**CENS Distinguished Visitors Program – Seminar Series**
**BG (Ret) Dani Arditi**

- Israel's Geo-strategic Challenges – 11 August 2009
- The Second Lebanon War 2006 and Operation Cast Lead 2008/9:
   Lessons Learned – 17 August 2009
- The National Security Annual Assessment – 18 August 2009

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**Israel's Geo-strategic Challenges[1]**

**11 August 2009**

**Introduction**
Dani Arditi gave an overview of the possible impact that regional socio-political developments and geo-strategic challenges would have on Israel. The issues range from political transitions to nuclear developments through to domestic problems that Israel has to deal with. Israel shares long borders with Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. This proximity also means that Israel has to take into consideration a gamut of cross-border concerns when planning ahead or making any future projections.

**The Strategic and Regional Environment**
The Middle East was described as a region marked by conflicting religions, ideologies and regimes (e.g. semi-democracies, monarchies and dictatorships). It is also probably the only area, Arditi stated, where oil reserves are found alongside religious sites that are subjects of possible contention.

Most conflicts in the Middle Eastern region, Arditi argued, could be understood in terms of which actors constituted the "radical" and "moderate" axes. According to Arditi, radical Islamists have played a significant role in initiating and promoting hostilities and conflict towards Israel for the last 60 years. Much of the challenges that Israel faces could be traced to countries and organisations under the "radical axis" category.

Arditi provided a typology of the states struggling for hegemonic influence in the Middle Eastern region. Countries in the *Moderate Axis* include: the United States, Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Turkey. The *Radical Axis* constitutes Iran, Syria, Sudan, and areas controlled by Hezbollah and Hamas. The key powers in the region are Iran, Israel, Egypt and Turkey, with the most important element of the

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Middle East – or the main threat – being Iran. According to Arditi, the polarization between the Moderate Axis and Radical Axis is deepening. This is due to (1) the nuclear threat posed by Iran which also seen as the leader of the Radical Axis and (2) the increasing popularity of the concept of resistance.

## Lebanon

The results of the recent general election (Parliamentary Election, June 2009) in Lebanon surprised Israel's intelligence agencies as the moderate camp, i.e. the March 14 Alliance, managed to gain slightly more parliamentary seats and public support over the Hezbollah coalition. However, Arditi maintained that from a security and political perspective, Lebanon is an unstable state. In his opinion, Lebanon comprises two key states and they are the "Hezbollah State" (Southern Lebanon) and the "Nationalist State (Rest of Lebanon)." This division and the outcome of the 2nd Lebanese War will continue to shape military relations both within Lebanon and with Israel.

## Egypt

Arditi mentioned that Israel and Egypt, on the other hand, have several common interests and this includes their campaigns against terrorist threats and relations with Iran. Egypt has so far managed to overcome its internal terrorist threats. However, much would still have to be done to maintain the current level of stability. It was added that the main challenge to the Middle Eastern region and Egypt would be that of political succession. As President Muhammad Mubarak is in his 80s and the Egyptian political landscape is characterised by aggressive opposition groups, power transitions would be a concern and a process that could have deep implications on Middle East state relations.

## Jordan

Jordan houses more than 600,000 refugees from Iraq, forming approximately 10% of its total population. It remains to be seen how the US troop withdrawal from Iraq will impact Jordan. The main threat to the country is that of terrorism – specifically Hamas. Moreover, due to its shared borders and cultural ties with its neighbouring countries, problems arising or flowing from Iraq, Palestine and the West Bank might have some "aftershock" effects and incite emotional reactions from the Palestinian community in Jordan.

