



The Futile Power and the Determination of Israel's Future



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Prof. Dr. Walid 'Abd al-Hay¹

Introduction

The power concept in international relations (IR) is central in IR theories. For since when the Greek historian Thucydides wrote History of the Peloponnesian War, the Indian Kautilya wrote Arthashastra (about political science and economic policy), the Arab Ibn Khaldun wrote al-Muqaddimah (The Introduction), and Hans Morgenthau wrote Politics Among Nations, the concept of power dominated the approaches and philosophies of IR. Its definition is almost confined to a narrow concept expressed by most IR researchers, albeit with different formulations. It means that a state has the capabilities to make other states comply, i.e., the state achieves its central goals by using its power towards the parties targeted.²

IR literature speaks of three types of power: Hard power that coercively achieves a goal, such as military, economic, geographic, demographic, and natural resource power; soft power that achieves goals by attractive forces, such as legitimacy, political values, education, culture and diplomacy, etc.; and smart power which manages the hard and soft powers in an integrated manner, enhancing the chances of achieving strategic goals at the lowest cost and highest possible return.



As for the futile power, it means the inability to reach a strategic goal, despite the long period and the presence of the three powers. If IR scholars have been preoccupied with measuring the variables of power, it is necessary also to measure results and compare them with the variables of power that were exerted to obtain these results. That is if the cost far outweighs the results, then we are facing a futile power, and if pragmatism considers the idea to be correct as long as it brings benefits, then the power should be measured by the results obtained from employing various variables.

The history of colonialism during the past two centuries, the invention of guerrilla wars by oppressed peoples, and the disintegration of ancient and contemporary empires are all examples of how forces could become futile. Some studies estimate



that 25% of international conflicts have ended with the victory of the weak.³ Perhaps the examples of the Vietnamese victory over the US, the Algerian victory over France, the Afghan victory over the Soviet Union at first and the US later, the length of the Korean conflict without a result for either party, or the US inability to change the political system in some Latin American countries such as Cuba are all proof of that.



Therefore, a futile power can be determined when:

- ▶ a. Soft and hard powers exist without the smart power.
- ▶ b. Long time passes without reaching the goal, despite the availability of the three powers.
- ▶ c. There is confusion in defining strategic goals, despite the availability of the three components relatively.

In this research paper, we will discuss if the concept of futile force applies to Israel.

First: The Futile Hard Power

Since the Basel Conference of 1897, the central goal was to establish a Jewish state on all the land of Palestine, which means the complete control over Palestine and getting rid of its Arab population to ensure having a Jewish state. It is the same objective that has been increasingly raised in Israeli literature in the post-Oslo Accords 1994 period, particularly during the terms of Benjamin Netanyahu.



Benjamin Netanyahu

In order to assess the achievement of this goal, the following observations must be made:

- ▶ 1. The Palestinians in historic Palestine outnumber the Jewish population; 7.234 million Palestinians compared to 6.697 million Jews, i.e., a difference of 537 thousand, and although the Jews control 98.7% of historic Palestine, except the Gaza Strip (GS), Israel still has a strategic problem, the Palestinian population. Despite all its might, it seems that Israel does not know how to solve it, especially as this population is increasing in a way that deepens the intractable Israeli problem, which is evident as follows:⁴



The total population of Israel, Arabs and Jews, until the beginning of 2022 was 9.5 million, including about 7 million Jews, with 1.9% annual increase of Jewish population. As a result, Israeli population is expected to reach about 13.2 million in 2040. This is while noting that the sources of Jew immigration are starting to dry up despite the increase in recent months due to the Ukrainian war. However, the general rate of immigrant increase remains between 16–18 thousand annually, which is the same rate of the 2000–2020 period.

As for the number of Palestinians in 2022 in historic Palestine; The 1948 occupied territories, the West Bank (WB), and GS, it is 7.2 million; where 1.9 million are in the 1948 territories, 3.2 million in WB and 2.1 million in GS. Based on a 2.3% annual increase, Palestinian population is expected to reach about 13.8 million in 2040. Accordingly, the Arab and Jew population of historic Palestine will be 27 million, with a population density of 1000 ppl/ km², whereas it is now 530 ppl/ km², ranking 22nd globally.⁵ Hence, the Palestinian population will remain outnumbering the Jews, and this is a predicament for Israel, especially since most of the settler colonial experiences that had imbalanced population ratio in favor of the citizens ended in the defeat of the settlement project; as happened in South Africa, Algeria, Zimbabwe, former Rhodesia, etc.



