

ON ISRAELI GEOPOLITICS: THEORIES AND CASE STUDIES

Tiberiu Condulescu

European Institute for Jewish Studies, Stockholm

Abstract

Situated within the broad field of geopolitics and foreign policy with a special focus on the case of Israel this article examines how geopolitical considerations influence foreign policies. In this respect, existing research defines the relationship between two dimensions of the political: geopolitics and foreign policy in the case of a small-sized, medium-power state: Israel. Even though there are various other factors contributing to foreign policy beyond geopolitics, my present aim is to focus specifically on the relation between these two. The main concern addressed is to what extent geopolitical considerations, termed as geopolitical consciousness, influenced the foreign policy behavior of the state of Israel.

Introduction

Israel, as well as other states, became concerned with geopolitics to a great extent, especially after the territorial changes that occurred in the aftermath of World War II and the decolonization period worldwide. Confronted with several major problems after its foundation in 1948, the state of Israel had to resort to a genuine geopolitical stance within the Middle-East. Among the determinants that framed Israel's unique geopolitical situation and geopolitical consciousness were: first, the fact that the fledgling state was surrounded by a generally hostile Arab world, (Newman 1998, 4), second that it occupied a strategic position in the Suez area (Friedman 2008, 7) and third that it was a Jewish state (Newman 1998, 4). Fourth, beyond geographic considerations it had to adopt a specific stance in respect to demographic issues as well (Bialer 1990, 68, 76), ultimately linked to one of the most salient resource problems of the region which constitutes the fifth determinant: fresh-water and its acquisition, supply and distribution (Newman 1998, 14). These five dimensions were the major constituents of the basis of Israeli geopolitics in the past and today as well, but with variations in scope and importance. Yet, my research at present will draw mainly on one of these: geographic considerations which I considered most relevant for the present research. Thus geopolitical consciousness will be limited for most of its part to this one dimensions of geopolitics interwoven to some extent with the issue of water resources. I chose to give a lesser importance to the demographic factor for a series of reasons: it is first of all organically linked to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to which a lot of research and work has been already allocated in terms of the refugee

problem and population growth within the territories in and around Israel providing small space for any new approaches on the issue. Second, given the historical background of the establishment of the state, more specifically the various waves of immigration, it is somewhat difficult to analyze the exact influence geography had on the population, as classical geopolitics would proceed. As such land was chosen for its unique role and importance in the region.

Not only does Israel represent a unique case for understanding the influence of geopolitics on foreign policy but it also entails a series of other features that motivate its choice as the subject of the current work. First, a relatively low number of works address the issue of Israeli geopolitics explicitly and even if they do so, they either do that from a broader geopolitical perspective or they address mainly the role of the demographic factor both in respect to settlement activities and the refugee problem, or the current crisis in the dynamics of the population. Fresh-water, as the most vital resource in the area, especially in connection to the Jordan River, became prominent because of the desire of each state to control as much of it as possible.

Second, Philippe Moreau Defarges (2003, 125-126) created a theoretical framework unexploited yet in further research, by observing three types of foreign policy options available to Israel, based on the geopolitical considerations at its disposal, within which to scrutinize the effects of geopolitics on foreign policy. The first one is the isolationist approach towards the surrounding world, based on the logics of the fortress. The second one is the expansionist option based on the logics of the Promised Land underlining the tension between Israel's contemporary borders versus its biblical ones. The last option questions the isolationist policy in favor of reconciliation with the Arab world, an option more successfully embraced towards the end of the century. These strategies were not mutually exclusive as one might expect after such a straightforward categorization, though there were periods when one or the other prevailed. Even more so, the same geopolitical consciousness depending on the given circumstances would have the capacity to fuel different processes in the 61 year long history of the state.

The third and last reason justifying the choice of the subject is the fact that ever since its foundation the state of Israel has played a pivotal role in Middle-Eastern politics with the capacity to draw the attention of all major

actors on the international scene to the events that took place around and within its borders, sometimes posing a threat even to world security.

Turning on the ambivalence of Israeli foreign policy, which is the research subject of the present paper, I will scrutinize how strong the relationship between geopolitics and foreign policy was and what it evolved into. From the early days on Israel managed to conduct its foreign policy in a very brilliant but often puzzling way drawing benefits from all major powers interested in the Middle-East, changing its attitude towards the surrounding Arab world in various instances. I will therefore analyze in what ways these changes in attitudes were determined by the geopolitical consciousness of the state, claiming that it played a very significant role in the development of the relations with the surrounding world. Therefore the contribution to the existing literature will be in providing an evaluation of specifically Israeli geopolitics and an analysis of the effects of the land-water connection (mainly territory) on foreign policy for subsequent research.

Apart from Moreau Defarges, I draw upon the writings of scholars such as Frederic Encel, John Agnew, George Friedman, Avi Shlaim, Uri Bialer, Paul Johnson, Alain Dieckhoff, Baruch Kimmerling, William Quandt, Stewart Reiser, Bernard Reich and Michael Oren who have addressed various aspects of Israeli politics, especially topics concerning: Zionism and its policy consequences, the relevance of the major Israeli wars and their geostrategic implications, modern Jewish history and Israeli foreign policy, and different views on the development of Israeli geopolitics and the role of water. I have also conducted interviews with professors Philippe Moreau Defarges and Frederic Encel as well as with the head of the French Institute for Geopolitics Professor Beatrice Giblin.

This article is structured into two sections, each tackling different aspects of the topic at hand. The first section provides an overview of some of the most important geopolitical notions considered here, as well as about Zionism and foreign policy. The second section comprises two case studies: the Six Day War and the Camp David Accords underlining the geopolitical approach to the investigation of these. The method of analysis utilized is process tracing, with the purpose of tracking how specific events and turning points affected the behavior of the state and what role geopolitics played in their development. My conclusions show that the geopolitical consciousness of the state (especially in terms of land and water) was

inherently part and determined both events analyzed, defining parts of them as well as the whole process presented.

