



# An Assessment of Israel's Position in the 1991 Gulf War

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## Abstract

The Persian Gulf War was one of the defining incidents that shaped the current situation of the Middle East. There has been a vast amount of studies about this conflict but on a specific case why Israel stayed out of the conflict even though she was attacked continues to be an intriguing question for researchers. Saddam's decision on invading Kuwait and the war following this is going to be summarized in order to present the structure when this incident took place and also to build an environment in which Israel's decision on refraining itself from the war is going to be analyzed. Israel is perceived as one of the most aggressive countries in the Middle East mostly because of the wars that it included so far and the grand projects that it wants to put in practice in the future. With these assumptions it is rather hard to understand Israel's passive behaviour during the Persian Gulf War and possible reasons of this is going to be main focus of this study to understand the motivations behind such policy. Israel's state in that period and its capacity will be analyzed in order to understand whether this decision was taken directly and solely by Israel or it was a result of long-going dependency to another country or any other possible situation. Possible reasons that resulted with Israel's passive attitude will be under the scope to explain whether what Israel did was rather rational or not. In addition to that, the advantages that Israel enjoyed and disadvantages that it faced will be shown at the last part of the study.

**Keywords:** Persian Gulf War, Israel, Iraq Saddam Hossein, Yitzhak Shamir

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# 1991 Körfez Savaşında İsrail'in Pozisyonunun Bir Değerlendirmesi

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## Özet

1991 Körfez Krizi Orta Doğu'nun şu anki vaziyetinin şekillenmesinde en etkili faktörlerden birisi olmuştur. Bu kriz hakkında birçok çalışma yapılmış ve İsrail'in saldırıya uğramasına rağmen pasif tutumunu devam ettirmesi araştırmacılar için ilgi çekici bir husus olarak öne çıkmıştır. Saddam Hüseyin'in Kuveyt'i işgal etme kararını takip eden bu savaş hülasa olarak anlatılacak ve İsrail'in aldığı bu kararın oluşturduğu dış yapı aktarılmaya çalışılacaktır. İsrail bu savaş dışında Ortadoğu'nun en aktif ve agresif devleti olarak nitelendirilebilecek ve günümüz topraklarını revizyonist bir yaklaşımla genişletme amacıyla olan bir devlet olarak kabul edilecektir. Bu yaklaşım İsrail'in 1991 Savaşı'ndaki pasif tutumunu daha ön plana çıkaracağı ve problematize edeceği için tercih edilmiştir. Bu davranış, İsrail'in o dönemdeki sosyal, askeri ve diplomatik gücü dikkate alınarak analiz edilecektir. Bu analiz sonrasında İsrail'in bu kararı kendi fayda-zarar analizleri sonucunda alıp almadığı sorusu üzerinde durulacak ve buna cevap aranacaktır. İsrail'in bu tavrının bu şekilde analizi ile bu hareketin rasyonel bir hareket olup olmadığı ve süpriz devlet davranışı olarak sayılıp sayılmayacağına bakılacaktır. Ve bu seçimin sonucu olarak İsrail'in elde ettiği çıktılar sonuç bölümünde analiz edilecektir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** 1991 Körfez Savaşı, İsrail, Irak, Saddam Hüseyin, Yitzhak Shamir

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## **Introduction**

Israel's history features many wars throughout their nation-state history. Middle East and the world itself were in a transitional epoch at the time of outbreak of the Persian Gulf Conflict. People of the region were experiencing the last days of the long-lasting cold war that is also identified as the pi-bolar world in which the USA and the USSR had the hegemonic struggle and that witnessed many conflicts during that time. The year 1991 was the *terminus* for the competition in the cold war from the Western perspective and the beginning of the New World Order. But Iraq was one of the countries that were ignoring the New World Order promoted by the USA and as a result of that; Iraq invaded Kuwait because of various reasons. Oil prices and economic issues were the most salient ones of those reasons. The study will not try to bring the 1991 Gulf War's general reasons and consequences even those for Iraq since the analysis is going to focus on Israel's position during the war. But in brief; Iraq invaded Kuwait since; Kuwait historically was a part of Basra which was one of the 3 provinces of Iraq under Ottoman Rule. Second, Iraq's leader of the time Saddam Hossein had expansionist ambitions. Third, Western support on Saddam Hossein during the 1980-8 Iraq-Iran War played an adjuvant role on Iraq's aggression in the region. Fourth, Iraqi Nation's debts were pushing and cornering Saddam since Iraq was not able to pay.<sup>1</sup> It is important for one to notice that Saddam was accustomed to Iraqi people and he was aware of Iraq's regional and international capacity which indicates that Saddam was acting rational since he had to come up with a bail-out plan that would save Iraq from that position.<sup>2</sup> But also Saddam had become aggressive over the course of historical development of his rule. One of the most important indicators of this was Iran-Iraq war just before the Gulf conflict. These reasons all together resulted with increased aggression in the Iraqi political side which threatened Kuwait primarily but then this aggressive attitude was reflected on Israel, as well. The reasons why Iraq under Saddam rule tried to reflect its aggression on Israel is analyzed with further inquiry in the remaining parts of the study. The political and social state of Israel will be under the scope to be able to examine what Israel as a state witnessed during the Iraq-Kuwait War. The long-lasting Arab-Israeli conflict will be referred for its continuation after 1967 Six Days War. The study's main aim of analysing the reasons of Israel's passive behavior during the 1991 Gulf War. "Were there any other reasons than breaking the US-Arab alliance?" is going to be main question on Iraq's aggressive behaviour. Furthermore, Israel's decision will be evaluated; whether it was rational or not at the time. This study is mostly about the answer why Israel chose to stay in a passive mood. Because Israel for the whole Arab-Israeli conflict process was not a country that refrained itself from war against any Arab country. In

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1 Kemal İnat, "Irak: ABD ve Saddam Hüseyin İşbirliği ile Gelen Yıkım", (in) Kemal İnat and Burhanettin Duran et. al. (eds.) *Dünya Çatışmaları Çatışma Bölgeleri ve Konuları*, Ankara: Nobel Yayınları 2009, s. 12.

