

# Strategic Survey for Israel 2015-2016

Shlomo Brom and Anat Kurz, Editors



**iNSS**

המכון למחקרי ביטחון לאומי

THE INSTITUTE FOR NATIONAL SECURITY STUDIES

INCORPORATING THE JAFFEE  
CENTER FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES



TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY  
אוניברסיטת תל-אביב



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## **2015-2016**

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## Preface

The *Strategic Survey for Israel* series presents an annual review of events and trends in Israel's regional and international environment, an analysis of the consequences of these developments for the state's political and security situation, and policy and operational recommendations that will assist Israel in dealing with the challenges posed by these formative developments.

Accordingly, the essays compiled in this year's volume, *Strategic Survey for Israel 2015-2016*, discuss problematic and threatening developments, both actual and potential, that are relevant to Israel. At the same time, the essays reflect a profound effort to encourage new directions of thought that are focused not solely on threats, but on opportunities and possibilities for action as well. Based on an informed analysis of the situation, these fresh ways of thinking may well alleviate the severity of the said threats, and also provide Israel with ways of improving both its regional and international status.

At the present time, identifying political and security opportunities in the Middle East appears to be a particularly difficult task. For the past five years, the region has been marked by instability, with each new conflict and war – between countries and within countries – joining the existing conflicts that continue to undermine the stability of the surrounding environment. Each new outbreak constitutes another link in the chain of social, ideological, political, and territorial upheavals sweeping the Middle East, with the result being a region primarily marked by violence. Millions of people in the region have found themselves in the heart of conflict arenas, and many who have not lost their lives have lost their homes and their way of life. In these distressing conditions, many have found physical and ideological refuge in religious and political extremism that plays a significant role in expanding the circle of violence entrapping many societies in the region – some more, some less.

Under these circumstances, in a region rife with tension and war, in particular between weak government centers and non-state factions challenging the existing political order and systems and striving to gain control over areas and populations, attention is naturally paid to threats. The attention of leaders and governments in the Middle East itself and in the international community has been diverted to defense and warfare, with the overall aim to reduce the potential for damage and destruction embodied in these threats, and even to suppress them completely. Nevertheless, and perhaps for that very reason, it is also necessary to think about the opportunities, namely, diplomatic and political modes of action that can potentially contribute to arrangements and understandings, elimination of conflict, stabilization of conflict arenas, and improvement of the lot of people living in areas of upheaval and other hazardous places.

In order for Israel to preserve itself and safeguard its future – not only in the pure and narrow security aspect, but also in political and economic aspects (which bring with them security implications) – Israel should strive to seek opportunities, even as it continues to defend its territory and its citizens. The efforts to identify these opportunities should be active and goal oriented, mindful of the price sure to be incurred by realizing the possibility of a more comfortable regional and international environment. Incalculable security risks must be avoided and responses to threats – that even a future warming of relations with countries and organizations in the region will not necessarily eliminate – must be prepared. While not every event in the Middle East is relevant to Israel's interests, the art of policy means the ability to discern which of the diverse elements in a volatile environment represent trends and phenomena that require constructive counter efforts, together with positive measures for shaping the situation.

The essays included in this volume present a situation assessment on various topics and probe their significance for Israel's security. The vast majority address both sides of the equation – threats and ominous developments on the one hand, and a positive potential for judicious handling of these threats on the other. On this basis, principles are formulated, along with concrete and operational recommendations, toward a policy that will help Israel deal with the difficult challenges before it.

The reviews and analyses are divided into four sections, presenting a comprehensive picture of Israel's strategic situation during the past year, with an emphasis on trends that will continue and dictate the dilemmas facing Israel in the coming year and beyond. The first section focuses on regional upheavals; the second section deals with the involvement of the global powers in the Middle East; the essays in the third section – Israel in the Middle East – discuss various aspects of the direct interaction between Israel and events in its immediate environment; the essays in the fourth section – the internal theater in Israel – deal with internal affairs directly related to national security, with the necessary references to regional trends.

The first section, "Regional Transformation in the Middle East," contains one integrative essay, which in itself reflects the difficulty in isolating the various significant aspects in the respective spheres of events. This essay, written by Mark Heller in cooperation with Shlomo Brom, Yoel Guzansky, Emily Landau, and Gallia Lindenstrauss, analyzes three key developments that occurred during the period under review. The first is the signing of the nuclear agreement between Iran and the major powers, which has heightened anxiety throughout the Middle East and in the international arena, given that the de facto recognition of Iran as a nuclear threshold state and the lightened sanctions will make it easier for Iran to increase its influence over the regional axis it leads, which includes Hezbollah and the Bashar al-Assad regime. The second is Saudi Arabia's military intervention in the civil war in Yemen and its war against the rebels supported by Iran, which signaled growing Saudi activism in the framework of the regional struggle. The third is Russia's military intervention in the ongoing civil war in Syria, which has changed the balance of power in this conflict, while highlighting the conflict's international dimension and role as a theater for the struggle between the world major powers. For its part, Israel does not belong naturally in any of the regional camps. Furthermore, it will be difficult for Israel to expand engagement and cooperation with regional, state, and non-state groupings on common interests in the absence of concrete progress in the political process with the Palestinians.

The second section, "Israel and the Leading International Actors," likewise comprises a single essay that is a comprehensive examination of the main international players exerting influence in the Middle East. In addition to

a discussion of the scope and character of the involvement of each of the international players – the United States, Russia, the European Union, and China – this essay, written by Oded Eran and Zvi Magen, analyzes spheres of encounter and competition between them with respect to events in the region. The essay emphasizes Israel's interest in balancing measures so that it will be able to maintain proper relations – political, security, and economic – with as many actors as possible, whose respective interests are not always mutually compatible. The analysis indicates that in view of the growing international involvement in Syria, Israel should take care to coordinate its policy with the United States in this theater, which can help ease the tension between them that was aggravated by differences of opinion concerning the nuclear agreement with Iran.

In addition, Israel's strategy in the Syrian arena to prevent activity by jihad groups and Hezbollah on Israel's border in the Golan Heights and Hezbollah's acquisition of advanced weapons demands careful coordination between Israel and Moscow in the context of the Russian involvement in Syria. As to Israel's relations with the European Union, one factor in the tension between the parties is the prolonged stalemate in the Israeli-Palestinian political process and severe European criticism against Israel in this context. In addition, the warming of relations between Turkey and the EU caused by Turkey's enlistment in the effort to limit the wave of immigration to Europe by refugees from the Middle East could add another negative element to the already difficult relations between Israel and the EU. The reference to Israel-China relations toward the close of the essay returns the discussion to the Israeli-American context. While Israel and China are fostering economic ties, Israel must be cautious with respect to measures likely to aid China in expanding its influence, including in the Middle East; such measures run the risk of a clash with American interests.

The third section, "Israel in the Middle East," combines both individual and integrative discussions, and the essays here are constructed as responses to questions posing diverse dilemmas. The first essay in the section, written by Udi Dekel and Omer Einav, examines the challenges and opportunities facing Israel and the interface between the respective challenges: in the Palestinian arena; the northern arena – the Golan Heights and Lebanon; the arena governed by peace treaties, namely, Egypt and Jordan; and the geostrategic

theater, where Israel deals with various regional forces. The analysis suggests that because there is little risk of a war involving Israel in the coming year, Israel should focus its security efforts on the “campaign between wars,” and strengthen its deterrence – also through positive reinforcement of other players in the region, particularly in the spheres of economy and energy.

In the essays that follow in this section, several material questions are discussed. Carmit Valensi considers whether a new order in the Middle East can be expected, and how Israel can take part in designing it; Zvi Magen and Udi Dekel analyze the significance of Russian military involvement in Syria; Yoram Schweitzer and Shlomo Brom look at the importance of the Salafi jihadist movement and the Islamic State among the threats facing Israel; Ephraim Kam examines the implications of the nuclear agreement between the powers and Iran on Iran’s status in the Middle East and its stance toward Israel; Kobi Michael questions whether the religious dimension has supplanted the nationalist dimension in the escalation in the Palestinian violence that erupted in the fall of 2015; Anat Kurz and Gilead Sher discuss the viability of the “two states for two peoples” paradigm in view of the years-long deadlock in the political process between Israel and the Palestinians; and Pnina Sharvit Baruch and Kobi Michael survey the growing delegitimization of Israel in the international arena. The section closes with an essay by Assaf Orion and Udi Dekel examining how well prepared Israel is for the security challenges facing it, which concludes in a vein similar to the message of the section’s opening essay: the lessons of the previous conflicts in which the IDF was involved indicate that Israel would do well to formulate a flexible and evolving strategic concept, in whose framework capabilities and means of action are tailored to the specific requirements of each challenge. This strategy should be centered on the use of soft power, in addition to the established use of military power.

The fourth section of the volume, “Israel’s Internal Arena,” opens with a comprehensive essay by Meir Elran, Gilead Sher, Eran Yashiv, and Carmit Padan reviewing principal aspects of national security in an internal sociopolitical context: the subject of governance, aggression, and provocations in the public discourse in Israel; the growing polarization and tribalization in society; and economic trends affecting how the security

challenges are met. Some of these topics are dealt with extensively in other essays included in this section.

An essay by Zipi Israeli focusing on Israeli public opinion on national security topics supports the assessment that the Iranian threat was perceived as most menacing, especially before the escalation in the Palestinian popular struggle against Israel in the fall of 2015. Other trends in public opinion indicate that the idea of “two states for two peoples” retains wide acceptance, although a drop in the rate of support for the idea is discernible when the meaning and price of separation from the Palestinians is mentioned. Beyond that, the compiled results of public opinion surveys hint that leadership has a public mandate to make weighty decisions, including concerning a concrete political process with the Palestinians. Another essay in this section, written by Shmuel Even, examines the question of the defense budget and concludes that the demand for establishing an orderly process for formulating and approving the defense budget continues, although the Ministry of Defense has become more flexible on the matter, agreeing to carry out substantial reforms and cost-cutting measures. The primary recommendation at the end of the essay is to establish a mechanism for greater efficiency in the Ministry of Defense.

Another important subject is relations between Israel’s Jewish majority and Arab minority. The analysis, written by Ephraim Lavie, leads to the conclusion that in addition to the ongoing national conflict between the parties, and despite the absence of full equality, the reciprocal relations between Arabs and Jews have broadened in many areas. Concern exists that the wave of Palestinian terrorism that began in late 2015 and expressions of identification by Arab leadership in Israel, as well as the responses to these developments among the Jewish public, will undermine these delicate relations. At the same time, the existing integrationist trends can be expected to aid the parties in overcoming the crisis. The next essay in this section, by Alex Altshuler, discusses the challenges and the readiness to deal with the civilian front, issues shared by both the Jewish and Arab publics in Israel. The discussion focuses on efforts by the various home front agencies to prepare for scenarios of missile and rocket attacks, together with the growing need to prepare for popular terrorism, while at the same time upholding stances of morality and tolerance. In addition, the need for comprehensive planning for

diverse scenarios is emphasized, including those that are relatively unlikely to occur but could cause severe damage, such as earthquakes. Addressing these spheres, individually and collectively, will improve Israel's readiness to deal with emergency situations.

The volume concludes with an essay by Amos Yadlin, which offers integrative insights on Israel's strategic situation that should lie at the basis of policy formulation regarding Israel's foreign affairs and national security matters in the coming five years. A primary conclusion emerging from this analysis is that at the present time, when the Middle East is rocked by turbulence and political and security upheaval, Israel must do the utmost to fashion opportunities in order to advance its political and security status. Since the Iranian nuclear issue is less of an immediate issue than last year, and the international community understands that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not at the heart of the conflicts and tensions in the Middle East, Israel has an opportunity to formulate proactively, in coordination with the United States, a strategy that can respond to the threats before it and perhaps to advance peace arrangements with additional states in the Middle East.

The editors would like to thank the volume's contributing authors, most of whom are members of the Institute for National Security Studies research staff. As in previous years, heartfelt thanks go to Moshe Grundman, Director of Publications at INSS, and Judith Rosen, editor of English publications at the Institute, for their contribution to the composition and production of this volume. Special thanks also go to Omer Einav for his valuable comments and assistance, and to Ela Greenberg for her editorial work.

Shlomo Brom and Anat Kurz  
January 2016





# Regional Transformation in the Middle East 2015

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Mark A. Heller / 17



# Regional Transformation in the Middle East 2015

Mark A. Heller

The three most noteworthy regional developments in 2015 were the formulation of the nuclear deal (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action – JCPOA) between Iran and the P5+1, the Saudi military intervention in the Yemeni civil war, and the Russian military intervention in the Syrian civil war. Whatever its implications for Iran’s nuclear program and nuclear proliferation in the Middle East, the nuclear deal also heightened concerns about Iran’s capacity to pursue a hegemonial agenda in the region. Like the Saudi intervention in Yemen, the Iranian nuclear deal must therefore also be viewed through the prism of an intensifying competition between regional powers – based on identity no less than on geopolitical interests – for preeminence in what seems like a region made increasingly chaotic by the weakening of central authority in various states and, as a result, the multiplication of local actors in regional alignments and balances. The third development, Russia’s direct involvement in the combat in Syria, served as a dramatic reminder that the competition among outside great powers for influence and presence in the Middle East, which defined the region’s geostrategic role in world politics for most of the twentieth century but was thought to have dissipated following the end of the Cold War, has returned with a vengeance.

None of these developments impinged directly on Israel’s near term security agenda; all of them had potentially significant longer term ramifications.

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Shlomo Brom, Yoel Guzansky, Emily B. Landau, and Gallia Lindenstrauss contributed to this chapter.

Symptomatic of a growing regional disorder marked by the proliferation of actors unwilling or unable to carry out rational security dialogues, these developments highlighted the risks of escalation, intended or otherwise, in the context of shifting alliances, rising and falling powers, and strategic ambiguities. Steps to mitigate these risks are not inconceivable, but by late 2015, conditions needed to facilitate those steps seemed improbable and were not, in any case, entirely under Israel's control.

## **Growing Regional Disorder**

The turmoil in the Arab world that erupted in late 2010 in Tunisia and was initially labeled the “Arab Spring” began as a series of domestic upheavals and crises. The regional dimension of these upheavals was mostly evident in the “demonstration effect,” that is, the inspiration that anti-regime demonstrations and rebellions in one state gave to disaffected publics in other Arab states. As a result, the Arab Spring, like a kind of contagion, spread from Tunisia to Egypt and from there to Libya and Yemen. However, internal crises and the weakening of authority in certain Arab states quickly provided fertile ground for the eruption of struggles for power among various forces – some of them states and some of them ideological movements. These struggles took on a mixed character. In one sense, they constituted classic contests among regional powers competing for power and influence. At the same time, however, they were confrontations between different ideological worldviews, and even identities. This second element of the “Great Game” has become more prominent in the last two years; it fuels and exacerbates violent conflicts between local actors in various theaters throughout the region and sometimes also results in the subordination of some actors' material interests and considerations while benefiting those of other regional actors.

This change has coincided with the growing military involvement of global actors, largely in response to the threat presented by the Islamic State (or ISIS). Thus, by the end of 2015 in Syria, Iranian and Iranian-proxy forces (Hezbollah and Iraqi Shiite militias) maintained an ongoing presence on the ground in support of the Assad regime; Turkish ground forces and air forces intervened intermittently, ostensibly as part of the anti-ISIS coalition but more often to support Turkmens or harass Kurds; and American, French, British, Jordanian, Russian, and Israeli air forces all operated in Syrian air

space, the first four against ISIS, the Russians against any forces opposed to Assad (of which ISIS was not the most proximate or immediate), and Israel in order to interdict weapons transfers to Hezbollah and, occasionally, to attack sources of fire at Israeli territory – usually government forces.

Apart from Israel, all of these outside actors have some potential influence over their allies or protégés, and agreement among them could potentially enhance the chances of an imposed ceasefire or even political agreement – but only if the outside actors raise a credible threat to coerce their own “side” to make decisive concessions. Despite recurrent rumors of some convergence of views among the outside forces around a power sharing formula involving a transitional role for Assad and a more permanent role for those he ostensibly represents, by year’s end there was little concrete evidence of any willingness of outsiders to reconcile their own contradictory interests. Thus, the confluence of escalating indirect and direct involvement by regional actors and the introduction of extra-regional military forces (albeit largely limited to air forces, except for the Iranian-led coalition) has intensified the chaos in the region, enhanced the risks of confrontation and escalation, and rendered domestic conflicts even less amenable to some kind of political resolution.

## **Regional Axes**

In terms of regional alignments, there are four main local actors. The first, and most coherent, is the “axis of resistance” led by Iran. There are three dimensions to this axis: the political, that is, the ambition of the Iranian state to become a leading regional actor with dominant influence throughout the region; the sectarian, that is, the sense of Iran as the central Shiite force protecting and advancing the interest of Shiites and their allies; and the ideological, that is, the mission of “resistance” to Western influence and presence, especially that of the United States (the “Great Satan”) and its ally, Israel (the “Little Satan”).

The second grouping is the axis of pragmatic Sunni states led by Saudi Arabia. This axis also has three dimensions: the Saudi state struggle with Iran for regional leadership, especially in the sub-region of the Gulf; the historical confrontation between Shiites and Sunni Islam, which in Saudi Arabia takes an extreme Wahhabi-Salafi form; and the practical dimension

of Gulf states' security alliances with the West, especially the United States, even as Iran remains determined to eliminate or at least reduce the Western presence in the Gulf.

The third actor is the Muslim Brotherhood, a movement that emerged in Egypt in the 1930s but has since developed into a major region-wide Islamist force with important connections and influence in Qatar and Turkey. Finally, there are the Salafi jihadist movements operating throughout the Arab space and in the Muslim world as a whole. The most prominent of these in recent years have been al-Qaeda and its even more virulent offshoot, the Islamic State.

Complicating the picture further is the fact that with the exception of the "axis of resistance," these actors are tacit and loose alignments rather than highly cohesive and disciplined entities, and the relations among them are in a constant state of flux. In recent years, they have fought among themselves and with each other, often using local agents, and in 2015 their struggles reached new levels of intensity. In the Salafi jihadist camp, for example, the Islamic State and al-Qaeda have stepped up their verbal hostilities in a contest that is cloaked in tactical arguments but in fact is about primacy within their common constituency and targeted support base. Moreover, while the Muslim Brotherhood camp (Turkey and Qatar) and the "pragmatic" Saudi-led Sunni camp are both opposed to Iranian influence and committed to the anti-Assad forces in Syria, they have squabbled over developments in Egypt, with the former supporting the Muslim Brotherhood government that briefly held power following the departure of Husni Mubarak and the latter endorsing (and underwriting) the ouster of President Mohammad Morsi and the subsequent repression of the Islamists by a military coup led by General Abd al-Fattah el-Sisi. Against this background, it is striking that Egypt under Sisi, though a "natural" partner in the pragmatic Sunni alignment, takes a rather more ambivalent approach than do the others to the Syrian civil war and implies, in contrast to Saudi and UAE insistence (as well as that of Turkey and Qatar), that while the Assad regime must eventually be removed, there may be some continuing role for Assad to play in a transition. Perhaps this seeming inconsistency is explained by the fact that Egypt itself is targeted in Sinai and inside Egypt proper by Salafi jihadist elements, including offshoots of the Muslim Brotherhood, some

of which have declared their allegiance to Assad's strongest adversary, the Islamic State, and announced the creation of its Egyptian extension, Wilayat Sinai (the Sinai Governorate).

### **Conflicts Within, Conflicts Between**

Such inconsistencies and contradictions make it impossible to reduce all the murderous conflicts and instabilities of the region to variations on a simple Iranian-Saudi/Sunni-Shiite dichotomy. Indeed, in some local arenas, that dichotomy hardly comes into play at all. In Libya, for example, a three-way civil war involving pragmatic secularists supported by Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the Emirates; elements of the Muslim Brotherhood; and jihadi actors identified with al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (in addition to various tribal factions and local gang leaders) has persisted since the fall of Muammar al-Qaddafi in 2011. But since none of these factions is allied with Iran, and the Shiite population in Libya is negligible, the Libyan reverberations of the Arab Spring continue to unfold without reference to the major fault line in Middle Eastern socio-politics.

That, however, is not the case, elsewhere in the region. Syria is arguably the preeminent stage on which the conflict among the four alignments plays out. Iran and its non-state proxies/protégés (Hezbollah and Iraqi and Afghan Shiite militias) continue to shore up Assad with funding, weapons, training, advice in the formation and activation of militias, and – most critically – direct involvement in combat. On the other side, the pragmatic Saudi-led Sunni axis and affiliates/supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood (Turkey and Qatar) are effectively allies in the struggle to remove the Assad regime, supporting both secular and “moderate” (i.e., Muslim Brotherhood) rebels, and even certain jihadi elements opposed to the Islamic State. Meanwhile, the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra (which defines itself as the Syrian arm of al-Qaeda) fight the others and one another. They enjoy no direct assistance from any state, but benefit from the support of elements within various regional states and volunteers from the entire Muslim world.

Graphic and highly publicized IS depredations in the Middle East and terrorist attacks against non-Middle East targets in the region and beyond have resulted in growing international military activity ostensibly aimed at the Islamic State (though in practice that is not always the case) – first by the

United States and Turkey, then Russia, then France, and, at the very end of the year, Britain. Together with the refugee crisis threatening to overwhelm European response capacities in 2015, the formation of an international anti-Islamic State coalition caused most foreign attention to be focused on Syria. But that did not mean that other ongoing conflicts, also framed by the Iranian-Saudi/Shiite-Sunni fault line, were necessarily less salient.

On the contrary, regional involvement in the Yemeni domestic conflict escalated when Shiite Houthis broke out of their northern redoubt and tried to take control of the entire country. The ouster of long-time President Ali Abdullah Saleh in the Yemeni chapter of the Arab Spring had not produced a sustainable political order or introduced the kind of stability lacking even before the popular challenge to Saleh. The results of the election in 2012 were forcibly challenged in 2014 when Houthi rebels in the north, reportedly cooperating with army officers still loyal to Saleh, moved into the capital, San'a, and then in early 2015 advanced south to threaten Aden, where elected President 'Abd Rabbuh Mansur Hadi had taken refuge before decamping to Saudi Arabia. Although there is no evidence that Iran had explicitly pushed the Houthis to launch their 2014 offensive, their Shiite identity and links with Iran prompted the Saudis and other Gulf Arabs to view this development as part of a larger Iranian campaign of encirclement, and they responded in March with a large scale air offensive and limited ground operations, which inflicted widespread damage and extensive civilian casualties.

Operation Decisive Storm successfully checked the Houthis and pushed them back – and the inability of Iran to prevent that exposed serious limitations of its power – but it did not produce a conclusive victory. As the fighting persisted through 2015, al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula took advantage of regional and international actors' preoccupation with the war against the Houthis in the west of the country to expand its presence in the center and east, where the Islamic State also began to show signs of activity. What this means is that both Iran and Saudi Arabia were pulled into a local conflict by local proxies or allies and forced by their all-encompassing bipolar framing of regional developments to commit to courses of actions that precluded cooperation in addressing issues of common concern. In short, Yemen provides more evidence of the inconsistencies and contradictions



of regional change, though without any clear dynamic, direction, or sense of emerging new order.

Of course, not all regional actors were drawn into the quasi-system of alignments and alliances. One major example was Israel; another was the Kurds, who have every reason to maximize their own power but lack any identity markers or ideological beliefs that might incline them to align with any of the regional axes. Kurdish policies and behavior strongly reflect the contradictions of transformation without a clear sense of direction. On the one hand, the Kurds have shifted from being an object of Middle East politics to becoming a political subject in their own right. That process began with the weakening of central Iraqi state authority in the 1991 Gulf War, accelerated after the 2003 war, and was given further impetus by the disintegration of the familiar state framework in Iraq and Syria. Those developments, along with the perception that the Kurds are the most reliable and effective force fighting the Islamic State, seem to imply the arrival of the “Kurdish moment,” that is, a concatenation of circumstances that will allow the Kurds to achieve their long-desired independence, at least in northern Iraq. Even in northern Syria, the Kurds have been able to strengthen their position and, with American air support, inflict some striking defeats on Islamic State forces in Kobani and Tel Abyad (as well as in Sinjar, in Iraq). In July, they consolidated three separate enclaves between Qamishli and Kobani in which they had already declared autonomy. An even more promising scenario from their perspective would be the unification of the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq with the autonomous enclaves in northern Syria. The emergence of an independent Kurdish state would be the most dramatic manifestation of the geographical collapse of the Sykes-Picot agreement declared by the Islamic State in 2014 (when it took down indicators of a border between Iraq and Syria) and would, more than anything else, underscore the political transformation of the region.

Still, transformation has not yet been extensive enough to eliminate all constraints on Kurdish freedom of maneuver. Some regional forces that traditionally contained Kurdish ambitions continue to do so, among them, the Turks and the Iranians. Turkey renewed its offensive against the PKK, the Kurdish underground in Turkey and in northern Iraq, following the collapse of the Turkish-Kurdish peace process in July 2015. Iranians, due to their

central role in the fight against the Islamic State in Iraq, have increased their influence there, including in the Kurdish Regional Government's areas of jurisdiction, and like the Turks, are apprehensive that more forceful assertions of Kurdish aspirations for independence in Iraq or Syria could reverberate in Kurdish-populated parts of their own country. Furthermore, growing Western sympathy for the Kurds did not always translate into material support; many Kurds interpreted Western indifference to Turkish attacks on the Kurdish positions in northern Iraq as a quid pro quo for permission to use airbases in Turkey to attack the Islamic State, that is, as yet another instance of Western betrayal of the Kurds. The Islamic State threat also prompted the KRG to abandon, at least temporarily, its intention to hold a referendum on independence, perhaps because Islamic State offensives or Islamic State control in northern Iraq had led so many non-Kurds to flee to Kurdistan, changing the demographic character of that area. Finally, endemic disunity among Kurds undermined their ability to act as a coherent entity in regional and international politics. In short, regional transformation had gone far enough to enable the Kurds to assume a more autonomous role than in the past, but not far enough to take on the role of a legitimate, full-fledged state participant in the evolving regional system.

### **Israeli Security and the Prospects for Regional Cooperation**

Events in 2015 generally tended to reinforce the sense that the region as a whole was on a course of growing disorder, violence, and insecurity. Slowing or halting that trend or even reversing its direction was not inconceivable, but it would require at least one of two major policy shifts among leading Middle East actors, if not both. The first would be some kind of détente between Iran and Saudi Arabia (on behalf of its GCC partners). Given the centrality of this political-ideological-geostrategic rift to much of regional dynamics, any moderation of the tensions between them would imply the strong possibility of reduced tensions in a number of regional conflict arenas. In fact, despite their contradictory positions on almost every issue, both Saudi Arabia and Iran have previously exhibited enough pragmatism to permit some coordination when circumstances require it. Indeed, there were some signs of a thaw, however instrumental, in relations between Iran and some of the Gulf states following the election of Hassan Rouhani

as President in 2013 and the elaboration of two nuclear agreements – the interim agreement in 2013 and the JCPOA in 2015. These took the form of conciliatory statements by senior leaders on both sides of the Gulf, reciprocal high level visits and meetings, and the signing of agreements on a number of issues – all suggesting that the two sides had turned a page on the chronicle of their mutually suspicious relations. Any further deepening of the process of reconciliation would have a positive impact on the situation in Syria by enhancing the prospects for some kind of agreed transitional and/or power-sharing arrangement that could halt the bloodshed and ongoing destruction of Syria. It would also ameliorate conditions in Iraq, where Saudi Arabia and Iran already quietly coordinated the ouster in 2014 of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki and the election of the more conciliatory Haidar al-Abadi as his successor. And in both Syria and Iraq, Saudi-Iranian coordination could upgrade the campaign against the Islamic State, which is perceived as a threat by both protagonists. Finally, such coordination could help contain and resolve the crisis in Yemen and promote understandings about a more stable political order in Lebanon.

Nevertheless, despite the undoubted potential benefits to both sides and to the region as a whole of détente between Iran and Saudi Arabia, the two sides continue to operate on the basis of mutual suspicion and hostility, and the road to an historical conciliation between them seems as long as ever. Unable to overcome their weighty confessional-ideological differences, contradictory interests, and historical animosity, they seem to be bent on a course of protracted hostility. Iran may want to improve ties with the Gulf states as an element of a broader move to end its international isolation, and the Gulf states may be persuaded that some accommodation of an undeniable rising regional power to the east in conditions of American retrenchment is advisable. But it is doubtful whether the need for tactical coordination will be enough to overcome the heavy burden of history and truly change the underlying dynamics of regional politics. In any event, this kind of shift is one in which Israel can play no real role.