Geopolitics, Zionism, and Foreign Policy

Geopolitics is the discipline that developed in the last century in an atmosphere of great power rivalry and colonial imperialism focusing on the analysis of the relation between geography and political power within a political entity. It was meant as a guideline to harnessing geographic knowledge to further the aims of specific nation states having an instrumental purpose as well, today referring mostly to how foreign policy elites and mass publics construct geographic imaginations of the world to inform world politics (Agnew 2002, 14-15) and how they utilize geography for specific aims. Hence, geopolitics concentrates on how space determines politics and how political entities use space to achieve their aims. It is therefore particularly useful to analyze international relations which often have a strongly spatial dimension, especially in the Middle East where territories are contested for various reasons in a relatively small area.

This section aims is to clarify how geopolitics is applicable to Israel, why it is a useful tool to analyze both the developments in the Middle East and the making of Israeli foreign policy and to introduce ideas that can be developed in future research. Subsequently my argument is that geopolitics is one of the most appropriate tools to analyze the events in the region and given the importance of geopolitical considerations it also has a clear influence on Israeli policies, especially those that concern the surrounding Arab world.

Geopolitics is an efficient tool to analyze the Middle East as it focuses on the conflict for the acquisition and control of territory. From the early 50's to the 70's several states caught up in the Arab-Israeli conflict aimed first and foremost at gaining additional territorial growth in order to establish a strategically and politically superior position in the region: Syria aspired to a position of hegemony in the region, Egypt wanted to become the unquestioned leader of the Arab League and implicitly the Arab world while Jordan aspired to gain the territories of the Palestinians and maintain control of the West Bank, opposing the establishment of a rival state that could threaten its own existence. Israel as well wanted to secure its territorial existence once it came into being after almost two millennia of Jewish dispersion. Therefore the ensuing conflict essentially revolved and revolves around the control of a small territory, which is specifically relevant in the dispute for the Temple Mount, one of the places with the

greatest symbolic values in the world, from which the second Intifadah broke out. (Giblin, interview 2009) Geography also defined the target locations of agricultural settlement that were established in Palestine and later on Israel, which were always set up in places of strategic and geographic value. (Giblin, interview 2009) Therefore, in our case it is especially important to observe how politics used the configuration of physical geography to create new political relations and situations. The last important element of geopolitical analysis are the representations and symbols used by the various factions involved in the conflict, representations that fuel a wide range of feelings and actions. (Giblin, interview 2009)

Zionism and Geopolitics

Geopolitics starts from a simple premise: the geographic location and conditions play a significant role in the way people and states behave. Therefore geopolitics scrutinizes the interaction between politics and space. There are three dimensions of analysis in case of any state: internal geopolitics, focusing on demographic structure and territorial integrity; regional interaction, focusing on relations with the neighboring countries and interaction with the great powers (Friedman 2008, 2), dimensions we will examine in the present section. Although this paper does not aim to present an overarching description of Zionism and its implications, I summarized the ideas with greater impact on the geopolitical positioning and foreign policy of the state.

Zionism fostered two geopolitical visions according to the revisionist historian Avi Shlaim (2004, 657): the non-recognition of a Palestinian national identity and the quest for an alliance with a great power. One major Zionist imperative was from its outset the establishment of an alliance with a great power that could protect Israel and support it. This struggle for finding the proper ally remained constant and started even before the statehood period with Turkey as envisaged power, followed by Britain and France in the 1950's and 1960's. Yet ultimately it was the American option that would prevail, due in not a least significant way, to David Ben-Gurion who maneuvered himself through the early stages of statehood in sometimes ambivalent ways but always loyal to his ultimate goal, namely that of securing US support for Israel (Shlaim 2004, 659).

What particularly made Zionism relevant from a geopolitical perspective was its aim to establish a political entity in Palestine for the Jewish people, and this made it unique among all the ideologies (nationalism, liberalism,

socialism) in the framework of which it appeared. Nationalism as such took the link between territory and the nation as normal and given, yet Zionism was not based on a living reality in this sense, but on historical memories, ties and feelings. (Kimmerling 1983, 205) In their aim to give a political-geographic existence to the Jewish people in Palestine, some Zionists such as Ahad Ha-Am recognized that the Jewish state would play a unique role in the game of interests of the great powers being located at the crossroads of three continents (Hertzberg 1981, 57), a role ultimately fulfilled.

Zionist politics was also responsible to a great extent for the aggressive water policies implemented by Israel because of its major concern with agricultural settlement and cultivation. Reclaiming the land and making the desert bloom were high aspirations of Zionism that would have implicitly made the Jewish society in Israel thrive and would have provided some form of legitimacy to the state, since the Arab population did not have either the means or the underlying ideological motivation to do it. The four main reasons identified for the aggressive stance on water (limiting distribution of water, cutting distribution from the Arab side, water diversion, etc.) were seen to be: the need to support intensive agricultural production, the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict, sharing and contesting symbolic places with the Palestinians and the problematic status together with the boundaries of Jerusalem. (Schnell 2001, 216) Would there have been any remedies to these, whether to all or just some, it was expected that Israel's policies would have been less pragmatic.

Zionism was concerned with the redemption of Israel by settling the land as well as creating strategic settlements along the border. Redemption was understood both from the non-Jewish population and from desolation and nature. (Kimmerling 1983, 201) Yet this interesting strategy implemented along the boundaries, termed Frontier Settlement, whose origins may be linked to German and Italian practices, (Penslar 1991, 7) defined as the settlement of people in border and peripheral areas of the country for both political-military reasons and ideological ones, was central to the Zionist enterprise not only because of securing boundaries and enhancing the socio-economic capacity of the areas but also because of creating stable points from where to launch further settlements or expansionist activity. (Morag 2007, 188) Especially characteristic during the Mandate period, these settlements created the seedbeds of the military as well (Morag 2007, 154).