2 Hal Brands and David Palkki, "Saddam, Israel, and the Bomb, Nuclear Alarmism Justified?", *International Security*, Vol. 36, No. 1, (Summer 2011), pp. 133-166.

this sense, 1991 Gulf War is a rather surprising occasion in this process since Israel stayed out of war even though there were casualties and deaths because of Scud<sup>3</sup> missiles launched from Western Iraq. The study will continue to investigate this phenomena with further detail.

The rooted Arab-Israeli conflict had grabbed a vast amount of attention from various disciplines. And the 1991 Gulf War was a dangerous war that had potential to turn into an Arab-Israeli conflict. But the Gulf War stayed in the Gulf although there were Scud missiles launched against Israel from Western Iraq which resulted in hundreds of casualties and with a few life losses. The situation was dire for Israeli society to bear with even though it was a fact [for the Israelis] that Israeli Defense Forces would be able to shut down the Scud launchers effectively in a given period of time. But this idea is/was also challenged by some Jewish scholars who are experts on Israel such as Ze'ev Schiff. He argued that the Israeli society was vulnerable to Scud SSMs [Surface-to-Surface Missiles] although those were not existential threats. He also frames the reason why Israel was passive during 1991 Gulf Crisis as political *constraints*.<sup>4</sup> The reason why he labeled the reasons as political seems to indicate that militarily Israel was more than eager to attack and retaliate Iraq's assaults but in the economic sphere there was a different calculation and atmosphere that refrained Israel from joining the conflict. For the military operations he argued that it was not that certain that if Israel attacked there would be a certain military victory for Israel. Iraq was likely to have the support of Syria and Jordan against Israel which seemed to make it difficult for Israel to conduct aerial operations to Iraq in a quick manner. He also underlines the superiority of Iraqi forces' manpower, enlarged with Jordan and Syria's inclusion, which would decrease the chances of a total victory. He also points out that Israel would economically suffer from this kind of an escalation which would damage the economy in an unrecoverable way.<sup>5</sup> These reasons can be explained as following; Israel at the time was ruled by Right-oriented Likud party under president Shamir which was trying to increase his credibility so that he and Israel would be able to establish some leverages for the continuing Israel-Palestine issue. Israel stood passive during the war since it was aiming for the post-war bargains. This was of course the result of Israel's guaranteed conditions on holding back from the War against Iraq.

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3 *Scud* is a series of tactical ballistic missiles developed by the Soviet Union during the Cold War. It was exported widely to both Second and Third World countries. The term comes from the NATO reporting name "Scud" which was attached to the missile by Western intelligence agencies. The Russian names for the missile are the R-11 (the first version), R-17 (later R-300) Elbrus (later developments). The name Scud has been widely used to refer to these missiles and the wide variety of derivative variants developed in other countries based on the Soviet design.

4 Ze'ev Schiff, "Israel After The War", *Foreign Affairs*, Spring 91, Vol. 70 Issue 2, 1991, pp. 19-33.

5 Schiff, pp. 20-21.

An alienated Israel after the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars was obviously in need of keeping its deterrence credibility high in the region. Israel's strategic doctrine in 1980s included maximization of Israel's deterrence capability and that if such capability is not effective on its own; the army was imagined as the quick response at full force. The main purpose of this doctrine of detergency was to establish the idea that there are certain *red lines* that Israel would never let any Arab country cross and if they do the result will be a harsh punishment without any toleration to the Arab leaders and military commanders.<sup>6</sup> In order to protect these red lines Israel was obliged to prove its technological and military superiority over other regional powers. Additional to this idea of superiority, Israel's strategic doctrine have also included limiting the number of civilian casualties. Therefore, Israel's strategic planning was standing on two important principles; firstly, carrying the conflicts to the enemy territory to reduce the number of casualties; secondly, resorting to pre-emptive strikes to stop conflicts from escalating to large scale wars.<sup>7</sup> And with Saddam's challenge to Israel's deterrence with Scud missiles the response was the US Patriots settled in Tel-Aviv and other bordering cities of Jordan which was a terrible situation for Israel since any existence of foreign troops to defend Israel was regarded as humiliation for them. Although their credibility was damaged during this war Israel's passive attitude was returned in both material and non-material means as 10 Billion \$ was paid for Israel as War compensations according to some sources and Israel was the sole deterrent power in the region after Iraqi Army was defeated in a certain way. But this situation was not going to last long as other regional powers were starting to flourish and enrich their military capabilities. States such as Turkey and Iran in the North and Saudi Arabia in the South was going to be next competitors for Israel in the coming future in all sectors.

The case of 1991 Gulf War itself is very significant and important in many ways. The study will try to focus on the parts that are related to Israel which is the area that still requires further contributions by researchers as much as other wider sides of the concept. There are not many studies that reflect the question of why Israel stayed out of war. This may be a result of discrete politics and diplomatic secrecy during the time of war. The study also tried to benefit from the newspapers articles and the political announcements made throughout the crisis which is really important to understand the psychology and the political atmosphere of that time. Without this operationalization of the war time's material research would be very detached from the atmosphere, political structure and the social conventions of the time. This is mainly the reason why those materials are involved in the study. The remaining part will present a brief historical background of Israel at the time of the crisis since it is argued that the state of both countries both Israel and Iraq determined their strategic action. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait is seen as a strategic one as well since there

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6 Schiff, p. 30.

7 Schiff, p. 28.

was no escape plan for Iraq and Saddam to rejuvenate Iraq and create an escape route from economic recession after the 1980-8 Iraq-Iran war. And similarly staying a low-profile in the Gulf Crisis was the strategic action to do for Israel at the time as the regional segregation and alienation was becoming a threat for Israel because of its aggressive attitude against the Palestine issue. These reasons together will be evaluated on whether those actions rational or not in the following parts of Israel's historic evaluation.

### **State of Israel at the time of 1991 Gulf War**

The negative outcomes of Yom Kippur War of 1973 was still observable even though it was a victory for Israel. After 1973 Israel became less confident more isolated and more dependent than ever on the U.S. economic, military and diplomatic support.<sup>8</sup> Israel after 1973 had only the US as the sole military supplier and the only country capable of giving a well-rounded support. Throughout the time that spent till the 1991 Gulf Crisis Israel had witnessed major changes from the 1970s to 1980s marked with the Camp David treaty in 1978.