There is a different kind of shift that could conceivably be advanced by Israeli actions, though even in this respect Israel's transformative potential is limited. The reference here is to regional security consultation/coordination. The current state of disorder in the Middle East has created a new set of

complex and cross-cutting state and sub-state interests. Most notably, it has exacerbated the tensions and disputes between pragmatic Sunni Arab states and Iran and its proxies, as well as between these states and Salafi jihadist organizations like al-Qaeda and ISIS. Some of these states also feel more threatened, due to internal tensions.

Like the Kurds, Israel has no natural affinity with any of the alignments in regional politics. Indeed, it shares even fewer identity markers with any other Middle East actor. The Kurds, at least, are Sunni Muslims. Israel's Jewish character and vocation means that it stands completely alone in terms of religion, language, ethnic identity, and cultural tradition. At the same time, Israel is a notable political-military force in the region, and coincident geo-strategic interests have in the past permitted certain kinds of unpublicized security dialogue (exchanges of intelligence and assessments) and operational cooperation, particularly between it and the so-called "peripheral" states (those on the periphery of the Arab core of the region) and non-Arab and/or non-Muslim sub-state actors like the Kurds and Lebanese Christians, but also with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and with Egypt.

For the most part, the substantive content of this kind of dialogue as well as the degree to which it was explicitly acknowledged was highly constrained, especially with respect to Arab states, because of widespread Arab identification with the Palestinians and popular hostility to Israel. Five years of Arab Spring upheavals and intensified Iranian-Saudi/Shiite-Sunni animosity have produced a clearer common Israeli and Sunni-Arab interest in containing the Iranian-led Shiite axis, and the 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran may have heightened even more concerns about Iran's enhanced potential to become a hegemonic power. The degree of that concern is evident, not just in the Saudi response to events in Yemen – an uncharacteristically large scale and protracted military operation not coordinated in advance with the United States – but also in the alacrity with which other Gulf states (and Sunni Arab states further afield) rushed to provide material contributions to the military campaign or at least unqualified political/diplomatic support.

According to some observers, the extent of anxiety about Iran may mitigate some of the traditional Arab resistance to overt security dialogue with Israel. That analysis is seemingly buttressed by events such as public meetings by Saudi Prince Turki bin Faisal with Israeli personalities and interviews with

Israeli media, as well as the United Arab Emirates' agreement to permit the accreditation of an Israeli diplomatic mission to the International Renewable Energy Agency, based in Abu Dhabi.

While such developments suggest that there might well be more receptivity than in the past to coordination/cooperation with Israel on an ad hoc basis, this does not yet portend Arab endorsement of a formal, institutionalized comprehensive regional security mechanism in which Israel is seen as a legitimate partner, or any abandonment of the historic Arab rejection of "normalization" with Israel in the absence of some significant movement on the Palestinian issue – precisely the kind of change that made it possible for Jordan to "come out of the closet" following the 1993 Camp David Agreement and convert its de facto convergence of interests with Israel into a formal peace treaty.

Of course, "like-minded states," including Israel, can expand the scope of their dialogue. Events of recent years have already encouraged them to do that, and different Israeli policies on the Palestinian issue, even if only declaratory, might accelerate the willingness on the part of Sunni Arab states predisposed in that direction to move even further. But for the parties to move beyond instrumental cooperation below the horizon toward the much more ambitious arms control and regional security structures of the type prematurely envisaged in the 1990s, there would need to be a truly momentous breakthrough on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. By itself, Israel can bring that about only through the kind of far reaching unilateral measures that few realistically expect it to take. Otherwise, an historic breakthrough in Arab-Israel relations still depends on a negotiated Israeli-Palestinian agreement. In other words, notwithstanding all the upheavals and realignments in the region since the outbreak of the Arab Spring, the Palestinians continue to cast a long shadow over the web of Israel's political and security relations with the rest of the Middle East. That, at least, has not been transformed.



# Israel and the Leading International Actors

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Oded Eran and Zvi Magen / 31





# Israel and the Leading International Actors

Oded Eran and Zvi Magen

As we enter 2016, we are confounded by the turn of global and regional events and processes and their impact on the Middle East. The relationships between the external players and their positioning in the region have changed significantly in 2015, making it difficult for Israel to adjust, calibrate, and navigate between local and external players.

The United States will elect a new president at the end of 2016. It is clear that President Obama will not change the pattern of dealing with global and regional issues in the last year of his two-term presidency. Barring major upheavals, President Obama will continue to adhere to the policy of “leading, if possible, from behind, attacking, if necessary, from above, and watching from the side.” This policy translates into a continued, mostly aerial campaign against the Islamic State (IS) and military assistance to some of the groups fighting in Syria. It will mean that the United States will exert efforts to contain the conflicts in Iraq and Syria by trying to curb the success of the Islamic State and prevent its spread beyond the territory already under its control. Notwithstanding the Republican presidential candidates, who are demanding more robust and decisive action, President Obama will resist straying from the current policy; he may be tested, however, if the situation dramatically changes in favor of the Islamic State.

By now it is clear that the United States has become accustomed to Russia’s involvement in seeking a political solution in Syria. The new Russian military posture in Syria, characterized by the intensive use of missiles as well as aerial and naval power in defense of Assad’s proxy

regime, poses a serious challenge to US policy. In the relatively small space of Syria, Russian fighter jets operate in close range to the United States, as well as to American allies such as Turkey, Jordan, Britain, France, Israel, and so forth. The Russian-Turkish confrontation over the downing of the Russian fighter jet is an example of a crisis that could recur in the future. Judging by the reactions hitherto, it can be assumed that the United States will continue to contain Russia's military efforts in Syria, recoiling from any direct confrontation unless the Russian forces intentionally counter the American forces. The United States applies this policy of containment to Russia's activities elsewhere, such as in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, where it tries to contain rather than confront Russia unless certain red lines, such as Article 5 of NATO, are crossed. Given this policy, the United States will be extremely reluctant to be dragged into a major confrontation between Turkey and Russia although, legally and technically speaking, Article 5 would apply in this case.

Israel has indicated, both directly and indirectly to the United States – and indeed to all other relevant actors – its red lines in relation to the situation in Syria. Assuming that no major changes will occur in 2016, Syria should not become a bone of contention between Israel and the United States. Israel, however, will have to follow closely the international efforts to reach a political arrangement in Syria and to make sure that such an arrangement, if reached, does not come into conflict with its interests; Israel's ongoing dialogue with the United States should help to protect Israel's interests.

President Obama successfully removed the domestic hurdles of the Iranian nuclear deal, including those presented by Israel. Unless Iran blatantly violates the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), President Obama will adhere to the US commitments, again refusing to be dragged into the presidential election rhetoric. Like on other issues, the President will try to transfer any crisis in the Iranian nuclear deal to the relevant international forum. In such a situation, the Israeli government will again face a dilemma. A significant violation by Iran of the JCPOA is bound to become a major issue for the United States at any point of time, and certainly in a heated presidential race. It will be difficult for Israel to stay out of this discussion, especially having been heavily involved in the process undertaken by the US Congress concerning the JCPOA. Although the Prime Minister of Israel

can now claim that damages to the bilateral relations with the United States were less severe than his critics predicted, the potential damage of siding with any of the two presidential contenders may be greater than those created by confronting a president on his way out.

Evidently, President Obama has abandoned the attempt to renew a political process between the Palestinians and the Israelis, certainly when the White House is involved. While the US Secretary of State may still seek an opening, it is clear that the Palestinian Authority is not interested in this track, preferring instead gains within the international arena, while the Israeli government is unwilling to meet the preconditions put forward by the Palestinian Authority for resuming negotiations with Israel. Israel, however, will continue to carefully monitor the reactions of the US administration to initiatives presented by international organizations, first and foremost in the UN Security Council, which will create a new framework for a peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Both the President and the Secretary of State have hinted on different occasions that this may happen, especially if the initiative is launched by a different member of the Security Council, such as France, following the US presidential elections. This would emulate the precedent set in late 1988 whereby the outgoing American administration recognized the Palestine Liberation Organization and launched bilateral discussions with it. It should be added that further deterioration and increased violence between Israel and the Palestinians may accelerate this process, regardless of the American presidential and Congressional elections in early November 2016. New settlement activity advanced by the Israeli government may generate a similar reaction by the US government.

The toughest challenge to American foreign policy in recent years is Russia's aggressive strategy in the Middle East and the Black Sea region. It seems that the Russian leadership has embarked on this strategy in an attempt to extricate Russia from the pressures of the sanctions imposed after its invasion of the Ukraine; the increased domestic threat from radical Islam; and the declining stability of the regime. Moscow perceives that winning its case in Syria is the key to resolving its other problems. The Ukrainian crisis is likely to linger, especially if Russia remains convinced that the United States is determined to push NATO'S borders eastward. In February 2015,

the process to contain the conflict in the Ukraine produced the Minsk II Agreement, mostly due to a softer approach taken by Germany and France than that of the United States. From Russia's point of view, the Minsk process failed to deliver the desired result of removing the sanctions, leading Russia to try to strengthen its hand in Syria and combine the solution concerning the Ukraine, which included lifting the sanctions in return for Russia's position of understanding in the negotiations over Syria's political future, including Assad's role in an agreed-upon framework. In implementing this strategy, Russia launched a massive aerial operation supposedly aimed at the Islamic State, according to official statements; in reality, it was largely directed at the opposition forces fighting against the Assad regime, at least in the early stages. The Russians initially used two squadrons of fighter jets, interception jets, and helicopters operating from the air force base near Latakia. It also deployed anti-aircraft and marine units, in addition to military intelligence and maintenance advisors already deployed to assist the Syrian army in fighting the various opposition groups. Thus far, the Russians have avoided deploying ground forces, leaving that role to other coalition partners, such as Iran, which dispatched several thousand Iranian soldiers, Hezbollah forces, and combatants from Shiite militias, including from Iraq, which is not directly involved in the fighting in Syria, but hosts the coalition's headquarters.

Russia's pursuit of its interests, both domestically and globally, guides its intervention in Syria. Syria is Russia's last military and political base in the Middle East and serves as its proxy state, which predicates its interest in being a major participant in the region's political processes. Russia perceives its involvement in Syria as part of its campaign against militant Islamists inside Russia, while it will seek to use any gains in Syria as leverage in the argument over the future of Ukraine and the removal of sanctions. In order to achieve that goal, it is highly probable that Russia will allow for Assad's departure. The Russian involvement since its initial aerial attacks has been confined primarily to attacking forces other than the Islamic State; given its limited successes, Russia has moved into what seems to be a well-planned political stage, preceded by intensive dialogue with various Syrian rebel groups and by Assad's visit to Moscow where he presented his plan for dealing with the current crisis. The international political process, beginning

with two rounds of talks held in Vienna on October 23 and October 30, 2015, is still moving slowly, with Russia actively engaged in talks on the side with the opposition groups and even with Saudi Arabia, which wields influence on the developments in Syria.

Understanding Russia's motivation in Syria and elsewhere in the Middle East and Europe is a key to Israel's relations with Russia. Relations between the two countries are intricate, and in recent years have developed positively. In the Ukrainian crisis, Israel has refrained from criticizing Russia, while the latter has toned down its criticism of Israel and its military operations in Gaza. Russia also has refrained from delivering sophisticated weapon systems, such as the S-300 anti-aircraft missile, to Iran and Syria, even though Russia and Iran have established political-military coordination on the eve of Russia's enhanced operation in Syria, aimed at weakening the conflict. Nonetheless, Israel will have to ascertain that its freedom of action to move against Syria or hostile forces operating on its territory, if needed, is preserved, even if it may have a negative impact on its short-term and long-term security concerns. Clearly, a new regime in Damascus built around a coalition of pro-Iranian, pro-Hezbollah Shiite groups and remnants of the Syrian army, all backed by Russia, is not Israel's most favored outcome. On the other hand, Russia could rein in such a government and prevent an escalation with Israel, which could put Russia's long-term interests at risk.

The European Union, Israel's leading economic partner, is caught wrestling on four different fronts. The Greek financial crisis is over for now, but the scenario of a member state defaulting on payment of its extended national debt and being removed from the economic union has not been erased. If and when it happens, it could be a case of a much larger debt of a much bigger economy with serious economic and political ramifications. A crisis that is not totally unrelated, created by centrifugal forces, is in Britain. In 2017 Britain will hold a referendum, deciding whether to remain as a full member in the European Union. A negative decision will obviously shake the European Union's core and may generate a domino effect, weakening the organization.

Israel is watching these developments with great interest. The European Union has been increasingly critical of Israel's policies toward the Palestinians, and in recent years has used economic means to express its opposition to the

Israeli government's settlement building activity. The Israeli government may mistakenly view a politically weakened European Union as a positive development, and as an opportunity for building coalitions with groups of EU member states, such as those of the east Mediterranean basin. On the other hand, a cohesive European Union, which has a large degree of moderating influence on governments who are friendly in principle to Israel, may be able to prevent anti-Israeli initiatives proposed by individual member states. This is still rather theoretical, but these developments within the European Union could trigger a debate in Israel as well as within Europe as to the best course for their bilateral relations.

Related to it is the extent to which Israel will want to cooperate with the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) in 2016. Israel has been cooperating with this EU policy instrument reluctantly ever since it was launched in 2004. The ENP has been Europe's answer for states in Eastern Europe and in the Mediterranean, who are not eligible for membership in the European Union. The current ENP is visibly influenced by the other crisis facing Europe – the human tsunami of refugees. Ever since the start of the Arab Spring, the European Union has failed in its attempt to deal with the implications of the Middle Eastern upheavals for Europe. In spite of numerous resolutions and action plans, the European Union remains unprepared to deal with the consequences of the situation in the Middle East.

Europe has experienced human migratory waves in the past, whether immediately after World War II or after the wars in the Balkans; the current wave, however, is much larger and more complicated as it involves refugees from various backgrounds, from Afghanistan to western and northern Africa. The limits of solidarity between the member states are evident as states have been reluctant to open their borders and to agree to absorb refugees. Even in Germany, which initially showed a strong commitment to refugee absorption, criticism is now being leveled against its open door policy. Under the weight and pressure created by the massive number of refugees, the European Union has agreed to a deal with Turkey. In return for maintaining tighter and more controlled borders with Iraq and Syria, Turkey will receive three billion euros and perhaps more for absorption of more than two million refugees within its borders, and will be offered a new opportunity to engage in negotiations over its admission to the European Union. Although Turkey's membership

in the European Union will not happen in the near future, Ankara, due to its willingness and goodwill to absorb the refugees, may be able to further exert leverage mainly on NATO to refrain from cooperation with Israel unless there is a significant change in Turkey's relations with Israel.

In order to arrest the spilling over of the refugee crisis into the eastern and southern parts of Europe, the European Union recognizes that it must address the problems that have compelled millions to seek a more secure environment and better employment opportunities. The new ENP is part of the mantra used by EU leaders to try to address these problems, but what the European Union offers in the context of the new ENP is inadequate, however, in terms of the financial resources and the vision that may convince people to remain in their current location, and give them hope that the situation will soon improve.

The fact that the new ENP is aimed at neighbors with vastly different characteristics from those of Israel comes as an addition to the strong anti-Israeli winds blowing from several European capitals, and has made the rationale for negotiations with the European Union over the terms of a new ENP questionable for Israel. To the extent that it is possible, Israel and individual member states could develop alternative modes of cooperation. One such area of cooperation could be in combating terror, which has increasingly preoccupied the European Union as the Islamic State succeeds in using the social media networks to deliver its messages to the second and third generations of Muslim immigrants. Many of the thousands of European Muslims who have flocked to the Islamic State are already indoctrinated before they even reach the Islamic State, and are full of hatred for the society in which they grew up. Some of them have returned to Europe, experts in terror. The member states of the European Union will have to undertake a number of steps to upgrade their cooperation in order to wage a successful campaign against the Islamic State, and Israel can assist in containing this threat within Europe.

Last but not least are Israel's relations with the newcomer to the Middle East – China. The quick and expanding volume of bilateral trade fails to reflect the scope of the economic interchanges between Israel and China. Chinese companies are heavily involved in mega-infrastructure projects; large and medium-sized Israeli companies are being taken over by Chinese

firms; and the large Chinese conglomerates are establishing centers in Israel. Chinese businessmen and firms are obviously seeking know-how and innovation. Although the “Chinese invasion” is a blessing for many, it also raises several questions. While penetrating the Israeli market is relatively easy, the road for foreign companies attempting to enter the Chinese market is still long and replete with cultural, bureaucratic, and economic hurdles. On the political level, many Israelis, among them government officials, do not deny the economic benefits, but do ask whether Israel should be so open and generous in allowing the sale of significant assets or in granting contracts to Chinese companies with clear links to the Chinese government while China sells weapons to Israel’s enemies, and is unlikely to abstain, let alone veto anti-Israeli resolutions in the UN Security Council. Chinese activities can be explained by seeking sound, long-term, profit-making opportunities, and this is evident from the patterns of Chinese investments, whether by individuals, companies, or the government. Yet when some of the Chinese activities are juxtaposed with China’s strategic projects, such as the One Belt One Road, the Asian Investment and Infrastructure Bank, or the building of naval bases from the South China Sea through the Indian Ocean to the Horn of Africa, questions should be raised as to whether construction of ports in Israel by Chinese firms is not a part of a much grander scheme. Moreover, relations between Israel and China are not detached from the political and military relations between Israel and the United States. While Israel should maintain its freedom of decision making, wider strategic considerations should be brought into play when analyzing the long-term future relations between Israel and China.



# Israel in the Middle East

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# Challenges and Opportunities for Israel in the Coming Year

Udi Dekel and Omer Einav

In the five years since the start of the regional upheavals, the dramatic, the novel, the unexpected, and the unfamiliar have become the new normal. This significant period, which saw the collapse of states, the fall of regimes, and the continuation of wars, is not yet over, and clearly the volatility will continue into the near future. Three struggles underway may be likened to shifts in the tectonic plates of the Arab world. The first is the socioeconomic struggle touched off by the so-called “Arab Spring,” which was led by frustrated young people who believed that all roads in life were blocked to them, leading to a sense that they could never realize their hopes and dreams. However, the changes since they took to the streets and public squares have only put more distance between them and their ambitions. The second is the inter-ethnic struggle between Shiites and Sunnis for regional dominance: against the emerging Iranian-led hegemony of a Shiite axis has been the rise of an internally divided and unstable Sunni front consisting of actors from Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, and the Gulf states on the one hand, to al-Qaeda, the Islamic State, and likeminded Salafi jihadist groups on the other hand. The third struggle is the struggle within the Sunni camp against the ascendance of the Islamic State, the embodiment of the revived notion of a caliphate based on *sharia*. The Islamic State is spearheading the new effort to realize that ancient dream, which in turn has given rise to a long list of opponents: the Sunni states, political Islam, and Sunni Salafist movements that are not the Islamic State.

The dynamic and multilayered nature of these struggles poses serious challenges, but these same struggles also offer many opportunities to shape a strategic environment of a different kind. This dualism is true for all those involved in the Middle East, and especially so for Israel. Israel has adjusted its policy to the frequent changes by monitoring developments while sitting on the fence, and in particular by strengthening defensive elements and avoiding involvement as long as possible. At the same time, however, Israel has remained stagnant in its ability to construct new tools to leverage the situation, at least within its close strategic environment, and it continues to operate on the basis of rationales and rules of the game that are not effective. Therefore, the most important challenge as well as opportunity for Israel in the coming year is to adopt updated methods of thinking, internalize the fact that it is in the era of a major confrontation to reshape the Middle East as well as its own position and status in the region, and formulate an approach that looks for opportunities and develops a new mix of multidisciplinary tools and efforts.

The most important principle in shaping a regional agenda to promote Israel's interests is the understanding that there is a close linkage among processes and trends in different geographical spheres. Unlike the Middle East prior to 2011, today it is virtually impossible to engage in one arena without affecting another or without causing a chain of unintended consequences. Therefore, it is hard to act on an opportunity in a certain area, certainly independently, and it becomes necessary to enlist other actors, both state and non-state, as partners. The weakening of the state structure in large parts of the region has made social and cultural influences much more important than in the past. One's reference point must thus change accordingly, with close attention paid to the construction of supra-state strategic coalitions and the opportunity to reach out and cooperate with relevant sub-state elements.

Israeli decision makers must remember that now, more than ever before, the country's immediate surroundings comprise a complex, multi-faceted reality operating on the basis of various rationales, marked by mutual relations and influences. Israel must prepare for the possibility that the existing state order in the Middle East could collapse and that nations could dissolve into separate ethnic or religious sub-states, autonomies, enclaves, or other entities. It therefore behooves Israel to cultivate ties, both public and covert, with

ethnic groups, minorities, and other actors that are not hostile to Israel and that have the potential to play a constructive and stabilizing role in shaping the future Middle East.

In its new strategic surroundings, Israel has the opportunity to improve its regional position and cultivate cooperation with “pragmatic” elements in the Arab world on security, energy, technology, agriculture, and water infrastructure. To this end, Israel must present a genuine “entry ticket”: promoting the political process with the Palestinians by placing a political initiative on the table, accompanied by the genuine intention to establish a two-state reality, which as such maintains Israel’s uniqueness as a Jewish and democratic state.

### **The Palestinian Arena**

To a certain extent, the outbreak of Palestinian violence in September 2015 took the Israeli public and its leadership by surprise because of the ongoing nature of the attacks, their frequency, and the choice of weapons – in most cases knives and automobiles. The combination of social, national, and religious motives, fueled further by Islamic State-inspired Salafi jihadist ideals, touched off the outbreak. The younger generation of Palestinians sees no way out of its plight, which generates among them an urgent drive to change the current situation. One of the expressions of this despair is the choice to attack Jews, which at least gives them some meaning and effects a changed reality, while also granting glory because of the resistance to Israel through their willingness for self-sacrifice.

However, a closer look at the situation shows that this eruption of violence was not a strategic surprise, but only another link in a chain of violent terrorist outbreaks. The pressure cooker would have blown sooner or later because of the cumulative economic, social, and national problems within the Palestinian public in the absence of any glimmer of political dialogue, and with the Gaza Strip in a shambles more than a year after Operation Protective Edge and all promises for reconstruction unfulfilled.

In tandem, Israel faces the ongoing delegitimization campaign waged against it by the Palestinian Authority in the international arena. The campaign focuses on delegitimizing Israel by ascribing responsibility to it for the political deadlock and attacking the construction in the West Bank Jewish

settlements, a policy that for the international community is proof that Israel is not interested in peace or compromise. An example of the consequence of the deadlock is the European Union's decision to label products made in the West Bank. Israel must understand that this is another warning sign as to the set of boycotts, sanctions, and limitations it will face if it adheres to the status quo and does not act to jumpstart the political process.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Israel's own interests demand that the political process be promoted. This should not be viewed as necessary because of international pressure, but rather as necessary from the understanding that Israel is close to the tipping point, beyond which it will no longer be possible to implement a two-state solution. At that point, the supreme Israeli interest of being both a Jewish and democratic state will be very much in danger.

At the same time, Israel must urgently formulate a response to the problem of Palestinian terrorism, based on awareness that this response is not exclusively security and military related, as this is a complex problem of which terrorism is only one manifestation. Israel's response to the outbreak of violence must be based on the understanding that there is potential for seepage of the ideas that the Islamic State spouts much beyond the general inspiration it provides to young people seeking to overcome the cycles of despair in the possibility of improving their lot in nonviolent ways. Therefore Israel must offer alternatives to the Palestinian public. One, it must use integrated, parallel, and synchronized anti-terrorism efforts at the security, infrastructural, social, and cognitive levels, founded on a multidisciplinary approach in which the emphasis is on improving the economic and infrastructural situation of the Palestinians in East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip. Two, it must present a political plan to promote a series of arrangements between Israel and the Palestinians and display authentic, credible determination to move toward conflict resolution. It is necessary to engage in dialogue with the Palestinian leadership with the express intention of creating a political horizon. Three, from behind the scenes Israel must help the PA and other influential elements in Palestinian society present competing and more attractive ideals than Salafist jihadism, which tries to capture the hearts and minds of young people in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In this regard Israel should make informed use of social media and pay particular attention to schools and curricula, employment initiatives, and job training for the young,

and instill in them a sense that they can affect their future through positive means. The younger Palestinians do not believe in the political process, especially not one that was carried out simply for show (the process for its own sake). Therefore, it is imperative to stress the positive changes to the Palestinian population – emphasizing the significant improvements in way of life and freedom of action, employment, and movement – as soon as the political process is resumed.

### **The Northern Arena**

Developments in Syria and their ramifications for Lebanon command much international attention and present the most turbulent situation in Israel's environment. While it is difficult to envision the future endgame, there is a high potential for the sudden formation of a military threat that would in all likelihood be manifested in terrorism aimed at Israel. The further cohesion of the northern arena into a single bloc was made evident in the growing consolidation of the Iranian-led Shiite axis, which includes Assad's regime and Hezbollah. At present, the axis maintains a military coalition, together with Russian forces operating in Syria. Assad's dependence on Iran and Hezbollah has made the northern Golan Heights and southern Lebanon into a single unit, currently representing the most severe military reference threat to Israel's security. Furthermore, it seems that in the last few years, after the Second Lebanon War (2006) and since the onset of the crisis in Syria, there has been an inversion of roles between Hezbollah and the Syrian army. The Syrian military, which represented the most severe conventional military threat against Israel, is disintegrating because of the civil war and its failure to recruit new soldiers, whereas Hezbollah, with the backing of Iran's Quds Force and Shiite militias from other countries, has assumed a more prominent role. Hezbollah has highly developed military capabilities, especially missiles, rockets, UAVs, and aerial defenses. At the same time, southern Lebanon has supplanted the Golan Heights as Israel's most peaceful border, mostly because Hezbollah would like to avoid a confrontation on yet another front, while the Golan is becoming a crowded, and therefore combustible, playing field.

Israel ranks the Iranian-led Shiite axis at the top of the list of severe threats. This axis has grown in strength because of cooperation with Russia,

which provides extensive air cover to President Assad's supporters as they fight the rebels and supply advanced weapons to the regime. And indeed, the further growth of this axis must be stunted as much as possible, and scenarios involving escalation if/when the axis can turn its full attention to Israel must be prepared. But it is also unwise to ignore the overall landscape of the northern arena: the Islamic State is a key factor in the struggle over Syria's future, even if its presence in the Golan is limited (Yarmouk Martyrs Brigade, which has sworn allegiance to it, sits in the southern part of the Golan Heights), as is Jabhat al-Nusra, al-Qaeda's satellite, whose presence on the Israeli border is more extensive. Therefore, it is necessary to take into account the Salafi jihadist element, which relies on Sunni dominance and is liable to threaten Israel in the future, perhaps sooner than is commonly thought. Because neither option currently in place in the northern arena – dominance of the Iranian-backed axis versus dominance of the Salafist jihadist groups – is attractive, to say the least, the time has come for Israel to formulate a proactive policy in the arena together with players amenable to understandings and with shared interests to improve conditions and create tools of influence, especially in southern Syria, to prepare for the escalation that will inevitably arrive.

Beyond sharing the knowledge it has gained in fighting terrorism, Israel should weigh deeper involvement in the US-led coalition fighting the Islamic State. Such involvement could be manifested in: strategic agreements with Jordan to create a joint region of influence in southern Syria; intelligence sharing to foil attacks and launch attacks at the Islamic State's centers of gravity; a multidisciplinary method of action for Israel's political and security establishment that would integrate military, economic, infrastructural, social, and ideological efforts; joint efforts in cyberspace to fight Islamic State propaganda and its use of social media and the internet; and strategic dialogues designed to examine new ways to shape the Middle East without necessarily adhering to old models.

## **Egypt and Jordan**

One positive byproduct of the regional instability is the spotlight on the shared interests of Israel and the states with which it has peace agreements, i.e., Egypt and Jordan. The fact that both of these states have a large Sunni



majority has made them susceptible to Salafi jihadist radicalization inspired by the Islamic State. This danger, especially given the long borders both states share with Israel, has made preservation of their stability and the resilience and integrity of their regimes into a supreme interest not only to them, but to Israel's national security as well.