The underlying idea for this strategy was that whereas borders symbolize the limits of a country's sovereign territory, a frontier is a political-geographic space lying within as well as beyond the integrated region of the political unit into which expansion may take place. (Kreiner, Mansfeld, Kliot 2006, 383) Frontier as taken from the American experience and understood by the Israeli one as well thus came to mean the line dividing the inhabited from the uninhabited, while having the connotation of a movement always towards the horizon creating the illusion of infinite expansion. (Kimmerling 1983, 3) And indeed in the period of the Mandate, expansion was deemed as infinite.

Apart from this, it needs to be underlined that Zionism as such had some concern for peace. This was one of the basic aims of the Zionist movement and it was understood first and foremost in terms of recognition and legitimacy of existence. (Kimmerling 1983, 3) Therefore as long as the surrounding environment was hostile and no bargaining position could be attained, peace in whatever terms was inconceivable.

The Importance of Jerusalem

Jerusalem cannot miss from any geopolitical analysis of the Middle East given its uttermost importance for Jews, Muslims and Christians as well, yet given the fact that several writings have been dedicated to the subject I only focus on some of the most relevant facts. Jerusalem is a micro-cosmos on its own and a continuous source of tension and rivalry. (Encel interview, 2009) If Israel as the Holy Land is the crossroads of three religions, Jerusalem is their crucial point, giving home to the most sacred places of Judaism and Christianity and the third most sacred place of Islam.

What makes the situation even more explosive is the concentration of holy places in one small area, namely the Temple Mount within the Old City of Jerusalem. Historically divided into four quarters: the Muslim, the Armenian, the Christian and the Jewish one, the Old City has been one of the most controversial territories, ever since its recapture by the IDF in 1967. Set up initially according to the UN Partition Plan of 1947 as international territory, Jerusalem was soon divided by Jews and Muslims, to be later incorporated into Israel following 1967. The first state leader who created the powerful symbolic value of Jerusalem was Ben-Gurion, according to whom the Negev and the Galilee were only the body of Eretz Israel whereas Jerusalem was its spirit. (Encel interview, 2009) Therefore there could be no Jewish state without Jerusalem. The failure to recapture

the Old City and East Jerusalem in 1949 was thus seen as a tragedy in view of the demographic and military efforts put into it.

Israeli Foreign Policy in Geopolitical Terms

Israel in its foreign policy goals and objectives fits into the general pattern of Middle Eastern states seeking first and foremost security and well-being for its people, (Reich 2004, 121) with survival and security being its main concerns (Defarges interview, 2009). The geopolitical discourse has therefore evolved around these two elements of policy and along the five determinants enumerated earlier.

What makes foreign policy singular in this case is the fact that Israel has an atypical set of determinants through which it views the world and which affects its approaches to foreign policy. (Reich 2004, 122) First, it is the fact that Israel sees itself as a Jewish state, unique to the world with a particular role in Jewish history and the life of the Diaspora, beyond the role other nation states have for their representative nations. Second is the Zionist ideology of the state with which even today many Israelis identify themselves. Zionism aimed at creating a sovereign Jewish state that would represent a safe haven for persecuted Jews from all around the world to ensure their survival. Third is the security policy which identifies three major concerns: enhancing the security of the state; establishing, sustaining and expanding peaceful relations with the Arab states and last, opposing any form of anti-Semitism wherever it may exist or arise and ensure Jewish immigration to Israel. (Reich 2004, 125) Out of these, a specific set of foreign policy options arose.

Three Foreign Policy Approaches

Derived from the reluctance of the Arab world to accept Israel as a state of the Middle East, peace and security or security and peace came to be the central themes of Israeli policy, (Reich 2004, 135) and in order to manage these a set of three possible options came to the forefront. Taking the above mentioned factors into consideration Israel's three foreign policy options, drawing on the observations of Philippe Moreau Defarges, were isolationism, expansionism and/or reconciliation.

The Isolationist Approach or the Option of the Fortress

Israel has traditionally perceived itself as an isolated player on the world stage. This is not only because of the persecution the Diaspora Jews have experienced throughout the centuries but also because of the concept of the reality of statehood that has evolved in the last 60 years during which Israel

has been involved in 5-6 major conflicts perceived as defensive wars against external aggression and which guaranteed the continuous existence of the state in a hostile region. Regardless of the controversies surrounding some of these wars, the image of a threatened state has been maintained all throughout its existence, and under such circumstances the logic that would prevail was that of the fortress.

Defining for the isolationist logics is the so called *Massada complex* based on an ancient event. The Massada was a hilltop fortress in Palestine overlooking the Dead Sea. During the Roman occupation in 70 A.D. the people of the region chose to die heroically for their freedom in the face of the Roman attempts to quench their rebellion, instead of surrendering. This event revived by the Zionists created a powerful echo within the Jewish people who had been persecuted up till the last century. Defending the country from external invaders is therefore seen as the ultimate form of heroism that specifically derives from the Massada complex (Encel 2006, 271) which is a powerfully constructed image to maintain the cohesion and unquestionable importance of the army as well. Young Israeli soldiers were taken to the Massada hilltop for their swearing in ceremony where they declared in unison that: "Massada will not fall again". This mentality led to policy implications according to which the new formed state could only rely on itself, through a strong military posture and should maintain independence in foreign policy without external interventions (including that of the United States) in its security decision making process. (Newman 1998, 11) Nonetheless, this did not exclude the creation of strong bonds with foreign powers sympathizing with the Israeli cause. This logic has been the foundation of Israeli politics since 1948, changing more powerfully only after the 1990's.