During the 1980s Israel's understanding of security and threat was widening its geographical borders to the region and even beyond it. In this context, Sharon, said: *"Our main security problems during the 1980s will stem from external threats from two sources, namely: One – the Arab confrontation; second – the Soviet expansion which both builds on the Arab confrontation and at the same time provides it with its main political and military tools."*<sup>9</sup> From Sharon's explanation it is clearly observable that Israel is going to enlarge the periphery of their security concerns. 1979 Iran's Islamic revolution brought another threat against Israel's survival. With having threat both from Iraq and Iraq against its survival, Israel had to depend on the US which accepted as a superior power and which was able to balance against the Soviet penetration in the Middle East. One should not omit the difference between Israel's strategic doctrine and its military doctrine. Israel's strategic doctrine was in tendency to enlarge the periphery so that all potential threats were considered strategically at the same time. Its military doctrine on the other hand was limiting the threat framework to closer threats accordingly with their aerial and missile range capabilities. A second differentiation was in the method of de-escalation or resolving the conflicts. Strategic doctrine with widening potential threat periphery was making Israel more dependent on United States since the combination of Arab forces were much more bigger than Israeli Defense Forces. Military doctrine in contrast was pushing Israel's limits further for dealing Israel's problems with its own means and limitations.

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8 Efraim Inbar, *Israel's National Security: Issues and Challenges Since the Yom Kippur War*, New York: Routledge 2008, p. 3.

9 Efraim Inbar, *Israel's National Security: Issues and Challenges Since the Yom Kippur War*, New York: Routledge 2008, p. 14.

Another important concept of Israeli strategic doctrine and military doctrine is *deterrence* indeed. In March 1988 Chief of Staff Dan Shomron stated that, "Of course, in 1973, during *Yom Kippur* war, the Arab countries possessed gas... But they never used it, and there is a reason for this. This type of weapon invites [a] very harsh reaction." Which shows Israel was relying on its deterrence very much against the existing threats in the region.<sup>10</sup> And the Israeli leaders continuously emphasized the deterrence in responding to the threat of Iraqi chemical weapons.<sup>11</sup> For the Israeli side resolving conflicts without resorting to conventional war seem to have gained importance because of the impediments in economic and manpower related measures. Regardless of the constraints Israel's deterrence had four main dimensions. Decisiveness was really important for the Israeli deterrence since whenever a military conflict erupted, Israel had to mark a decisive victory to protect its deterrent position. Secondly, autonomy was may be the most important thing for Israel as being in need of no other actor to survive or protect itself or even to aspire for more power and influence. Israel alongside with revisionist and expansionist policies had to maintain its borders defendability at all costs. The last one was no history of defeats for Israel. With this four separate legs Israel was strategically planning to maintain its deterrence in the region against potential Arab threats at the time.<sup>12</sup> There even harsher statements on the possible outcome of usage of gasses in a war against Israel, one by Defense Minister Rabin at the time in 1988 as if there were chemicals used by Iraq Israel would retaliate tenfold.<sup>13</sup> But it is obvious that the deterrence dimension of strategic doctrine failed abruptly since Iraq attacked Israel continuously during the Gulf War Crisis. Iraqis especially the ruler Saddam Hussein was not afraid from Israeli retaliation and in fact he was expecting a reaction from Israel as it was a promise that has to be kept.<sup>14</sup> The last dimension of deterrent position of Israel was deploying *casus belli* which was not emphasized much after 1967. *Casus belli* means shortly an incident that potentially causes war of at least give one party legitimacy to wage war against the other.<sup>15</sup> Israel with firmly establishing red lines and considering them as *casus belli* indicates that Israel was technically preparing itself for the possible threats. And via this declaration Israel again was posing a firm

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10 Mike Eisenstadt, "The Sword of the Arabs: Iraq's Strategic Weapons, Policy Paper 21, Washington Institute for Near East Policy 1990, Washington D.C., p. 53.

11 Gerald M. Steinberg, "Israeli Responses to the Threat of Chemical Warfare", *Armed Forces & Society*, Vol. 20, No. 1, Fall 1993, p. 89.

12 Yoav Ben-Horin & Barry Posen, *Israel's Strategic Doctrine*, Prepared Report for the Office of Secretary of Defense 1981, California: Rand.

13 Gerald M. Steinberg, "Israel Responses", p. 89.

14 Barak Mendelsohn, "Israeli self-defeating Deterrence in the 1991 Gulf War", *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 26:4 2003, DOI: 10.1080/0141-2390312331279698, p. 97.

15 David Horowitz, *The Israeli Conception of National Security: The Constant and the Changing in Israeli Strategic Thought*, 1973, p. 9



deterrent actor who would not tolerate of violations of the rules of the game.<sup>16</sup> This summary of developments in the understanding of threat, deterrence and periphery of Israel was seen necessary to perceive the atmosphere in which Gulf Crisis escalated.

Yitzhak Shamir's government was in duty and the Arab-Israeli peace process was moribund by the time Iraq invaded Kuwait on August 2, 1990.<sup>17</sup> Revisionist politicians in Israel were focused on keeping the occupied lands under Israeli control from 1967.<sup>18</sup> This was the main problem that triggered an Arab-Israeli conflict between Israel and most of the Arab countries. The war deteriorated efforts to seek an Arab-Israeli peace, and the United States deliberately excluded Israel from the international coalition to establish a respond to Iraq's aggression, which included several Arab states that opposed Iraq, in an effort to avoid splitting the group. So this situation has a great amount of common relations with the Arab-Israeli conflict and its continuation. The decision on keeping Israel out of the war should be considered and analyzed relatively to this situation. Soon after the beginning of the hostilities in January 1991, Iraq fired 39 Scud missiles at Israel, trying to divide the coalition by deviating Arab attention away from its anti-Iraqi stance to Israel. Israel at the time socially and politically alienated in the Middle East and was keen on defending the country's integrity at all costs. For a state like Israel that has always been active in Arab-Israeli conflict to stay put even though being attacked was an unbearable pain for some people. And some parts of Israeli society and political sphere even tried portray Iraq-Kuwait war as an opportunity for Israel to take the attention from Palestine conflict and may be securing their position in the occupied lands of Judea, Samara and Gaza. The stakeholders of these ideas defended that Shamir was increasing his credibility in terms of having more to say when the war ends and attention returns to Israel-Palestine conflict.<sup>19</sup> They defended the argument of bearing a softer pain today to reduce the bigger pain of tomorrow. These reasons will be analyzed with further detail in the coming parts of the study. For summarizing Israel's situation at the time of the war was socially and politically alienated after 1967 and 1973 Wars with Arab states which fed the ideas of redeeming honour and revenge of Arab countries even more since Israel did not surrender to the Arab states. So any sparkle of war could threaten Israel's security unless it was between Arab states which were going to relieve them at most.

