives the threat of a specific state. The assessment of the military capability of a state as compared to its historical capabilities and other states indicates reasoning behind its interactions and justifications for action in the international realm. With these acknowledgements about the complexity of military power, this paper will assess the military capability of Israel and determine its level of competitiveness and strength as compared to the past and the present.

### **Manpower**

When Israel declared its independence in 1948, it enacted compulsory military service for all men and women that reach the age of eighteen. Voluntary service is allowed at the age of seventeen.<sup>9</sup> This encompasses all children of Israelis including those who were born in Israel and left the country when they were

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<sup>5</sup> "Microsoft Word - Mearsheimer2001.doc - Mearsheimer2001.pdf," accessed March 21, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse, and Beth A. Simmons, *Handbook of International Relations* (SAGE, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Peter Breiner, Max Weber & Democratic Politics (Cornell University Press, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> "Military Service," Israel Government Portal, accessed March 21, 2014, <http://www.gov.il/FirstGov/TopNavEng/EngSituations/ESNewImmigrantsGuide/ESNIMilitaryService/>.

young. Currently, because of this compulsory draft, 3.8 million Israeli men and women are available for military service, although only about 2.9 million men and women are actually fit for service.<sup>10</sup> There used to be major exceptions to the compulsory draft law, one which related to a particular religious group within Israel. The Haredim, or the ultra-Orthodox Jews of Israel, were provided an exception to the rule if they were studying in seminary full time. However, in March of 2014, the Israeli government removed that exception and mandated the draft of a certain quota of this group of people, only allowing 1800 of the group to escape the draft. The Haredim make up 10% of Israel's 7.8 million people, making them 780,000 strong.<sup>11</sup> If 1800 are given exceptions to this new draft law that leaves 778,200 to be available for mobilization. While that number is rather small in comparison to the 3.8 million available for military service, it still contributes a large degree to the number of people who are able to be mobilized with one political act.

Israel's manpower may be one of the most underestimated factors of its military power. The ability to mobilize 2.9 million people, roughly 40% of Israel's population, who are actually fit for service, is comparable to the largest country in the world. China has 45.6% of its population, which is roughly 1 billion people, ready and fit for service. The United States has 37.6% of its over 300 million people fit for service.<sup>12</sup> The largest country in the world and arguably the strongest military power in the world have relatively equal sizes in 'reserves' in terms of population percentages with the 99th largest country in the world.<sup>13</sup> While when facing other states in battle, percentage of population ready for service bears little weight in the outcome-because smaller populations will still produce smaller cohorts of soldiers- the comparable percentages paint a picture of Israel's priorities and their development of society's preparedness for military engagement. To have 40% of an entire state's populace ready to mobilize indicates a society where preparation for military engagements is a way of life and not unusual to the common people. It is this kind of society that is ready for battle before it arrives at their doorstep.

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<sup>10</sup> "CIA - The World Factbook," accessed May 6, 2012, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html>.

<sup>11</sup> "Israel Passes Ultra-Orthodox Draft Law," March 12, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/03/israel-passes-ultra-orthodox-draft-law-2014312101340345116.html>.

<sup>12</sup> "CIA - The World Factbook."

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

## **Technological Developments**

In a world where technology has become its own language, states with the greatest technological advances tend to be perceived as those with the greatest power. In fact, technology has become one conceptual definition of power in its comprehensive self. The development of cutting edge technology, particularly as it relates to military capabilities, gives any state an advantage when faced with a less developed state. In Israel's case, they have increasingly become a military-industrial state, where the state's marketplace is largely characterized by companies who primarily focus on the arena of military related technological advancement.

In 2000, Israel presented its first anti-missile machinery, an interceptor and destroyer known as the Arrow System. Created through a partnership between Boeing and Israel Aerospace Industries, the system and its newer versions, is designed to destroy incoming exo-atmospheric kill vehicles. It has fire-control radar, a launch control system and a battle management center.<sup>14</sup> Following the production of the Arrow System, the state owned company Rafael Advanced Defense systems designed the Iron Dome, which became operational in 2011. This new anti-missile defense system was built to destroy short-range rockets and artillery shells from four to seventy kilometers away. The system also was recognized as an effective measure against aircraft at certain altitudes.<sup>15</sup> Lastly, the development of the David's Sling Weapons system in 2010, a system which is "designed as an additional layer of defense against ballistic missiles, to add interception opportunities to the joint U.S.-Israel Arrow Weapon System and to improve Israel's defense capabilities against missile threats" gives Israel its third anti-missile system in fourteen years.<sup>16</sup> All three systems are effective at intercepting and destroying their intended targets.