► 2. The ongoing militarization: Israel ranks first in the Global Militarization Index, with an average of 437 points.⁶ Even though its population is 0.11% of the world's population, it has been at the top of this list for a long time,⁷ and it was a major party of 8% of all war conflicts in the world since 1948.⁸ Therefore, it fits the description of the Garrison State, as per the political sociologist Harold Lasswell. It is the state where security is superior to any other goal.⁹ When searching for the concept of the Garrison State, we find that Israel is frequently mentioned in Western studies or media reports.¹⁰



Harold Lasswell

The impression of Israel being a Garrison State increases when considering two other dimensions related to militarization and the priority of security. They are:



- ▶ a. Global Peace Index (GPI): According to GPI that uses 23 indicators and whose data are based on the reports of the United Nations (UN) and various academic centers, Israel ranked low, particularly in 2018 and 2022, ranging between 2010 and 2022 between 134th and 152nd. Among the 20 Middle Eastern countries, it ranked the 13th. Based on that, it becomes clear that the economic cost of such a situation amounts to 8% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP),¹¹ knowing that Israel ranks the 30th among the top GDPs of the world.¹²
- ▶ b. Political stability index in Israel: We have mentioned in a detailed study that the political stability in Israel will remain in the negative side until 2030.¹³ This means that this state, which was founded 84 years ago, 1948–2022, and despite all of its hard power, it has not been able to achieve the minimum positive political stability. This establishes social fatigue and deepens doubts about the feasibility of the Zionist project.

Researchers point out that the state's involvement in "prolonged wars" negatively affects the other types of power, as an example, the US. It also applies to Israel in its over stretching of its military activities from Palestine to the adjacent environment, the neighboring Arab countries, to the regional environment; striking Iraq, Sudan, Tunisia, and the military intervention in Morocco to support it against Algeria. Then in the international community; overt and covert military intervention in African countries and through security companies, etc.¹⁴ Furthermore, Israel ranks 18th globally in the Global Firepower (GFP) index, with a score of 0.2621.¹⁵ It has fought successive wars since its establishment, and according to most sources, the number of Israelis killed in battles with the Arabs since 1948, has reached 24,981, i.e., an annual rate of 342.¹⁶ We add to this that the current Israeli military spending rate (2020) is 5.6% of GDP compared to the global average of 2.2% of global GDP, which means that Israel spends 2.5 the rate of global spending.¹⁷ During periods of war or military operations in GS, its military spending increases, about 9% of its usual military spending.¹⁸ Nevertheless, Israel is among the most politically unstable countries in the world, as we mentioned earlier.



Therefore, we conclude that hard force has not achieved for Israel until this moment its strategic goal; the establishment of a "pure and stable Jewish" state.

Second: The Futile Soft Power

In our previous definition of soft power, we indicated that the tools for achieving “legitimacy” constitute the core of soft power. It means the ability to find an integration between hard and soft power to achieve goals, and this integration must have a sufficient degree of legitimacy and acceptance by the international community.

Here, it is necessary to answer the long-term strategic question: What is the extent of international acceptance of “the legitimacy of Israeli behavior and its management of its conflict with the Palestinians in particular”?

1. The Status of Israel in the UN

Most researchers consider the compliance with the UN Charter and resolutions the most expressive indicator of international legitimacy. In this context, Israel ranks globally first in the number of condemnations leveled against it by UN bodies, due to its violation of international conventions and laws. It was condemned in some UN bodies by decisions that exceed the total resolutions that the rest of the world was condemned by, especially concerning human rights. In some years, the rate of convictions of Israel has reached three times that of all other countries.¹⁹



This means that despite the legal or de facto recognition of Israel, there is not enough international official satisfaction to describe it a legitimate state. The Soviet Union was a strong country by the standards of hard force, and it was recognized by most countries, but it collapsed and its hard power was of no avail.

2. The International Public Opinion on Israel

In Western public opinion polls, the public opinion in 23 out of 27 countries, representing about 75% of the world's population, view the Israeli role in the world negatively, i.e., 85% of countries view Israel negatively. Also, Israel is globally the fourth most hated countries. Even in countries that traditionally are known to be pro-Israel, such as the US, polls indicate that youth, highly-educated and the democrats are increasingly becoming less sympathetic with Israel.²⁰



3. The Attraction Force of the Israeli Model

According to Jewish Agency, the percentage of Jews living in Israel out of all the Jews in the world stands at 45.3%, i.e., 54.7% of the world's Jews do not belong to Israel. This weakens the claim that Israel is the "state of the Jews" or that it constitutes an attractive political model.²¹



In April 2022, a report by *Israel Hayom* newspaper has revealed that 33% of Israelis have thought of reverse migration, for the following reasons:²²

- ▶ a. 40% cited the high cost of living.
- ▶ b. 22% cited the security situation.
- ▶ c. 18% said social rifts.
- ▶ d. 20% other reasons.