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16 Yoav Ben-Horin & Barry Posan, "Israel's Strategic", p. 16.

17 Bernard Reich, *A Brief History of Israel*, Second Edition, 2008, New York, p. 158.

18 For further information about Israel's situation at the period see Efraim Inbar, *Israel's National Security: Issues and Challenges Since the Yom Kippur War*, New York: Routledge, 2008.

19 J. J. Goldberg, "Doves and Hawks Together: American Jews, Israel and the War", *Commonweal* 1991, pp. 123-5.



## **Background of Iraq-Israeli Relations Before 1991 Gulf Crisis**

This study is not going to focus on the historical reasons and the historical materialistic process that ended with a war. Instead the study will focus on only the specific things in the close history which is not going to cover for more than 10 years back in history of the 1991 Gulf Crisis. In 1981, Iraq-Israeli relations had taken a downturn when Israel took advantage of Iraq's busy state of war with Iran when Israel bombed the Iraqi nuclear facility at Osirak.<sup>20</sup> For this time Saddam Hossein was not able to retaliate since Iraq was putting all of her energy for the 1980-8 Iraq-Iran War which may be considered as the most important reason of 1991 Gulf Crisis since Iraq was in 30 billion dollars in debt when the war ended. Israel's invasion of Lebanon [1982] was another rift widening moment between Israel and Iraq since Iraq was completely against the revisionist Zionist ideas that defended the idea of enlargement of Israeli border at every chance. And this is one of the strongest reasons why Iraq was trying to start a ground war. This was because Iraq was planning to retake the invaded lands from Israel if not demolishing Israel completely to give these lands back to their original owners with natural bargains than provided to Saddam against Israel.

When 1980-1990 era analyzed in that sense it is observable that Israel was quiet aggressive against both Iraq and Palestine during that time which sort of indicates that Israel was in a situation that she had no more credit for further atrocities and aggressions. This is may be the reason why Israel did not really push for War during the Gulf Crisis within the framework of the decision on Israel's non-active role would be the best solutions for it. This is a result of the reactions to the Israeli aggressions in Palestine and Israel's attacks on both Iraq and Lebanon with the problems added in the West Bank there was a ready to war stance between Israel and Arab states which led many scholars to think that Gulf Crisis was formed to prevent a deadly war between Israel and Arab states. Since the 1980s Iraq had the most modernized army of the Middle East with addition of man power which was obviously the reason why Israel conceived Iraq as a threat. But after the diplomatic processes and strategic meetings Israel's inclusion to the war seemed to bring more harm than good to both U.S. and Israel simultaneously. In terms of this competition Israel was always against the U.S. foreign policy mentality of cultivating some *useful* and *friendly* Arab states in the Middle East. Israel was always sure of that these deployment of force to a specific state would create an asymmetrical threat to Israel because of the hatred and non-peaceful relations with the Arab states. In this context when the background of Israel and Iraq's co-historical process before the War it is observed that Israel used Iran-Iraq War to hit Iraq multiple times knowing that Iraq was not going to be able to retaliate. It was almost too obvious that Saddam would seek revenge after the Iraq-Iran war which was actually the case but Israel this time was acting different. Maintaining a passive state even though the homeland is under attack which is the least expected thing from

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20 Scott B. Lasensky, "Friendly Restrained: U.S.-Israel Relations During the Gulf War Crisis of 1990-9", *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, June 1999

Israel to bare. Then the motivation behind this passive attitude should be more beneficial than retaliating Iraq and redeeming Jewish society against Arabs. Or Israel calculated that this large scale war was not that feasible for them or any other potential motive may have played a substantial role in the decision making-process but an in-depth analysis is required.

### **Reasons of Israel's Passive Stand in the 1991 Gulf War**

This study indicates that this incident was a result of a securitization process. Israel and Iraq have designated each other as enemies and struggled to eliminate other's abilities in order to *survive* in the region. This conflictual situation escalated in a process of securitization where two sides used each other to accumulate means of war. To analyze this, study requires basic practical conceptualizations of certain subjects like state, conflict etc. Concepts such as conflict, war and survival of the state in International Relations discipline are often explained by the approaches of realist tradition. This is why this study preferred the realist perspective of state. For explaining the 1991 Gulf Crisis the state definition of realism seems to grasp the reality better about the competitive and selfish nature of the states. For Realism, state is a rational actor that directly or indirectly struggles for power.<sup>21</sup> In this study Iraq is portrayed as the nation-state that struggles for more power and that has an aggressive approach of power. Although Israel might be considered through this assumption also in general but for this specific issue there is another realist assumption that suits Israel's state during 1991 Gulf Crisis which suggests that survival is the pre-condition for states to reach all other goals that they can have.<sup>22</sup> For this study and this incident Israel is portrayed as the state that cares about its survival more than any other interest of it during the course of 1991 Gulf Crisis. Stability and Balance of Powers are also another two very important tenets of the nation-state system, which enables state to survive and flourish in their environment.<sup>23</sup> This assumption is accepted to be able to explain the United States' role in the conflict both for Israel and for Iraq during the crisis. United States is portrayed as a stabilizer for the region since it seems that U.S. was the biggest motive behind Israel's decision on not joining the war. These assumptions are chosen due to practical need of having a framework of perceptions of state and its nature of ambitiousness for power and survival instinct. while explaining a conflictual phenomenon which is 1991 Gulf War.