Egypt is already taking vigorous action against the Islamic State's branch in the Sinai Peninsula, Wilayat Sinai (previously known as Ansar Bait al-Maqdis), which is involved in extensive domestic terrorism in Sinai and Egypt. So far, Jordan has remained stable, both in terms of the status of the royal household and in terms of the scope of terrorism on its soil. The kingdom has succeeded in protecting itself against the storms raging all around it, in Syria and Iraq, but Salafi jihadist cells already in place are liable to become active and undermine the existing order there. Israel must prepare for a scenario in which it will have to stand by Jordan's side to maintain the kingdom's stability and even existence.

Security cooperation between Israel and Egypt and Jordan has proven itself. For now, its fruits are evident in the very fact of these states' relative stability. The hidden challenge and opportunity is exploiting the security platform to promote other regional interests. Egypt and Jordan are both opposed to the main streams of anti-Israel enemies in the Middle East – the Iranian-Shiite axis and the Salafist jihadist brand of Islam – and on that basis, it is possible to promote broader understandings. In addition to the fight against terrorism in Sinai, it is critical to reach understandings with Egypt on reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, in order to reduce the pressure on the Gaza population before it boils over toward Israel. The goal is to try to affect President Sisi's policy: since Operation Protective Edge, Sisi has not allowed any relief for Gaza, as he seeks to deny Hamas an achievement of any sort.

Israel must expand its relationship with Jordan – likewise an anchor in the region's stability – beyond the security dimension, by starting economic, civilian, and infrastructure projects that will yield dividends of peace. In addition, Egypt and Jordan are platforms for expanding Israel's cooperation with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. In order to further strategic relations with these nations, Israel must act – i.e., beyond rhetoric alone – to renew the political process with the Palestinians. Jordan needs the political process

in order to reduce the potential threat of its Palestinian majority to the regime, reduce the pressure of ominous scenarios such as the collapse of the PA, and be able to play its central role in the Palestinian context and use its position as a moderating influence, especially in terms of lowering the flames over al-Aqsa.

## **The Regional Powers**

The Middle East is divided into ideological and political camps rooted in historical, religious, and cultural factors. At present, one can discern four major regional blocs: the Shiite axis led by Iran; the “pragmatic” Sunni camp led by Saudi Arabia; political Islam, led by Turkey, Qatar, and the Muslim Brotherhood; and Salafi jihadist Islam, led by the Islamic State and al-Qaeda. Given that Salafi jihadist Islam is at odds with all the other players and that political Islam is on the wane after the 2013 military coup in Egypt, it seems that Iran and Saudi Arabia emerge as the major powers in the Middle East. Both are fighting in different arenas: against one another and, it would seem, both against the Islamic State. The many competing interests mean that the two camps are incapable of converging to fight the Islamic State; the same is true for the other parties involved.

Both powers threaten Israel: the Iranian axis on the one hand and the Salafist jihadists on the other do not recognize Israel’s right to exist. Therefore, Israel must build connections with those entities that do accept its existence and understand its important role in shaping and stabilizing the region. To that end, Israel must pave the way for cooperation with the camp led by Saudi Arabia, the one considered closest to Israel in terms of congruent interests and common enemies. Israel’s ignoring the Saudi peace initiative is a mistake, and even if many of its sections are by now irrelevant, Israel would do well to recognize it as the basis for starting a dialogue with the Arab world, led by Saudi Arabia. The lack of an Israeli initiative to promote the political process with the Palestinians prevents the cultivation of official relations between the sides and leaves the objective unobtainable.

The organizing principle of the new geopolitical map and the many actors in the Middle East should – indeed, must – generate a new type of thinking in Israel. What is perceived as a multiplicity of threats could become a wealth of opportunities serving a regional strategy that promotes an integrated,

multilayered policy. So, for example, the crisis of trust between Israel and Turkey represents an extended deadlock that should perhaps be reexamined. The two countries have much in common and can benefit in many ways from coordination and cooperation, as was the case in the past. In addition, it is necessary not to limit the sphere of possibilities by trying to generate cooperation only with state players. Rather, Israel should seek out other, sub-state players that could serve as channels of influence for Israel in the region and give rise to positive forces critical to the stability and future of the entire Middle East.<sup>2</sup>

### **Implications for Israel**

As a regional actor, Israel must shape its policy in light of the fundamental understanding that the future will be different from the past, and that right now, operating in the dark in the midst of regional chaos is a fact of life. This starting point must be translated into creating opportunities while remaining prepared to confront threats. Mapping the challenges and internalizing the idea that there are connections between events and trends in different places is the key to formulating policy. So, for example, realizing the connection between the ideological and cultural phenomenon of the inspiration of the Islamic State and the Palestinian stabbing terrorism could help generate strategic insights for Israel in all arenas. The first shock of the regional upheavals is far in the past and the risks are well-known. Now it is time to try to make the situation yield the positive strategic dividends inherent in it.

War is an extreme scenario serving as the foundation for military force buildup and preparedness. But the risk of escalation to war in the coming year is low. Therefore, security action should focus on the current confrontation between wars to improve Israel's strategic position not only by strengthening its image of deterrence but also by providing positive returns to its strategic environment in the fields of economy, energy, technology, water, and more. In addition to strengthening its components of defense, especially along the borders, it behooves Israel to create levers of influence beyond its borders by means of, e.g., cooperating with Israel's peace partners and the "pragmatic" players, and striving to create inherent strategic depth that would distance threats and save the costs of direct action.

When one examines the trends in Israel's regional environment and the challenges it faces, one must confront several essential questions about the present and its relationship to the future. The next chapters are devoted to a broader and more in-depth discussion of these questions, which are the critical ones facing both the government and the security establishment as they prepare to formulate policy and strategy for the coming year.

## Notes

- 1 Jodi Rudoren and Sewel Chan, "E.U Move to Label Israeli Settlement Goods Strains Ties," *New York Times*, November 11, 2015, <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/12/world/middleeast/eu-labels-israeli-settlements.html>.
- 2 For more on the topic of reshaping the Middle East, see Robin Wright, "Imagining a Remapped Middle East," *New York Times*, September 28, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/29/opinion/sunday/imagining-a-remapped-middle-east.html>; Jeffrey Goldberg, "The New Map of the Middle East," *The Atlantic*, June 19, 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/06/the-new-map-of-the-middle-east/373080/>; Mahdi Darius Nazemroaya, "Plans for Redrawing the Middle East: The Project for a 'New Middle East,'" *Global Research*, September 4, 2015, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/plans-for-redrawing-the-middle-east-the-project-for-a-new-middle-east/3882>.

# The New “State Order” in the Middle East

Carmit Valensi

It is five years since the Middle East was enveloped by revolutions that were over-optimistically called the “Arab Spring,” and a stable political order has not yet emerged in the region. Notwithstanding the domino effect that characterized the initial events, in retrospect, each arena and set of circumstances was defined by its own characteristics. More than a single common fate, the regional developments have so far generated different political models that exist concurrently in the respective Arab states. There are collapsing states (Syria, Yemen, Libya, and Iraq); “functional states” coping with instability and immediate challenges that have so far maintained their state framework (Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, Egypt, and to a lesser extent, Lebanon); and a new model, that of the Islamic State, which, through its challenge to the nation state and accepted international standards, presents an innovative attempt to realize the idea of the Sunni religious caliphate.

The common tendency to eulogize the modern borders of the Middle East designed in the framework of the imperialist agreements following WWI is not justified as an overall basic assumption. The functional states will presumably continue to maintain their state frameworks in the coming years (even if a change of regime in those states occurs). Most of the countries, except in the Fertile Crescent, are the political outgrowth of territories that have existed for hundreds of years, sometimes under the rule of dynasties that ruled for long periods and had an interest in preserving the territorial division. If stability is maintained, it is not necessarily the result of effective

regime performance, improvement in the political and socioeconomic situation, or a receding of ethnic, religious, and social tension in states. It is, rather, the result of an ebb – even if temporary – in the revolutionary spirit, and even more so, concern about the specter of chaos, violence, and bloodshed facing the population in the collapsed states.

Five years of bloody internal struggles – wrapped in extremist ideas and accompanied by violence on the part of Salafi jihadist groups in the collapsing states – are largely undermining the viability of the idea of the nation-state. The weakening of national identity has gradually exposed the ostensibly subordinated pattern of people's primordial identities based on religious, ethnic, and tribal identities. These identities are resurging as the parameters of an alternative order to the state structure in various regions of the Middle East, and it appears that the state borders and frameworks in part of the Middle East will not revert to what they formerly were. The processes of fragmentation in Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen may mature into a new and more stable political order encompassing the religious and ethnic identities of the residents of the region. In this context, three political models likely to be formed as a response to the geopolitical challenges in the collapsing states can be identified.

### **Dissolution, Violence, and Chaos**

The first scenario assumes that the existing situation will continue, and most likely will worsen. Focuses of instability in the region will aggravate the existing processes of disintegration and chaos and will prompt more extreme violence, which will cohere as a new “order” in the Middle East. The situation in Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Yemen will continue to deteriorate, and the ability of the central governments to consolidate authority and order will decline. The elements that will continue to feed the chaotic situation are violent conflicts in four spheres: (a) between Shiites and Sunnis under the influence of the struggle for regional hegemony between Iran and Saudi Arabia; (b) within the Sunni camp between the various groupings, especially the battle against radical Islam and Salafi jihadist terrorist organizations; (c) within Arab society: the same young people who began the Arab Spring and whose path to self-realization and fulfillment has been blocked might try to break through the barriers; (d) ethnic minorities such as the Kurds

will demand self-determination and independence. All these factors will lead to the strengthening of armed militias, which will expand and become more common in the absence of any internal or external centralizing power able to stabilize these arenas. Unless a change occurs, the likelihood of a pessimistic scenario materializing will increase in a way liable to cause the violence to spread and to destabilize countries that have hitherto been relatively successful in maintaining a state framework.

### **From a Collapsed State to a Divided State: The Federation Model**

This scenario assumes a process of countries being divided into sub-units or autonomous regions (according to ethnic or tribal divisions). It is possible that the sub-units will be managed under a federal administration. These sub-units (cantons) will enjoy a degree of autonomy in internal matters. The federal model in the Middle East is likely to bridge the desire of the Arab countries and the international community to preserve the state's territorial integrity and the desire of ethnic groups to maintain their cultural independence and political autonomy.

For example, the model of Kurdish autonomy in northern Iraq could expand and evolve into a federal state structure in which autonomy would be granted to additional regions in Iraq according to an ethnic division (Shiites and Sunni), all linked to a central administration. This federal structure is also likely to constitute a model in other theaters, such as Syria, Libya, Yemen, and possibly other states in the area with ethnic or religious minorities in distinctive geographic regions.

The federal structure is not foreign to the Middle East. To a great extent it is reminiscent of the millet system that prevailed during the period of the Ottoman Empire – a religious community whose members conducted themselves according to the laws of the community on condition that these did not clash with the laws of the country. In exchange, the population benefits from freedom of religion and cultural autonomy. Although the federal structure was not successful in the Middle East in the past,<sup>1</sup> it is possible that long years of dissolution and violence could lead certain theaters to reconsider this model.

## **“Disintegration and Assembly”: From a Single Large State to Small Independent States**

States finding it difficult to maintain any state framework at all, or to generate agreement on a central administration, are likely to decide on dissolution and division of their territory into several separate and independent entities along ethnic and religious lines (so that Sunnis will not rule Shiites, and vice versa). This idea is not new in the Middle East. A similar case can be seen in Yemen, which before its 1990 union had two autonomous units: North Yemen (independent since 1918) and South Yemen (since 1967). Some assert that the situation in South Yemen and North Yemen was better before the union, in comparison with the current state of “united” Yemen.

Fulfillment of the Kurdish vision of establishing an independent state (separate from the Iraqi administration) is a possible example of a political settlement of this type. Indeed, the development of Kurdish autonomy into an independent entity is not an unreasonable scenario, but this too is encountering difficulties and opposition within Iraq and from its neighbors having a Kurdish community (Turkey, Syria, and Iran), which will therefore attempt to block this scenario. In the future, Syria and Lebanon could also find themselves divided into independent state entities along ethnic lines. In Syria, for example, one proposed model was already applied during the French Mandate period, with Alawite autonomy in the coastal strip in the west, Druze autonomy in Jabel Druze north of Jordan, Sunni autonomy in central Syria, and Kurdish autonomy in the north.

While the first scenario – continuation and acceleration of the existing trend – currently appears very likely, it appears that the conditions are not yet ready for progress in the other two models as an option for stabilizing the situation and relieving some of the distress and rivalries in the region. Development in stages is also possible – first dissolution into homogeneous ethnic frameworks, and in the second stage, their unification into a federal or confederative framework. At this stage, the international community believes that it is possible to turn the clock back to the state framework that prevailed in the region for nearly 100 years. In the long term, the other models can emerge from either official approval from a state’s central government, or mainly through the creation of facts on the ground that will win local or international recognition. In any case, history shows that



it would be preferable for the initiative for a new political order to be local and authentic, not derived from the dictates of force by external powers.

These possible developments are independent of Israel, which does not possess levers of influence for designing its environment. Direct involvement by Israel in designing new political arrangements in the Middle East, even if it were possible, might well saddle Israel with responsibility for the failure of efforts at stabilization and the continuation of chaos. At the same time, Israel should prepare for the disintegration scenarios, and should take action out of the public eye to improve its connections and relations with ethnic groups that are not hostile to it, such as the Kurds, Druze, and other minorities. The particular nature of an arrangement emerging in the region is likely to affect Israel's security and strategic situation. Extending Israel's connections and cooperation with local groups and communities will therefore improve its strategic status in advance of the formation of a different order in the Middle East.

In any case, open and covert humanitarian aid from Israel to local communities and minorities in its strategic environment is likely to constitute a positive lever for improving its status among populations and ethnic groups and better its future situation. Israel would do well to change its approach, which holds that the future of the region is unpredictable – an axiom that has been borne out repeatedly over the past five years. Nevertheless, a change of direction is required, involving a more active role *vis-à-vis* actors with potential for cooperation in the future. At the same time, both continued monitoring of deep currents and a thorough study of the culture, history, religion, and tribalism in the Middle East are necessary in order to understand how to promote Israel's interests.

## Notes

- 1 It appears that the federal model in a regional format (meaning a central government managing whole countries) is less suitable to the current regional area, in part because of the absence of a central and legitimate actor capable of leading a regional federation. This model therefore deals with an internal state federation.



# Does Russia's Intervention in Syria Hold Opportunities for Israel?

Zvi Magen and Udi Dekel

Since late September 2015, Russia has launched airstrikes in Syria in order to assist the forces defending the Assad regime against the rebels and the Islamic State. Russia's intervention includes the deployment of aerial forces (close to 40 fighter jets and helicopters), aerial defense systems, and aerial command and control systems. President Vladimir Putin described the purpose of Russia's intervention as a battle against the Islamic State, although as of November 2015 most of the targets attacked were those belonging to the rebels, who were described as terrorists but were not aligned with the Islamic State. The Russian squadrons deployed in Syria are operating as part of a coalition that includes the Syrian army still loyal to Assad, Iran (which has dispatched some 2,000 Quds Force fighters to Syria), and Hezbollah, providing aerial assistance to the coalition forces on the ground. In addition, Russia is using heavy bombers and cruise missiles fired from its soil and even from submarines in the Mediterranean.

Russia's decision to intervene militarily in Syria stemmed from several considerations. One, given the rebels' joint attack on the power centers that Assad – Russia's ally – still controls, Russia concluded that the tipping point in the battle would occur unless it stepped in immediately. Two, Russia wishes to retain its naval stronghold on the Syrian coast as a base of operations in the Mediterranean. Three, Putin wants to restore Russia to its former glory as an influential superpower in the international arena, and active involvement in the Middle East is a means to achieve regional and international influence. Four, Russia has identified an opportunity to

challenge the United States, in particular when President Barack Obama is leery of expanding US military activity in the Syria crisis. Five, Russia is interested in diverting global attention and the locus of confrontation with the United States and the West away from Ukraine and redirecting it toward the Middle East, thereby also gaining relief from the economic sanctions imposed on it because of its Ukraine policy. Six, the central pretext Russia gave for intervention was the concern over the approach of Salafi jihadist Islam, led by the Islamic State, i.e., the threat to the nations on Russia's borders as well as to Russia's own Muslim population.

It seems that the Russian campaign in Syria was planned as a tripartite effort. The first, offensive stage took place in October, conducted by Russia's air force. One of the aims of this stage was to help Assad's forces seize control of critical areas while suppressing the rebels' offensive along the coast and on the Aleppo-Damascus axis. The attacks on rebel targets were apparently designed to encourage them to cooperate with a political initiative led by Russia on Syria's future political order. This stage received massive media coverage and was attended by an extensive public relations campaign to portray Russia as an influential power, a goal that was achieved, at least in part. After the targets were "softened up" from the air, the coalition (Assad, Hezbollah, and Iran) launched a ground offensive to conquer territory and expand the regime's control in the Aleppo and Damascus regions, including the connection from the Aleppo sector towards the Syrian coast, a stronghold of the Alawites. For now, this offensive has had only limited success because of: the stubborn resistance of the rebels who are getting help and transferring advanced weapon systems from Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, and even Turkey; the weakness of the Syrian army, which has been fighting primarily a ground war for five years; the failure of the Iranian support forces (Quds Force), which have taken many losses, especially in the command structure; the weakness of the central command; and impaired cooperation among the forces involved.

The second, political stage was begun after Russia's military intervention achieved a turning point on the battlefield and forged the perception that Russia is ready to commit fully to maintain the Bashar al-Assad regime. The political process was launched in Vienna on October 23, 2015, continued on October 30, and resumed again on November 14. At first it assumed a

limited format, which expanded subsequently because of Russia's efforts to involve most of the powers and nations of the region. The major dispute in the behind-the-scenes negotiations concerned the future of Assad himself; no mention of the issue was made in the concluding statement. It seems that even for Russia, Assad personally has become a liability, and Russia would be willing to give up on him while retaining the nature of the regime in exchange for promoting Russia's broader interests (such as a settlement in Ukraine). The involvement of Iran in the political talks and the fact that it is an important partner in the Russian coalition provide a great deal of weight to Russia's international standing. Still, there are gaps between Russian and Iranian interests and the future holds disagreements between them, both on the question of Syria and on the question of a future regional settlement.

The third stage of Russia's campaign in Syria seems to have deviated from the original plans and includes focused attacks on the Islamic State. After the downing of the Russian airliner in Sinai in October 2015 – the result of a bomb planted by the Islamic State's proxy in the Sinai Peninsula – there was an increase in the intensity of the Russian attacks focusing on Islamic State targets. For Russia, the terrorist attacks in Paris in November provided an opportunity to try to establish a broad international coalition to fight the Islamic State as well as to impose a political settlement on the fighting parties in Syria. After the West vacillated between indifference and resistance toward the Russian political initiative, the parties reached a compromise. On December 19, 2015, a broad meeting of the UN Security Council formulated a plan to jumpstart the peace process by a "roadmap," which details the stages of transition to end the war in Syria and promote an agreed arrangement within 18 months.

If the process continues in its present format and a resolute, broad international coalition is formed operating under a coordinated Russian-US leadership, the probability increases that Russia's firm intervention will cause a turning point in the Syrian confrontation, severely damage the Islamic State, and oust the latter from areas formerly controlled by Syria and Iraq. However, among the expected outcomes of such a development are greater willingness of individuals and groups in the Sunni camp to enlist in the ranks of the Islamic State, and increased activity by its proxies and affiliates in the region and around the world.

Russia's involvement in Syria has many internal implications for Israel. On the one hand, Israel and Russia have had a military coordination system in place since the start of Russia's intervention to prevent friction and aerial encounters. This coordination may be expected to continue. On the other hand, Russia's intervention has several negative implications. Militarily, the deployment of Russian S-400 ground-to-air missiles in northern Syria limits the Israeli Air Force's freedom of action and secrecy because it covers extensive areas in Syria, Lebanon, and northern Israel. However, so far the Russian airspace coverage over the skies of Syria and Lebanon has not limited the aerial activity of the Israeli Air Force in this space. A more dangerous development would be the transfer of the missile system to the Syrian army. In addition, the Israeli establishment is very worried about the cooperation and assistance extended by Russia to the Iranian-led Shiite axis. Other than the growing strength of the Iranian axis, such cooperation is liable to help Iranian and Hezbollah forces become embedded in the Golan Heights, thereby increasing the threat to Israel.

Therefore, Israel should further its strategic dialogue with Russia and, in this context, insist that Russia not allow the development of another Iranian-led front against Israel in the Golan Heights in particular and in southern Syria in general. Moreover, Israel must try to advance the opportunity inherent in Russia's intervention and the Russia-Iran-Hezbollah coalition to restrain Iran and Hezbollah from acting against Israel. It is also necessary to establish new rules of the game acceptable both to Israel and to Russia to prevent friction, erroneous assessments, miscalculation, and escalation, and to use these rules to bridge understandings on promoting future political arrangements in Syria.

# Israel and the Salafi Jihadist Threat

Shlomo Brom and Yoram Schweitzer

Although the threat to Israel of prior decades of conventional, high intensity warfare launched by armies of neighboring nations or a coalition of Arab nations has been vastly reduced, Israel faces three major threats of a different type. The first is the threat from the Iranian-led Shiite axis, which includes Iranian allies, not all of which are Shiite, and is known as the “axis of resistance” because of its ideology that is directed at the West and Israel. The second is the threat resulting from the failure to settle the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the choice of conflict management over conflict resolution, or at least efforts toward that objective. The third is the threat from various Salafi jihadist groups, especially the Islamic State (ISIS) and the groups identified with it throughout the Muslim world, as well as al-Qaeda and other groups within the global jihadi camp.

The third threat was amplified by the upheavals and crises in the Arab world that began in late 2010 and weakened many Arab states. This in turn prepared the ground for the burgeoning Salafi jihadist movements, which succeeded in exploiting the vacuum created by the structural weakening of the Arab states, the persistent governmental, economic, and social crises besetting them, the culture of endemic institutional corruption, and the effect of these elements on the public, on top of the existing religious and ethnic tensions.

The rise of the Islamic State as a new Sunni phenomenon, including its conquests of vast tracts of land in Iraq and Syria, the declaration of the establishment of a new Islamic caliphate in those territories, and the fear of the phenomenon expanding to other large areas of land have led to the

formation of a new set of priorities in the United States and the West and invited the belief that the Islamic State is the major threat that must be confronted.

### **The Shiite Axis Heads the List of Priorities**

Israel has not seen a similar change in the definition of its priorities in confronting the various threats before it. The Israeli government's avowed policy clings to the view that the major threat to Israel comes from Iran and its allies. Several reasons are at the base of this approach.

First, the Iranian threat is multidimensional. To a large extent, decision makers focus on the nuclear threat, which is based on an intelligence assessment that contends that since its inception, the Iranian nuclear program has sought to acquire military capabilities, a goal Iran has never repudiated. In Israel, few – if any – believe that Iran has changed its policy, and Israel views a nuclear Iran as an existential threat. Israel is worried that Iran will try to cheat and will violate sections of the nuclear agreement even in the first years, and certainly further down the road. At the same time, Iran represents another strategic threat because of its large inventory of advanced ballistic missiles. This array of weapons, equipped with conventional warheads, can already be used to attack Israeli cities and strategic targets, as can the shorter range missiles and rockets in the hands of Hezbollah, Iran's proxy. There is also the threat of support and encouragement of asymmetric warfare and terrorism on the part of other Iranian proxies, such as Palestinian organizations enjoying Iranian support. In addition, Iran has a well-developed ability to conduct terrorist campaigns against Israeli and Jewish targets throughout the world.

Second, the prevalent assessment among many experts in Israel is that Iran's hostility to Israel is deeply embedded in its ideology, and there is little hope that the nature of the Tehran regime will change in the foreseeable future.

Third, the Israeli assessment is that Hezbollah is the most serious direct military and terror threat. Fighting this organization will exact a steep toll, given the bitter experience of previous confrontations. Hezbollah is a hybrid organization: it enjoys the advantages of a non-state entity, including lower signature and the ability to conduct effective asymmetrical warfare with fewer political, image-related, and legal constraints than a state, but it also has military capabilities rivaling those of states, including large inventories



of weapons, some at the very forefront of military technology, as well as a large, dedicated, and well-trained military force. These allow the organization to realize a massive threat to targets in every part of Israel. At the same time, Hezbollah participates in Lebanese politics and wields much influence in that arena, and enjoys the support of a large part of the Lebanese public. While Hezbollah's participation in the Syrian civil war has cost it dearly, it continues to amass strength and receive advanced weapon systems from Iran and Syria, and through them also from Russia, and it is gaining operational experience on the battlefield.

### **How Does Israel Relate to the Islamic State Threat?**

At the same time, Israel must be prepared to confront threats stemming from the growth of Salafi jihadists, several of which have already been manifested. So far, the central arena of such activity against Israel has come from the Sinai Peninsula, which has seen an increase in Salafi jihadist activity, with one group even joining the Islamic State under the name Wilayat Sinai, i.e., the Sinai province of the caliphate. Several attacks – rocket launches and ambushes – directed at Israel have already come from Sinai and resulted in civilian deaths. In the north, Assad's loss of control over most border areas across from Israel's Golan Heights is cause for concern that Salafi jihadist groups will have easy access to Israel through the northern border and, at a certain point, will decide to realize their anti-Israel ideology by carrying out attacks on Israeli soil. This concern has grown more acute since Jabhat al-Nusra, a group that identifies with al-Qaeda, began operating in the northern sector of the Golan Heights border while the Islamic State launched an offensive in southern Syria.

At a time when the Islamic State made extensive territorial gains, the concern grew that this momentum would bring the Islamic State to Jordan as well. At first glance, Jordan's circumstances seem optimal for the penetration of the Islamic State: it has an overwhelming Sunni Muslim majority; there is a large population supporting Islamist ideology, with the Muslim Brotherhood traditionally enjoying significant local support; and the kingdom is struggling under the strain of one and a half million Syrian refugees on its soil who are weakening the country's already shaky economy. From Israel's perspective,

an Islamic State takeover of Jordan, with which Israel shares its longest border, is a nightmare.

Nonetheless, at this stage the threat of the Islamic State and the Salafi jihadist organizations seems low, for several reasons. One is that the Islamic State and most of the major jihadist organizations are still active mainly in arenas at some distance from Israel. Another reason is that the concern about negative developments in Jordan has significantly waned, with the Jordanian regime proving its steadfastness. The army is loyal to the regime and can, with relative ease, handle the direct military threat represented by the Islamic State. Furthermore, the internal Jordanian arena is stable thanks to the king's good crisis management, economic aid from abroad, and the public rallying behind the king after the Islamic State burned alive the Jordanian pilot it had captured.

A third factor mitigating the immediacy of the Salafi jihadist threat to Israel is that despite their ideological commitment, the struggle against Israel is still low on the list of priorities of these groups. The Islamic State is focused on fighting in Iraq and Syria against the respective regimes, rival rebels, the US-led international coalition, and the Russian-Iranian alliance. Its proxies – the groups that have declared their loyalty to the Islamic State – are primarily interested in their own local arenas. The Egyptian proxy, Wilayat Sinai, is focused on fighting the Egyptian army and therefore does not launch many attacks against Israel. Even the active al-Qaeda affiliates are more concerned with their local arenas, and attacks against the West and particularly against Israel are of secondary interest. Thus, for now, Jabhat al-Nusra prefers not to open a front against Israel in the Golan Heights as long as it is engaged in a life-and-death struggle with the Assad regime and other rebel groups. Therefore Israel is more concerned by the reemergence of Hezbollah in the Golan Height than by Jabhat al-Nusra and its activity in the Quneitra area.

The last reason is that the responses Israel has developed for Palestinian terrorism and Hezbollah provide a response to Salafist jihadist organizations as well. Israel is concurrently strengthening its defensive measures (detection and obstruction, if needed) along the borders and continues to develop and produce surface-to-surface missile and rocket interceptors.

Yet these elements notwithstanding, Israel is seeing the beginnings of a debate about this very threat scale. Generally, threats must be examined on the basis of two main parameters. One is the strength or impact of the threat, i.e., the ability of the threatening element to inflict heavy damage on Israel, and the other is the probability of the threat being realized. In the foreseeable future, the strength of the threat represented by the Iranian-led axis greatly outweighs the Salafist jihadist threat, although one must consider the possibility of changes in this balance in the future. The relative success of the Islamic State in constructing a state-like framework could place at its disposal state-like and economic resources that might allow it to develop various military capabilities. The Islamic State will also presumably try to acquire nonconventional weapons – biological and chemical – like the type that may already have fallen into its hands thanks to Iraqi experts who fled Saddam Hussein's Baath regime and since then are under its aegis.