However, military technology is not solely limited to anti-missile systems. Because of the innovation and new direction of military attacks in the 21st century, states have begun to find it necessary to prioritize technology pertaining to cyber-security. Israel has within the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) its own

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<sup>14</sup> "Boeing: Arrow Interceptor," accessed March 22, 2014, <http://www.boeing.com/boeing/defense-space/space/arrow/>.

<sup>15</sup> "Iron Dome Missile Defense System | Jewish Virtual Library," accessed March 22, 2014, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Peace/IronDome.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Jeremiah Cushman, "Missile Interceptor Goes Beyond Iron Dome," *Military Periscope Special Reports*, February 21, 2013, 1–1.

computer training program, Mamram, that thousands of cadets each year attend in order to become part of the cyber-security team Matzov, or other intelligence units.<sup>17</sup> These young cadets graduate into a country that “attracts more venture capital investment per person than anywhere else in the world and exports \$25 billion a year in high-tech goods and services”.<sup>18</sup> This is one explanation for why Google, Microsoft, IBM and Intel all have research centers in Israel. Tracing technological development in the cyber-security aspect is rather challenging due to the secrecy of the field; however, the presence of those particular companies and the numbers of cadets going through Mamram give way to the understanding that Israel has devised a strong cyber-security strategy and system to continue its development in that area.

### **Economic Strength**

In addition to technological development, a state’s economic development will always play a significant role in its military power. Wealth and power are undoubtedly linked through a number of ways. Not only does the research and development of military artillery and technology as well as the sustainment of forces rely on funding, but the overall health of the state’s economy gives way to what aspect of government will take top priority. Israel has the twenty-seventh largest GDP per capita in the world.<sup>19</sup> Israel ranks fourth in the world for highest percentage of GDP spent on military expenditures, falling behind South Sudan, Oman and Saudi Arabia.<sup>20</sup> Israel’s current economic strength can be attributed in part to its industry of military technology that generally sells a great deal of products. The country’s annual export sales for the past eight years of unmanned aerial systems (UAS) have been roughly \$578 million in U.S. dollars. It is expected to “increase by ten percent yearly” through the year 2020.<sup>21</sup> It is primarily the percentage of GDP spent on military expenditures

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<sup>17</sup> Matthew Kalman, “Israel’s Military-Entrepreneurial Complex Owns Big Data,” *Technology Review* 116, no. 5 (October 9, 2013): 91–91.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> “The World’s Richest and Poorest Countries | Global Finance,” accessed March 22, 2014, <http://www.gfmag.com/component/content/article/119-economic-data/12529-the-worlds-richest-and-poorest-countries.html#axzz2wf8O2zES>.

<sup>20</sup> “CIA - The World Factbook.”

<sup>21</sup> “Consultancy Forecasts Israeli UAS Export Growth,” *Defense News*, accessed March 22, 2014, <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20130520/DEFREG04/305200018/Consultancy-Forecasts-Israeli-UAS-Export-Growth>.

that makes clear that the Israeli government's top priority is the strength of its military and its overall power. As discussed earlier, the concern for power and military capability may be in part due to its geography in relation to many Arab Islamic states.

### **External Support**

Between oil politics and religious underpinnings, the region is inflated with external party interests, economic opportunities and spiritual clashes, all of which, through traces of history, have been the basis of the world's characterization of the region. These factors in the Middle East have been the cause for centuries of violence and militarization of the region due to power incentives that external actors and involved states possess. As outside states find the potential for increased power or economic monopolies in another region, it is argued by realists in particular, that they will find any excuse to become involved in the area to take advantage of those opportunities.