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21 Jack Donnelly, "Realism", in Scott Burchill and Andrew Linklater (eds.), *Theories of International Relations*, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition 2013, Palgrave Macmillan

22 Kenneth N. Waltz, "Theory of International Politics", Long Grove: Waveland Press, 1979, p. 88.

23 Richard N. Lebow, "Classical Realism", in Tim Dunne et. al. (eds.), *International Relations Theories (Discipline and Diversity)*, Oxford University Press, 2010, p. 70.

## **Why Iraq Pulled Israel into the Conflict?**

Iraq was in a dire situation where the US-led coalition was preparing to crush Iraqi army and not only stop the invasion but to leave big scar in the Iraqi army that would provide comfort for Israel in the coming years. Iraq, foreseeing the damage, tried to present the issue as the struggle between an imperialist power, United States, and Iraq, the sole voice of Arab world against it. Iraq's target was obviously Saudi Arabia but Saudi government felt threatened enough with Iraqi army in Kuwait thus did not bite the Iraqi bait which left Iraq alone against the US and other Arab countries in its cause of expanding the Iraqi state and maximizing its power. Saddam Hossein tried to include Israel into the war to pressurize Arab government via Arab public opinion. Because Saddam new that Arab coalition would not side with Israel since it would create a very strong reaction from the public opinion. In this sense it is considerable that Iraq was a rational actor in attacking Israel since it portrayed the result as retaliation due to Israel's deterrent posture and this retaliation leading to deformation in the US-led Arab coalition. And this effort to pull Israel into the war considered as the most rational thing that Saddam did in the Gulf war of 1991. Furthermore, attacking Israel is considered Saddam's only strategic response in the war. Through launching Scud SSMs to Israeli soil, Saddam was trying to pull Israel into the war as a strategic action which he thought was the only way of breaking the US led Arab coalition.<sup>24</sup> For analyzing Iraq's eagerness for involvement of Israel to war a deep analysis from Iraqi perspectives is required.

After the elaborated analysis of Iraqi records Hal Brands pins out 5 important situations that motivated the attack on Israel:

1. Saddam's hostility toward Israel was hardly manufactured. Like Iraqi leaders before him, he understood that a forward-leaning stance toward Israel could help him outflank moderate Arab leaders and achieve regional acclaim.
2. The Iraqi records reveal that even before Saddam became president of Iraq, he privately advocated waging a war of attrition to liberate the Israeli-occupied territories. This ambition was central to the Iraqi nuclear programme. Saddam believed that acquiring nuclear weapons would deter Israel from making nuclear threats against Iraq, thereby allowing the Arabs to bring their larger armies and populations to bear in a prolonged, conventional war. The Israeli attack on the Tammuz nuclear reactor in 1981 deferred this vision, and the Iran–Iraq war re-focused Saddam's attention to the east. Yet Israel was never far from his strategic calculus.
3. Saddam saw the war with Iran as a potential springboard to an eventual conflict with Israel, and his wartime experience particularly Israeli support for Iran and participation in the Iran/Contra scandal made him increasingly wary of Israeli (and American) intrigues both real and imagined.

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24 Aharon Levran, "Israeli strategy after Desert Storm: Lessons of the Second Gulf War", 1997, London: Frank Cass, *BESA studies in international Security*, p. 6.

4. Saddam emerged from the Iran–Iraq war convinced that his regime was attaining the capabilities necessary for a war against Israel, and he reportedly ordered his military commanders to make initial preparations for this conflict in 1988–1989.
5. Saddam’s decision to attack Israel in 1991 was in part a cynical effort to split the United States-led coalition.<sup>25</sup>

From this points’ evaluation it is almost certain that Iraq’s attack on Israel had certain motivations behind it. Surprising part in this conflict was about the more rational state which was usually Israel. Understanding the surprise state behavior has always been a point that every political scientist would aspire to reach if not able to foresee it. Israel’s attitude in the Gulf War Crisis was and is considered as a surprise state behavior at the time since as it was argued above even the closest partner of Israel, U.S. was concerned about a pre-emptive strike that would jeopardize the U.S. led Arab coalition. This is a significant reason to categorize this behavior as a surprise behavior for the other states than U.S. since it was the one trying to restrain Israel from entering the War. As it is argued above Saddam was pretty sure that when Israel is threatened it will attack with all force because of her strategic survival doctrine. And it was argued that Saddam was ready to escalate the war even further after the Israeli inclusion with the chemical warfare threats against Israel. Again this is also another indication that for Iraqi side it was planned as this seemed like the automatic response of Israel against an attack to its survival because Saddam was threatening to burn half Israel down.

First, when the war broke out Israelis’ perceived it as it was a signal and indication of the threats that surround Israel on the daily basis at the time.<sup>26</sup> Since Iraq’s aggressive behavior towards Kuwait was in background legitimizing the idea that Iraq was the biggest threat in the Middle East against Israel’s survival since Saddam had expansionist ambitions. Although U.S. was the iron clad defender of the Israeli survival, Israel had the convention of not welcoming any foreign troops for the defense of Israel. This seemed also potentially deteriorate the defensive credibility of Israel in the Middle East since this incident would portray Israel as hopeless and in need of foreign military existence to defend it.<sup>27</sup> In the context of securitized actor Iraq did what was expected from her as launching Scud missiles on Israel but the reaction was the surprising part. Thus a good examination of this phenomena and analysis of the reasons that conducted to this result is necessary.

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25 Hal Brands, “Saddam and Israel: What Do the New Iraqi Records Reveal?”, *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 2011, Vol. 22. 2011, Taylor & Francis Group, LLC, pp. 501-02.