The Expansionist Option or the Theory of the Promised Land

Deeply rooted in the conscience of the Jewish nation was the dream of acquiring the Promised Land, the territory promised by God to Abraham. This dream was to influence Israeli foreign policy mainly because of the size of the territories allocated to the state in 1947 and the need for establishing a powerful deterrence towards the Arab world surrounding it. (Reiser 2001, 79) Once the fortress, mentioned earlier, had been established the need for expanding the fortress arose, a phenomenon similar to that of an empire. (Defarges interview, 2009) The finest example for territorial expansion, and a key moment in Israel's history in this respect was the Six Day War. It was not the only occasion on which Israel occupied foreign territories but it is the most significant defining Israeli policies from then

on. Once some form of expansion occurred Israel's discourse could change for it not only gained territories with which to undertake possible future bargains but it also created a certain type of deterrence towards the surrounding world. Expansion in this sense was inextricably part of Israeli policy.

The Reconciliatory Option

Israel did not advocate an offensive policy willingly from its beginnings on. The looming menace of the surrounding Arab world and its hostility towards the Jewish state kicked off the conflict, not that the events previous to its establishment had not already degenerated into armed disputes where both the Jews and Arabs had made a series of bad choices. The 1947 Partition Resolution provided Israel with a small territory that made it almost impossible for her to enter any kind of peace negotiations with the Arab world, being considered both an inferior and a small state. Nonetheless the issue of territory became a vital question, even though gaining territories could only be achieved by war especially when a complete change in status quo was expected to occur.

The first step forward in respect to reconciliation happened after Israel gained a definite geopolitical advantage in front of all its three major neighbors by capturing territories important if not even vital to them. This brought possible peace negotiations one step further in some sense, though it created a series of problems as well. After Nasser's death in 1970, Egypt's attitude towards the Arab-Israeli conflict gradually changed under the influence of the United States who became increasingly involved in the peace process. Thus, in 1979 the first peace-treaty with an Arab country was signed, between Israel and Egypt following the Camp David Accords. From then on further peace was not any more out of discussion but became more a matter of time, since the newly established relations with Egypt did not develop into what was expected by the Israeli side.

Ultimately things for Israel came down to the issue of isolating itself in the region, dominating the region or establishing friendly relations with its neighbors. (Defarges interview, 2009) Yet as mutually exclusive as these seem, Israel found ways in which to combine the three approaches and conduct a complex foreign policy while one view dominated the others to some extent.

The role of the United States in Defining Israeli Policies

In assessing the actual independence of Israeli policies, be they based on geopolitics or other considerations, we need to clarify in the present section the role played by the United States. Evidence shows and most scholars agree on the point that the Cold War itself played more a secondary role in the making of Israeli foreign policy while virtually almost none in shaping its domestic politics. (Karsh 1997, 156) Even more, apparently neither of the superpowers or the declining powers had a decisive say in their smaller Allies' grand strategies be it Israel or any other state. (Karsh 1997, 156)

In the 1960's the United States had not yet become a leading power in the region and was still preoccupied with developing its relations with the Arab world, which meant that had it not been for Truman's pro-Jewish inclinations American support for the establishment of Israel would either have not existed or not sufficed to make the Zionist endeavor reality. (Johnson 1988, 525-526) It was actually the initial reluctance, of both Britain and the US, to the establishment of the Jewish state that drove Israel into the arms of the Soviets with whom cooperation lasted for a short while. (Karsh 1997, 160)

Eisenhower saw no particular interest in Israel and relations with the US started improving only in the 1960's, especially after the French had lost their interest in Israel and the Soviets gained a foothold in the region. American-Israeli relations entered a new phase based on two major considerations: an ideological/sentimental one and a strategic one. (Lewis 1992, 2) US support did not become substantial until the Kennedy-Johnson and the Nixon years, reaching its peak towards the end of the century when Israel became the largest recipient of US foreign aid in the region. The 70's and 80's were the years when the relation with the US flourished whereas the early 90's brought about cooling down in US-Israeli cooperation, which did not mean that the US would not support Israel anymore, just that the administrations became more critical of the Jewish state than before. What also needs to be given attention is the fact that the exact nature and extent of US commitment to Israel remains somewhat imprecise because there is no mutual treaty or formal alliance binding the two countries together, requiring the US to intervene with arms under volatile conditions. (Reich 2004, 134)

It is true that the backing of the US implied a somewhat more robust self confidence but it by no means meant that the Jewish state did not have a will of its own according to its capacities. This aspect is especially relevant

when considering Israel's nuclear program at Dimona in the 60's, about which the US was rather critical, as a result of which Israel acquired the nuclear bomb in the 70's; as well as a series of local conflicts in which the opinion of the US was totally ignored. Israel is up till today seen as a very much independent state regardless of her ties to the US. The special relationship is one that needs to be sustained but Israel refused and refuses to let outsiders influence its perceptions of threat or security which are decisive in defining its foreign policy. (Reich 2004,, 134)

Given the discussions in this section it is a paradox that even though such a wide panoply of geopolitical conceptions may be applied and apply to the study of Israel, the official discourse of the state avoids the mention of geopolitics and Israeli academia is reluctant to use the term geopolitics, resorting rather to the use of international relations theories. (Encel interview 2009) Yet as the current analysis proves, state policies, various implemented actions, foreign policy, as well as the founding ideology extensively rely on some form of geopolitical notions, determining a form of global geopolitical consciousness that is always present in the making of policies vis-à-vis the Arab world and the international community. Geopolitical consciousness therefore needs to be understood as the panoply of considerations in respect to space, resources, identity, water, strategic positioning and regional status that are all present to a different extent in defining Israel's foreign policy.

The Six Day War and the Camp David Agreements

After having clarified all the relevant conceptual aspects, I now turn to the cases chosen for analysis. First, I provide an overview of one the most important wars fought by Israel and second I focus on the peace agreement that represented a milestone after this war. The Six Day War provides some of the most interesting geopolitical perspectives to be analyzed since subsequently to it Israel tripled its territory and changed its position in the region. The Camp David Accords were the first successful peace negotiations with an Arab state, concluded with territorial rearrangements, marking at the same time a clear departure towards peace as a viable option.