This is where a new component enters the picture that is typical of the Islamic State and other Salafist jihadist groups: the absence of a responsible leadership. This feature is in ample evidence in actions that violate all the rules of the game and international standards. On the other hand, specifically in the Shiite axis, Iranian and Hezbollah leaders are demonstrating a more responsible policy in operations, are willing to accept restraint, and are not interested in opening a military front against Israel. Therefore, the major change, of which the first signs might already have emerged, lies in the prospects of the threat being realized. While there is a decrease in the probability that the threat from Iran and its proxies will be realized, the threat from the Islamic State and Salafist jihadist organizations is more at hand than before.

In the scenario of a de facto division of Syria, the confrontation between enemy groups could gradually die down, whereupon the Islamic State and Salafist jihadist entities might turn more of their attention to Israel. Also, competition among the various actors in Syria is liable to develop over their ideological commitment to the Arab-Muslim fight against Israel and their desire to prove it. The spread of the Islamic State to southern Syria might not only generate closer contact with Israel, but also lead to friction with the Druze in the Jabel Druze region as well. This friction might prompt internal pressure in Israel to intervene. Furthermore, pressure from the Islamic State

on Jordan could result in Israel positioning itself alongside Jordan in a fight. In Sinai too, the failure of Egyptian army actions to defeat the Salafist jihadist groups there may well lead to the reality of a jihadist entity being in control of that territory. Once Egypt ceases its efforts against it, the Islamic State is liable to turn its attention to Israel.

On the other hand, the struggle between the Iranian-led Shiite axis and the Saudi-led Sunni axis and the decline into civil wars in various arenas have reduced the motivation of Iranian-affiliated groups to open a front against Israel and have strengthened Israel's deterrence, which is still in place after the Second Lebanon War. The nuclear agreement between Iran and the world powers also has the potential to restrain Iran, which would not like to jeopardize its ability to enjoy the fruits of the agreement and the lifting of the sanctions. It is therefore likely that a confrontation with the Iranian Shiite axis will not turn into a war. At the same time, limited incidents with potential for escalation, especially action against advanced arms shipments to Hezbollah, further Hezbollah and/or al-Quds entrenchment in the Golan Heights, and escalation in the Gaza Strip, are liable to continue to occur.

Therefore, Israel must take into account that in practice, the potential for friction with Salafi jihadist groups is rising and is liable to become a more central component in the range of threats it will have to confront in the future. The realization of this scenario greatly depends on the success of the international and regional efforts to eliminate the Islamic State phenomenon, the unfolding of the Syria crisis, the question of whether Egyptian President Sisi can restore sovereignty to Sinai, and internal developments in Jordan, all of which are highly uncertain. On the other hand, judicious conduct by Israel can continue to reduce the likelihood of a comprehensive confrontation with Hezbollah and Iran.

# The Nuclear Agreement and Iran's Ambitions for Regional Hegemony

Ephraim Kam

Striving for regional hegemony is a fundamental element in Iran's strategic conception. Up until now, this ambition has not translated into territorial expansion. Iran's goals are to change the conditions of its strategic environment, bolster its status in the region, influence the region's main processes, and motivate groups and powers to acknowledge Iranian interests in the region. This ambition, relating first and foremost to the Persian Gulf area, and broadly to the Middle East as a whole, can be attributed to several causes: Iran's geopolitical position; its potential economic wealth; its central standing in the Muslim world, mainly in the Shiite camp; its imperial history in the region; its capability for building up a strong military force; and last but not least, Iran's recognition that the surrounding environment poses threats and risks, but also opportunities.

Two key factors currently affect Iran's efforts to achieve regional hegemony: the upheaval in the Middle East and developments related to the nuclear agreement. The fateful developments in the region over the past five years pose serious risks for Iran. First and foremost, the territories in Syria controlled by Assad have been greatly reduced, and his continued rule is in question. The Assad regime is Iran's main, and virtually sole, ally, and if it falls, it cannot be replaced. Consequently, since 2012 Iran has exerted growing efforts to stabilize Assad's regime and safeguard its future, mainly through the stationing of military advisors in the Syrian army; dispatching al-Quds Forces to fight beside those supporting the Assad regime; allocating weapons and military equipment to Syria; and providing financial assistance to the

regime. This aid reached a new peak in September 2015, when Iran sent an estimated 2,000-3,000 soldiers from the ground forces of the Revolutionary Guards and the al-Quds Force to take part in the fighting in Syria. As a result of this expanded involvement, over one hundred Iranian soldiers have been killed in northern Syria in recent months, including senior officers. Following the thwarted offense of the pro-Assad coalition and the increased number of losses suffered by the al-Quds Force, Iran decided to withdraw some of its forces and return them to Iran. Since the beginning of the civil war in Syria, Iran has supported and also urged the involvement of Hezbollah forces in Syria, and has reinforced them with Shiite militias from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. This aid improved the Assad regime's situation to some extent, but has not yet ensured its stability and future.

Secondly, the 1991 Gulf War, followed by the occupation of Iraq by American forces, removed the Iraqi threat to Iran, and therefore provided Iran with new opportunities in Iraq. Iraq is very important to Iran because of its proximity, and the fact that 60 percent of its population is Shiite and receptive to Iranian influence in Iraq. The situation in Iraq, however, is unstable, rife with widespread violence, while Iran has rivals in the Iraqi system who oppose the expansion of its influence and intervention in Iraq; Iran also fears that the instability in Iraq could spread to its territory. Anxiety about further deterioration in Iraq has motivated Iran to provide military aid to the Iraqi security forces, which up until now have demonstrated their inadequacy, and to support the Shiite militias with the intention of replacing the unmotivated Iraqi security forces in the battle against the Islamic State.

Thirdly, the Islamic State established itself forcefully in Iraq in mid-2014, and has become an important player in the Middle East theater. Iran perceives the Islamic State as a concrete threat, jeopardizing its most important interests in the region – the future of the Assad regime in Syria, the Shiite militias and the government in Iraq, and Hezbollah in Lebanon. The appearance of the Islamic State presents a new/old Sunni ideal, perceived by the Iranians also as part of the Sunni-Shiite conflict and a challenge to the Shiite camp and to Iran's ambitions for regional hegemony. The Iranians perceive the sources of the Islamic State's power – its control of large territories in Syria and Iraq, its weapons and money, its fighting ability and determination, and its success in attracting tens of thousands of young people to its ranks – as

a tough and dangerous enemy. As a result of this realization, Iran is making great efforts to halt the Islamic State in both Iraq and Syria.

Despite these dangers to Iranian interests, some positive aspects for Iran have also emerged. Western governments have bolstered their recognition of Iran, an important factor that can help stabilize the situation in Syria and Iraq. Iran's influence in these two countries can help stop the Islamic State, along with Iran's willingness to use substantial military force against the Islamic State. The rise of the Islamic State, regarded as a significant threat to the free world, has improved Iran's image, while it has drawn attention away from Iran's large scale use of terrorist organizations by proxy and its status as leading the radical countries in the Middle East. Iran's regional importance has been further enhanced as a result of increased cooperation with Russia in the struggle against the jihadist organizations in Syria – despite the possible disagreements between them about the future of the Assad regime – and the tightening of economic and nuclear ties between them, as well as Russia's supplying of weapons to Iran. At the same time as Iran was negotiating with the P5+1 on the nuclear question, Iran succeeded in forging spheres of influence in the surrounding areas populated by Shiite Muslims, by supplying them with money and arms. It exploited the fighting in Afghanistan to gain a sphere of influence in the western part of the country, relying on the Shiite minority there. Iran is also working to consolidate its influence in Yemen, important for its location at the entrance to the Red Sea coast, and south of Saudi Arabia, by taking advantage of the civil war in Yemen and supporting the Houthis.

The nuclear agreement that has given Iran international legitimacy for being a nuclear threshold country has boosted Iran's status and image as a partner in the fight against the Islamic State and as a key player contributing to the region's stability. The nuclear agreement conferred on Iran a positive image, at least in part, finding its place in the family of nations. By removing the sanctions, Iran will be able to substantially expand its economic ties with various countries, and devote more resources to its allies, including the Shiite armed militias and organizations. As a result of the high-level dialogue held over the past two years between Iran and the Western governments, the US administration and other governments expect and hope that the dialogue can be expanded to include regional issues. From the perspective of the American administration, this expansion, should it prove possible, will

help moderate the Iranian regime, and make it a positive player that will be able to contribute to stabilizing the volatile situation in the region. By carrying out the nuclear agreement and eliminating the sanctions against Iran, the United States believes that it can strengthen the position of the more moderate parties in the Iranian leadership and facilitate this dialogue.

The American administration believes that there are people in the Iranian system, such as Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammad Javad Zarif, and likely also President Hassan Rouhani, who are interested in augmenting the dialogue with the United States. Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei admitted as much in the context of achieving the nuclear agreement, and Rouhani said that under certain conditions, implementation of the nuclear agreement could be the start of new relations with the United States. Khamenei, however, together with the heads of the radical wing of the regime, including the commanders of the Revolutionary Guards, strongly opposes expanding the dialogue. Khamenei, who continues to foster Iran's revolutionary image, regards the United States as an enemy, and suspects it of trying to overthrow the Iranian regime from within. Khamenei publicly announced that Iran's policy in the region is the direct opposite of US policy, and that ending the struggle against the United States contravenes the Qur'an. He thereby made it clear that he would not extend the dialogue with the American administration beyond the nuclear issue.

On regional issues, Khamenei announced that Iran would not neglect its friends in the region. Iran will continue to defend the "resistance" in the region, especially that of the Palestinians, and will support to the best of its ability anyone fighting against Israel and Zionism. Khamenei, as well as senior Revolutionary Guards officials, has spoken about extending Iranian influence to the West Bank and sending arms there, as Iran is doing in the Gaza Strip. Khamenei added that Iran will continue supporting the Syrian regime, the people and the regime in Iraq, the oppressed peoples in Yemen and Bahrain, and the resistance fighters in Lebanon, and will provide them with all assistance. Khamenei's declarations make it clear that the Iranian regime regards the nuclear agreement as a means of lifting the sanctions and expanding Iran's influence in the region, and not as a gateway to forging regional cooperation with the American administration and instilling moderate and constructive policy in the region.



## Conclusion

The above analysis leads to the conclusion that the developments in the region and the nuclear agreement have indeed improved Iran's status and enhanced its regional influence, but will not lead to a real change in its regional policy. Two reasons shape this conclusion. First, although some individuals in Iran are interested in a more extensive dialogue with the United States that could lead to better relations, and possibly eventually to a more moderate regional policy, the radical wing of the regime and its leader Khamenei continues to harbor suspicions toward the American administration, despite the nuclear agreement. Khamenei has made it clear that he intends to continue the radical policy that has characterized Iran since the beginning of the revolution and the formation of the Islamic Republic. It is obvious that Khamenei is making the strategic decisions in Iran, and it is hard to believe that those advocating dialogue with the American administration and a more moderate policy in the region can act against his will, which is supported by most of the radical establishment.

Second, the clash between Iran's policy in the region and that of the United States is substantial. The ambition to achieve regional hegemony has been a key element in Iran's strategic concept, even during the Shah's rule; it derives from Iran's sense of power, but also from its perception of a threat. The means by which Iran seeks to promote its hegemony are through military force buildup, with an emphasis on its array of missiles and naval capabilities; development of its nuclear potential, while maintaining the possibility of realizing that potential when the time is right; promoting deterrence, which relies upon the use of terrorism when necessary; expanding Iran's influence in other countries through monetary aid and arms supplies; and expanding its multitude of armed militias, satellite organizations, and other allies, based within the Shiite population. Khamenei has stated clearly that he will not relinquish these resources and methods.

What this means is that the tension and conflict will continue between the Iranian approach and that which the American administration is trying to instill in the Iranian regime. In all probability, this tension will subside only if and when a real change takes place within the Iranian regime, and as a result, also in its policy in the Middle East theater. Such a change is possible in the future, because many people in Iran want a regime with a different

character. This transformation has not yet begun, however, because the regime has been skillful enough to employ measures to stop it. At the same time, it should be kept in mind that Iran's efforts toward gaining hegemony in the region are not free of obstacles: the threat to Assad's regime; the expected opposition from the United States, especially when it learns that the Iranians are not acting according to its wishes; the failure to defeat the Islamic State; internal difficulties in other Iranian spheres of influence – Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen; and the counter efforts by Saudi Arabia, and perhaps also by other countries in the region.

What is the significance of all this for Israel? As long as the Iranian regime does not undergo any transformation in its character, its attitude towards Israel, including its refusal to recognize Israel's right to exist, will remain unchanged. This situation, in which Iran's regional status becomes stronger even despite the obstacles, poses a danger to Israel. Iran will do everything it can, as Khamenei has promised, to rein in Israel's freedom of action, and to damage it. In practice, this effort is liable to include setting up another front against Israel from South Lebanon to the Golan Heights through Hezbollah, while bolstering Hezbollah's capability to strike against Israel, in addition to attempting to penetrate the Palestinian arena in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. At the same time, it is unlikely that Iran will pursue any direct confrontation Israel, or at least not while it is busy trying to stabilize the situation in Syria and fight against the Islamic State. From the positive angle, if the Islamic State is eventually defeated, even with help from Iran, this will also serve Israel's interest. Above all, it is clear that if Iran decides at some stage to break through to a nuclear weapon, the array of threats which Israel will have to address will change substantially. At this stage, it is more likely that Iran will prefer to wait, and put off any decision to break out to nuclear capability by at least a few years.

Israeli countermeasures will have to pass through the United States. The American administration's policy on the nuclear question will contribute to the anticipated strengthening of Iran, and the United States is therefore expected to be committed to aiding its allies – not only Israel – and to assuage their concerns about Iran, if Iran does continue its radical policy in the region. An open question is whether the current and future American administration will show the necessary determination vis-à-vis Iran, or will practice appeasement toward it, as it did in the nuclear talks.

# **The Eruption of Violence in the Palestinian Arena: A Transition from a National Conflict to a Religious Conflict?**

Kobi Michael

The events that erupted in Jerusalem during the Jewish holidays in the fall of 2015, reflecting what Palestinians feared were Israeli intentions to change the status quo on the Temple Mount, spilled over into Israel, to the border area with the Gaza Strip, and into the West Bank. Palestinian usage of terms related to Jerusalem and the Temple Mount – such as the al-Aqsa or al-Quds Intifada – strengthened the prevailing sense that the religious dimension was the major motif behind the recent escalation and “knife terrorism.” Indeed, most of the stabbing assailants, whose actions have taken the form of “self-sacrifice attacks” (in reference to the high likelihood of their being killed), attribute their decisions to stab and murder Jews to Israeli conduct at the al-Aqsa compound and the blatant offense to the religious symbol that holds such great importance for Muslims.

Most of the incitement in the media and the social networks has also revolved around the issue of al-Aqsa, warning of malicious Israeli intentions to change the status quo at the site to allow Muslims and Jews to pray there simultaneously, similar to the arrangement in place at the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron. Palestinian anger has likewise been fanned by the suspected Israeli intention to rebuild the Jewish temple on the ruins of the al-Aqsa mosque. Religious leaders and preachers have aggravated the situation and inflamed the masses in the name of al-Aqsa, using slogans relating to defense of the Muslim holy site, which, they contend, is a Palestinian responsibility. These

messages are readily absorbed by the younger generation, despite the fact that most do not live a religious lifestyle. The strengthening of al-Aqsa's religious dimension has been inspired by the Islamic State – namely, its Islamic propaganda and the calls to fulfill the vision of the restoration of the golden age of Islam, which are disseminated by means of the internet and the social media.

Consequently, it is important to consider whether this religious dimension and inspiration is also indicative of a fundamental change in the nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Is the nationalist conflict becoming a religious conflict, or is the religious dimension of the conflict (which has always existed) currently taking on greater significance? And if so, what does this mean?

The emerging profile of the young Palestinian knife assailant from East Jerusalem indicates that the phenomenon involves primarily young people who are disconnected from the realms of education and employment, who are for the most part idle, and who rely on the social media as a primary source of information. These young Palestinians experience ongoing frustration based on their lack of a credible horizon for a better future and on a growing sense of despair on a national level due to the failure of the Palestinian leadership to chart a course toward a positive future. Although the traditional mechanisms of restraint and containment of Palestinian society in East Jerusalem were once able to restrain and contain the violent potential or channel it to other less violent outlets, these mechanisms have been greatly weakened by the changes underway in Palestinian society in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Not only has parental authority eroded, but the education systems do not function and are characterized by a shortage of classrooms (most young Palestinians taking part in the disorderly conduct have deserted the formal education systems) and a lack of control over the material being studied. In addition, the institution of community elders (*shaykh*) and mukhtars has lost its status and influence. In actuality, it is a population without leadership.

The young members of this sector express their anger and frustration through acts of disorder, knife attacks, and other displays of violence. The reverberations of the attacks have been amplified by the sense of hysteria among the Israeli public (that is, until Israelis grew accustomed to the situation within a few weeks of the onset of escalation), with the assistance of the

media and the incitement underway on social networks. These reverberations have aroused a sense of accomplishment among the young generation. After all, using nothing more than knives, they have succeeded in bringing about a change that neither the adults nor the Palestinian leadership had been able to achieve by means of their strategy of internationalization of the Palestinian issue on the one hand, and popular resistance on the other hand, and that Hamas has also failed to achieve through its strategy of armed struggle.

Despite the religious nature of the recent outburst of violence, al-Aqsa for young people has become symbolic of a nationalist sentiment more than a religious sentiment, and of motivation for violent resistance in the spirit of Islamic State jihad. Terrorism and violence have become tools with which these young people express their desire for change, though they have been unable to define the exact nature of the change they would like to bring about. It is a rebellion against the status quo – both the Israeli establishment and the Palestinian establishment – and an attempt to break free of the reality in which they live in a way that brings with it a sense of pride and spiritual uplifting.

The fact that they use the name al-Aqsa and portray their struggle using slogans calling for the site's immediate liberation from the Zionist infidels is also not indicative of a sweeping process of religionization. The struggle of the young Palestinians involved in the current wave of violence is not being waged in the name of the Qur'an, and its goal is not to make religious ritual, centering on prayer at the al-Aqsa mosque, the formative essence of their lives. Al-Aqsa imbues the nationalist, generational, and cultural sparks of motivation with a religious dimension. Under the influence of the propaganda films of the Islamic State, these young Palestinians share a growing sense that they too are party to something greater, to a new idea, to revival and renewal, all of which have religious elements. What we are witnessing is a secularization of jihad, as the religious imperative becomes a personal and collective incentive framed, inter alia, as national resistance.

During the weeks following the onset of escalation, the attacks, which were carried out by individuals acting on personal initiative, maintained a more or less steady scope and frequency. During the same period, demonstrations and clashes between groups of young Palestinians and Israeli security forces decreased relatively rapidly. Among the factors in this development

were the provisions and adjustments made by the Israeli security system. Another was the understanding regarding arrangements at the Temple Mount reached by Jordan and Israel with American mediation, to the almost complete exclusion of the Palestinian Authority. At the same time, Israeli society adapted to the wave of terrorism as characteristic of the regional reality, and the media and public reverberations declined accordingly. These developments enabled the Israeli security system to adhere to a strategy of containment and differentiation between the non-involved population and the knife-wielding assailants and other attackers. Indeed, the decisive majority of Palestinians in Jerusalem have not been involved in the terrorism or violence, and those who have been involved were working against the vital interests of the uninvolved population, which seeks to integrate into the Israeli fabric of life in the city, even if only due to the lack of a better and more promising alternative.

During the initial weeks of the escalation, the violence and the “stabbing terrorism” moved from Jerusalem to the West Bank, with the central locus in the Hebron area, which is characterized by a notable Hamas presence and influence and a high level of friction between Palestinian residents and the Jews in the area. The Palestinian security forces are having difficulty enforcing their authority in the region – particularly when the leadership preaches popular resistance – and typically refrain from direct confrontation with the centers of power. Hamas has been working to encourage the violence and escalation while keeping it separate from the Gaza Strip (with the exception of intentional and controlled friction along the border fence), with the aim of intensifying the chaos in the West Bank, embarrassing the Palestinian Authority and its security forces, and pushing Israel into a confrontation with the local population. Hamas’ overall goal herein has been to destabilize the Palestinian Authority and bring about its downfall.

In conclusion, it is evident that the religious dimension of the struggle over al-Aqsa, in addition to inspiration stemming from the jihadist propaganda of the Islamic State, is channeling the prevailing sense of frustration among young Palestinians, their loss of faith in their leaders, their desire to protest, and their rejection of the existing order into violent energy and the use of knives as a cultural symbol and an expression of their ability to withstand and resist a strong force – the Israeli army and Israeli society. Nonetheless, the

national dimension of the conflict has not vacated its place for the religious dimension; rather, the religious dimension has become a source of inspiration motivating the Muslim population to engage in violent action which, for its part, and with the help of the social media and institutional support – through the glorification of *shuhada* (martyrdom) and the support of their families – has gone viral, thereby encouraging other young Palestinians to turn to terrorism.





# Breaking the Two-State Paradigm?

Anat Kurz and Gilead Sher

## **The Current Situation**

In recent years, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict arena has seen growing momentum toward the reality of a binational state. The roots of this trend lie in the frozen political process – in particular, the failure of the most recent round of talks between Israel and the Palestinians mediated by US Secretary of State John Kerry. This failure, much like the failures of previous rounds of negotiations, reflects both the inability and the lack of political willingness on the part of the Israeli and Palestinian leaderships to bridge the gaps in the conditions that will allow the sides to return to the negotiating table – even before testing the ability to bridge the gaps in their respective fundamental stances. Consequently, it seems that in the foreseeable future, chances are slim that understandings on all or even some of the core issues of the conflict can be reached that could serve as a foundation for formulating a permanent agreement based on the two-state principle.

Most of the arrangements mandated by the interim agreement, signed between Israel and the PLO in 1995, continue to this day, with the sides' approval. This interim state, however, is rife with tension. Against the backdrop of the political deadlock, recent years have witnessed significant outbreaks of violence in the conflict arena: the summer of 2014 saw another large scale operation in the Gaza Strip between Israel and Hamas, and the fall of 2015 witnessed a renewed outbreak of Palestinian terrorism that began in the Jerusalem outskirts and spread to the rest of the city, throughout the West Bank, and other population centers within the Green Line. The rivalry between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas, along with their respective

losses of internal legitimacy, heightens the situation's volatility. Beyond the conflict arena itself, and to a certain extent within it, there is an intensifying emphasis on the conflict's religious components at the expense of its historic national and political aspects. All these developments contain a palpable risk for escalation and threaten to distance the fragile political process even further from the Israeli and the Palestinian agendas.

In tandem, there is a proactive Palestinian-Arab campaign against Israel in diplomatic, academic, and economic channels, particularly in various international institutions, the global media, and international public opinion. This campaign in essence reflects the Palestinians' abandonment of direct talks with Israel and their attempt to impose demands for an agreement on Israel. These processes and trends in turn serve to make Israel cling to its positions more forcefully, so that formulating a foundation for renewing talks that is acceptable to both sides becomes even more difficult.

For its part, the international community, preoccupied with other fronts and crises – first and foremost, the upheavals in the Middle East, some of which are the background for a renewed struggle between the superpowers, along with the refugee crisis in Europe – currently has little interest in investing in the Israeli-Palestinian political process. These and other immediate and demanding issues are diverting regional and international attention away from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and are allowing the parties to the conflict to postpone the moment they will be forced to make difficult, historic decisions that bring with them electoral, strategic, and security risks. Therefore, the present situation is not altogether inconvenient for them.

### **The Viability of the Two-State Solution**

The political deadlock and the ensuing political and security ramifications prompt the question: is a mutually agreed-upon resolution of the conflict in the spirit of the “two states for two peoples” principle still relevant? The answer is: yes. A resolution based on two nation states is very relevant, even though the shelf life of the idea is unknown, as well as how far the situation is from the point of no return – where the idea is no longer relevant.

The assessment that without separation from the Palestinians in the West Bank Israel will not be able to ensure its future as both a Jewish and a democratic state is supported by a broad segment of Israeli society and

explains, at least in part, the degree of support for the two-state solution among the Israeli public.<sup>1</sup> Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has himself affirmed the validity of the idea several times and has called on the Palestinians to return to the negotiating table without preconditions, albeit while expressing Israeli conditions for an agreement and reservations about the probability of reaching a permanent, mutually-accepted solution to the conflict.

Likewise among the Palestinians, many have not abandoned the notion of political independence alongside the State of Israel.<sup>2</sup> For its part, the PA is working for independence, although not via talks with Israel but rather through the international system, as evidenced by its concerted effort to enlist international recognition of a Palestinian state, an effort that has in recent years chalked up some impressive results in the West. In other words, whether or not through negotiations, the Palestinian leadership, particularly that of the PA in the West Bank, is committed to the two-state solution. Moreover, the relevant international players in the political process – the United States, the European Union, Russia, the United Nations, and also key Arab states – still speak about the two-state solution, although there are some essential differences of opinion about how to promote it. From the point of view of these actors, a resolution based on an imposed settlement is, for now, not high on their agenda.

Nonetheless, over the years there have been calls in the Israeli right wing political camp for the annexation of Area C in the West Bank, i.e., calls for a binational reality in one state. These ideas are based on the belief that it is possible to distinguish between territorial and political rights for the Palestinians. In tandem, along with the deadlock in the political process, the Palestinian arena has in the last few years also shown renewed interest in the single binational state. This approach recycles the idea underlying the Palestinian struggle against the State of Israel before recognizing it and engaging in negotiations that led to the signing of the Oslo Accords. Furthermore, the single binational state is an idea discussed internationally, especially in Europe, probably reflecting erosion in the belief that the two-state solution is attainable.

Hence the question: is the idea of a single binational state viable? The answer is: no, it is not. It may of course be that a single binational state will become a de facto reality unless the political and territorial situation

in the conflict arena changes. However, a process in this direction will not only sustain but will also exacerbate the tensions between the two national communities, and will also inflame the ideological and religious friction. As past and present experience shows, these tensions are fed by extremism and violence. Therefore, the reality of a single state, whether it develops of its own because of the two sides' inability to renew concrete negotiations toward the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel, or it develops because of international pressure (an unlikely scenario at this time), may be called an arrangement but will not resolve the conflict.

Therefore, to stabilize the arena, cultivate normalization in the relationship between Israel and the Palestinians in particular and between Israel and the Arab nations in general, and strengthen those aspects of normalization already in place, one must not look for alternatives to the two-state solution. Instead, in order to divert the dynamic leading irreparably away from an end to the two-state idea, and despite the well-known difficulties and the current political circumstances on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides, it is imperative to find a way out of the dead end in the political process. This will necessitate a decisive measure of national responsibility, political courage, and historic vision on the part of the leaders and the public on both sides.

## **Out of the Dead End**

It is difficult to imagine a formula for renewing and conducting the negotiations that has not yet been considered or tried, at least in its initial stages. These include process initiatives, recipes for permanent settlements, and possibilities for independent steps (both Israeli and Palestinian). In other words, there is no need to reinvent the wheel. It is only necessary to reexamine frameworks that have already been proposed and perhaps even discussed in the past, with the goal of implementing whichever seems to be the formula most suited for this time.

An examination of all the official initiatives and outlines for a permanent agreement proposed and even discussed over the last two decades shows that all is in place. These are the landmarks of the political process,<sup>3</sup> and are joined by the many unofficial initiatives and proposals placed before the public and decision makers over the years by civil society elements. There is no denying the complexity of the geopolitical and internal realities of both

Israel and the Palestinians, which are growing ever more fragile in unstable, violent, and dangerous surroundings. But one can also not deny that as time passes, the issues, to the detriment of both Israeli and Palestinian interests, become more complicated, and their resolution much more elusive.

### **Israel's Political Option**

From Israel's perspective, this is the time for a balanced and graduated political initiative. Israel's long term interests – ensuring the nation's future as the secure, democratic nation state of the Jewish people – depend on a territorial division of the area between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea into two nation states. Therefore, at this critical juncture, Israel must at the earliest possible opportunity be proactive in order to draw its borders in a way that reflects the foundations of its existence implied in the Declaration of Independence: a democratic nation state for the Jewish people.