## Saudi Arabia

Arditi mentioned that Israel tends to view Saudi Arabia's intention with suspicion. On the one hand, the Kingdom is an important part of the moderate axis and initiated the peace programme. On the other hand, it is also a source of financial and ideological support to terrorist organisations that are linked to Osama Bin Laden

## Iran

Thirty-five years ago, Iran was Israel's main ally in the Middle East. However, Arditi said, things have since changed dramatically. Currently Iran, as a leader of the radical axis, is active in promoting its ideology and gaining ideational support for its activities against Israel. Arditi noted in particular that the most concerning issue to date is Iran's nuclear development programme. He estimated the programme would most likely be completed between 2010 and 2012. At this stage, Iran has managed to achieve progress in its uranium enrichment programmes at its Natanz site and within the overall Shihab-3 intermediate range ballistic missile development scheme. Arditi thus opined that in 1½ years time or more, Iran might become a nuclear superpower especially with international acceptance apparently growing of its move. Should this happen it would create instability in the Middle East and result in what Arditi described as a "point of no return".

There are three key implications of a "Nuclear Iran." Firstly, as a Political-Strategic concern, it might lead to a destabilisation of the moderate regimes in the Middle East. Next, from a Military-Strategic perspective, this might lead to a regional domino effect creating a Middle East nuclear arm race. Finally, there is a possibility that the nuclear programme might become a platform or 'umbrella structure' for the sharing of nuclear development knowledge with Syria, Hezbollah and Hamas.

## Syria

It appears from the recent direct negotiations (approximately 10 months ago) that Syria is willing to accept Israel as a partner. However, Syria is also sending mixed signals with its support for the Hezbollah, Hamas and its strategic ties with Iran. Arditi noted that while Syria's policies are generally conservative it remains unclear if it will pursue a nuclear or missile programme with Iran or North Korea.

## Palestinian Areas

Palestine is an area characterised or divided by differing ideologies and regimes. It comprises parts of the Hamas controlled Gaza strip and the Fatah or the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) governed territories of the West Bank as well as sections of the Gaza strip. The Hamas came into power approximately 2½ years ago and, according to Arditi, their ambition is to take over the PNA and rule over the entirety of Palestine. He also added that the coming 2010 Palestinian general election may or may not bring any changes to the current political landscape. As for the military situation between Israel and Hamas, there have been no major clashes since a ceasefire was reached in January 2009. Hamas is trying to recover from Operation Cast Lead. However, Arditi stressed that it is still too early to assess the results of the ceasefire.

## Hezbollah

Hezbollah is essentially a strong multi-dimensional military force with counter rocket and missile capabilities.  They have control over Southern Lebanon and political influence over the Lebanese government.  Arditi stressed that Israel's deterrence measures limits the extent of Hezbollah operations in Lebanon and hostilities towards Israel. For the last 2½ years, Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah has not appeared or shared Hezbollah's ideology in public. Arditi opined that it is difficult for the Hezbollah to run any public movement with its leader seemingly in hiding.

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## The Second Lebanon War 2006 and Operation Cast Lead 2008/9: Lessons Learned[2]

## 17 August 2009

**The Second Lebanon War**

Dani Arditi began by providing a brief summary of the Second Lebanon War which broke out a few weeks after the conclusion of elections in Israel. He stated that at the time, one of the main aims of Israel was to assist the Lebanese government in regaining control over the entire territory of the country, parts of which are controlled by Hezbollah.

Arditi outlined the main lessons learnt during the conflict, concluding that one of the main realizations arrived at was the fact that for the past 60 years of its existence, Israel did not have an updated national security doctrine. He then proceeded to elaborate on another critical lesson, which was the importance of identifying the nature of the conflict quickly. In such a situation, it was crucial to do this within the first few hours of the conflict itself. This was something the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) was unable to do during the initial 10 days of the conflict, causing the loss of both valuable time as well as casualties. Another vital area which needed improvement was the interaction between those at the political level and the military which was not satisfactory during the conflict. This problem was highlighted in the Winograd Commission Report and was one of its most important recommendations.