The Six Day War

One of Israel's major military operations and most important victories was achieved in the summer of 1967 during the Six Day War that brought geopolitical considerations to the top of the agenda by the conquests realized. The Jewish state practically tripled its territory and gained

geopolitical advantage over each of its neighbours. It is argued that water, and especially occupying territories with significant water resources played a significant role in the conflict as could be seen during earlier events in 1965 when clashes over water occurred between Syria and Israel. Overall there were a number of reasons for the increased tensions that led to the breakout of the conflict such as Israel being seen as a colonial-settler state in a post-colonial Middle East that was eager to forget the colonial experience, the Cold War bipolarity, political rivalries between some of the Arab states, Palestinian, Egyptian and Israeli cross-border raids, poor intelligence and the political insecurities of the Eshkol government. (Selby 2005, 338) Yet as long as we keep in mind that it was the closure of the Straits of Tiran that triggered the war and that the Golan was taken for mainly strategic purposes, in which water was as important as the location itself, we may see that water played indeed an important role in the breakout of the conflict and in the way it unfolded.

The most significant confrontation preceding the Six Day War arose because of water disputes in 1964 over the plans of Israel to divert water from the Galilee to the Negev. Syria who had most vehemently opposed such a move and was expressly against Israel's National Water Carrier program not only tried through the Arab League's support to implement a project by which to divert the Hasbani and Banyas rivers before they reached Israel but took up arms against the Jewish state as well. These events showed that Syria was capable of tampering with the Jordan River's origins by shutting off its supplies while Egypt could enact a blockade on the Straits any time it wanted to. (Oren, 2002a, 17) This dual menace had therefore underlined the essential role of water in a possible future confrontation which would follow a year later.

In the Arab world the period after the Suez War brought about some significant changes such as the rise of Egyptian charismatic leader Gamal Abd-al Nasser and Pan-Arabism, elements which conveyed the Arab interests a new geopolitical dimension: the creation of a monolithic Arab state entity while Israeli boundaries and the refugee problem became more of a second rank concern. (Reiser 2001, 75) From then on Israel represented a political and physical barrier in achieving this goal. It is important to understand the fact that neither Egypt, nor Jordan nor Israel really wanted the war which broke out in June, which as evidence came to suggest was in significant part a consequence of the false information provided by USSR intelligence to both Egypt and Syria. (Beilin 1992, 41)

Given these assumptions it is important to concentrate on why Israel commenced such overwhelming military operations although evidence suggests that it was completely unaware of its actual conquering potential and was more bent on peace with some of its neighbours especially Jordan rather than on war. (Beilin 1992, 41) After real mobilization started on all sides due to the false information launched by the Soviet Foreign Ministry it was almost impossible to stop the escalation and thus Israel launched a pre-emptive strike that would have surprising consequences. Eshkol had even tried to strike at Syria by an indirect route through the UN Security Council, but the Soviets vetoed all actions against their protégé. (Oren 2002, 30)

The spark that ignited the build up seems to have been most likely the Soviet attempt to exploit the local states, in order to frustrate the US, rather than the domestic and regional agendas of the participants. (Beilin 1992, 41) The trigger of the attacks was a strategic move on behalf of Egypt to which it had resorted earlier in the past as well by blocking the Straits of Tiran and occupying the region of Eilat, an action that not only endangered Israel's trade routes with the East but put it in a geopolitically fragile situation since the port city was crucial in developing the Negev. (Bregman 2002, 71) This move was considered a legitimate *casus bellum* (Reich 2004, 127) and since none of the great naval powers intervened to protect the freedom of navigation Israel felt compelled to re-establish the status quo.

In this period the internal political situation of Israel was somewhat unstable as well because of growing rivalries between Ben-Gurion (Prime-minister) and Yigal Allon on the strategy of deterrence to be adopted and later between Yitzhak Rabin (Chief of Staff) and Levi Eshkol (PM and Defence Minister) on who could crack down most strongly on the Arabs. In the end the debate reached a form of compromise in which Israel had acquired an undeclared bomb and enhanced conventional power.

The Rabin - Eshkol debate on the other hand ultimately resulted in relinquishing the Defence Minister post to Moshe Dayan, then a member of Ben-Gurion's Rafi party, a move that let loose the break. Dayan had already been an established name in the Israeli army and political circles after his successes in the 1956 campaign, proving to be one of the most brilliant strategists of the period.

It is at this point required to examine that, as the person in charge of military operations, Moshe Dayan, brought about changes both to the

strategy and the aims of the military operations. Initial plans envisaged occupying Gaza and bargaining for the Straits as well as pushing as far as the Canal, Dayan on the other hand had not wanted to occupy the Gaza Strip under any circumstances, foreseeing the dangers of engulfing a large Arab population into the territory of Israel. (Bregman 2002, 80) He had also not wanted to occupy the Suez Canal, having issued orders for the army to stop short of it but not take it. (Bregman 2002, 80) Orders were thus clear regarding both Gaza and the Suez Canal. He was further reluctant to take over the Golan Heights as well, considering that such a move would perpetrate the conflict with Syria forever even though it would constitute a strategic asset. Yet in the course of the war that lasted but six days it seems that he was convinced into overriding all his previous considerations. Apparently due to stringent requests in respect to Gaza and lack of specific information about the positions of the troops in the Sinai Peninsula, Dayan consented to going as far as the Canal and occupying the Gaza strip from which settlements were shelled. (Bregman 2002, 85-86) The West Bank was a totally different story given the national disappointment of the failure to take it in 1949. A possible occupation of both East Jerusalem and the West Bank, which were seen as organic parts of Israel would not only have meant re-establishing to some extent the historical territory of Israel but would also strengthen the sense of Jewish identity, (Bregman 2002, 92) yet such events were not even deemed possible before the war. However in what regards Dayan he would remain unpredictable and enigmatic.