Such an initiative must aim at separation from the Palestinians, whether by expending efforts on renewing the negotiations (regional and bilateral), with willingness to put all the core issues on the table and attempt to reach a full agreement, and if not, to try to reach negotiated interim steps that will advance the parties toward the two-state goal. Given the difficulty in progressing along those channels, independent steps should be taken to create the reality of two states with a defined border between them. Such independent steps may include, for example, declaring temporary borders until the conditions are ripe for an agreement on permanent borders. Dealing with the Jewish settlements is imperative, and requires an engagement with the public and preparation of public opinion on the critical need to take decisive action for the sake of the Jewish and democratic state. Any move in this direction requires prior formulation of a national prioritization program for resettling citizens now living beyond the security fence (or beyond any other line to be named as a temporary border) and legislation on voluntary evacuation with commensurate compensation and relocation. These would of course also be necessary for an agreement achieved through negotiations.

To advance any plan or framework, the government must commission special staff work in the political-security cabinet, the relevant government ministries, the National Security Council, and a peace administration. Such an administration should focus on reviewing Israel's official positions on

the various political initiatives and selecting those that can help pave the path to the two-state goal. In coordination with one another, these bodies would examine the Arab Peace Initiative as a framework for regional talks to support negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, while granting Israel security guarantees and support for the Palestinian leadership toward the respective difficult decisions each side will have to take. Coordination of the process from beginning to end with the United States and Europe is likely to make it easier for Israel to enlist US support in particular, and international support in general for its positions and demands; furthermore, this could lead the PA back to the bilateral channel. A development in this direction would inevitably take place at the expense of the PA's strategic choice in the spring of 2014 to follow the international route rather than engage in direct talks.

## Notes

- 1 According to the Peace Index issued by the Israel Democracy Institute in September 2015, 46 percent of Jewish respondents in Israel expressed support for the two-state solution, while 30 percent expressed support for a one-state solution. However, after Prime Minister Netanyahu's speech during the opening of the UN General Assembly that month, 50 percent of respondents said that the two-state solution was still viable, compared to 46 percent who felt the idea is no longer relevant. See <http://www.peaceindex.org/indexMonth.aspx?num=297&monthname=%D7%A1%D7A4%D7%98%D7%9E%D7%91%D7%A8#VIVmG3VrKUK>.
- 2 According to a survey carried out by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in October 2015, 48 percent of the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip support the two-state solution, while 51 percent are opposed. Sixty-five percent of respondents thought that the Jewish settlements in the West Bank invalidated the two-state solution, while 32 percent believed this to be a surmountable obstacle. Seventy-eight percent of respondents felt that the chances for the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel in the next five years was small or very small, whereas 21 percent thought chances were high. See <http://www.pcpsr.org/en/node/621>.
- 3 Resolution 181 of the UN General Assembly (1947); Resolution 194 of the UN General Assembly (1948); Resolution 242 of the UN Security Council (1967); Resolution 338 of the UN Security Council (1973); Resolution 1397 of the UN Security Council (2002); Resolution 1515 of the UN Security Council (2004); Resolution 11317 of the UN General Assembly (2012).

# The Delegitimization of Israel: Trends and Responses

Pnina Sharvit Baruch and Kobi Michael

The Israeli expectation was that given the regional challenges and turbulence, and the collective sense of Salafist jihadism as a severe global threat, the State of Israel, the only functioning democracy in the Middle East and an element on the frontlines of the battle against radical Islam and terrorism, would gain international stature. Many are therefore surprised that the international delegitimization of Israel has continued to increase in scope and intensity, influencing a wide range of audiences, opinion makers, and intellectual circles. This growing delegitimization, characterized by a profound, fundamental hostility to Israel, could exacerbate Israel's standing in the international arena, negatively affect its political and military freedom of action, and perhaps even damage its economy. Therefore, the topic is relevant to the country's national security and requires a systemic response.

The delegitimization phenomenon relies on a conceptual infrastructure and a network of groups and activists located in many countries around the world. It is marked by sweeping criticism of Israel's policies as well as political, cultural, and economic activism against Israel. The boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) movement has succeeded in disseminating an idea that is multidimensional (academic, economic, legal, cultural, diplomatic, and media-related) to political and public spheres in the West.

The BDS movement and its supporters have integrated many groups with different objectives and varying degrees of opposition to Israel. Some would like to see the end of Israel's existence as the nation state of the Jewish people; some would like to help the armed struggle against Israel by limiting

the country's ability to use military force for self-defense. Others want to force Israel to accept international dictates on how to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The more extreme objectives, however, are not presented outwardly; rather, the movement uses messages couched purportedly in legitimate criticism of the Israeli government's policies, focused primarily on the efforts to end the Israeli occupation and guarantee human rights and equality in Israel and the areas controlled by it.

The phenomenon has become more challenging and dangerous for Israel as a result of the movement's intellectual foundation that informs and reinforces its seminal ideas. These ideas are informed by legal formulations presenting Israel as a rogue state that refuses to honor the most fundamental values of the international community and whose basis for existence is legally questionable. An anti-Israel language, conceptualization, and consciousness have crystallized, rendering Israel as a colonial aggressor; a law-breaking, racist nation; and the sole guilty party for the plight of the Palestinian people. According to the BDS movement, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict feeds the radicals in the Muslim world, and is even a factor in the rise of radical Islam, including the Islamic State. These messages have permeated broad liberal circles, including the younger generation of intellectuals who, in the future, will form the backbone of politics, government, culture, and business in the West.

What differentiates the debate on the delegitimization of Israel from other international conflicts around the world? Besides the preoccupation of both the media and the public, the delegitimization movement does not seek to exert pressure on Israel to change its policies, in and of itself a legitimate thing to do; rather it demonizes Israel and seeks to undermine its legitimacy as the nation state of the Jewish people. In this context it is important to distinguish between delegitimization and legitimate criticism of Israel. Criticizing Israel, like any other nation, is acceptable conduct in the international arena, and should be done through diplomacy and other standard tools of foreign policy. Lumping all critics and types of criticism together is a grave error, as it strengthens those who delegitimize Israel by placing them together with those who are simply critical of some of Israel's policies. It also radicalizes the "legitimate" critics by pushing them, unwisely, towards the camp of the delegitimizers.



The perception of Israel as being opposed to the two-state solution and ending the occupation as well as not upholding the human rights of those it governs, has facilitated the wide dissemination of Israel's delegitimization and its influence on politicians and decision makers around the world. Much of the criticism is also linked to the way Israel's use of force is assessed and to the relatively high number of civilian casualties resulting from Israel's military operations. Therefore, when Israeli officials decide on a policy or issue a statement, they should consider the possible implications and weigh the costs versus the benefits. Considering the implications of actions and statements on world public opinion does not necessarily mean conceding to external dictates, as is sometimes claimed; rather, it means deliberating important strategic considerations that should be taken into account, as any other strategic factor. At the same time, it behooves Israel to continue to present and clarify the complexity of the conflict, both politically – the difficulty in reaching a settlement acceptable to both sides, and militarily – the challenges of confronting an enemy operating from within a civilian population and under its cover.

The negative perception of Israel in world public opinion does not stem solely from Israel's conduct in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and from opposition to one policy or another of a given government. Indeed, the Israeli side has claimed that delegitimization is a modern manifestation of anti-Semitism. Although we cannot examine in depth the nature of this claim and its validity, messages that emphasize the anti-Semitic nature of the criticism against Israel are, from a purely utilitarian perspective, a double-edged sword; they undermine any serious attempt to address the substance of the criticism and lead to unwillingness to pay attention to Israel's position. This is especially true when anti-Semitism is attributed to the larger public, which is not part of the core group leading the campaign and does not identify with its essential objectives.

Israel and its supporters need to highlight some of the characteristics of the BDS movement: its aggressive behavior, designed to scare and silence anyone who expresses support for Israel; elements of discrimination based on race, religion, and nationality that are evident in the movement's beliefs; and its infringement upon freedom of expression, academic freedom, and pluralism. Emphasizing these characteristics could make it possible to

harness others who are not necessarily supporters of Israel, but who are opposed to such discrimination and violation of these values. It is imperative to point out that the delegitimization movement does nothing to contribute to resolution of the conflict; on the contrary, it only feeds and amplifies it. Supporting Israel's delegitimization weakens the moderate forces on both sides and strengthens the extremists, while it diminishes and even neutralizes incentives to engage in negotiations for a political settlement. This assertion, however, is more persuasive when Israel is not seen as adopting policies that undermine the possibility for such a settlement.

In formulating an overall policy, four major categories of response are recommended:

- a. Reactive response to delegitimization events and/or initiatives that could not have been foiled or disrupted ahead of time;
- b. Preventive response to thwart delegitimization actions before they occur, including foiling and/or disrupting delegitimization projects, taking action against their instigators, their financing, the dissemination of their messages, and so forth. The credibility of the core members needs to be questioned, their radical agenda exposed, and actions foiled before they occur. This means investing in appropriate intelligence capabilities and working in a more sophisticated way with organizations, university campuses, and others.
- c. Proactive response to influence various groups in order to block the effects of delegitimization. In this context, it is important to create personal contacts and host delegations in Israel in order to present the complexity of the situation in an unmediated fashion. Furthermore, given the mass of anti-Israel texts that are being published and taught, academic counteraction is necessary, such as by publishing research, influencing curricula and syllabi, creating courses and research programs, supporting pro-Israeli researchers and teachers, and so forth.
- d. Constructive response to expose target audiences to Israel's contribution to the well-being of populations in the Middle East and around the world as an antithesis to Israel's portrayal as an apartheid, racist, and colonialist state. For example, Israel could help establish an action network of Israeli organizations and entrepreneurs working around the world for the betterment of humanity, helping weak populations with

water, food technologies, humanitarian issues, and so forth. It is important to integrate into international and local institutions representing civil society in the fields of human rights, workers' rights, and environmental protection. These institutions are usually the most vocal of Israel's critics. To be effective, it is imperative to hold a dialogue also with the critics of Israel, as long as their criticism is legitimate, both in essence and in language, in order to distinguish them from those who are promoting Israel's delegitimization.

In addition to government and institutional agents, civil society – individual players and organizations, Jews and non-Jews, in Israel and abroad – needs to be enlisted to question and disprove the assertions made by the delegitimization movement, brand Israel with a more positive image, and shore up its international standing while taking maximum advantage of the relative strengths of each player and organization.

Israel is facing difficult challenges on every front, yet the BDS and delegitimization movement is not a decree of fate. If Israel acts in an informed manner and invests the required efforts and resources, the scope of the delegitimization movement could be reduced. Its negative implications could be all but eradicated, causing it to eventually peter out.



# Israel's Response and Readiness in Face of the Expected Security Challenges

Assaf Orion and Udi Dekel

An analysis of Israel's strategic environment and security challenges in 2016 prompts the question whether Israel's political-security response suits the anticipated strategic framework of the coming years. The IDF strategy document, published in August 2015 (in a shortened and unclassified version), makes it possible to consider whether the IDF is preparing for the right challenges.<sup>1</sup> The strategy document emphasizes, inter alia, the main extreme scenarios facing the IDF: a war in Lebanon, a war in the Gaza Strip, and military operations in a country having no border with Israel (i.e., Iran). In addition, until those extremes come to pass, the IDF is preparing for operations in the framework of the "campaign between wars," and is running a "current security routine," including border security, counter-terrorism, curtailment of enemy force buildup, and the impeding of terrorist infrastructure and capability development, while accumulating legitimacy.

The IDF document indicates that current strategy allows for the use of force at various levels, depending on the political goals – be it to preserve the political-security situation or to fundamentally change it, whether by operations seeking to deter the rival players, or alternatively, to decisively defeat enemies, mainly semi-states, such as Hezbollah and Hamas (organizations with military and governance capabilities and responsibility for territory and populations). The IDF is tasked with decisively winning battles at the tactical level and enabling victory in the war, the latter meaning achievement of the

political goals set by the political leadership. This is done by leveraging military achievement in order to force the enemy to accept either Israel's conditions for a ceasefire or a stable security arrangement. This operational concept is based on strong defense to fortify the security and resilience of the home front, combined with offense that combines massive precision fire strike with rapid land maneuvers to reach and damage the enemy's centers of gravity.

Over the years, the strategic assessment of the IDF and the defense establishment has shaped a reference framework for military force buildup and readiness for war. In the early years of the state, this was an all-out Arab attack – an “everything scenario,” in which a coalition of Arab countries attacks Israel simultaneously on all fronts. Since peace treaties were signed with Egypt and Jordan, and following the civil war in Syria, the conventional military threat to Israel posed by the regular armed forces of Arab countries has lessened considerably, while at the same time, irregular or semi-regular threats have developed and become stronger, accompanied by a revised and diverse world of concepts and terms: asymmetric warfare, hybrid players, extensive terrorism campaigns, guerilla warfare and guerilla terrorism, and others.

### **Prioritizing the Response to the Spectrum of Threats**

Devising the security response to this range of threats requires striking the right balance between the response to severe scenarios and urgent challenges, and between short-term readiness on the one hand, and capability building for more distant future challenges on the other. Over the years, this balance has focused on the principal challenges combining a severe risk and/or probable potential for escalation into a military conflict. The main priority in recent years has been the Iranian nuclear project, i.e., the capacity to damage it in a way that will put Iran several years from attaining a nuclear bomb. Following the signing of the JCPOA between Iran and the major powers, the Iranian nuclear project will presumably progress during two main time periods: (a) in the coming decade – clandestinely and cautiously, in order to prevent exposure of violations, and (b) once the restrictions established in the agreement are rescinded, when Iran is likely to move forward more openly with the project. During the coming decade, therefore, penetrative intelligence capabilities

should be developed to detect both Iranian violations of the agreement as well as activity toward acquisition of nuclear capabilities anywhere in the region; these capabilities must be complemented by preservation of relevant operational capabilities and the ability to intervene militarily, if necessary.<sup>2</sup> It is important to achieve strategic coordination with the United States concerning deeper and wider intelligence coverage, allowing access for Israel to the findings from inspections for the purpose of detecting Iranian violations of the agreement, and agreeing on responses to Iranian violations of the agreement. At the same time, it is necessary to build an infrastructure for intelligence and operational capabilities in preparation for the removal of restrictions on Iran or the cancellation or collapse of the agreement.

The IDF ranks a scenario of a military conflict with Hezbollah as the second highest threat. The operational response focuses on an attack against all dimensions of the organization's power: (a) reducing Hezbollah's rocket and missile threat through a combination of precision strike, land operations, and improved defensive capability against rockets and missiles (Iron Dome, David's Sling); (b) attacking Hezbollah's strategic rear with the aim of neutralizing its control centers and supply and support channels, including channels for external aid; and (c) treating Hezbollah as a key element in the Lebanese state system, and consequently attacking infrastructure in Lebanon that serves belligerency against Israel by Hezbollah and its supporters. At the same time, owing to Hezbollah's military buildup among the civilian population and assets, it will necessarily involve attacking those military forces and assets, especially launching systems, concealed within residential buildings and embedded in cities and villages, most of which are Shiite.

Against the operational gains and essential reduction of the potential damage to Israel, it will be necessary to take into account possible consequences of attacking dual-purpose infrastructures and military targets embedded in densely populated areas: a large number of casualties and damage to civilians among whom Hezbollah deliberately placed its military facilities; destruction and ruin that will weaken the already fragile governing system in Lebanon; the development of a widespread civilian crisis in Lebanon that will facilitate the rise and spread of radical groups, such as Salafi jihadist groups; and consequently, a negative impact on Israel's international legitimacy and future freedom of action. In addition, despite the prolonged calm on the

Israeli-Lebanese border, due to effective enforcement by Hezbollah and the Lebanese Armed Forces and political support from the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNFIL), it is necessary to prepare for destabilization in southern Lebanon and increased terrorist activity. Penetration by terrorist squads seeking to attack Israel must be prevented. Building capabilities for a response to Hezbollah also gives the IDF basic operational capabilities for a response against Hamas.

The Palestinian system is not defined as a major military theater, despite its key political weight and its ramifications for the security situation in Israel and in Judea and Samaria. A security response is required for the range of threats that includes organized terrorism of varying scope and in various formats, terrorism by individuals encouraged by ideological inspiration and incitement, by virally distributed contents, and regional radical phenomena like the Islamic State. In view of the political deadlock, the military response alone cannot by itself eliminate popular uprisings or the threat of terrorism, and certainly not terrorism perpetrated by isolated individuals; substantial political, economic, social, and infrastructure inputs are necessary. Israel should avoid weakening the Palestinian Authority security agencies, continue to cooperate with them, and even take action to strengthen them as long as they enhance the security of both sides.

In the southern arena, Israel is threatened not only by direct and indirect fire and tunnel attacks from the Gaza Strip (mainly by Hamas, but also by Islamic Jihad and other radical groups), but also by the possibility of “popular” assaults, such as mass storming of the border fence, and even infiltration of an Israeli community in the area near the Gaza Strip. A response to the threat from Gaza must therefore have two aspects. The first is readiness for major military campaigns against the military infrastructure of Hamas and the other terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip for the purpose of substantially reducing the threat from these organizations and deterring them from additional attacks. The IDF has the capability to take control militarily of the Gaza Strip or critical areas within it, and must prepare suitable operational plans and demonstrate determination in the use of force, if necessary. The second aspect is reduction of the risk of escalation, in part through an urgent and major effort toward reconstruction and stabilization of the Gaza Strip in both infrastructure (energy, water, sewage, housing)



and employment aspects, realizing that the population's distress contributes to potential security instability, and that it is therefore worthwhile to reduce this distress in controlled fashion, even at the price of somewhat easing pressure on the Hamas government.

For the sake of the security of its borders, Israel must continue to improve the border detection and obstacle systems and fortify weak points, joining independent efforts and low profile cooperation with neighbors on the other side of the border that provide Israel with forward strategic depth and keep threats away from its territory. Emphasis should be placed on Jordan and Egypt, relevant peacekeeping forces, and pragmatic local forces in southern Syria sharing a common interest with Israel in uprooting terrorism, keeping the population at peace, and maintaining daily life.

### **The Concept of Response, in Light of the Lessons of Previous Clashes**

From an analysis of the strategic environment, the IDF has concluded that it must prepare for a variety of scenarios, including surprises. Building readiness requires balancing preparation for severe scenarios of possible damage to Israel against the likelihood that these scenarios will materialize. Formulating the response concept calls for a continuous process of learning from the IDF's recent rounds of conflict in Lebanon and the Palestinian theater,<sup>3</sup> while adapting to the new situation. An analysis of the experience accumulated from these conflicts shows a number of weak points and problems that should be addressed in preparation for the coming conflicts:

- a. In most cases, the IDF has had to launch a military campaign guided by a vague policy directive, lacking clear definition of the required political-security end states for after the fighting – which is an important prerequisite in clearly defining the desired military achievement. The critical role of discourse and prior coordination of expectations between the senior political and military leaderships is even more necessary when there is no clear and agreed strategic purpose, which is sometimes formulated only in the course of the campaign.<sup>4</sup> Recent years show increased difficulty in clearly defining the required political-strategic achievements by the political leadership. This difficulty is rooted in the desire to retain political flexibility and room for political and strategic maneuver and to reduce

the risk of critical judgment of the attained achievements at the end of the fighting. In addition, the Israeli governments' political-security strategy seeking "preservation of the status quo" means that their expectations from military operations are the restoration of calm at minimal cost. In order to improve the balance of cost and achievements in future campaigns conducted by Israel, an ongoing discourse between the political and military leaderships is vital. This will allow the design of a comprehensive policy aimed at preventing wars through the use of the whole toolkit available to the state, while tirelessly building the necessary military capabilities in the event of a war situation, should it erupt.<sup>5</sup>

- b. Although the IDF is oriented toward achieving decisive victory on the battlefield, it realizes very well the difficulty in translating this achievement into a political victory, or even into a strategic decisive victory that deprives the enemy of the will and ability to continue fighting. The military effort in conflicts is therefore oriented toward a more limited achievement of obtaining deterrence that will postpone the next round of fighting for as long as possible, in accordance with Israel's traditional concept that it has embraced since its establishment. In practice, while the Second Lebanon War led to a lull on the northern border longer than Israel has ever known (this coming summer will mark a decade of calm on that front), the intervals between campaigns in the Palestinian theater are quite short. Deterrence by itself is only one element in postponing conflicts; since it is a result whose success can be assessed in retrospect only, it is a questionable criterion for defining military achievement before or during conflicts.
- c. In recent years, a high priority in force employment has been assigned to massive precision strike, utilizing the IDF's intelligence and operational capabilities seeking to reduce IDF casualties and collateral damage in enemy territory. Land-based maneuvering capability is essential for demonstrating direct offensive capability, striking directly at a land-based enemy, and conquering enemy territory and clearing it. Employing this capability involves complex military-political considerations, such as the effect on the conflict's duration, the difficulty of halting the fighting, protection of forces in enemy territory, return of the forces to Israeli territory without this being perceived as a retreat, and the high level of

friction with the civilian environment with its significant potential for causing more casualties to the warring parties and the population among which the fighting takes place. The IDF should develop maneuvering capability suitable for operations in urban areas and fighting among civilians, while formulating a special response for challenges both on the battlefield and in the political theater. Joint political-military discourse improves the political leadership's knowledge of the military's capabilities and increases the supreme military leadership's awareness of the political leadership's considerations.

- d. Operational planning assigns a high priority to surprise in the opening overture, based on intelligence superiority and operational opportunities. Examples of this include the destruction of the enemy's surface-to-surface missile units, decapitating strikes on senior enemy commanders, and wide attack against terror rank and file. The purpose is to throw the enemy off balance and disrupt its plans. At the same time, a strong and unexpected Israeli opening strike sometimes forces the enemy into an escalating response because of the need to offset its losses by exacting a price from Israel. As history teaches, the conditions for an opening Israel military strike may not exist for reasons of operational feasibility and legitimacy considerations.
- e. It is difficult to bring conflicts to an end when the political goals are not clearly defined and the operational concept is not aimed at achieving decisive military victory over the enemy. This leads to the prolongation of conflicts, gradual erosion in operational outputs, and great difficulty in translating military achievements into political returns. This dynamic aids the enemy in emerging from its state of shock and adapting to the new situation, while portraying its endurance in the face of Israeli power as the proof of victory. In this way, conflicts last longer than planned, with mutual attrition between the sides, feelings of missed opportunities from the failure to maximize the utility of force, and what appears to be a strategic draw at the end of the conflict. The conclusion is that preliminary formulation of a political-military concept concerning the war goals and planning a set of diplomatic and operational measures for terminating the conflict on terms set by Israel are necessary. This level of strategic

- planning is an important element in the ability to shorten the duration of the fighting and improve the balance of cost-achievements to Israel.
- f. The defensive aspect has been assigned more weight in management of the conflict, and as a result, in the security concept as well. A growing proportion of the military-security investment is channeled into defense capabilities, which facilitates functional continuity on the home front and the battlefield, improves national resilience and social cohesion, and provides leaders with flexibility and maneuvering room in decisions about the timing and method of using force.
  - g. The battles over both perceptions and cyber warfare have gained increased weight in the long, ongoing campaign and in the conflicts themselves. The establishment of a cyber command in the IDF is a significant measure in devising a response – both defensive and offensive – for the cyber realm. This command will be tested by the IDF’s ability to deal with the various challenges, and constitutes a key element in the array of efforts to promote the goals set by the political and military leadership. In the struggle over perceptions, Israel needs to recruit support from sympathetic audiences, undermine the enemy’s advantages, and strengthen its own victorious image. It is necessary to institutionalize a national system for guiding and coordinating all the measures concerning perceptions, and integrating them with the other efforts.

### **Principles for Formulating an Updated Military-Strategic Concept**

Israel’s geo-strategic environment features basic instability, rapid change, and a wavering state order among its neighbors. When added to the lessons of the recent military campaigns, this environment requires the formulation of a flexible and ever-evolving strategic concept that adapts existing and future tools and capabilities to the specific challenges of each conflict, and relies less on past anchors of the reference threat and a purely military response, and combining more non-military efforts generally referred to as soft power.

It is necessary to formulate a concept of waging an ongoing campaign as a principal activity. This requires the “campaign between wars” as a prolonged principal campaign, rather than a secondary interim activity between wars (which still constitute the supreme military test). The campaign between

wars is aimed at strengthening deterrence, preventing escalation into war, bolstering the IDF's operational advantages, weakening enemies, countering enemy threats and disrupting its force buildup, imposing excessive costs on its force buildup, designing improved conditions for dealing with the expected threats (including in war, should one erupt), preparing infrastructure for partnership with other actors, attaining influence among the population beyond Israeli territory, and strengthening actors that have shared interests with Israel.

In addition, a multidisciplinary operational concept should be applied to integrate a plethora of efforts – military, diplomatic, economic, civilian, humanitarian, legal, media, and infrastructure – based on smart power and a process of joint learning on the part of all the parties participating in the efforts: both among themselves and between them and the political leadership. All this will facilitate shortening combined multidisciplinary procedures in response to special events, trends, and aggregate threats.

As a supplementary dimension to this multidisciplinary effort, analytical and network capabilities must be developed. Israel is struggling against networks of enemies (state and non-state actors, patrons and proxies, sponsors and clients), all of whom share hostility to Israel. These enemies seek to challenge Israel simultaneously in a number of theaters; disrupt its routine; drain it economically, socially, and politically; and disrupt the IDF's ability to focus a critical mass of force and weapons against the various threats. On its part, using smart power, Israel must also take advantage of the network approach and form an array of partners (even in the framework of an undeclared coalition) and use a variety of tools and disciplines against the enemy networks as part of a long campaign.

Israel should enhance its influence in the strategic environment by utilizing its powers and advantages to attain strategic advantages that will result in new options for shaping a more favorable environment for a prolonged period. This must be subordinated to considerations relating to the need to bolster stability and governance, moderate the populations' distress, reduce the sources for terrorist recruitment and extremist influences, and strengthen forces having shared interests with Israel.

On the basis of the multidisciplinary concept and the network approach, it is necessary to shape a policy aimed at improving Israel's regional and

international status, which will be led and coordinated by government ministries, security agencies, and agencies dealing with foreign relations and the media. One fundamental element is creating a relevant intelligence and situation picture that will make it possible to identify and define the strategic problem at any given time and context. For this purpose, the intelligence community will have to expand and deepen its understanding of and access to the social, cultural, and political dimensions of an increasing variety of actors in the region. This conclusion is also valid for the other agencies involved in carrying out policy: military, security, diplomatic, economic, and others. These agencies should synchronize their actions with joint understanding and unity of purpose. Such multidisciplinary synchronization and coordination in the campaign requires leadership from a multidisciplinary administrator directly subordinate to the Prime Minister.

## Notes

- 1 “IDF Strategy,” from the IDF website, [http://www.idf.il/SIP\\_STORAGE/FILES/9/16919.pdf](http://www.idf.il/SIP_STORAGE/FILES/9/16919.pdf).
- 2 Major General (ret.) Isaac Ben-Israel: “The agreement... prevents a nuclear bomb for the next 15 years.” See Dov Gil-Har, “Ben Israel in a Surprising Position: The Nuclear Agreement is Good for Israel,” *Walla*, July 15, 2015, <http://news.walla.co.il/item/2872982>.
- 3 Operation Defense Shield, the Second Lebanon War, Operation Cast Lead, Operation Pillar of Defense, and Operation Protective Edge.
- 4 MK Ofer Shelah: “What we have is a method of fighting in which the relation between effort and effectiveness is impossible. You enter a war without knowing what its goals are, and you fight in a way that will bring you to red lines in a limited conflict.” See Amos Harel, “Ofer Shelah: This War was Known in Advance; the Lapse of Protective Edge Will Recur,” *Haaretz*, April 2, 2015, <http://www.haaretz.co.il/magazine/.premium-1.2605852>.
- 5 Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu: “I’m asked if we will forever live by the sword – yes,” See Barak Ravid, “Netanyahu: I Don’t Want a Binational State, but We Need to Control All of the Territory for the Foreseeable Future,” *Haaretz*, October 26, 2015, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.682374>.

# Israel's Internal Arena

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# The Internal Arena and National Security

Meir Elran, Gilead Sher, Eran Yashiv, and Carmit Padan

The nuclear agreement between Iran and the P5+1, banning Iran from developing nuclear arms and limiting its ability to do so, was generally viewed by the Israeli government and the public as a bad development. Nonetheless, the deal might postpone the realization of the nuclear threat to Israel by ten to fifteen years at least, and therefore can offer a genuine sense of relief as it directly affects the map of Israeli security threats in the coming years. This is not the only area in which there is a significant chance of reducing the overall security threat to Israel. Concurrent with the problematic nature inherent in Islamic radicalization, manifested by the Islamic State and al-Qaeda affiliates, as well as by the ongoing Iranian support of radical elements, the broad picture shows that the regional threat against Israel is actually decreasing; the Arab states have not posed a military threat to Israel for over a generation, while Hezbollah and Hamas, for different reasons, are no longer at their peak. The real complex threat that continues to be troublesome is the conflict with the Palestinians; a recent escalation of security threats – beginning in Jerusalem, and boiling over into the Green Line and now mostly in the West Bank – risks turning into a third intifada.