26 J. J. Goldberg, “Doves and Hawks Together: American Jews, Israel and the War”, *Commonweal*, 1991, pp. 159-163.

27 Bar Illian, “Israel After the Gulf War”, *Commentary* 1991, p. 35.

## Meaning of Israel's Inclusion

Although the headline emphasizes the results of Israeli inclusion to the War, the exclusion of Israel still held significant results for both the region and Israel. The question whether Israel kept itself out of war completely or not remains but at least it is a consensus that Israel had no large-scale attacks against Iraq during and after the 1991 Gulf War. It was also reported that King of Jordan at the time Hussein alongside with PLO leader Yaser Arafat stated that Israel was actually retaliating against Scud missiles with Cruise<sup>28</sup> missiles launched from Negev. Additional to the information of Israel was bombing Iraq with repainted aircraft alongside with American and Turkish military aircraft.<sup>29</sup> And thus Saddam's attacks were justified since Israel practically was a part of destruction of Iraq in this War. Jordanian King was also pushing further against another sensitive point with arguing that Israel is just a protectorate of the U.S. with saying that Israel owes its protection to USA. Therefore, one should be careful while analyzing this phenomenon since there are unknown facts that may change or disprove the whole study which is a very negative situation for a researcher to have a spurious relationship between variables.

Israel's reaction to the crisis should be analyzed within the framework of the Arab-Israeli conflict.<sup>30</sup> Israel remained technically at war with Iraq since the first Arab-Israeli war when it participated in hostilities against Israel. It is argued that on the U.S. side there was an automatic fear about Israel within the framework of its strategic survival doctrine may have dictated that a pre-emptive strike was the best solution for the continuation of Israel's welfare in the Middle East.<sup>31</sup> On 2 April Saddam disclosed that Iraq had binary chemical weapons and that he would use them to "burn half of Israel" should Israel try to attack Iraq and it became an open secret that he was developing a nuclear-biological-chemical capability.<sup>32</sup> There was also concern that much of the interna-

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28 *A cruise missile* is a guided missile used against terrestrial targets that remains in the atmosphere and flies the major portion of its flight path at approximately constant speed. Cruise missiles are designed to deliver a large warhead over long distances with high accuracy, that is, small circular error probability. Modern cruise missiles are capable of travelling at supersonic or high subsonic speeds, are self-navigating, and are able to fly on a non-ballistic, extremely low-altitude trajectory. They are distinct from unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) in several ways: the cruise missile is a single use weapon which is always sacrificed in the mission; it is not intended to provide aerial reconnaissance; and the warhead is integrated directly into the hull of the vehicle and cannot be separated. There is considerable overlap between cruise missiles and anti-ship missiles.

29 Bar Illhan, "Israel After the Gulf War", *Commentary* 1991, pp. 37-8.

30 Bernard Reich, *A Brief History of Israel*, Second Edition, 2008, New York, p. 160.

31 Shai Feldman, "Israel's Grand Strategy", paper presented at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 7 May 1997, Cambridge

32 Amatzia Baram, "The Invasion of Kuwait: Decision Making in Baghdad," in *Iraq's*

tional community did not take Hussein's threats as seriously as Israel did.<sup>33</sup> Despite the areas of discord, during the Iraq-Kuwait crisis Israel concurred with President Bush's approach. In a meeting in December 1990, Bush and Shamir accentuated the positive support of Israel for the U.S. response to Saddam Hussein, and Israel was assured that there would be no Persian Gulf solution at its expense.<sup>34</sup> The positive meetings and the congruence of the policies of Israel and the United States during the crisis helped to decrease Israeli fears about what is going to happen after the war. Israel was convinced that the embargo of Iraq would not work and that economic sanctions and UN resolutions would not remove Iraq from Kuwait and Hussein from Iraq. Israel benefited politically from the fact that Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip generally applauded the Iraqi takeover of Kuwait, identified Saddam Hussein as a hero, did not really show sympathy for the occupied Kuwaitis. During the period of hostilities, the Israeli government moved further to the right when the Mole-det (Homeland) Party, represented by Rehavam (Gandhi) Ze'evi, joined the cabinet. Shamir's domestic political approval rating and popularity increased during the war, particularly because of the decision not to respond to the Scud missile attacks.

Within the light of this knowledge it is reasonable to say that whatever Israel was going to do was going to define the future of the region whether it was entering the war or the complete opposite option. If Israel included herself in War against Iraq that would have broken the code between USA and her Arab allies since attacking a country that Israel also attacking would imply that they are fighting with Israel on the same side, which was unacceptable for Muslim World. Israel was perceived as an enemy to the Muslim Arab World due to her aggressive attitude towards Palestinian issue. The problem for Israel was the linkage established between the Palestinian issue and the Gulf conflict. Soviets made a proposal for disputing all of the existing problems in the Middle East in the same year with the conflict in September which denied by both Israel and USA simultaneously. And the Secretary of State at the time asserted that Iraq-Kuwaiti problem and Israel-Palestine issues are two separate conflicts of the Middle East and they had to be treated differently.<sup>35</sup> Thus Israel should have kept aside of the War if USA was going to continue the benevolent relations with the allied Arabs which was providing a lot of assistance and comfort for the Gulf War. It was certain that USA would defeat Iraq by its own as well but since Israeli side believed that even though Saddam was defeated he could rise back in just one day they were pretty occupied about what was going to happen after the war. With these doubts and concerns it is a question mark what was

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*Road to War*, (ed.) Amatzia Baram and Barry Rubin, 1993, London: Macmillan, p. 11.

33 Bernard Reich, *A Brief History of Israel*, Second Edition, 2008, New York, p. 159.

34 Avi Shlaim, in Alex Danchev and Dan Keohane, eds., *International Perspectives on the Gulf Conflict, 1990-91*, London: St Martin's Press, 1994, p. 71.

35 Avi Shlaim, in Alex Danchev and Dan Keohane, eds., *International Perspectives on the Gulf Conflict, 1990-91*, London: St Martin's Press, 1994, p. 66.



possible if Israel launched a large-scale War against Iraq. The general answer given to that question was mostly about a chemical or biological war between Israel and Iraq. Since most of the Israeli intellectuals and politicians believed that Saddam's Scud missiles were not a really asymmetrical one if Israel had the chance to destroy the launchers by herself. And the Patriots established in the country at the time was not really able to diminish the raining Scud missiles as almost half of them 19/39 damaged Israeli countryside with more than 1000 casualties and 2 deaths.<sup>36</sup> The reason that the Scud missiles were not able to create the chaos that Saddam wanted them to create are diverse. Since most of the Israelis left Tel Aviv due to its position and priority in the Scud attacks the casualties were reduced. When the Ballistic Missile attacks are analyzed it is really striking that Iraq's Scud attacks were not really effective even the total casualties were less than just one ballistic missile was able to do in Tehran and London attacks.<sup>37</sup> And also the Patriots debris was also as much harmful as Scud missiles for Israeli people. It is almost certain that Israel would not really stay on the defensive position if a ground war with Iraq was allowed.