To understand the important if not even crucial role of water in respect to the Golan as such, historical evidence suggests that it was a group of settlers and kibbutznik, from the Galilee region that pressured the government and mainly Dayan into considering occupying the Golan Heights. (Ben-Ami 2008, 151) The war had actually already been decided by the eve of the 9th of June. This argument seems to be acceptable in light of the fact that Dayan had not wanted to occupy neither the Gaza strip nor the Suez Canal but ultimately was convinced to do it, just as it happened with the Golan Heights. He had known that if once taken, Israel would never be willing to relinquish the strategically vital plateau for it would create a buffer zone along with the rest of the territories taken. Thus what had been until then a fight with Syria for the demilitarized zones would turn into a struggle for the Golan Heights. (Muslih 1993, 621)

Once the war was over, Israel had acquired control of most of the freshwater sources in that region as well, being able to veto any kind of increase of the water supply (Sharif 1996, 71) to the Arab parties until the

peace settlement in 1994 with Jordan. The military operations had proven that the land-water nexus could easily be established since Israel did not have to venture far away from its UN designed borders in order to gain control of headwaters and additional water resources. (Sharif 1996, 72)

The initial euphoria of the victory combined with the gradual realization of what changes the new status quo would imply in terms of demography, a possible peace for territory strategy, future settlement possibilities in the occupied territories and the new image of Israel as a colonial country prompted the government to reconsider the possibility of peace. Even though the Israeli government secretly decided to make known its readiness for peace agreements with both Syria and Egypt on June 19th 1967, the response it received after the convening of the Karthoum Summit by the Arab world was both negative and worrisome: peace was not an option. (Beilin 1992, 42) The agreements sought for by the Israelis would have entailed an exchange of the Sinai and the Golan for peace treaties with Egypt and Syria while planning to resettle the refugees of the Gaza strip as part of a regional plan. (Oren 2002, 313) Dayan as well was in favour of this idea, envisaging a whole series of possible peace solutions, while at the same time supporting the establishment of Jewish settlements in the West Bank. (Oren 2002, 316)

If peace was not foreseeable any time soon, the occupied territories still gave Israel an enhanced strategic position making it more defensible and providing it with early-warning time due to greater strategic depth. Even so the conquest of these new lands stirred up the dispute about the degree to which they were a real resource for territorial expansion, in the sense of how control of the areas could be increased by settlement and ownership in order for sovereignty to be enacted at some later stage. (Kimmerling 1983, 181) The only territories that would unequivocally become annexed were Jerusalem and the Golan Heights.

Compared to the War of Independence for example, the Six Day War had altered the geopolitical calculations in the region in a far different way. Whereas it had consolidated Israeli existence, making it clear that Israel would not disappear any time soon, the sudden seizure of Arab land completely altered the “no peace, no war” policy of the Arabs (Reiser 2001, 69) as well as the dream of Arab unity. As in 1948, a new Jewish state appeared in the region in 1967 as well, but this time it had managed to prove its military superiority by achieving an overwhelming victory over the Arab armies. In this new situation Israel had acquired valuable land

from the Arabs, which would change the perspectives of bargaining for peace, perspectives that actually changed in less than a decade leading to the peace agreements with Egypt in 1978. Relations with Jordan would have probably evolved in a similar way had the Palestinian refugee problem not acquired a national dimension and a different representative, the Palestinian Liberation Organization.

The Camp David Agreements

After the Six Day War Israel gained the definite status of regional power able to withstand the aggression of any of its neighbours and got surrounded by an aura of indestructibility while its geopolitical status had changed in a most significant way, the state reaching the borders of the often evoked Greater Israel, having within its confines the West Bank of the Jordan, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights and going even beyond, through the capture of the Sinai Peninsula. Along with these changes in the balance of power the next decade brought about a series of other surprises. The first one was the 1973 Yom Kippur war that had caught the Israelis by surprise and changed the blissful atmosphere of the post 1967 period. The second was the Israeli-Egyptian peace agreement from the end of the 1970's which I will take a closer look at.

The event that triggered the re-evaluation of the regional status quo of the 70's was the 1973 Yom Kippur War that had shattered the myth of Israeli indestructibility. This almost lost war had powerfully shaken the Israeli public and the political elite as well and brought about another dimension in the relations with the Arab world. If until that time isolationism and expansionism were the most often considered options, the new state of mind dominating Israeli society and the realization that only negotiations could improve the conflict led to a gradual thaw in Egyptian Israeli relations under American involvement (Karsh 1997, 180) paving the way for a new policy of reconciliation, concluded in its first phases with a series of disengagement agreements, followed by a peace agreement. The next agreement would follow almost two decades later and these two events would represent the culmination of Israel's reconciliatory efforts, thus creating the third path of foreign policy options: reconciliation with the surrounding world.

After having restored the country's pride, self-respect and honour president Sadat of Egypt could move on to start a dialogue with the Israelis whose attitude and leadership changed in a significant way making a land for peace strategy as called for in the UN Security Council Resolution 242

acceptable without much protest on behalf of the Israeli side. (Bregman 2002, 143) This sudden shift to bilateral talks after a recent war came as a surprise to the Israeli side which had learned to treat the possibility of peace with any other major Arab country as a mere illusion after the events that occurred in the past. It is at this point important to keep in mind that it was indeed the Egyptians who made the first steps towards peace while the option of a reasonable geopolitical reconfiguration of the area made it an acceptable idea to the Israeli side, which would commit itself to the peace efforts once it became clear that it was possible.