Given these circumstances, in 2016, Israel most likely will continue to confront primarily low-to-mid-intensity security challenges in ongoing cycles of conflict with the Palestinians, which time and again demonstrate the centrality of that conflict in the Israeli reality. This gives rise to several questions. To what extent will Israel consider confronting the roots of the conflict, so as to promote the desired reality of two nation states? To what extent will Israel

consider turning its attention to other important topics on the national agenda that are not directly connected to military security, but significant for fortifying society and ensuring civil security in the broad sense of the term?

This chapter deals with four major internal issues that are analogous to the four walls of a house whose strength and sturdiness are critical for Israeli society to flourish and be secure. They are constructive governance; civil public discourse and conduct; positive inter-tribal relations; and a supportive economy. Each is accompanied by challenges that threaten the ability of Israeli society to function and thrive.

### **The First Wall: Constructive Governance**

According to the United Nations, good governance promotes equality, participation, pluralism, transparency, assumption of responsibility, and the rule of law, and does so in an effective, efficient, and sustainable manner. The practical meaning of these principles is manifested in free, fair, and regular elections; representative legislation creating laws and providing enforcement; and an independent judiciary that is supposed to provide an interpretation of the laws passed.<sup>1</sup> In true democracies, this definition represents the barest minimum. At first glance, Israel would seem to enjoy a satisfactory level of governance, even in comparison with other solid democracies. So, for example, in 2014, according to the governance index of the World Bank,<sup>2</sup> Israel ranked at 85.6 percent in government effectiveness (compared to 92.8 percent for the United Kingdom, 84.6 percent for Spain, and 97.1 percent for Japan), reflecting stability over the years. Israel received 87.5 percent in quality of regulation (compared to 97.1, 75.5, and 84.1 percent to the United Kingdom, Spain, and Japan, respectively), a higher grade than in the past. In the rule of law, Israel ranked at 83.2 percent (compared to 94.2, 79.8, and 89.4 percent, respectively, regarding the above-mentioned nations), also a higher grade than in the past. For controlling corruption, Israel received 76.4 percent (compared to the United Kingdom at 92.8, Spain at 70.2, and Japan at 93.3 percent), a grade lower than in the past. *The Economist's* democracy index for 2014<sup>3</sup> placed Israel in the thirty-sixth place, with a score of 7.63 among the nations of the world (compared to the United Kingdom, ranked sixteenth with a score of 8.31; the United States, ranked nineteenth and scored 8.11; and Spain, which placed twenty-second at 8.05).

What do Israel's own citizens think? The Global Corruption Index<sup>4</sup> of 2014 places Israel thirty-seven among 175 nations with a perception of corruption of 60/100 (similar to Spain; lower than the United States, in seventeenth place, with a grade of 74, and the United Kingdom, in fourteenth place, with a grade of 78). In general, there is a downward trend in the level of trust the Israeli public places in its government institutions, including the IDF, the courts, the police, and the state-controlled media.<sup>5</sup>

Both the Israeli public and government tend to be dissatisfied with the level of governance.<sup>6</sup> The oft-heard complaint is that since the establishment of the state, the governments of Israel have found it difficult to conduct and implement policy, so that the gap between the decisions made by the government and those implemented is large and growing larger. Execution of policy is often unreliable, incomplete, and/or slow. Israelis speak of bureaucratic obstacles, bottlenecks (especially in the Ministries of Justice and Finance), and the problematic nature of the interface between elected officials and the public service. This was the reason for the establishment of the Governance Committee ("the team for improving staff work and the executive capabilities of government ministries") headed by then-Director General of the Prime Minister's Office, Harel Locker, following the recommendations of the Trajtenberg Committee. The Governance Committee pointed to five structural flaws in the public service: the realization and execution of policy; a cumbersome bureaucracy; poor management of human resources in the civil service; the lack of systemic vision and lateral cooperation; and flaws in the ability to think strategically, plan policy, measure, and follow up. The committee's report was submitted and approved by the government in June 2013.<sup>7</sup>

To date, as far as we know, implementation of the committee's recommendations has not yet occurred. Several developments in the past year indicate that significant political and bureaucratic obstacles still make it very difficult to govern at both the national and local levels. This was especially apparent this past year in the convoluted processes of approving the natural gas framework; the serious corruption cases that came to light,<sup>8</sup> such as those linked to former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, the political party Israel Beitenu, and others; as well as the delayed appointments of several senior personnel, such as the governor of the Bank of Israel and the chief of

the Israel Police. The scandals and fiascos associated with the top brass of the police that led to the early retirement of a large number of senior police officers also played a role in frustrating the critical work of law enforcement and undermining public trust. Furthermore, the legitimate public debate over the role and functioning of the judicial system, especially the status of the Supreme Court and its relationship with the legislative and executive branches of government, often diverges into unwarranted directions, with severe implications for the foundations of Israel's democracy.

A regime that fails to govern because of political reasons, such as having a razor-thin majority, poor governance, or because it does not enjoy the public trust, will also find it hard to provide for its constituency. This is true when it comes to issues of quality of life, personal safety, and public order, and might also extend to issues of national security in the broad sense of the word. The repeated leaks from the cabinet sessions during Operation Protective Edge and the severe criticism aimed at the Prime Minister meted out by his fellow cabinet ministers, even those belonging to his own political party, are clear evidence of this difficulty, which threatens the government's freedom of action even when associated with critical issues of national security.

## **The Second Wall: Violence in the Public Discourse and Public Conduct**

The past year saw the continued, if not intensified, trend of a public discourse that is hostile, alienating, and exclusionary. This peaked during Operation Protective Edge (2014) and the campaign for the election to the twentieth Knesset (2015), and was evident everywhere, from politicians' irresponsible statements to abusive comments in the blogosphere. This discourse promotes hatred, racism, and violence, all of which are gaining momentum through social media; some of these media serve as a platform for incitement and verbal violence.

A clear association exists between the deterioration of the public discourse into a violent debate and the freedom exercised by some individuals and organizations to conduct violent actions as well as between the ugly phenomena of racism, exclusion, and bigotry, and the apathy and lack of compassion towards the other and the weak. All these directly affect Israel's index of violence: according to the 2014 index, using international comparisons, the

murder rate in Israel is 2.4 per 100,000, similar to the average in OECD nations. But the rate of violent assault is more than twice as high in Israel, reaching 700 per 100,000, compared to the OECD average of 300. The rate of sexual assault in Israel is, on average, 10 percent higher than in OECD member nations. These data reflect a decrease in the overall number of violent crimes, but an increase in their severity. Since 2003, Israel has recorded 620,000 instances of violent crime on average per year, but only 210,000 (34 percent) are reported to institutional authorities, while 66 percent go unreported.<sup>9</sup> The roots of this phenomenon lie in the public's lack of trust in the police and law enforcement agencies. Moreover, the Ministry of Public Security concludes that, "violence in Israeli society is prevalent in every field and walk of life and is seeping into public institutions providing services to the public at large."<sup>10</sup>

Physical violence is directly linked to verbal abuse and cyberbullying, a growing variation of the old theme of hooliganism, and manifested in the public at large and among children and teens. Cyberbullying is on the rise among Israeli schoolchildren. According to research done by the Ministry of Public Security in December 2014, 12 percent of schoolchildren aged 12-18 reported they had been threatened or humiliated online; 7.2 percent reported that they had been harmed by impersonation and/or identity theft; and 4.7 percent reported they had been sexually harassed on the internet.<sup>11</sup> A different study, published in May 2015, carried out by Kinneret College showed that half of all schoolchildren in grades 3-9 have been bullied in the social media and 70 percent of them have been bullied on school grounds.<sup>12</sup> Incitement and verbal violence are not the lot of the unschooled only; politicians are guilty as well, certainly at sensitive times such as during general elections and security crises.

### **The Third Wall: Polarization and Tribalism**

Israel of 2015 is represented by the politics of identity. No longer is there a discourse of processes or moral values, only of tribal identities. Israeli citizens are hard pressed to define a shared vision, and many political leaders nurture tribalism instead of rallying behind unity and the needs of the state, its values, its future, and the individual's role in it. The vulgar discourse and violent behavior have torn new ruptures in the delicate fabric of relations

among ethnic and social groups. In this context, the relationship between the Jewish majority and the Arab minority is the country's most significant political and social challenge in terms of the character of a state that defines itself as both Jewish and democratic. This is the case particularly when the scales are increasingly tipping in favor of the first, perhaps at the expense of the second. In this past year, this relationship certainly experienced new lows, manifested in intentional legal exclusion through the Law on Governance (March 11, 2014), which raised the electoral threshold to 3.25 percent of the vote, motivated in part by the intention to curb the representation of Arab citizens in the Knesset.<sup>13</sup> The move failed because of the Arab parties' decision to run together as the Joint List, headed by Ayman Odeh, who tries to focus on the civil agenda rather than the political-national one.<sup>14</sup>

Exclusionary, hurtful statements aimed at the Arab minority were made in public, including some outrageous statements expressed during the elections to the twentieth Knesset in March 2015. The deterioration in the security situation starting in October 2015 again raised the level of fear and anti-Arab hostility, if not downright racism, among a growing segment of the Jewish public. This has been expressed in violence, some of it extreme, against Arabs. This further shreds the delicate fabric of relations between Jews and Arabs, a development that threatens public order and personal safety, and magnifies mutual fear and distrust. After previous crises, both sides managed to construct a conscientious and informed process of moving towards coexistence. It is important to make a concerted effort to make sure this happens again after the flames of the current crisis have been extinguished.

In the intra-Jewish arena, Israel experienced difficult confrontations between the ultra-Orthodox and the secular,<sup>15</sup> but the most anguishing social protest of the past year was led by young people from the Ethiopian community, and exposed the deep rift between them and Israeli society and its institutions. The protest included harsh allegations of persistent racist-motivated discrimination and exclusion. Despite the outcry, the protest failed to engage the interest of other social groups. The public discourse was rife with claims that the Ethiopian protest was being supported by elements on the radical left; accusations that social protests are "politically" motivated thus strip the protests of their essence and contents, and stop them dead in their tracks.

On June 7, 2015, President Reuven Rivlin coined the phrase “the four tribes,” expressing a holistic view that “Israeli society needs a wake-up call,” and that “the ultra-Orthodox, the secular, the religious, or the Arab must not be allowed to feel that what is most precious to them is in danger or is being threatened.” According to President Rivlin, “the new Israeli order demands to move away from the commonly accepted notion of majority versus minority, to a new approach of partnership among the different sectors of Israeli society.”<sup>16</sup> Four elements must serve as the foundation for that partnership: one, the sense of security felt among each sector that joining this partnership does not mean giving up the fundamental components of its identity; two, a sense of mutual responsibility; three, fairness and equality; and four, the most challenging, the creation of a shared Israeli ethos.

Although President Rivlin did not mention intra-Jewish identity struggles, his words expressed a courageous and far-reaching vision based on the recognition that no single group or tribe has a monopoly or an inherent superiority within Israeli society. It is based on the profound understanding that allowing the situation to persist and deteriorate into instability and possibly even bloodshed, especially between Jews and Arabs, is unwarranted and totally wrong, and that we still have the power to change direction. Only time will show the extent to which the President’s vision can turn into reality. It also greatly depends upon processes that all the tribal segments of Israeli society must undergo before they recognize that only this vision can ensure their long-term existence, prosperity, and wellbeing.

### **The Fourth Wall: A Supporting Economy**

An important factor in the resilience of Israeli society and its ability to successfully meet repeated security challenges is the existence of a strong, stable economy, and – no less important – a supporting economy. A supporting economy refers to the construction and preservation of a national economy that strives for a reasonable measure of equal opportunity and a reduction of income gaps among the various sectors of the public. One of the fundamental challenges of the Israeli economy, however, is its high level of inequality, which has increased greatly in the last few decades, although recent indications have revealed a certain moderation of this trend.<sup>17</sup> This high level of economic inequality contributes to social tensions and has deepened the already



existing rifts in Israeli society. Inequality is measured in various ways, and includes poverty, which is relatively measurable; income gaps among different population sectors; and other more complex statistical indexes.

The system faces other challenges, some of which preserve inequality while others negatively affect economic stability and growth. The most important ones in the short term are the management of a reasonable fiscal policy that will not create enormous deficits and debt, in part by rationalizing the planning of the defense budget; and in the intermediate to the long term – addressing the exorbitant cost of housing, both via fiscal policy and via the Bank of Israel's policy.

## **Conclusion**

The response of a sizable segment of the Israeli public to the violent events that erupted in Jerusalem in the fall of 2015 was notable for its worrisome mixture of panic, confusion, and growing hostility towards Arabs, at times bordering on overt racism and unbridled violence. This volatile mix of emotions was particularly striking given the fairly limited severity of the dangers and violent attacks against Israeli citizens (as of the date of this writing), certainly when compared to previous waves of violence. No less worrisome is the sense that the public response has been overly emotional and disproportionate, swayed by messages disseminated via the government institutions and social media, and by inflammatory statements made by public opinion leaders and politicians, some of which bordered on clear incitement aimed squarely at the Arab population. The first few weeks of this security crisis have given the impression that social resilience and public fortitude have been dealt a serious blow.

We must then ask if the disproportionate conduct is linked to the nation's internal socioeconomic state of affairs. While the present situation is complex, it also shows that it is not totally bleak; in several areas positive marks of strength could serve as the basis for societal growth. Still, the public at large – aside from the narrow discourse on security, which has a profound effect on the nation's mood – still does not pay adequate attention to the domestic socioeconomic arena and its interconnectedness with the security situation. The failure of the social protest of 2011 still reverberates, and the necessary engagement with ways of promoting and prioritizing social matters is still



marginalized, as is the significant connection between the social and the security domains. When such discussions are held, they are often seen as damaging to the security interests, as reflected in the IDF's harsh response and strident opposition to the Locker Committee's report on the defense budget. Furthermore, over the years, civil mechanisms of criticism of the army and the defense establishment, such as the State Comptroller, the Knesset, and the media, have weakened. As a result, the public discourse on security and foreign affairs has become shallow and polarized, and many issues are never brought to the public's consciousness or debated with any depth.

All of this leads to two conclusions: one, it is important to allow the public discourse to bridge the gap between security and social issues in order to enhance security in the broad sense of the meaning; two, reinforcing the components of internal strength, including the human and social capital in Israel, will also strengthen the resilience of the Israeli public and its ability to better handle national security challenges. The security escalation that started in the fall of 2015 exposed the weaknesses and strengths of Israeli society. It is critical to find ways to reduce the pitfalls, such as the unwarranted anxiety and hatred, and reinforce the strengths, such as alertness and the willingness to commit and be mobilized for the public's sake.

The following chapters in this section will analyze these and other issues as interlocked parts of a whole that requires both broad and significant national attention. Without concerted government involvement, based on rigorous prioritization, multi-year planning, and meticulous implementation, the chance of changing this worrisome picture is unlikely, embedded as it is with toxic seeds of deterioration and the potential to damage the fundamental fabric of Israeli society and national security.

## Notes

- 1 For more on the United Nations definition of governance, see <http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/governance>.
- 2 See the World Bank, "Worldwide Governance Indicators," <http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#countryReports>.
- 3 See the Economist Intelligence Unit, "The Democracy Index 2014," [https://www.eiu.com/public/topical\\_report.aspx?campaignid=Democracy0115](https://www.eiu.com/public/topical_report.aspx?campaignid=Democracy0115).
- 4 See the Global Political Corruption Index, <https://www.transparency.org/cpi2014/results>.

- 5 Yael Hadar, "Public Trust in Governing Institutions in the Last Decade," *Parliament* No. 63, <http://goo.gl/vSGnke>.
- 6 Dafna Barak-Erez, "Governing Instability in Israel: Is the Election System Fully to Blame?" *Law and Business* 14 (2012): 493-509.
- 7 See findings of the Governance Committee headed by Harel Locker, <http://www.pmo.gov.il/SiteCollectionDocuments/meshilut2013.pdf>.
- 8 Doron Navot, *Political Corruption in Israel* (Jerusalem: Israel Democracy Institute, 2012).
- 9 Ministry of Public Security, "National Violence Index, Central Findings, 2014," [http://mops.gov.il/researchanddevelopment/israelviolenceindex/pages/israelvioind\\_statistics\\_2014.aspx#top](http://mops.gov.il/researchanddevelopment/israelviolenceindex/pages/israelvioind_statistics_2014.aspx#top); Ministry of Public Security, Division for Strategic Planning and Policy, "National Violence Index of Israel, summary," (2014), [http://mops.gov.il/Documents/Publications/RD/ViolenceIndex/ViolenceIndex\\_des\\_n2\\_2014.pdf](http://mops.gov.il/Documents/Publications/RD/ViolenceIndex/ViolenceIndex_des_n2_2014.pdf).
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ministry of Public Security, Research Department, "Survey on Cybercrime and Cyberbullying," January 2015, [http://mops.gov.il/Documents/Publications/CrimePrevention/CyberBullying\\_Jan2015.pdf](http://mops.gov.il/Documents/Publications/CrimePrevention/CyberBullying_Jan2015.pdf).
- 12 The study was done under the direction of Prof. Amos Rolider, chair of the Behavioral Sciences Department at Kinneret College, and Dr. Meyran Boniel-Nissim, a senior lecturer in the department. Conducted in 2015 via the Sarid Institute for Research Services, the study was based on data collected from a representative sampling of 1,300 schoolchildren in grades 3-9. See Eli Ashkenazi, "A Plague that is Spreading: Half of the Children is Bullied Online," *Walla*, May 13, 2015, <http://news.walla.co.il/item/2853874>.
- 13 Nadia Hilou and Manal Hreib, "Israel's Electoral Threshold: Implications for Israeli-Arab Political Representation," *INSS Insight* No. 539 (April 23, 2014), <http://www.inss.org.il/index.aspx?id=4538&articleid=6869>.
- 14 Itamar Radai, Meir Elran, Yousef Makladeh, and Maya Kornberg, "The Arab Citizens in Israel: Current Trends According to Recent Opinion Polls," *Strategic Assessment* 18, no. 2 (2015): 101-16, [http://www.inss.org.il/uploadImages/systemFiles/adkan18\\_2ENG\\_version2288992018.pdf](http://www.inss.org.il/uploadImages/systemFiles/adkan18_2ENG_version2288992018.pdf).
- 15 For example, the murder of the late Shira Banki during the LGBT parade in Jerusalem on August 2, 2015.
- 16 See "Speech of the President at the Herzliya Conference Marking a Year of His Presidency," June 7, 2015, [http://www.president.gov.il/ThePresident/Speeches/Pages/news\\_070615\\_01.aspx](http://www.president.gov.il/ThePresident/Speeches/Pages/news_070615_01.aspx).
- 17 See "Findings from the Household Expenditure Survey 2014 Data on the Israeli Households Income, Expenditure and Durable Goods Ownership," [http://www.cbs.gov.il/reader/newhodaot/hodaa\\_template.html?hodaa=201515267](http://www.cbs.gov.il/reader/newhodaot/hodaa_template.html?hodaa=201515267).

# Public Opinion and National Security

Zipi Israeli

The violence that began in the fall of 2015 placed the issue of security at the center of public discourse in Israel in a year that until then had been largely routine in this respect. In the elections to the twentieth Knesset in March 2015, economic and social issues took center stage and the security issue was pushed to the side. Nevertheless, the possibility of a conflagration was always present, especially in the wake of Operation Protective Edge. This essay will present the public's views on key security issues based on a variety of published public opinion surveys.

## **The Security Threats**

Most of the public fairly consistently rates the level of threats facing Israel as high or very high (74-80 percent).<sup>1</sup> The public's sense of personal security, on the other hand, has fluctuated greatly. Just before Rosh Hashanah in 2015, 40 percent of the public felt no change in personal security, 33 percent reported a worsening, and 23 percent felt improvement.<sup>2</sup> Only two weeks later, one week after the escalation began, the picture had changed substantially.<sup>3</sup> Approximately 80 percent said they felt less safe, and only 21 percent felt the same.<sup>4</sup> It thus appears that the public's sense of personal security depends on the mood and on changing events as they occur and develop.

In August 2015 the public ranked rocket fire and terror tunnels from Gaza as the number one threat. Next was the Iranian nuclear threat and the threat from the Palestinians, though in 2015, few people were particularly alarmed by the possibility of another intifada.<sup>5</sup> It is interesting to note that in February 2015, IDF Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot asserted that the first

front on which a flare-up was expected was the Palestinian front.<sup>6</sup> Syria, the Islamic State, and al-Qaeda were at the bottom of the list.<sup>7</sup> At the time of writing, the public did not perceive the Islamic State as an important threat, which is similar to the view of the defense establishment.<sup>8</sup> The perception of the threat from Hezbollah varies widely. In some surveys it is rated as a very important threat, while in others, only marginal,<sup>9</sup> although the chief of staff considers it a dangerous enemy.<sup>10</sup> The public's short memory may have affected its rating. The threat from Hamas, which became clearer in the wake of Operation Protective Edge, is more recent and was thus regarded as more serious than the threat posed by Hezbollah.

What follows is a review of the public's views on the three main fronts troubling Israel: the Gaza Strip in particular, the Palestinian question in general, and the Iranian issue.

### ***Gaza***

After Protective Edge ended, the public discussion focused on when the next round would begin. As time passed, the public's attitude toward the operation appeared to be ambivalent. There was agreement across party lines that the decision to undertake the operation was justified (90-95 percent during the fighting, and approximately 80 percent six months to a year later).<sup>11</sup> This is not surprising, since the political-security establishment (including the opposition factions) and the media were unanimous in believing that the operation was just. It appears that in this case, the "rallying around the flag" that is characteristic of democratic countries at the beginning of wars continued even after time had passed.

As for the results of the operation, the picture is more complex. With the passage of time, the public became more divided in its level of satisfaction and its belief that the operation had succeeded. This feeling of ambivalence is evident in the responses to several questions. When asked, "Are you satisfied or disappointed?" 41 percent said neither satisfied nor disappointed, 32 percent replied satisfied, and 27 percent said disappointed. Regarding the results of Protective Edge, 50 percent called them good and 47 percent poor.<sup>12</sup> As for the security situation after the operation, 54 percent believed that it had not improved, 32 percent that it had, and 11 percent that it was worse.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the number of Israelis who believe that Israel was the

victor has been declining and the proportion who think that Hamas won has increased. The sense of victory was already fading during the operation. In July 2014, 71 percent said that Israel was winning, but this dropped to 51 percent in August and 46 percent in 2015. The number of those believing that Hamas won, on the other hand, rose from 6 percent in July and 4 percent in August to 20 percent in 2015.<sup>14</sup>

The public's ambivalence about the outcome of the operation may be partly due to a dispute about its conduct, which made its way into the public discussion, rather than the substance, on which there was a consensus. For example, some questioned whether everything necessary and possible was being done to keep the threat from recurring and challenging the communities close to the Gaza border fence and Israel generally. This ambivalence was also likely a result of the proximity of the campaigns against Hamas. Even during Protective Edge, most of the public (71 percent) believed there was little chance it would lead to total calm on the Gaza front for at least three years.<sup>15</sup> Now, more than a year after the operation, there is no public expectation that a military campaign would lead to total peace and quiet. The common assumption is that another round of escalation is only a question of time and that the most that can be achieved is to postpone it for as long as possible. The occasional rocket fire over the past year has also naturally influenced the public's views on this question, although the defense establishment believes that Hamas is doing everything it can to prevent this and that the rockets were launched from Gaza by other organizations.

### *An Agreement with Hamas*

At the end of Operation Protective Edge, the possibility of a long-term cease-fire was raised. This would have included agreement on reconstruction in Gaza and consideration of the possibility that Israel would allow Hamas to build a port and open the border crossings for commerce. In 2015, this issue was virtually absent from the public agenda in Israel. From June to August, there were a few media reports of clandestine negotiations between Israel and Hamas on a long-term arrangement, but they failed to produce results. IDF Intelligence research division head Brigadier General Eli Ben Meir, like others, emphasized that the process of reconstruction in Gaza was a critical factor in preventing the next round of violence. Over the past year, Israel

has largely opened the border crossings to Gaza and is allowing civilian reconstruction materials to enter. It is believed, however, that humanitarian distress there is liable to accelerate processes of escalation and deterioration that could result in another round of conflict between Israel and Hamas. The public does not appear to be invested in this issue, which is not on its agenda. An examination of public opinion over the years on negotiations with Hamas reveals a consistent picture of broad opposition. The same is true of the past year, with some 70 percent opposed.<sup>16</sup> A large proportion of the public (57 percent) also believes that Hamas does not wish to maintain the lull.<sup>17</sup>

To summarize, it is likely that Gaza will continue to trouble the Israeli public in 2016, depending on the actual state of security. The contradictions in the public's views reflect a kind of deterministic adjustment to the repeated rounds of conflict. Some would say that this reflects the public's disillusionment and understanding of the nature of the clashes and the constraints under which Israel operates, such as the limited chances for achieving strategic goals in fighting against Hamas.

### ***The Palestinian Theater: The West Bank and Jerusalem***

During 2015, the number of terrorist attacks and attempted attacks in Judea, Samaria, and Jerusalem increased. This is a result of the diplomatic stalemate that has existed since April 2014, after talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) mediated by US Secretary of State John Kerry failed. Despite the rise in the number of attacks by Palestinians, the subject had been almost completely absent from the public and media agenda. Only in late September, when a significant escalation occurred, did the Palestinian arena again become important. Findings from public opinion polls reveal a complex picture.

On the one hand, the public has consistently supported negotiations between Israel and the PA (62-75 percent)<sup>18</sup> and believed that continuing deadlock was harmful to Israel's security (about 60 percent). This support continued during the period of escalation (60 percent in favor).<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, only a few people believed that negotiations would really lead to peace in the coming years, and even the escalation since the fall of 2015

has not caused these positions to change (about 20 percent believe this, compared with 70 percent who do not).<sup>20</sup>

Polls about the possibility of a third intifada conducted over the past year for the Peace Index, a project of the Israel Democracy Institute and Tel Aviv University, show a changing picture. In October 2014, 32 percent of respondents thought that an organized intifada was beginning, while 58 percent saw the events as locally initiated actions by individuals.<sup>21</sup> In March 2015, 49 percent believed that the chances of a third intifada were great, compared with 40.5 percent who thought they were small.<sup>22</sup> In April, 53 percent of the public believed that without negotiations, a third intifada was very likely.<sup>23</sup> In September, however, shortly after the violence began, 44.5 percent thought that a situation in which there is no agreement could continue only a short time (up to a year). About 20 percent believed it could continue for 2-3 years, and only 26 percent thought that even without an agreement, the current state of relations between Israel and the Palestinians could continue for more than three years without a major outbreak of violence.<sup>24</sup> It appears, then, that the public is relatively aware of the consequences of an absence of negotiations. The question is, what solution does it prefer?

### ***The Preferred Solution to the Conflict with the Palestinians***

From 2003 to 2013, public support for the two-state solution was strong and stable at almost 70 percent, even during times of crisis, and irrespective of the government in power.<sup>25</sup> This has fallen over the past year but is still high at 50-60 percent, even since the escalation of the fall of 2015.<sup>26</sup> Other proposed solutions to the conflict have little support. Only a small proportion of the public, 27-30 percent, want to preserve the status quo, and a minority, 10-30 percent, want to annex the residents of the territories and establish a single state under Israeli rule.<sup>27</sup> A majority of the public (52-72 percent) believes that annexing Judea and Samaria would have extremely negative consequences for Israel.<sup>28</sup>

The slogan “two states for two peoples” has been deeply rooted in Israeli public consciousness for years, yet when questionnaires present the practical implications of this slogan, a more complex picture emerges. If the words “permanent agreement” are included in the question about two states, support for the idea drops to 40-47 percent (and has been declining slightly

in recent years).<sup>29</sup> Support for two states falls to 44 percent when the public is asked about mutual recognition of the two people's national identity as part of a permanent settlement, after all issues in dispute are resolved and a Palestinian state established.<sup>30</sup> Only 21 percent supported the Arab Peace Initiative, which calls for Arab recognition of Israel and normalization of relations after occupation of the territories conquered in 1967 ends and a Palestinian state is established.<sup>31</sup> The public is also divided on evacuating the settlements in the territories as part of a permanent peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians (48 percent are opposed and 46.5 percent are in favor).<sup>32</sup> When asked specifically about the settlement blocs, a large majority of the Jews surveyed (68 percent) agreed that the large settlement blocs should remain under Israeli sovereignty as part of a peace agreement.<sup>33</sup> In addition, a majority of the public believed that the settlements contribute to security.<sup>34</sup>

### ***Jerusalem***

The escalation in violence that began in the fall of 2015 placed the issue of Jerusalem firmly on the public agenda. Though the city has always been at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it has barely disturbed the Israeli public, and this was the case for most of 2015. The issue did not feature prominently in the media's agenda, and thus the public was likely unaware of the issue of the Temple Mount and the incidents in Arab neighborhoods in Jerusalem. The concept of a united Jerusalem has been firmly established for years in Israeli discourse, and even in 2015, the public did not perceive these issues as being among the significant security threats to Israel.