For whatever reason they wish to be involved, a number of outside states, particularly the United States, have instilled in their budgets and in their speeches resounding support for the country of Israel. Since 1985, the United States has provided Israel with almost \$3 billion in grants annually, most of which goes towards the Israeli military.<sup>22</sup> Because of the United States role as a hegemon in international politics, this bears significant weight on the military power of Israel. At this point in history, the 99th largest country in the world has the military powerhouse backing it in almost every situation. Depending on how one perceives it, this could be a positive or negative thing for the state of Israel. In terms of its military power, Israel has been able to increase its capabilities through the funding of the United States. It also can proceed into military engagements with some faith in America's support.

Additionally, there is a large deterrent factor in the sense that other states are less likely to engage militarily with Israel due to its hegemon supporter. From a skeptical standpoint, the support of the United States is conducive to complications and tangled alliances that may be tricky as time goes on. History has already shown that alliances with the United States may not always be beneficial due to the tendency for the U.S.'s extreme involvement in that state's

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<sup>22</sup> "U.S. Foreign Aid to Israel - Open CRS," September 16, 2010, <https://openocrs.com/document/RL33222/2010-09-16/>.



affairs. Either way, with the support of the United States, both financially and in its rhetoric, Israel has enough leverage in world politics to be one of the most influential states with the most potential to gain more power and capabilities.

### **Implications**

Through even a rather brief analysis of Israel's military status, it is evident that one of the top priorities of this specific state is its military capability. In contrasting numbers and percentages with other powerhouse states, it is understood that Israel continues to be consistently progressing in the world of military strength. It has not slowed its military growth nor has it become stagnant in any way.

To fully assess Israel's military capability, an extensive statistical analysis would need to be performed. However, for the purposes of this analysis, I posit that the assessment performed was adequate for the purposes of this discussion. Between its ability to mobilize huge amounts of manpower, technological developments through contracts with companies like Raytheon, economic strength due to industry surrounding military technology and external support through the hefty sums given by the United States, Israel has made its mark on the world as a country with military as a high priority with few to no intentions of negating that priority through any means.

Because of this high and increasing military capability, Israel will continue to maintain its status as a major and definitive player in Middle Eastern politics. As referenced earlier, the militarization of a state, for whatever stated cause, tends to evoke similar actions in surrounding states and invested states. As Israel continues this path of military progression, the rest of the region will respond in kind. Although Israel can and does cite its fear of being wiped off the face of the earth, a fear evoked by a quote from Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2005 and claims regarding increased military action from other states, it can also be inferred that its increased militarization are inciting realistic responses from Arab states.<sup>23</sup> Israel must understand that even if their intentions behind increased and continuous military progression are defense related, the perceptions increased militarization create could give way to that Cold War like state down that road, where security in the region heightens to an unprecedented level.

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<sup>23</sup> "Truth Squad: Has Iran Said It Wants to Attack Israel?," CNN, accessed May 5, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2011/11/23/politics/truth-squad-iran-israel/index.html>.

Additionally, in the case of the Middle East, it is only natural that states within the region respond accordingly to the possibility of external actors becoming involved in the area. Specifically regarding special interest politics, the country with the largest oil reserves in the world, Saudi Arabia, also has the seventh largest defense budget in the world and is expected to grow by 7.92% annually, possibly revealing a correlation between military strength and a high priority of resource protection.<sup>24</sup> In response to increased militarization of one state, surrounding states undergo threat perception analysis to devise their own strategy of how to enhance military capability and preparedness as a precaution to possible danger. As militarization continues, the region increasingly moves closer to reaching a Cold War like status, leaving states in a Prisoner's Dilemma concerning how to respond to possible threats without entering into a period of unprecedented heightened security.

Israel's military capability is superior to that of other states. What it chooses to do with that increased military power will define oil politics and religious interactions in the Middle East for the next decade. Those decisions will also have an effect on how the country is perceived by external states, as well as its sources and levels of funding for militaristic endeavors. Military capability, though difficult to measure through quantitative analysis, plays a large role in world politics. In the Middle East, a region so defined by special interest politics and religious underpinnings, military capability continues to be the impetus by which Israel will thrive in the next decade.

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<sup>24</sup> "Saudi Arabian Defence Industry Placed Seventh among the Top 10 Military Spenders," Yahoo Finance UK, accessed March 21, 2014, <http://uk.finance.yahoo.com/news/saudi-arabian-defence-industry-placed-000000421.html>.

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