The Yom Kippur war had serious political costs and destabilized the position of the Israeli government of that time, which had acquired after the 1973 elections a young and somewhat indecisive leadership. It was under this constellation that the US threatened with its *reassessment* policy which induced the Israeli side to consider negotiations with Egypt and have Kissinger involved in his well-known shuttle diplomacy. The war also led to United Nations Security Council Resolution 338 that would call for an immediate cease-fire and the implementation of the provisions of Resolution 242 from then on, present in each major negotiation process ever since. (Dieckhoff and Tessler 2008, 302) Given the political developments in Israel, Sadat was just waiting for the appropriate moment to make his next move, which happened shortly after the elections which were won by Begin. A secret meeting in Rabat between Dayan and the Egyptian deputy prime-minister was convened in mid September 1977, an event from which Sadat's historical visit to Jerusalem was just a couple of steps away preparing the ground for the peace agreement. (Dieckhoff and Tessler 2008, 302)

It was Secretary of State Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy that created the starting bridge between the Israeli and the Egyptian sides, yet its importance must not be overestimated. Contrary to general perceptions it was the local actors, especially president Sadat of Egypt and Israeli prime-minister Begin that played the crucial role in getting the peace process among the two countries started in the late 1970's. (Karsh, 1997, 181) Both leaders were motivated by personal considerations as well wanting to change their past reputations and reduce the ongoing tensions between the two states. (Karsh, 1997, 182)

The main points of the Accords were: relinquishment of the entire Sinai Peninsula, evacuation of settlements and airfields in the Sinai and

establishment of a Palestinian administrative authority. (Quandt 1978, 454-455)

Things were not clear within the Israeli political spectrum about the future of the Occupied Territories though. Agreements had been included regarding the establishment of a Palestinian self-governing authority in Gaza and the West Bank for an interim period of about five years until a final solution could be reached but the situation was not entirely clear even under these circumstances. The future of the Golan was not addressed anywhere in the Accords, indeed it was an issue to be settled among Israel and Syria but it would soon turn out that it was very much linked to how things worked out with Egypt. Whereas the Accords dealt only with transitional arrangements regarding the Palestinians, they were fairly precise and definite about the Egyptian-Israeli arrangements.

The peace agreement at Camp David with Egypt marked a new era in Israeli history. It first meant geopolitical stability on the southern border: expanding into Egyptian territory was ruled out and the final status of the borders was negotiated as well. It secondly brought the Palestinian issue into a new phase. At this point when Israel's most dangerous and strongest neighbour was put at peace, focus shifted to Syria and the Arab-Israeli conflict changed into the Syrian-Israeli conflict, (Pipes 1991, 5) because of Syria's aspirations of achieving strategic parity with the Jewish state (aspiring to re-establish Greater Syria which encompassed most of Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Jordan, the Occupied Territories and a small part of Turkey) and becoming the unquestioned leader of the struggle for Palestinian rights and interests. (Pipes 1991, 2)

The Accords were unquestionably a success, yet not in the way it was expected, creating a mere "cold peace" between the two parties, leaving further Israeli settlement in the Occupied Territories possible. As soon as it became clear that Egypt was eliminated from the conflict, the Arab countries had lowered their aggressive stance in respect to the Jewish state seeing military confrontation not as promising anymore, while talks became an acceptable approach. (Pipes 1991, 4-5) The peace with Egypt provided in some form or another the confidence for a more aggressive behaviour towards the surrounding territories creating a sudden shift from reconciliation to expansionism by striking at Iraq's nuclear reactors near Baghdad, annexing the Golan, accelerating settlement in the West Bank and invading Lebanon. (Pipes 1991, 7) Evidence came to show that Israel had strongly pushed for the intensification of the settlement program in the West Bank in the immediate years after Camp David, having managed to

alter the demographic balance in some places to the extent that the occupation could hardly be reversed. (Saunders 1988, 420) If the shift was indeed sudden, the ideology behind it was not. Out of the two major schools of thought that dominated Israeli politics, the one represented by Begin prevailed. This meant that with Camp David achieved, Israel received a free hand to focus on Greater Israel. (Shamir 1988, 193) Yet Labour maintained the opinion that holding on to the Occupied Territories would but destroy the Jewish identity of the state. The fundamental change in the Israeli posture towards the Arabs that was expected to occur, thus failed to materialize. (Shamir 1988, 191)

Conclusions

This article shows that Israeli foreign policy was determined to an important extent by the state's geopolitical consciousness and especially by the considerations regarding territory. As the two cases come to prove possession of territories was the most important factor in fueling the events surrounding Israel's modern history, whereas water played a significant role only in determining parts of the conflicts or peace processes.

Regardless if the piece of land under discussion was seen as part of the heart of Israel such as Judea and Samaria which constitute the West Bank, whether it was seen as a strategically vital asset such as the Golan Heights or the Gaza Strip, the latter which ultimately turned into a liability; or was considered the symbolic capital, Jerusalem, land has been the uttermost concern of the Israeli-Arab dispute.

The other dimension that came along with the problem of the land was that of water resources meant to develop the land and sustain the growing population. This is the reason why negotiations were always concerned to some extent with the problem of water, and the Camp David Accords with Egypt were no exception to this. Of course with Egypt it was more a problem of waterways: free navigation and use of the Straits of Tiran, the Red Sea and the Suez Canal.

Territory had and has its most important say in how Israel is portrayed: a minute and unique nation within the Middle-East. This is an important geo-regional component of the security discourse (Newman 1998, 13) which is a major reason for why so overwhelmingly much attention is given to the state by world media. This minute territory and even smaller parts within have showed in various instances their capability to spark major events in the region, constantly proving that the state cannot act without taking into consideration its geopolitical consciousness. Even

more, its whole understanding of security is based on geography: land being the ultimate concern for national security. Ultimately every state makes the politics of its geography, (Defarges interview, 2009) and Israel is an excellent example of this.

In what regards the importance of water behind Israeli military actions or decisions, this aspect is somewhat more problematic than that of land. (Defarges interview, 2009) As we could see from the analysis, considerations regarding territory were much clearer than those regarding water. Each of the sides had a concern for water in some form, therefore each of them tried to maximize their goals in that respect. Yet it was Israel who managed to secure itself areas important in terms of water but hardly defined its aims exclusively in terms of that. Water was also one of those dimensions that gained importance through time, an aspect that I had not dealt with in the present article. Water would have been interesting to be analyzed from a closer perspective as well, since its extraction and production went through significant changes in the last decades having an impact on its importance and relevance in policy determination.