Since the start of the violence in late 2015, some initial data have been collected about the Jewish public's views on issues relating to Jerusalem, which have undoubtedly been strongly affected by the violence in the city. In a Peace Index survey, 57 percent of Jewish respondents believed that Jews should be allowed to pray on the Temple Mount.<sup>35</sup> However, in a poll for *Maariv* conducted by Panels Politics research institute, a similar proportion supported a total ban on visits by Jews to the Temple Mount until the situation calms down.<sup>36</sup> The picture will probably become clear only after the situation in the city stabilizes.



On the issue of partitioning Jerusalem, in late 2014, a large percentage of the public opposed giving away Arab neighborhoods in East Jerusalem, even as part of a permanent peace treaty with the Palestinians (56 percent were opposed, 38 percent in favor).<sup>37</sup> However, a survey conducted after the recent escalation in violence gave a different picture, with 69 percent favoring separation from the Arab neighborhoods in East Jerusalem and only 24 percent wishing to keep them under Israeli sovereignty.<sup>38</sup>

In many respects, these findings indicate acceptance of the idea of two states for two peoples, even if they imply that in principle, the public is interested in separation from the Palestinians, sometimes without understanding its consequences.

### *Iran*

In 2015, the Iranian nuclear threat was the focus of the security discussion in Israel, especially in July, when the world powers reached a nuclear agreement with Iran. Surveys conducted during this period show that a large majority of the public believed the agreement endangered Israel (about 77 percent)<sup>39</sup> or was an existential threat to it (73 percent).<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, the public believed that Iran would not actually fulfill its obligations under the agreement (78 percent) and that the agreement would not prevent Iran from attaining nuclear weapons during the coming decade (74 percent).<sup>41</sup> A majority of the public therefore opposed the agreement (69-70 percent),<sup>42</sup> and a large proportion (51-60 percent) believed that the Prime Minister should use all available means to persuade Congress to reject it. Thirty-eight percent, however, would have preferred that he try to reach understandings with President Obama.<sup>43</sup> In this sense, the public adopted the views of the Prime Minister, partly because almost no establishment figures publicly supported the agreement. The public was divided between those who believed it was a bad agreement and those who believed it was very bad.

On the other hand, on the question of what Israel should do once the nuclear agreement was signed, the picture is more complex, with 32-47 percent of the public supporting a strike against Iranian nuclear sites and 40 percent opposing it.<sup>44</sup> This is a slight decrease in support for a strike from 2009, when 59 percent supported it and 41 percent opposed it,<sup>45</sup> and 2012,

when 48 percent were in favor and 52 percent opposed.<sup>46</sup> In April 2015, three months before the agreement was signed, 60 percent were opposed.<sup>47</sup>

In some respects, the findings reflect the public disagreement among high-ranking political and defense officials since 2011 about an Israeli military strike against Iran's nuclear facilities. In addition, the public did not have a good understanding of the Iranian issue in general and the agreement between the major powers in particular, and the questions asked were rather dichotomous. It is likely that in 2016, the issue will preoccupy the Israeli public less than other threats, and certainly less than before the agreement was signed.

## **Conclusion**

This essay reviewed the Israeli Jewish public's views on Israel's three main security issues: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Gaza, and Iran. Given the nature of the Gaza situation, the public discussion on this subject will likely depend on developments in the field. One isolated event is liable to lead to a general escalation on the Gaza front (and others). The Iranian question is not likely to occupy a central position in public discourse in 2016. The agreement between Iran and the world powers is a fact, and it is reasonable to assume that there will be no Iranian nuclear provocations during this period and no significant opposition to the content or terms of the agreement. Public opinion will therefore focus primarily on the possible consequences of the agreement, such as US indemnification for Israel's military power or Iranian intervention in Syria. However, an initiative by interested parties to return the Iranian issue to the public agenda in order to divert the discussion away from topics they seek to downplay cannot be completely ruled out.

At the same time, the Palestinian theater will likely remain a focus of attention in 2016. Despite the political deadlock and the deteriorating security situation, there is still public support for a political agreement with an emphasis on "two states for two peoples." This support raises a question, since it involves a point of view that has survived despite the growing polarization in almost every facet of Israeli life and the right wing government. In particular, the forecast on the issue of Jerusalem should be emphasized. A certain change may be taking place in the public's views on

this issue, but it remains to be seen whether this is a passing mood or a real change regarding the practical elements of an arrangement for Jerusalem.

Studies on public opinion show that most people hold inconsistent views and that only on the fringes are there small groups with strong opinions whom it is difficult to influence. Generally, public opinion is “on hold,” dormant yet subject to influence and recruitment, and it dictates the mood, though not necessarily the political and defense agenda. And if public opinion can be changed and shaped, then a legitimate leadership has room to maneuver. Studies also emphasize the role of decisive leadership, which can influence public opinion.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, and as a conclusion from the findings that served as an empirical basis for the analysis in this article, at this time, Israel’s leaders have a public mandate for a political process. In the public discourse, there are already signs of new ideas for solutions that have not been mentioned in the main public and media discussions and thus are still not reflected in polls. The very fact that the current government is right wing might perhaps enable the Prime Minister to show flexibility on political and security issues without having to contend with determined resistance from the Knesset opposition.

## Notes

- 1 For example, see Ephraim Yaar and Tamar Hermann, Israel Democracy Institute, “Peace Index – May 2015,” <http://www.peaceindex.org/indexMonth.aspx?num=292&monthname=אמ>, and “Peace Index – July 2015,” <http://www.peaceindex.org/indexMonth.aspx?num=295&monthname=יולי>.
- 2 See Ben Caspit, “*Maariv*’s Annual Survey: Gideon Saar Puts Up Fight against Netanyahu,” September 13, 2015. According to another survey, 70 percent believed that their personal situation had not changed. See “We’re Proud To Be Israelis,” Rosh Hashanah 5776 survey, *Israel Hayom* holiday supplement, September 13, 2015, pp. 4-5.
- 3 The level of anxiety can also be inferred from police figures for calls to 110, the non-emergency police hotline. When the terrorist incidents began in the first week of October, there were 20,000 calls. In the next two weeks, the number leveled off at some 15,000 a week, compared with 6,000-7,000 in ordinary times.
- 4 Mano Geva and Mina Tzemaach, Midgam Research Institute in cooperation with iPanel, Channel 2 News, and *Meet the Press*, October 10, 2015, [http://www.mako.co.il/news-military/politics-q4\\_2015/Article-3ad3eabe7325051004.htm](http://www.mako.co.il/news-military/politics-q4_2015/Article-3ad3eabe7325051004.htm).

- 5 Molad, "Security Threats, Policy Opportunities, and Operation Protective Edge," May 2015.
- 6 See Amos Harel, "East Jerusalem's Leading Role in Terror Attacks Catches Israel Off Guard," *Haaretz*, October 17, 2015, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-1.680771>.
- 7 See various approaches to ranking the threat: Molad, "Security Threats," and "Public Opinion Survey," findings presented at the INSS annual conference, "Security Challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," February 16-17, 2015, <http://heb.inss.org.il/index.aspx?id=4354&articleid=8843>.
- 8 Yaar and Hermann, "Peace Index – September 2015," <http://www.peaceindex.org/indexMonth.aspx?num=297&monthname.#ספטמבר=VogiHWBuljo>; "Public Opinion Survey," INSS conference, February 16-17, 2015.
- 9 "Public Opinion Survey," INSS conference, February 16-17, 2015; Molad, "Security Threats."
- 10 See Harel, "East Jerusalem's Leading Role."
- 11 For example, see Molad, "Security Threats"; Yaar and Hermann, "Peace Index – July 2014," <http://www.peaceindex.org/indexMonth.aspx?num=276&monthname.#יולי=Vogiv2Buljo>, and "Peace Index – August 2014," <http://www.peaceindex.org/indexMonth.aspx?num=283&monthname.#אוגוסט=Vogi32Buljo>.
- 12 For example, see Yaar and Hermann, "Peace Index – September 2014," <http://www.peaceindex.org/indexMonth.aspx?num=283&monthname.#ספטמבר=Vogi32Buljo>, and <http://www.peaceindex.org/indexMonth.aspx?num=284&monthname.#ספטמבר=Vogjg2Buljo>.
- 13 Molad, "Security Threats."
- 14 Yaar and Hermann, "Peace Index – September 2014"; "Public Opinion Survey," INSS conference, February 16-17, 2015.
- 15 Yaar and Hermann, "Peace Index – August 2014."
- 16 Yehuda Ben Meir, "The People's Voice: Results of a Public Opinion Survey on National Security Issues," *INSS Insight* No. 114, June 14, 2009, <http://www.inss.org.il/index.aspx?id=4538&articleid=2041>; Yehuda Ben Meir and Olena Bagno-Moldavsky, *The Voice of the People: Israeli Public Opinion on National Security*, Memorandum No. 130 (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2013); Yaar and Hermann, "Peace Index – September 2014."
- 17 Ben Meir, "The People's Voice"; Yaar and Hermann, "Peace Index – August 2014," <http://www.peaceindex.org/indexMonth.aspx?num=296&monthname.#אוגוסט=>.
- 18 Ben Meir and Bagno-Moldavsky, *The Voice of the People*; Yaar and Hermann, "Peace Index – October 2014."
- 19 Yaar and Hermann, "Peace Index – September 2014."

- 20 Khalil Shikaki and Ifat Maoz, "The Joint Israeli Palestinian Poll (JIPP)," Harry S. Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, June 2015, [http://truman.huji.ac.il/?cmd=joint\\_polls](http://truman.huji.ac.il/?cmd=joint_polls); Yaar and Hermann, "Peace Index – April 2015," <http://www.peaceindex.org/indexMonth.aspx?num=291&monthname=אפריל>; "Peace Index – July 2015"; and "Peace Index – September 2015."
- 21 Yaar and Hermann, "Peace Index – October 2014," <http://www.peaceindex.org/indexMonth.aspx?num=285&monthname=אוקטובר>=Vogms2Buljo.
- 22 Yaar and Hermann, "Peace Index – March 2015"; "Peace Index – September 2015."
- 23 Yaar and Hermann, "Peace Index – April 2015," <http://www.peaceindex.org/indexMonth.aspx?num=274&monthname=אפריל>=Vogm7mBuljo.
- 24 Yaar and Hermann, "Peace Index – September 2015."
- 25 Ben Meir and Bagno-Moldavsky, *Voice of the People*; Shikaki and Maoz, "The Joint Israeli Palestinian Poll (JIPP)," June 2015; Peace Index surveys.
- 26 Shikaki and Ifat Maoz, "The Joint Israeli Palestinian Poll (JIPP)," June 2015; Yaar and Hermann, "Peace Index – September 2015"; "Public Opinion Survey," INSS conference, February 16-17, 2015.
- 27 "Public Opinion Survey," INSS conference, February 16-17, 2015.
- 28 Shikaki and Maoz, "The Joint Israeli Palestinian Poll (JIPP)," June 2015.
- 29 Ben Meir and Bagno-Moldavsky, *Voice of the People*; "Public Opinion Survey," INSS conference, February 16-17, 2015.
- 30 In a survey conducted in December 2014, 54 percent of Israelis supported such mutual recognition and 36 percent opposed it. See Shikaki and Maoz, "The Joint Israeli Palestinian Poll (JIPP)," June 2015.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Molad, "Security Threats."
- 33 Yaar and Hermann, "Peace Index – December 2014."
- 34 Molad, "Security Threats."
- 35 Yaar and Hermann, "Peace Index – September 2015," <http://www.peaceindex.org/indexMonth.aspx?num=297&monthname=ספטמבר>=VognZGBuljo; Shikaki and Maoz, "The Joint Israeli Palestinian Poll (JIPP)," June 2015.
- 36 Ben Caspit, "Some 70% Favor Separation from East Jerusalem Arab Neighborhoods," *Maariv*, October 18, 2015, <http://www.peaceindex.org/indexMonth.aspx?num=298&monthname=אוקטובר>; Yaar and Hermann, "Peace Index – October 2015." A Midgam Research Institute survey for Channel 10 News found that 42 percent of respondents believed that Jews should not be allowed to pray on the Temple Mount, while 36 percent believed that they should be. See "Poll:

- Israelis Give Netanyahu Failing Grade for Handling of Terror,” *Nana10 News*, <http://news.nana10.co.il/Article/?ArticleID=1157247>.
- 37 Yaar and Hermann, “Peace Index – December 2015.” In 2012, 47 percent were willing to return the Arab neighborhoods of Jerusalem. See Ben Meir and Bagno-Moldavsky, *Voice of the People*.
- 38 Caspit, “Some 70% Favor Separation.”
- 39 Galit Edut, “Poll: 47% of Israelis Favor an Attack on Iran Following the Nuclear Agreement,” *Maariv*, July 17, 2015; Caspit, “*Maariv*’s Annual Survey.”
- 40 Yaar and Hermann, “Peace Index – August 2015.”
- 41 Sarid Institute for Channel 10 News, July 15, 2015.
- 42 Yaar and Hermann, “Peace Index –August 2015”; Sarid Institute, July 15, 2015, <http://news.nana10.co.il/Article/?ArticleID=1137624>.
- 43 Edut, *Maariv*, July 17, 2015; Sarid Institute, July 15, 2015.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Ben Meir, “The People’s Voice.”
- 46 Ben Meir and Bagno-Moldavsky, *Voice of the People*.
- 47 Yaar and Hermann, “Peace Index – April 2015,” <http://www.peaceindex.org/indexMonth.aspx?num=291&monthname=אפריל>.
- 48 For example, Asher Arian, *Security Threatened: Surveying Public Opinion on Peace and War* (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies and Papyrus, Tel Aviv University, 1999); Ben Meir and Bagno-Moldavsky, *Voice of the People*; Dan Caspi, *Pictures in our Heads: Public Opinion and Democracy* (Tel Aviv: Open University, 2001).

# Whither the Defense Budget?

Shmuel Even

Every year, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Defense argue over the size and composition of the defense budget, which makes it difficult for the government to reach a decision about the budget. Almost every year, the defense budget that is drafted before the beginning of the financial year is found to be inadequate, and a necessary supplement is granted during the year (table 1). This article describes the current defense budget data for 2016, and examines the many developments that have taken place in the discussion about the budget over the past year.

## **The 2016 Defense Budget**

In November 2015, the Knesset approved the state budget for 2016, including the defense budget.<sup>1</sup> According to the budget proposal, the net defense budget is NIS 56.1 billion, amounting to 16.1 percent of total spending in the state budget (after deduction of the payment of the principal debt).<sup>2</sup> The gross defense budget is NIS 64.1 billion, and includes approximately NIS 8 billion in “conditional expenditure.”<sup>3</sup> The gross defense budget for 2016 is financed by the country’s economic resources in shekels (NIS 45.6 billion), \$3.75 billion in various types of military aid from the United States (including aid in the framework of the 2007 letter of understanding, and special aid for joint projects), and revenues from the defense establishment’s resources.<sup>4</sup>

The defense budget is likely to increase during the year. In talks between the Minister of Defense and the Minister of Finance, a NIS 3 to 6 billion defense budget supplement was agreed upon, to be granted during 2016, in exchange for implementing reforms and reducing expenditure.<sup>5</sup> In other

words, the net 2016 defense budget is likely to be NIS 59 to 62 billion, and the gross budget NIS 67-70 billion. Furthermore, Israel and the United States are discussing an increase in aid to bolster Israel's military power, following the nuclear agreement with Iran and its accelerated military buildup as a result of the lifting of sanctions. At the same time, the two countries are holding talks to extend the military aid framework to the years 2019-2028.

**Table 1:** Trends in the Net Defense Budget (including supplements)  
(in NIS billions in current prices)

Year	Original Budget	Budget Supplement during the Year	Total Defense Budget
2010	48.6	2.7	51.3
2011	49.3	2.8	52.1
2012	50.5	3.1	53.6
2013	52.5	3.4	55.9
2014	51	*1.1	*52.1
2015	56.9	not final <sup>6</sup>	not final
2016	56.1	3-6 (forecast)	59-62 (forecast)

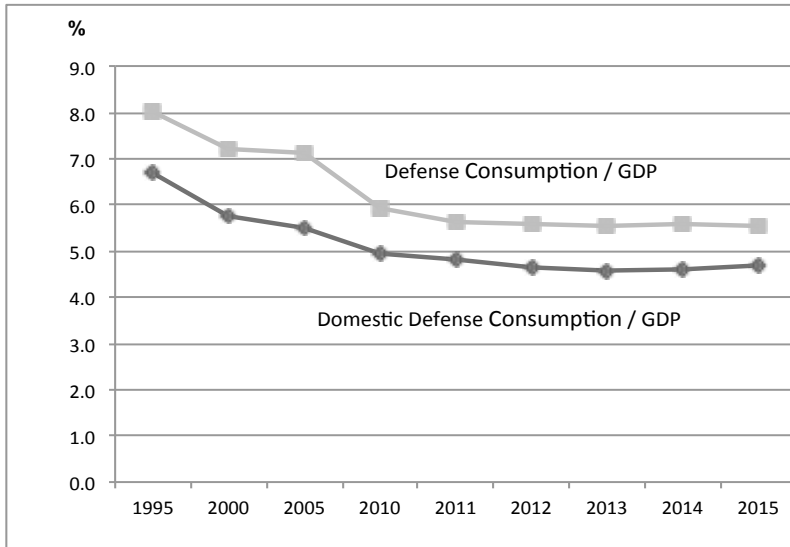
\* Does not include NIS 7 billion in spending for Operation Protective Edge

**Source:** Ministry of Finance, "Defense Budget Proposal for 2015-2016" and press reports

## The "Defense Burden"

According to the estimates for 2015, the ratio of defense consumption to GDP (the "defense burden") in 2015 is 5.5 percent and the ratio of domestic defense consumption to GDP is 4.7 percent.<sup>7</sup> These figures are similar to those in recent years and lower than in the previous decade (figure 1). At the same time, they are still very high in comparison with other countries around the world, in view of the exceptional defense threats to Israel.





**Figure 1:** The Ratio of Defense Consumption to GDP in Israel

**Source:** The Central Bureau of Statistics (2015 – estimate from December)

### The Discussion about Determining the Defense Budget

The discussion about the defense budget changed in 2015. In the second half of the year, four official documents were published about the subject. Notwithstanding the chronology of their publication, the documents should be read in the following order: (a) the report of the State Comptroller’s Office,<sup>8</sup> which points out the gap between the recommendations of the previous committee for examining the defense budget (the “Brodet Committee”) in 2007 and the current situation; (b) The Chief of Staff’s document, “IDF Strategy,”<sup>9</sup> which sets forth the goals and activities covered by the defense budget; (c) the report of the Committee to Evaluate the Defense Budget (“Locker Committee”),<sup>10</sup> which contains recommendations for determining the 2016-2020 defense budgets; (d) the Memorandum of Understanding on the 2015-2020 defense budget, signed by the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Defense, and which contains a summary of the discussion on the defense budget up to the present time.<sup>11</sup>

The following commentary relates to these documents within the context of discussing the defense budget:

*The State Comptroller's report:* Reducing expenditures in the defense budget was only partially achieved. The State Comptroller's report from August 2015 found that the defense establishment had achieved NIS 3.8 billion in savings in 2008-2012, compared to the aim of NIS 10 billion as recommended by the Brodet Committee. The State Comptroller found that the defense and political echelons paid little attention to streamlining and reducing expenditure. The State Comptroller noted that only one presentation in May 2011 was given to the cabinet about reducing expenditure in the defense establishment. Nevertheless, the final report stated that, "The Office of the State Comptroller takes a positive view of the decisions and measures recently taken towards reducing expenditure, including actions to instill a cost-cutting culture at all levels of the defense establishment."<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the underperformance in reducing expenditure, other reasons, such as the changing security situation, contributed to the gap between the Brodet Committee's recommendations and the current situation. One month after the Brodet Report was published in May 2007, Hamas gained control of the Gaza Strip; in the following years, the number of rockets acquired by Hezbollah exceeded ten times the number of rockets it had during the Second Lebanon War (2006); cyberspace became a new battlefield; and the IDF invested resources in building an independent attack capability against Iran. The State Comptroller was told that, "The maximum increase in the personnel in the standing army in 2008-2012 in the IDF was approved by the Chief of Staff, and took place in essential areas in which additional manpower was required, such as in unmanned aerial vehicle units, submarines, the fields of intelligence, aerial defense, cyberspace, and the home front."<sup>13</sup>

According to the State Comptroller's report, since the end of the Tefen multi-year budget (2008-2012), "the IDF is making multi-year decisions in various areas, but without a comprehensive and integrative multi-year outlook."<sup>14</sup> The lesson from the report is that a budgeted multi-year plan is important for the army; but anticipating and planning an accurate long-term outline for the defense budget, is unrealistic, because variables affecting the budget cannot be predicted so far in advance, particularly the security threats.

*The Chief of Staff's "IDF Strategy" document:* The "IDF Strategy" document, signed by Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot, provides what is "missing" in the discussion of the budget. Even though it contains no financial data,

the document details the needs of the army within an appropriate defense budget that is presented to the public, officials in government ministries, and many elected officials who are not exposed to classified documents. The document outlines a specific range of security capabilities and outputs<sup>15</sup> that the IDF seeks to achieve within the defense budgets for 2016-2020 within the framework of the five-year Gideon Plan. As part of the plan, the IDF also decided on major streamlining measures and budget cuts, although these were significantly less than those proposed by the Locker Committee.

According to the Chief of Staff, “The IDF strategy document presents the necessary changes required of the Israeli military – given the future challenges and changes in the characteristics of the enemy – such as bolstering and improving the effectiveness of land-based maneuvers, diversification of operational capabilities in the campaign between wars, strengthening the cyberspace dimension, and maintaining a clear superiority in aerial and naval intelligence.”<sup>16</sup> In the document, the Chief of Staff clarifies how he regards the division of responsibility between the military and political echelons, which also affects accountability for the budget. The role of the political echelon is to define the goals and constraints for the IDF, while the Chief of Staff’s role is to carry out the instructions of the political echelon – to build up the IDF and operate it accordingly. In the absence of clear instructions, the Chief of Staff presented his opinion of the necessary capabilities that should be budgeted.

*The Locker Committee:* The Locker Committee was established in 2014 to examine the defense budget as a follow-up to the 2007 Brodet Committee. The report of the Locker Committee, issued in June 2015, presents a long list of recommendations in accordance to the letter of appointment signed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.<sup>17</sup> The committee recommended setting the net defense budget at NIS 59 billion (a gross defense budget of approximately NIS 67 billion – including conditional expenditure), linked to the Consumer Price Index, for the next five years. This constitutes an increase in the budgetary basis, in comparison with recent years (table 1).

The most significant and controversial set of recommendations concerns IDF personnel, primarily the recommendations to eliminate the bridging pension for most soldiers in the standing army, and to shorten the compulsory service for men to two years. At the same time, the committee recommended

that any soldier in the standing army who is not promoted to the rank of lieutenant colonel by age thirty-six should be compelled to end his service with increased compensation (meaning that the IDF would not have any officers with the rank of major or lower above the age of thirty-six). It also recommended that a soldier in the standing army aged forty-two and up who ends his service should receive a one-time only capital grant instead of a pension.<sup>18</sup> In comparison to the current situation, the scenarios of service and lay-offs under the proposed model make it less advantageous for a highly capable population to serve in the standing army, because of its reduced remuneration and increased employment uncertainty within the standing army.<sup>19</sup>

The Locker Committee Report does not include a comprehensive picture of the army's resources, combat scenarios, and tasks, which are detailed in the IDF's strategy document. If the recommendations are implemented, the result would be a much younger and smaller army, with fewer soldiers in both the compulsory and standing army service as well as reserve duty; it is doubtful that they would be able to perform the tasks required of the army. Even though the committee recommended increasing the basis of the defense budget, it is difficult to see how all these recommendations can contribute to the IDF's ability to perform its tasks. At the same time, the Locker Committee Report does contain criticism and recommendations that are known to the defense establishment, and which deserve specific and in-depth investigation. Examples include recommendations that link contribution to security with salary in various IDF positions,<sup>20</sup> reducing the number of senior positions, cutting back on headquarters and staff agencies, and so forth.

After the report was published, Minister of Defense Moshe Ya'alon said that its implementation "will not allow the IDF and the defense establishment to deal with the threats against Israel and its people, and would detract from our ability to provide security to Israeli citizens . . . Anyone who wants to deal successfully with ISIS, Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran, and dozens more unscrupulous terrorist organizations armed with advanced weapons, as we have been doing up until now, cannot afford a mediocre army with mediocre people. Unfortunately, the Locker Report will lead Israel and its people into exactly this position."<sup>21</sup>

It is doubtful whether the weighty and specific tasks with which the Prime Minister charged the Locker Committee in his letter of appointment were appropriate for a committee of this type, mainly due to time considerations and resources at its disposal.<sup>22</sup> Former Director General of the Ministry of Finance Dr. Yaacov Lifshitz, currently a senior researcher at the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, said, “External probes like the Locker Committee are a poor substitute for rigorous internal staff work and for tough governmental decision-making.”<sup>23</sup> On such a broad subject, it would have been better for the Locker Committee to provide principled recommendations for determining the defense budget, and detailed recommendations for arranging governmental staff work to formulate, streamline, approve, and oversee the defense budget, rather than to elaborate on the severance grants to be given to various ranks.

*The Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Minister of Finance and Minister of Defense regarding the 2015-2020 defense budget:* In the end, it was decided not to implement the Locker Committee recommendations as a whole, with the Gideon Plan of the Chief of Staff to remain the basis for IDF activity and force building for the next five years, on the assumption that it will be approved soon. Nevertheless, at the urging of the Prime Minister, who had appointed the Locker Committee, the Office of the Prime Minister, Ministry of Defense, and Ministry of Finance discussed suggestions for compromise, taking into account the Locker Committee’s recommendations.

In this framework, a one-page memorandum signed by the Minister of Defense and the Minister of Finance was published on November 18, 2015. This document presented the following points of agreement on the 2015-2020 defense budgets:<sup>24</sup>

- a. Agreement to a realistic multi-year budget outline that will provide budgetary certainty for the defense establishment and facilitate the implementation of the Gideon Plan.
- b. A change in the standing army and pension model that preserves the IDF’s high-caliber personnel and significantly reduces the retirement quotas and spending on salaries and pensions.
- c. Shortening compulsory military service to two and a half years, and increasing the stipend for IDF soldiers doing compulsory service (which is slated to be substantially increased as early as January 2016).

- d. Implementation of the Goren Committee recommendations concerning the Rehabilitation Department budget.
- e. Increasing the research and development budget.
- f. Establishing joint cost-cutting teams, joint work, and full transparency between the Ministries of Defense and Finance.

These principles were elucidated in discussions between the Ministry of Finance and the defense establishment. The most significant recommendation by the Locker Committee – elimination of the bridging pension for most soldiers serving in the standing army – was not accepted. Nevertheless, it was agreed to lower the pension expenses by reducing the number of soldiers in the standing army who serve until the age of eligibility for a bridging pension; raising the retirement age for non-commissioned officers; and hiring civilians for certain posts.<sup>25</sup> In addition, the Locker Committee recommendation to shorten compulsory military service to two years was not accepted; instead, service will be shortened to two and a half years. The recommendation for implementation of the Goren Committee recommendations for the rehabilitation budget was accepted.

Despite the gaps in the Locker Committee Report, the report appears to have considerably influenced the understanding reached by the Ministers of Defense and Finance. The extreme views expressed in the report led the Ministry of Defense to be more flexible; it agreed to carry out reforms and deeper budget cuts than originally planned. In this way, the committee may have served the purposes of the Prime Minister who had appointed it.