**Operation Cast Lead**

Operation Cast Lead was an Israeli led initiative to counter two problems: that of the constant rocket and mortar attacks being fired into Israeli territory and the smuggling of arms by Hamas. Since 2001, approximately 8,000 rockets and mortars have landed in Israel. While these rockets and mortars were inefficient, it nevertheless has had a huge negative psychological impact on the Israeli population. This is exacerbated by the ability of Hamas to rearm itself through smuggling activities carried out primarily using underground tunnels located along the Gaza-Egypt border.

Israel had a number of strategic considerations leading up to Operation Cast Lead. One was to maintain peace negotiations with the Palestinian Authority even while carrying out the operation in Gaza. Other considerations included how to maintain good relations with Egypt and Jordan and containing the conflict so as not to involve Syria.

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Operationally Israel's goals were: (1) to stop the terror attacks against Israel; (2) to stop Hamas from rearming through smuggling activities; (3) to weaken Hamas' political control over Gaza; (4) to leave Israeli forces with some freedom to carry out counter-terrorism activities in the future; and (5) to free the Israeli soldier, Gilad Shilat, captured by Hamas.

The main military effort initiated by the IDF involved both air and ground forces. The IDF launched its aerial attack in the initial phase of the campaign, with the first 3 minutes being the most effective. It was also discovered during the campaign that the use of heavy bombs was the best way to close tunnels being used by smugglers. During the second phase of the operation, which began in early January 2009, ground forces were launched into Gaza. An important aspect in the campaign was humanitarian considerations. From the fifth day of the conflict, a two-hour window was observed where all fighting was stopped to facilitate humanitarian operations. This was implemented unilaterally by Israel at first and later with the coordination of Hamas. Despite this, Arditi admitted that it proved difficult to observe humanitarian considerations during such a conflict and mistakes were made.

Regarding the lessons learnt during the conflict, one of the main lessons was the importance of preparation. Israel spent a year preparing for Operation Cast Lead, both at the military and the political level, spending time analyzing the possible nature of the conflict and the goals of the government. The importance of information warfare was also emphasized, especially the role of civil intelligence agencies. Information and targets identified by these intelligence agencies formed a crucial part of the success of the campaign. In fact, during the 2nd Lebanon war, one of the main intelligence components was Mossad, which played an important role in allocating targets. Arditi also emphasized that, operationally, a short learning cycle should be implemented, with approximately 5 minutes between identifying a target and attacking it from the air.

Arditi then turned his attention to the dilemmas faced by the IDF during the conflict. He states that one of the main dilemmas was coming to a decision on the goal to be achieved through the conflict, which involved the choice between eliminating or weakening Hamas. In the end, it was decided that Hamas would only be weakened as eliminating it would not be possible. However, this decision proved controversial and was criticized by many in Israel. Tactical dilemmas included whether to continue with the successful aerial attack launched during the initial stages of the war or to proceed with naval and ground forces. In the end, the decision taken was that the IDF would not stop at aerial forces only. Another tactical consideration was whether to attack up to the north and center of the Gaza Strip or to concentrate forces on the southern area only. Further considerations had to be taken on whether to pursue a ceasefire or to demand for the release of Gilad Shalit, the IDF soldier taken hostage by Hamas. This proved to be a controversial issue at the political level, as some had argued for the fighting to continue until Shalit was released. There was also a need to consider the possible involvement by Arab countries and international

organizations in the operation. Some of these considerations included: (1) what to do with the crossing point in Gaza, which was primarily controlled by Israel; (2) the impact that the conflict would have on the international arena; and (3) the timing of the operation itself. Finally, it was also necessary to consider questions regarding the Israeli policy concerning Hamas.

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## The National Security Annual Assessment[3]

### 18 August 2009

### Introduction
In his talk Arditi outlined the process and methodology of the Israeli National Security Annual Assessment (NSAA), undertaken in 2008 by the National Security Council (NSC) under his direction. He explained the background of the establishment of the National Security Annual Assessment before briefly exploring its process and methodology. Arditi then shared some of the findings of the Assessment, before closing with looking at some of the challenges faced in carrying out the Assessment.