It was almost certain that Iraq and Saddam had the potential to use chemical weapons since the reports, newspapers, and photos from Israel suggest that each Scud missile that was launched was considered as a potential chemical weapon. Therefore, Baghdad's threats to use CWs was both implicit and explicit. As early as the first week after the invasion of Kuwait, the Iraqi ambassador to Greece warned openly that "Baghdad will use chemical weapons if it is attacked by the United States or Israel."<sup>38</sup> Another statement that supported these claims was made by Iraq's Minister of Defense, Lt. Gen. Saadi Tuma Abbas, when he seemed to threaten obliquely the impending use of CWs when he noted, "Thank God, the Iraqi armed forces have many modern weapons and munitions sufficient to destroy the U.S.-Zionist aggression. Some of which have not been used yet."<sup>39</sup> Further in this direction Israel's patience were becoming thinner after each Scud missile hit Israeli soil. And there are even further accusations against Iraq about that Saddam was ready to use chemical weapons to include Israel to the war in order to diminish the Arab-US coalition regardless of Israel's retaliation but there were other things that held Iraqi government back from using chemical weapons. One of the most significant ones was *The Weather* as another contributing factor to the nonuse of CWs were the unfa-

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36 Eric Karsenty, in Joshua Shemer, Itzhik Alshech, Bruno Cojocaru, Marian Moscovitz, Yair Shapiro, Yehuda L. Danon (ed.), "Medical Aspects of the Iraqi Missile Attacks on Israel," *Israel Journal of Medical Sciences*, Vol. 27 1991, pp. 603-607.

37 George N. Lewis & Steve Fetter, and Lisbeth Gronlund, "Casualties and Damage From Scud Attacks In The 1991 Gulf War", Working Paper for Massachusetts Institute Of Technology Defense And Arms Control Studies Program, 1993, pp. 18-19.

38 Athens Domestic Service in Greek, Aug. 9, 1990, in *Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS), Near East & South Asia*, Aug. 10, 1990, p. 28.

39 see for original copy: *Al-Ra'y* (Amman Jordan), Feb. 12, 1991, p. 20.



avorable atmospheric conditions during much of the ground campaign. Thus during the War, the prevailing wind was from the southeast, which would have reduced the effectiveness of CW attacks and increased the risk of chemicals returning back across Iraqi positions. Moreover, the weather remained rainy for much of the period, punctuated at times by violent storms. This would have reduced the expected persistency and effectiveness of CWs on the battlefield considerably.<sup>40</sup>

After analyzing the meaning of Israel's inclusion and exclusion related to 1991 Gulf War it is important to research the other reasons why Israel kept herself out of War. One of these other reasons seems to be the iron clad relationship between Israel and the US and for the remaining part of the study this relationship and its effects will be analyzed which is going to be followed by the conclusion.

### **Israel's Dependency on the United States**

From the beginning of Arab-Israeli conflict which has actually not resolved since the establishment of Israel in 1948, the US has been the most important supporter and promoter of Israel in the Middle East. Had it not been US' permanent support, Israel would struggle and suffocate in the region as a result of dire alienation. It is asserted that during the Gulf War Crisis, Israel was in constant contact with the US's top decision makers.<sup>41</sup> Which means that actually what Israel had in mind was reflected upon the U.S. decision makers' agenda contrasting the idea that the U.S. was pressurizing Israel in a one-directional way. This is obviously basing on the certainty in the U.S. side which is Israel's inclusion to the war was going to mean that U.S. led Arab coalition was going to shatter. Therefore, the U.S. was determined about keeping Israel distanced from any atrocities at the time which was rather abnormal thing to do for Israelis to not defend themselves when attacked not just threatened.<sup>42</sup> But after the elaborated analysis of the situation it is observable that Israel also had some bargains in this equation and it also was able to pressure the U.S. government for the destruction of the Scud launch-pads in the Western Iraq. Israel's position in the war was clear as there was not going to be any asymmetrical threats against Israel after the Gulf War as promised by the US. This was really significant in the sense that Israel's position was promised by both sides at the time which proves that Israel was standing passive because there was a bigger bargain. This process was tried to be managed by the U.S. within the diplomatic sphere

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40 Edward M. Spiers, *Chemical Warfare*, Chicago: University of Illinois, 1986, p. 213.

41 Scott B. Lasensky, "Friendly Restrained: U.S.-Israel Relations During the Gulf War Crisis of 1990-9", *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, June 1999, p. 1.

42 Abraham Ben-Zvi, "The U.S. & Israel: The Limits of the Special Relationship", New York, Columbia University Press, 1994, pp. 193-5.