Another constituent of geopolitical consciousness that has not been thoroughly touched upon at present is the demographic structure of the population, which not only adds a qualitative dimension to the notion discussed but brings into the picture the issue of identity, cultural borders and representations. In view of these the most intuitive research direction proposed is expanding and deepening the notion introduced here with various other geopolitical considerations in order to have an overall picture of geopolitical consciousness. Not only that, but for the accuracy of the research a number of other case studies besides the Six Day War and the Camp David Accords are also required.

Geopolitics, with clear considerations embedded in Zionism, as we could see was a clear determinant of isolationism, expansionism and reconciliatory action yet the present research provided only the framework and basics for a vaster analysis that can be carried further on along the lines of what was underlined earlier while focusing on all aspects of what can be defined as the geopolitical consciousness of the state and how this then influences foreign policy. Given the fact that geopolitics is an exceptional tool to analyze the events in the Middle East, I recommend therefore looking even deeper into the mechanisms that set in motion Israeli foreign policy for a better understanding of the events in the region, taking up a track of research yet unexploited as the size of the literature on specifically Israeli geopolitics comes to suggest.

Bibliography

- Agnew, John. 2002. *Making Political Geography*. London: Arnold.
- Beilin, Yossi. 1992. *Israel - A concise political history*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- Ben-Ami, Shlomo. 2008. "A War to Start All Wars: Will Israel Ever Seal the Victory of 1948?," *Foreign Affairs*, 87:5.
- Bialer, Uri. 1990. *Between East and West: Israel's foreign policy orientation 1948-1956*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bregman, Ahron. 2002. *Israel's Wars - A history since 1947*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Collins Kreiner, Noga, Yoel Mansfeld & Nurit Kliot. May 2006. "The Reflection of a Political Conflict in Mapping: The Case of Israel's Borders and Frontiers", *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 3: 381-408.
- Defarges, Philippe Moreau. 2003. *Introdução a Geopolítica*. (Introduction to Geopolitics) Lisbon: Gradiva Publicações.
- _____ interview by author, digital recording, Paris, France, 13 May 2009.
- Encel, Frederic & Francois Thuat. 2006. *Geopolitique d'Israel*. (Geopolitics of Israel) Paris: Editions du Seuil.
- Encel Frederic, interview by author, digital recording, Paris, France, 13 May 2009.
- Friedman, George. 2008. "The Geopolitics of Israel: Biblical and Modern", *Stratfor*.
- Giblin, Beatrice, interview by author, digital recording, Paris, France, 13 May 2009.
- Hertzberg, Arthur. 1981. *The Zionist Idea - A Historical Analysis and Reader*. New York: Atheneum.
- Johnson, Paul. 1988. *A History of the Jews*. New York: Harper Perennial.
- Karsh, Efraim, 1997. *Israel in The Cold War and the Middle East*. eds. Sayigh, Yezid & Shlaim, Avi Oxford: Carlendon Press, 156-185.
- Kimmerling, Baruch. 1983. *Zionism and Territory - The Socio-Territorial Dimensions of Zionist Politics*. Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California.
- Kohn, Leo Y. 1959. "Israel and the New Nation States of Asia and Africa". *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 324:96: 96-102.
- Morag, Nadav. 2007. "Water, Geopolitics and State Building: The Case of Israel", *Middle Eastern Studies*, 37:3: 179-198.
- Muslih, Muhammad. Autumn 1993. "The Golan: Israel, Syria and Strategic Calculations", *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 47, No. 4: 611-632.

- Newman, David, 1998. "Citizenship, Identity and Location: The Changing Discourse of Israeli Geopolitics" in *Geopolitical Traditions? Critical Histories of a Century of Geopolitical Thought*, eds. Dodds, K & Atkinson, D., London: Routledge.
- Oren, Michael B. 2002. *Six Days of War*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Penslar, Derek J. 1991. *Zionism and Technocracy – The Engineering of Jewish Settlement in Palestine, 1870-1918*. Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Pipes, Daniel. Fall 1991. "Is Damascus ready for peace?", *Foreign Affairs*.
- Quandt, William B. 1988. "Appendices" in *The Middle East: Ten Years after Camp David*, ed. Quandt, William B. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution.
- Reich, Bernard. 2004. "Israeli Foreign Policy" in *Diplomacy in the Middle East, The International Relations of Regional and Outside Powers*, ed. Brown, Carl L. London, New York: Tauris: 121-138.
- Reiser, Stewart, July 2001. "The Arab-Israeli Wars, A Conflict of Strategic Attrition," *Prolonged Wars: The Post-Nuclear Challenge*, eds. Karl P. Magyar, Constantine P. Danopoulos: 67-98.
- Saunders, Harold S. 1988. "Reconstituting the Arab-Israeli Peace Process" in *The Middle East: Ten Years after Camp David*, ed. Quandt, William B. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution: 413-441.
- Schnell, Izhak. 2001. "Introduction: Changing territorial concepts in Israel", *GeoJournal*, 53: 213-217.
- Selby, Ian. 2005. "The Geopolitics of Water in the Middle East: fantasies and realities," *Third World Quarterly*, 26:2: 329-349.
- Shamir, Shimon. 1988. "Israeli Views of Egypt and the Peace Process: The Duality of Vision" in *The Middle East: Ten Years after Camp David*, ed. Quandt, William B. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution: 187-216.
- Sharif S., Elmusa. Spring 1993. "Dividing the Common Palestinian-Israel Waters: An Internal Water Law Approach", *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 3: 57-77.
- Shlaim, Avi. 2004. "Israel between East and West: 1948-56", *International Journal for Middle East Studies*, 36: 657-673.
- Dieckhoff, Alain & Mark Tessler, 2008. "Israel et les Etats arabes: de la confrontation totale a une paix partielle" (Israel and the Arab states: from total confrontation to partial peace) in *L'Etat d'Israel* (The State of Israel), ed. Dieckhoff, Alain, Paris: Fayard, 293-312.