### The Establishment of the National Security Annual Assessment
After the 2nd Lebanon war in 2006 the Winograd Commission of Inquiry, set up to examine lessons learned, recommended that the national security assessment process needed to be improved in order to have a more professional analysis of national security doctrine at the strategic level. While many of the security agencies conducted national security strategy analyses, these were from the point of the view of the particular agency, and did not present a holistic view to the Prime Minister or Cabinet. Additionally, Arditi noted, the decision-making process for security situations and issues needed to be professionalized. As such, the Israeli Parliament passed the National Security Council Act in 2008. The Act states that the NSC should "prepare and… present to the Ministerial Committee on National Security Affairs, at least once per year, an annual and multi-year evaluation of the Diplomatic-Security situation." The general goal of this process, Arditi stated, was to, "Present the main strategic trends, dilemmas, and alternatives to the [Prime Minister] and the cabinet, in order to improve the decision making process and to prioritize national resources."

### The National Security Annual Assessment Process and Analysis
Arditi then outlined the four main stages in the Assessment process, discussing the challenges and key learning points of each stage. These were: (1) Integrating the products of professional teams; (2) Integrative strategic workshop with the heads of the professional teams and senior representatives of ministries and security agencies; (3) Presentation of the products to Prime Minister and his staff; and (4) Presentation of the products to the Cabinet.

Before conducting this, however, Arditi and the NSC team identified twelve national goals, defined key assumptions, and identified the main factors in achieving these goals. Of the twelve national goals identified, four main topics areas were then analysed. These were: (1) Non-state actors; (2) the Iranian threat; (3) National Resilience; and (4) the Peace Process. The NSC team than identified the main

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factors involved in achieving these goals as: (1) Power and Deterrence; (2) International Pressure; (3) Discussions and Negotiations; (4) National Resilience and Protection/Self-Defence.

**Challenges to the National Security Annual Assessment**
This was the first holistic National Security Annual Assessment ever carried out by the Israeli government. As such, Arditi explained, it was a demanding and complicated process that was a new experience for the political, military, and intelligence branches of the Israeli government. Arditi detailed how the Prime Minister largely kept himself out of the process; this was beneficial to the Assessment as it helped to avoid some of the common problems with strategic analyses carried out at the political level where it is easy to simply follow or back-up the expectations of the Prime Minister. The National Security Council in general and the Assessment in particular, were designed to challenge and give the Prime Minister alternatives views and assessments of the security environment.

Many of the security agencies needed convincing that this Assessment would not harm their agencies standing (as each agency also carried out their own assessments). Arditi here mentioned the importance of good personal relations between the decision-makers in the different agencies to overcome some of these reservations.

One of the biggest unforeseen problems was simply timing. First, Operation Cast Lead occurred during the Assessment process, taking away many of the staff and stopping the process for one month. Operation Cast Lead also changed many of the perspectives of those involved in the process; it was, Arditi said, "a meaningful event". While they re-analysed some of the key assumptions in one-day seminars after Operation Cast Lead, changing some of the findings; Arditi stated that if done again, he would've changed more. The other timing issue was that the Assessment was carried out near the elections. It was finalised and presented to Olmert, the Prime Minister at the time, two days before the election. Unfortunately, it stopped there, and with the change in Prime Minister and government, it was never presented to the Cabinet.

Of the four stages of the process (see above), Arditi stated that the most difficult was the professional integration of the work teams, which for him lay at the heart of the Assessment process. This was due to the involvement of both security and non-security agencies, as well as think tanks; the government agencies had competing demands whilst the security agencies were sceptical about information sharing with think tanks (even if, by and large, the think tanks were staffed with ex-security officers). As the intelligence agencies in Israel are politically very influential, Arditi noted this could have become a larger problem.