with clearly strategic reasons.<sup>43</sup> Since this bargain was too explicit to be public both states followed a discrete way in terms of achieving what both states wanted at the time. At first, the U.S. was trying to impede Israel's pre-emptive strike strategy and the try to eliminate the Iraqi threat posed to Israel.<sup>44</sup> Israel held a different view, which it presented at various Washington meetings. Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin claimed that under no circumstances should either side in the Gulf war be allowed to emerge with a dangerously large military power.<sup>45</sup> Following this process back and forth between the U.S. and Israel on whether Israel was legitimate on making pre-emptive strikes or not. It was certain that Israel was not thinking of starting the war when Yitzhak Shamir promised Bush government that.<sup>46</sup> There are other scholars who argued that Israel was not just submitting to U.S. foreign policy but Israel also indicated this strategic vision of maintaining the non-active war situation with Iraq was the best option for them.<sup>47</sup> This concerns are rational for the Israeli side since Saddam was trying to achieve vis-a-vis territorial gains against Israel and Israel's retreats from the occupied lands was the beginning of this procedure. Palestinian Liberation Organization was backing Saddam and refusing Israel's unity and USA's involvement in the Middle Eastern conflicts.<sup>48</sup> Additionally, Israeli side strongly believed that if Saddam's rule survived this war he would continue to threaten Israel's security in the region.<sup>49</sup> Which led Israel to push the US to be more active on destroying the Scud launchpads in Western Iraq. And on the Gulf War itself Israel and the US seem to be cohesive as it is obvious from the two statements of former Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger bluntly remarked, 'We do not want either side to win'. The Israeli general and several-time Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was clearer when he opined that, 'We do not want this war ever to end.'<sup>50</sup> Additionally, it is important to note that U.S.'s efforts to keep Israel restraint from war did even started before the crisis itself after it was certain that the war was inevitable when Deputy Secretary of the State Lawrence Eagleberger, Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz

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43 James A. Baker, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, New York, Putnam, 1995, pp. 385-9.

44 Lawrence Freedman and Efraim Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1993, p. 28.

45 Ze'ev Schiff, "Israel After The War", *Foreign Affairs*, Spring 91, Vol. 70 Issue 2, 1991, p. 29.

46 Shamir Yitzhak, *Summing Up*, Boston: Little Brown and and Coop, 1994, p. 224.

47 William Quandt, "Peace Process", Brookings Institution, Washington, 1993, pp. 394-6; For a more timely writing see, *New York Times*, published on 10 January 1991

48 Joel Beinin and Lisa Hajjar, "Palestine, Israel and Arab-Israeli Conflict: A Primer", *MERIP: Middle East Research and Information Project*, p. 9.

49 Norman Podhoretz, "In Israel with Scuds and Patriots", *Commentary*, April 1991, pp. 22-4.

50 Janice J. Terry, "The United States and Iraq at cross purposes – a Historic Overview", *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies*, Volume 2 Number 3, 2008, Intellect Ltd, p. 2.

and Senior National Security Council staffer Merrill Ruch visited Israel in order to make certain that Israel was going to stay passive.<sup>51</sup> This also shows that U.S. were able to both foresee the outcomes before they happened and tried to bargain with both Arab coalition states and Israel at the same time. But this does not indicate that Israel and Arab states did not have their own bargains and strategies beside the American project for the Gulf which was then named as the *New World Order*. This dual and trial relationships in and out of the region was almost determining every move since each actor was trying to act accordingly with the other major actors.

Obviously Saddam and Iraqi government was aware of the US support backing Israel in the region to feel secure if not only to survive. There Saddam was looking for some clues when he was going to invade Kuwait on how the US would react to this invasion. But the US sort of created an illusion or Saddam misinterpreted the signals and the result was certain defeat and humiliation for Iraqi leader. For understanding the potential response of the United States on 25 July, the US ambassador to Iraq, April Glaspie, had an interview with Saddam Husain and left Baghdad a few days later, assuming that there was not any problem in short term future. Which gave a signal to Saddam that even though Glaspie knew that Saddam had ambitions to invade Kuwait she still left Iraq implying that the US is not interested in an Iraq-Kuwait conflict.<sup>52</sup> The interview was controversial. In the Arab world it was widely believed that Saddam's main purpose was to probe potential the US reaction in case Iraq decided to invade Kuwait and that Glaspie's failure or lack of enthusiasm or intentional silence to strongly warn against this contingency was interpreted by Saddam as a green, or at least amber, light. Others have seen the meeting as a deceptive signal to Saddam, that was designed to keep the US intervention on the table and to provide some time to put the invasion plan in place. If this was the purpose, the meeting succeeded but at a huge price for Iraq because it played into Saddam's miscalculations.

As it is argued above US's role both in relations with Israel and Iraq weighted a great amount of importance in this process. Firstly, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait may not even have been taken place if Saddam did not receive this allowance signals. Secondly, Israel's strong and rooted relations with United States of America was one of the most defining features of Israel's passive stance during the Scud missile attacks. As it was really important to keep Arab states in line with U.S., Israel was kept out of the conflict to prevent an Arab-Arab conflict to an Arab-Israeli conflict. Therefore, from all perspectives US' relations with Israel and other regional actors played a very defining role in shaping the process to be least harmful to both the US and Israel's interests in the Gulf.

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51 Scott B. Lasensky, "Friendly Restrained: U.S.-Israel Relations During the Gulf War Crisis of 1990-9", *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, June 1999, p. 5.

52 Phebe Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, 3rd ed. 2012, Philadelphia: Westview Press, p. 218.

## **Conclusion**

This study's first finding is that Israel experienced changes between 1970-80s in terms of perceptions of national security. There were also differences between Israel's strategic doctrine and military doctrine. Military doctrine which relied on deterrence failed since Iraq was not deterred from attacking Israel. It is also found that Israel's passive behavior during the Gulf Crisis was because of an existence of a bigger bargain for Israel. This benefit was further weakened Iraq with a large scale war. It is indicated in the study that Israel's decision was a reflection of dependency on the US support in the region. With all the political announcements and the escalation of the process Israel's attitude against Iraq was still the same. Since Israel and the U.S. were agreed upon what Israel's inclusion to the war meant disadvantages for both of them and for the region Israel was restrained from entering the war against Iraq which was likely to divide the Arab coalition. This equation in the study was under investigation for defining why Israel perceived the strategic vision as a valid one and how U.S. was able to restrain Israel from entering the war. The study after this analysis had kept its argument on that there was a bargain since it was not an action that was spontaneous. This rationality assumption led the study to seek the reasons behind of this behavior and it was argued that Israel's calculations and the meaning of Israel's inclusion to the war alongside with the U.S.'s role in this process was under the scope for deepening the understanding of the reasons behind of this consequences. It was then pointed out that Israel was also perceived this passive attitude idea reasonable and bearable while the U.S. had its influence very much on keeping a low credited Israel out of war for both USA's and Israel's sake. This study is going to provide a small part of the wide issue and it is required to continue searching for clues if one inquires to reveal the truth behind this issue.

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