These percentages show that the attraction force of the Israeli model is weak, even for Jewish youth, and this is confirmed by another indicator, which is the fact that about 12 thousand Jews immigrate from Israel annually, according to official Israeli figures.²³

Third: The Futile Smart Power

Power, in its absolute sense, is that variable that controls the state, direction, position, or motion of a certain body. In IR, it means the ability of the state to compel other members of the international community to take into account its interests. In international law, the "legitimacy of using force" must be proportionate to the purpose.

Since its establishment, the ultimate goal of Israel was to "control the Palestinian land and empty it of its original inhabitants as much as possible." To achieve that, it has managed its IR by having nuclear armament, with between 80 and 400 nuclear warheads; alliances with polar powers; technological and scientific development in a way that surpasses any state in the region; and by making the Arab political regimes gradually recognize the "legitimacy of Israel's existence and normalize relations



with it.” However, the conflict did not stop, and Israel, since its establishment, goes through war once every five years, a rate that most countries do not go through. Perhaps one of the reasons for this is that Israel, when managing its smart power, does not have a vision for solving the Palestine issue other than using its hard power. It can be assumed that it has what IR researchers call “strategic blindness,” which means a political entity would reach “unintended and unexpected” outcomes.²⁴ Did the Zionist strategic mind in the beginnings expect that the conflict would last more than a century, from the Balfour Declaration until now? Did it expect that Israel would fight 14 wars, interspersed with military operations and continuous attacks by the Palestinian resistance until the time of writing of these lines, reaching low rank in political stability or peace indexes? Did those, who planned for the Zionist project, expect that the rate of economic growth in the Israeli GDP would decline from 30% in the mid-1950s to 5% today? Did they expect that that continued conscription among Israeli youth would cost 4.3% of GDP? Or that the continuous occupation of WB would cost annually \$6.8 billion, which is equivalent to about 8.7% of the annual government budget?²⁵



The hardest question is: How does the Israeli strategic mind imagine the right solution for the current Arab-Israeli conflict would be? Here strategic blindness will appear, as the Israelis do not have a solution. Each of the solutions they propose has its flaws that would revive the security concerns of the Israeli political decision maker. This is evident in the following proposed solutions:²⁶

1. The Forced Displacement of the Largest Possible Number of Palestinians

This can be done by making life hard and creating unrest among Palestinians, i.e., between those in GS and WB or between those living in the same areas, a situation that may reach a civil war, hence pushing them to seek refuge in neighboring countries. It can also be done by practicing Israel’s arbitrary expulsion policies. However, due to economic pressures and the positions of some Arab countries, this will reopen the



Palestinian file with the neighboring Arab countries. It will resurface the discussions similar to those revealed lately in 2022, in the transcript of a White House meeting between the then President Ronald Reagan and Prime Minister Menachem Begin, where they discussed expelling the Palestinians to other Arab countries, and how some of them—including some that have traditional relations with the West—were not ready to absorb a significant number of them.²⁷



Menachem Begin

Ronald Reagan

The former experiences of the Palestinians and international reactions make the asylum much less tempting. In addition, there is no guarantee that this scenario would be feasible in light of the large number of Palestinians in historic Palestine.

2. Keeping the Status Quo

That is, the continuation of high tension between the Palestinians and the Jews, the continuation of the Israeli mobilization, the constant threat of the outbreak of wars again with Arab or Muslim countries, and the failure to guarantee that changes will occur in Arab countries that would bring things back to the previous periods of high tension, etc. Indeed, after the Iranian revolution, the Israelis became more aware of their inability to fully adapt the region in favor of their strategies.

3. The Participation of Arab Countries in the Gradual Absorption of the Palestinians

This is done by allowing them to work and settle in other Arab countries, especially Jordan, the Gulf and Lebanon, and also by having development projects in some areas close to Palestine, in order to gradually turn them into an “alternative homeland.” They



could be near Gaza in the Sinai Peninsula, the Saudi islands that Egypt recently ceded, Tiran and Sanafir, or in the Saudi “NEOM” project, etc. Some Western countries like Canada may contribute to absorbing part of the Palestinians.

This scenario requires a long period, and the population increase will make the number of Palestinians a burden on the “host” countries, not to mention that instability in the Middle East, for many reasons, is the highest in the world. In addition, there is a significant percentage of Palestinians who do not accept what they consider the “trap of seduction,” and would remain in their land even if they are naked and hungry.



4. Genocide

This may be done by large-scale military operations, or by quiet killing through stifling environmental conditions; for example, burying nuclear or other wastes, promoting certain drugs, or poisoning the water, etc. All of that has one obstacle, for the separation in daily life and natural conditions between Arabs and Jews is no longer possible, and this makes the above procedures danger to everyone, especially with the increasing population and the high population density due to the limited space. This is not to mention the Arab and international reaction to such policies and their repercussions on the Israeli image.

5. Accepting the Establishment of a Palestinian State in WB and GS to Get Rid of the Palestinian Population Burden

This scenario faces the problem of settlements, Jerusalem, and the shared water sources, in addition to Israel’s loss of the strategic depth of the state and the guarantee of its security at borders, especially the Jordan River. This is not to mention the economic and military aspects these areas mean to Israel. Also the Israelis expect that WB, in the event of its independence, would become a new base of resistance, citing GS. Therefore, even if a possibility is weak, Israel never takes a chance.



6. One-State Solution

From a value perspective, this project seems tempting, especially in liberal circles, however, the population increase will make Israel a replica of the apartheid regime, with the potential of failure like South Africa. As for accepting the Palestinians on an equal footing, it means that the prime minister and the majority of Knesset members will be Palestinians, by the virtue of numerical superiority of the population, and this would make Israel lose its identity, and even its political existence.



Israel has set six “No’s for its settlement strategy, which are No to the:²⁸

- ▶ a. Two-state solution.
- ▶ b. One-state solution.
- ▶ c. Negotiations to find a final solution, but rather to negotiations must be just find mechanisms to ease the burdens of occupation on Israel.
- ▶ d. Dismantling of settlements.
- ▶ e. Sovereignty of the Palestinians over East Jerusalem.
- ▶ f. Return of refugees.

In addition, all Arab public opinion polls, whether by Western or Arab bodies,²⁹ have indicated that the percentage of Arabs who reject normalization, or Abraham Accords, with Israel is the highest and still increasing. All of this deprive Israel of regional acceptance to its strategy.

Conclusion

Israel has accomplished many parts of the Zionist project; the control over the land, penetrations of the Arab environment, and military and technical superiority over the Arab region. However, all of this did not lead its full and unambiguous legitimacy being recognized, or it being able to get rid of the Palestinian citizens, whose number exceeds the number of Jews in historic Palestine, or to stopping the resistance nor easing the burdens of self-defense, nor was it able to promote a positive image of it in its regional and international environments. This is in addition to cracks in its social fabric. This reinforces the idea that the power possessed by Israel is a futile power and that it has not yet made the transition into



being a natural state. We consider this a prelude to fatigue that would make many aspects of Israel similar to settler colonialism, especially the demographic, geo-political, and geo-strategic aspects.

As for Israel, there are new sources of concern, such as: the Iranian threat; the diminishing strategic importance of Middle East to the US compared to its other geo-strategic regions; the possibility of further Turkish flip-flopping towards Israel, especially as a result of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's relationship with the Islamic movements and the tendency to dominate the Mediterranean basin; the unequivocal rejection of Israeli presence by the Arab community; and the continuation of the Palestinian resistance, albeit with ebb and flow, however, it hasn't stop. It suffices to put the conclusion of a study issued by one of the most important Israeli centers of political studies, in November 2021, to confirm this continuing concern, "It is important to depict accurately the new situation that has gradually emerged over the last generation, and to voice a loud and clear warning against an excessively optimistic interpretation and unfounded expectations for a transformation of Arab-Israeli relations in the foreseeable future."³⁰



Recep Tayyip Erdogan



Endnotes

- ¹ An expert in futures studies, a former professor in the Department of Political Science at Yarmouk University in Jordan and a holder of Ph.D. in Political Science from Cairo University. He is also a former member of the Board of Trustees of Al-Zaytoonah University of Jordan, Irbid National University, the National Center for Human Rights, the Board of Grievances and the Supreme Council of Media. He has authored 37 books, most of which are focused on future studies in both theoretical and practical terms, and published 120 research papers in peer-reviewed academic journals.
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