## **Summary and Recommendations**

Once again, the process of determining the defense budget for 2016 did not take place in an orderly manner. The budget, which the cabinet approved only in August 2015, was, in effect, reopened in November 2015, and it now appears that some of the items in the Memorandum of Understanding signed by the Ministers of Defense and Finance are being interpreted differently by their ministries.

Increasing efficiency and cutting costs, both a focus of the Locker Committee and the State Comptroller, requires professional handling, and cannot be solved solely through external committees that convene once every eight years and ad hoc joint teams. It is therefore best to establish a cost-cutting

administration in the Ministry of Defense to deal regularly with cost-cutting projects, including the participation of representatives from the Ministry of Finance and the National Security Council. The administration should address concerns of inefficiency, such as the situation in the maintenance system of the ground forces, as cited by the State Comptroller. This agency will measure and monitor cost-cutting in the different units.

One result of the titanic struggle between the Ministries of Finance and Defense over the defense budget is an escalating debate over the defense budget, which is not free of power struggles; as a result, the overall purpose of the state budget discussion – to effectively adapt the government’s goals to the expenses and resources at its disposal in all spheres of activity – is sometimes forgotten. In the current situation, the public discourse about the defense budget is disproportionate to the defense budget’s share of the state budget, which is primarily civilian. The government should institute an in-depth discussion of spending by all the ministries, instead of settling for a discussion of budget supplements to their spending (in comparison with the preceding year), as has been the practice up until now. It is therefore proposed here to establish a permanent committee within the Prime Minister’s Office, with the purpose of examining and promoting streamlining in the civilian public sector, and that the government should conduct a thorough examination of a different government ministry each year in an area affecting multiple ministries (such as salary expenses). The discussion of the defense budget will thereby be kept in the correct proportion to its weight in the state budget.

The public criticism of defense spending goes beyond the financial aspect and detracts from the image of those serving in the standing army. This is liable to affect the willingness of those with the greatest capabilities to serve in the standing army. Therefore, it is proposed that professional language be used in the discussion on the defense budget. In his speech opening the winter session of the Knesset on October 12, 2015, President Reuven Rivlin stated, “We cannot give backing to the public narrative that paints them [soldiers in the standing army] as if they were ‘parasites’ or a ‘burden on the economy.’” Addressing all Knesset members, he observed, “Repair what requires repair [in streamlining] as is needed. But stamp out the defamation; repel the dismissive discourse that harms the spirit of the IDF and its soldiers.”<sup>26</sup>



## Notes

- 1 Ministry of Finance, "State Budget Proposal for the 2015 and 2016 Financial Years," Jerusalem, October 2015, [http://mof.gov.il/BudgetSite/statebudget/BUDGET2015\\_2016/Pages/default.aspx](http://mof.gov.il/BudgetSite/statebudget/BUDGET2015_2016/Pages/default.aspx).
- 2 The NIS 56.1 billion net defense budget constitutes 16.1 percent of the "state budget for calculation of the spending constraints" (NIS 347.7 billion). This figure is the total net state budget for 2016 (NIS 424.8 billion), minus the payment of the principal debt (NIS 88.8 billion), except for payment of debts to the National Insurance Institute (NIS 11.7 billion). See Ministry of Finance, "State Budget Proposal," pp. 20, 111.
- 3 "Conditional expenditure" relies on additional American aid (beyond \$2.4 billion a year), and on defense establishment revenues. See Ministry of Finance, "State Budget Proposal," pp. 114, 118. The two figures do not, inter alia, include the cost of the project for moving IDF bases to the Negev and an American aid supplement with respect to the nuclear agreement with Iran.
- 4 Ministry of Finance, "State Budget Proposal," pp. 114-18.
- 5 The additional NIS 3-6 billion consists of a supplement of up to NIS 3 billion (contingent upon implementation of reforms), a supplement of up to NIS 1.7 billion (contingent upon cost-cutting), and about NIS 1 billion with respect to increased costs. See Moti Bassok, "Netanyahu and Kahlon Know that the Budget is a Bluff – That Is How You Will Pay for the Additional Billions for Defense," *The Marker*, November 18, 2015.
- 6 The Ministry of Defense may receive a retroactive supplement to its 2015 budget from the state budget surpluses for 2015.
- 7 Estimates from December 31, 2015, based on data from the Central Bureau of Statistics database. Defense consumption is total actual defense spending, as defined by the Central Bureau of Statistics (including spending on the Mossad and the Israel Security Agency). Domestic defense consumption does not include overseas procurement (purchased mostly with American aid).
- 8 State Comptroller's Office, "Report on Processes of Streamlining and Convergence for the Defense Budget Framework," August 5, 2015, <http://www.mevaker.gov.il/he/publication/Articles/Pages/2015.08.05-Taktziv-Bitachon.aspx?AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1>.
- 9 Office of the Chief of Staff, "IDF Strategy," August 13, 2015. The document published was an unclassified version of the classified document, the multi-year Gideon Plan, [http://www.idf.il/SIP\\_STORAGE/FILES/9/16919.pdf](http://www.idf.il/SIP_STORAGE/FILES/9/16919.pdf).
- 10 "The Report of the Committee to Evaluate the Defense Budget," June 26, 2015 (released to the public on July 21, 2015). The committee was established in May 2014 as a follow-up committee to the Brodet Committee, in the wake of disputes



- between the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Defense over the size of the defense budget and the difficulty experienced by the cabinet in reaching a decision on the matter. The head of the committee was Major Gen. (res.) Yohanan Locker, former military secretary to the Prime Minister.
- 11 At the signing, Minister of Finance Moshe Kahlon said, "I am completely unwilling to accept the violent criticism in recent years against those serving in the standing army. It is shortsighted to hug them only during wars; they have to be hugged all the time." See Amiram Barkat, "Finance, Defense Agree Defense Budget," *Globes*, November 18, 2015, <http://www.globes.co.il/en/article-finance-and-defense-ministers-agree-defense-budget-1001082238>.
  - 12 State Comptroller's Office, "Report on Processes of Streamlining and Convergence," p. 8.
  - 13 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
  - 14 *Ibid.*, p. 24.
  - 15 For a further discussion, see Shmuel Even, *The Cost of Defense in Israel: Defense Expenditures and Recommendations for Drafting the Defense Budget*, INSS Memorandum No. 146 (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2015).
  - 16 See the Chief of Staff's preface in "IDF Strategy."
  - 17 According to the Prime Minister's letter of appointment, "It is the committee's job to examine and formulate recommendations about the desirable size and composition of the defense budget, taking into account the reference scenarios and the response derived from them required from the Ministry of Defense and the IDF." The committee was charged, *inter alia*, with making recommendations about the following topics: establishing a detailed process for formulating and approving the defense budget and formulating a multi-year plan for the IDF; the size of the defense budget and its principal components for each of the next five years; the model for the standing army; salaries and pensions; cost-cutting measures for the next five years; and more. See "The Report of the Committee to Evaluate the Defense Budget," p. 6.
  - 18 For example, an officer with a rank of colonel and a great deal of experience (seven years in combat roles, five years in combat support roles, five years in professional roles, or ten years in staff roles) will be released from the IDF after twenty-seven years of service with a total grant of NIS 1.46 million. See "The Report of the Committee to Evaluate the Defense Budget," p. 68.
  - 19 In general, it appears that the ability to maintain an army service model without a pension is likely to require a sharp rise in salary or severance grants (more than what the committee proposed), or a very risky compromise on the composition of personnel and military capabilities.
  - 20 "The Report of the Committee to Evaluate the Defense Budget," p. 39.

- 21 Ya'alon also said that “the Locker Report is shallow, extremely unbalanced, and completely disconnected from reality.” See Hezi Shternlicht, Zeev Klein, Lilach Shoval, “Locker Report: Shallow, Unbalanced, Completely Disconnected from Reality,” *Israel Hayom*, July 21, 2015, <http://www.israelhayom.co.il/article/299919>.
- 22 According to the report, the full committee met for a total of 160 hours, including only two hours with then-Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Benny Gantz and Deputy Chief of Staff (and current Chief of Staff) General Gadi Eisenkot (Appendix B of the Report of the Committee to Evaluate the Defense Budget). It is hard to believe that the limited time was sufficient to complete both in depth and detail all of the tasks listed in the Prime Minister’s letter of appointment (see above).
- 23 Yaacov Lifshitz, “The Locker Committee: A Preordained Failure,” *BESA Center Perspective Paper* No. 312, October 14, 2015, <http://besacenter.org/perspectives-papers/the-locker-committee-a-preordained-failure/>. In Lifshitz’s opinion, “We cannot seriously expect that a group of external individuals, whose daily work – and in many cases, whose expertise – lies in different fields, can within a limited time frame uncover previously unknown data, or use familiar data to create some new perspective, or analyze an existing perspective and reach meaningful insights that have never occurred to those involved on a day-to-day basis.”
- 24 Barkat, “Finance, Defense Agree Defense Budget.”
- 25 Amiram Barkat and Yuval Azulai, “Pension and Budget Total Unaffected,” *Globes*, November 15-16, 2015.
- 26 President Reuven Rivlin, speech at the opening of the Knesset winter session, [http://www.president.gov.il/English/ThePresident/Speeches/Pages/news\\_1201015\\_01.aspx](http://www.president.gov.il/English/ThePresident/Speeches/Pages/news_1201015_01.aspx).

# Relations between the Jewish Majority and the Arab Minority: Progress toward Integration?

Ephraim Lavie

After years of social and cultural interactions, the Arab-Palestinian community in Israel has come a long way in adapting to life with the Jewish majority. The sector has undergone processes linking it inextricably to the State of Israel in many aspects of life, and the Jewish majority is the main reference group for them.<sup>1</sup> The trend toward integrating Arabs into Israeli society and the Israeli economy continues, despite the crises that often affect the relationship between the two groups for social and economic or national and religious reasons – for example, the IDF’s operations in the Gaza Strip in recent years or the violent confrontation that began in September 2015 over the status quo on the Temple Mount. This essay analyzes the trend in an attempt to understand its robustness.

There is no consensus among Arabs on how they wish to define their status in Israel. Nonetheless, there is broad agreement that they should not give up Israeli citizenship in exchange for some other alternative. Israeli citizenship appears to provide them with hope and with possibilities that are preferable to any other existing model, such as annexation to a future Palestinian state or the Religious Islamic Movement’s idea of establishing an Islamic state.

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Although 65 percent of Arabs in Israel are still employed in manual labor such as construction, agriculture, and other non-professional jobs,<sup>2</sup> Arabs are integrated into the Israeli job market in many branches of commerce, education, and health services. While their numbers in the public sector are still low, more and more Arabs are employed in government ministries, and businesses are gradually beginning to realize the benefits of investing in Arab society.<sup>3</sup> Recent years have seen increasing numbers of Arab engineers recruited by the Israeli hi-tech industry – Muslim, Christian, Druze, and Circassian. The number of young Arabs choosing to study engineering and science has also increased consistently, and a wave of technology entrepreneurship among the Arab population has resulted in several startups.<sup>4</sup>

Arab men and women are involved in culture, theater, movies, television, and sports, sometimes representing Israel in these and other fields internationally, and in recent years, the intercultural dialogue through the arts has expanded.<sup>5</sup> This relates to all forms of joint creativity in the theater, the plastic arts, film-making, music, and dance. These activities serve as agents of social and political change and promote reconciliation, dialogue, and coexistence between Arabs and Jews, which allows the ability to imagine a future of peace.<sup>6</sup> Thus, for example, the joint creative processes in binational theater productions allow for conditions of equality between Arabs and Jews and provide creative artists and actors with public legitimacy to express different approaches and controversial points of view. These include Arab narratives and symbols not commonly found in Israeli political and social discourse, and they enable Arabs to face the dilemmas involved in their integration into Israeli society and the decision to link their fate with that of the country.<sup>7</sup>

In sports, there are a growing number of Arab athletes joining Israeli soccer teams, and more Jews play for Arab teams. The Bnei Sakhnin soccer club, which has made Jewish-Arab coexistence its credo, has become a symbol of integration and legitimacy for Arabs in Israeli sports. Arab athletes on the Israel national soccer team represent Israel abroad.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the Israeli media devotes extensive coverage to Arab soccer teams and players thanks to their growing prominence and professional success. The media tends to have a positive attitude toward the integration of Arabs into sports, stressing its inherent advantages and demonstrating their rejection of racism.

It recognizes, and hence affirms, that violence and chauvinistic politics threaten a sports culture that promotes coexistence.<sup>9</sup>

In Israel, proximity and everyday encounters between Jews and Arabs play a decisive role in the structuring of intercommunal social relations, even beyond that played by state apparatuses. Various types of Jewish-Arab cooperation take place in public spaces where the two groups encounter each other, such as shopping malls and markets, national parks, and beaches. Such places sometimes have features that neutralize national identities, so that encounters create a routine involving work and commercial relations and a social dynamic that humanizes the other.<sup>10</sup> Experience shows that during exceptional times, such as wars or outbreaks of violent conflict, such activities slow down. However, this does not lead to a rift, and economic considerations such as work, making a living, and consumption tip the scales. When the exceptional event ends, there is a rapid return to normalcy.

In many cases, the integration of Arabs into different fields of work has created a situation in which professional values become norms of conduct dictating Arab-Jewish relations. Trust is built between Arabs and Jews working together when they cooperate and help one another in their jobs, without regard to differences of religion or nationality. This is known to occur particularly in Israeli hospitals, where daily reality serves as a model for a society in which there are not only national and religious rifts and tensions, but also mechanisms promoting cohesion and unity.

As for integrating young Arabs into national service, progress has been made in the last decade, despite the Arab leadership's opposition because of the initiative's connection to security. At present, national-civic service is arranged through seven NGOs that connect volunteers with appropriate programs.<sup>11</sup> According to national service records from 2013, since the inception of the Authority for National-Civic Service there has been a steady increase in the number of volunteers: 240 in 2005-2006; 289 in 2006-2007; 628 in 2007-2008; and about 3,600 in 2012-2013. At present there are some 10,000 young Arab graduates of the program. According to figures from the authority, some 90 percent are women, and some 75 percent volunteer in Arab towns and villages close to their homes. Three-quarters of all volunteers are placed in the north, with the rest split fairly evenly between the center

of the country and the south. Ten percent of the volunteers opt for a second year of national service.<sup>12</sup>

University of Haifa sociologist Sammy Smooha concludes that according to data from indexes relating to Jewish-Arab relations, there is a solid foundation for Jewish-Arab coexistence in Israel. As such, most Arabs believe in living together, accept the state within the Green Line as the place where the relationship will be played out, feel that Israel is a good place to live, are committed to democracy as the mechanism for regulating their relations with the state, and agree that civil equality is the foundation for coexistence and an important objective of the state. According to Prof. Smooha, this reality refutes the commonplace public perception and the opinion of most policymakers and university researchers that Israel's Arabs are undergoing radicalization and are on a collision course with the Jews and the state.<sup>13</sup>

Predictably, most Arabs in Israel do not identify with the state and its Jewish symbols – official holidays, the national anthem, the flag, the Star of David. At the same time, most are satisfied with being citizens of the state and with their living conditions in general. They conduct social and political struggles to improve their status and promote their rights in the same way as other citizens, using democratic tools. This is the primary catalyst for their political and social activity; the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is only a secondary motive, and Israel's Arab citizens usually limit themselves to expressions of solidarity with their brethren. This conclusion is supported by the 2015 Alienation Index Survey, which showed a dramatic increase in the percentage of Arabs in Israel who identify with the Israeli flag (55 percent compared to 37 percent in 2014) and a decrease in the percentage who identify with the Palestinian flag, even among Muslims, for whom the figure dropped from 34 percent in 2014 to only 8 percent in 2015.<sup>14</sup>

The fact, then, is that Arabs in Israel have avoided playing an active role in the Palestinian national struggle. During the first and second intifadas, while they expressed sympathy and participated in public relations activities and propaganda, they did not play an active violent role. This has considerable importance in an assessment of their connection to the state and their sense of belonging. Furthermore, patterns of protest by Arab citizens of Israel during violent flare-ups in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in recent years and in the context of their socioeconomic status have been non-violent.

This is particularly striking given that Arab society possesses collective willpower and the potential for mass popular protests, particularly among young people, who have the ability to run decentralized protests, allowing different groups from various movements and locations to cooperate. This is done through use of the internet and social media, which enable them to bridge distances and unite different population groups around specific issues and causes. Arab civil society organizations use the internet in much the same way.

These patterns of protest undermine the authority of the Arab political parties and challenge traditional institutions such as the Arab Higher Monitoring Committee and the National Committee of Heads of Arab Local Councils. Such organizations tend to oppose protests and disturbances, which they fear will disrupt daily life and damage economic interests. Furthermore, the use of new media undermines the media of the established leadership, making it possible to enlist public opinion and lead the public in a way that seems, at least on the face of it, to be more democratic and equal. This protest model has been in evidence on various occasions in recent years. One example is the demonstrations against the Praver Plan in late 2013, when groups of young people without a party affiliation organized protests and recruited other young people from around the country. Another example is the internet petitions circulated by civil society organizations during Operation Protective Edge and the open letters they issued calling for an end to the war, condemning the killing of civilians, and appealing to the UN. A third example is the protests throughout October 2015 in response to the violent confrontations sparked by rumors of a change in the Temple Mount status quo.

According to Prof. Amal Jamal, a political scientist at Tel Aviv University, although protest patterns among Arabs in Israel were influenced by the Arab Spring, their enthusiasm is dampened by a fear of losing the resources and standard of living they have managed to acquire despite the state's discriminatory policies. Jamal notes that they have worked hard to survive in recent decades, meaning that they are especially unwilling to jeopardize their achievements by deviating from the norms of protest for an unclear future and political horizon at a time when the Arab world around them is collapsing.<sup>15</sup>

Therefore, the practical possibility of recruiting large numbers of people for popular protests exists, whether because they oppose the occupation and identify with the population in the West Bank, or because of religious motivations (such as the al-Aqsa issue) or a sense of discrimination by the state. Nonetheless, compared to the events of October 2000, the protests of recent years have been controlled. In most cases the police have shown restraint, as have the protesters; this was also true during the October 2015 protests over the status quo on the Temple Mount. At that time, local and national Arab leaders expressed solidarity with their brethren but acted responsibly and judiciously, calling for a one-day national strike and holding a major rally in Sakhnin, while Joint List Knesset members postponed their visit to the Temple Mount to avoid inflaming passions. The protests by the Arab community appear to reflect situational radicalization.

It is clear that resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will lift a weight from the shoulders of Arabs in Israel. Allegations that they sympathize with and support the PLO and the Palestinian leadership hinder their chances of advancement in Israeli society because they are seen as identifying with the enemy. Their solidarity with their fellow Arabs in East Jerusalem and the areas controlled by the Palestinian Authority, which is manifested at times in demonstrations, protests, and anti-Israel statements on the conflict, hinders their ability to negotiate with the establishment and Jewish society to advance their status.

In general, the state's actions to advance Israeli Arabs' status and integrate them economically have been implemented slowly, and not as part of an overall design to promote fundamental, comprehensive civil equality. Furthermore, against the backdrop of their ongoing struggle for equality, initiatives for cultural and political exclusion of Arabs have multiplied. Demands to weaken the position of Arabs and limit their civil rights have grown more strident among Israeli Jews. This has been manifested, inter alia, in new legislation designed to strengthen and stress the Jewishness of the state and has caused increasing hatred and racism against Arabs. As a result, despite the programs formulated and implemented in the past decade and the resources invested, and despite the equality of Arabs before the law, the Arab community is still excluded and faces discrimination in various ways.



This situation causes a dilemma for Arabs concerning their future and their status in Israel. On the one hand, they have adapted to the Jewish majority after extended social and cultural experience, and are clearly willing to become integrated within the country's social and economic life. On the other hand, they seek to ensure that they will attain full civil equality and that integration will not mean a loss of cultural, ethnic, or national identity.

In conclusion, despite the ongoing national conflict with its ideological and religious baggage and enmity, and despite the lack of full civil equality, relationships between Arabs and Jews are increasing in many areas, and both are leading their daily lives in a common space. These connections are based on mutual interests with economic, social, political, cultural, and psychological aspects, which in turn affect the consciousness of both societies, contributing to mutual recognition and stabilizing relations. This is evident from public opinion polls taken over the years. There is concern that Jewish-Arab relations in Israel could be damaged by several developments: the wave of Palestinian terrorism that started in the fall of 2015, in which a small number of Israeli Arabs participated to show their solidarity; reports of Israeli Arab citizens joining the Islamic State; and the Jewish public's response to these developments. But integration in recent years has become strong, and this crisis most likely will be overcome. Israel's recognition of the centrality of the Arabs' adaptation and integration since the establishment of the state, and the formulation of a long-term policy toward the community, could achieve two goals. One is to make a positive contribution to the Arabs' sense of belonging, of being citizens with full rights and responsibilities, and the other is to deepen assimilation within the society and the economy, without damaging their cultural and communal identity.

## Notes

- 1 Sammy Smooha, *Still Playing by the Rules: Index of Arab-Jewish Relations in Israel 2012* (Jerusalem: University of Haifa and the Israeli Democracy Institute, 2013), pp. 22-23.
- 2 See Meirav Arlosoroff, "Arabs Employed, but only in Agriculture and Construction," *Haaretz*, April 13, 2010.
- 3 See Hemi Peres, "Affirmative Entrepreneurship," *Globes*, April 19, 2010; Kobi Huberman, "The Economic Integration Engine as Part of a New Policy Proposal to Develop Engines for Integrating Arab Citizens in Israel," in *Economic Benefits*

- of Social Inclusion and Arab-Jewish Equality*, ed. Uri Gofer (Abraham Fund Initiatives, September 2008), pp. 25-43.
- 4 See the current breakdown in *Ma'antak*, a special supplement to promote the employment of Arabs in the hi-tech sector, *Haaretz* Commercial Department, September 2015.
  - 5 See information on joint Jewish-Arab film projects, such as *The Boys of Jisr*, a film depicting life in the village of Jisr a-Zarka, <http://arts.tau.ac.il/news/Jisrboys>. See also the work of artists Osnat Bar-Or and Manar Zoabi, which address loaded and controversial topics in Jewish-Arab relations through visual means to engender public discussion and effect social change. "A New Course at the University of Haifa: An Interview with Osnat Bar-Or and Manar Zoabi," *Mabat: Awareness in a Multicultural Society*, <http://goo.gl/qnbbdR>.
  - 6 From a study by Lee Perlman on the subject, "Acting Side by Side on the Israeli Stage: Jewish-Palestinian Theatre Collaboration in Israel from 2000-2010" (Ph.D. dissertation abstract, Tel Aviv University, November 2011). The study deals with the social, cultural, and political implications of joint theater productions by Jews and Arabs since the outbreak of the al-Aqsa intifada and the events of October 2000.
  - 7 According to Prof. Dan Orian's view that the theater is "a public stage representing reality and playing a role in its shaping," such productions contribute to the creation of a multiracial society. *Ibid.*
  - 8 Chen Kertcher, *Between Integration and Exclusion: The Reflection of Arabs in the Hebrew-Language Sports Media during Peacetime and Security Crises* (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research, 2015).
  - 9 *Ibid.* See also Muhammad Hasdiya, "The History of Arab Players," *People in Israel: Guide to Israeli Society*, Shmuel Ne'eman Institute, October 15, 2013, <http://www.peopleil.org/details.aspx?itemID=30301>; Yoram Meltzer, "The World at Turf Height," *Panim: A Journal of Culture, Society, and Education* 16 (March 2001), <http://lib.cet.ac.il/pages/item.asp?item=8685>.
  - 10 Researcher Erez Marantz, who pointed out an increased rate of workforce participation and mall visits by Arab women, found that the mall and the everyday contacts that take place there have an effect that contributes to equality. He cites one Arab woman as saying, "Here, we're all equal – Arabs, Jews, Russians. We're all customers here. We're equal because we all have the same money. I know many Jewish store managers by name and we exchange greetings." See Erez Marantz et al., "Israeli-Palestinian Women in the Retail Industry: Social Boundaries and Job Search Techniques," in *Palestinians in the Israeli Labor Market: A Multi-disciplinary Approach*, eds. Nabil Khattab and Sami Miaari (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 146.

- 11 Nadia Hilou and Idan Haim, "Civilian Service in Israel's Arab Society," *Strategic Assessment* 17, no. 1 (2014): 57-68, [http://www.inss.org.il/uploadImages/systemFiles/Hilou%20and%20Haim\\_adkan17\\_1ENG4.pdf](http://www.inss.org.il/uploadImages/systemFiles/Hilou%20and%20Haim_adkan17_1ENG4.pdf).
- 12 Ahmad Hatib and Ilan Biton, *National Civic Service in Israel: Survey and Analysis* (Jerusalem: Knesset Research and Information Center, 2011), <http://www.knesset.gov.il/mmm/data/pdf/m03118.pdf>.
- 13 Sammy Smooha, *The Lost Decade in Israel's Arab-Jewish Relations: Survey of Index Findings 2003-2009* (Haifa: University of Haifa, 2010).
- 14 See the findings of the 2015 Jewish-Arab Alienation Index Survey conducted by Achva College and published on February 22, 2015.
- 15 Amal Jamal, "The Fluidity of the Palestinian Political Lexicon in Israel in the Shadow of the Arab Spring," *Eretz Acheret* 69 (May 2014), <http://goo.gl/g93wA9>.



# Israel's Emergency Management Challenges

Alex Altshuler

The stabbing and car-ramming terrorist attacks that started in the fall of 2015 were not one of the main scenarios for which Israel's complex emergency management system had prepared or drilled. Since the Second Lebanon War in 2006, the institutions charged with preparing for emergencies have focused most of their efforts on different scenarios involving missiles and rockets. Indeed, Israel has made significant progress in preparedness for such attacks, but the stabbings and car-rammings highlight the complexity and multidimensionality of emergency preparedness. This interdisciplinary and inter-organizational mission requires ongoing cooperation among all parties involved; comprehensive planning with built-in flexibility; intensive drilling of various scenarios; and conceptual and operational preparedness for unexpected, unfamiliar, and changing situations. Meeting this challenge is difficult, but it is possible and critically important in the current situation.

## **Israel's Emergency Management System: Current Structural and Inter-Organizational Characteristics**

The Ministries of Defense and Public Security are charged with responsibility for the emergency management system. Each of them faces challenges, both internally and in creating synergy and maintaining coordination between them. As a result, despite the efforts of both, there are still gaps impeding their ability to take the next step required to defend Israel's home front.

On June 1, 2014, the government of Israel adopted two decisions, 1661 and 1662. These eliminated the Ministry of Home Front Defense, placed

overall responsibility for emergency preparedness on the Defense Minister, and instructed the Ministries of Defense and Public Security to discuss the division of responsibility and authority between them.<sup>1</sup> To date, this process has not been completed, nor has it resulted in a clear and comprehensive arrangement, yet it is extremely important that this happen in the very near future. A whole year elapsed before the Defense Ministry advertised the position of National Emergency Management Authority director (who plays a key role in the defense establishment's emergency preparedness, together with the commander of the IDF's Home Front Command),<sup>2</sup> and it is important that an appointment has been made. One can list various possible reasons for the delays in coordination between the Ministries of Defense and Public Security, including Operation Protective Edge, the March 2015 Knesset elections and the attendant political instability, and the recent spate of stabbings and car-rammings. However, the result is inadequate to meet Israel's emergency management challenges.

The situation at the Ministry of Public Security is also complex. The drawn-out, obstacle-strewn path to appointing a chief of police after Commissioner Yohanan Danino's retirement did not help achieve the peace and quiet needed to formulate and assimilate the multidimensional, integrative improvements necessary for Israel's emergency management system, even though the Israel Police are admirably handling the security challenges posed by the current wave of terrorism.

### **The Current Opportunity for a Strategic Leap Forward in Emergency Preparedness**

Given the many upheavals and changes in Israel's emergency management system in recent years, it would appear that the time is ripe to promote the long-awaited strategic change, based on the two following facts. The first is that following the elimination of the Ministry of Home Front Defense it is now amply clear that the leading government ministries on the emergency management issue are Defense and Public Security. The second is that three key officials are new to their positions: the Commander of the Home Front Command, the Director of the National Emergency Management Authority, and the Police Commissioner. In an optimal scenario, these two facts together could create an opportunity to introduce significant reforms and take a real

strategic leap. One of the key prerequisites for a significant improvement in Israel's emergency preparedness is integrated, coordinated, and continuous inter-organizational work. The country's complex emergency management system can and must function much more harmoniously and with greater integration than in the past, without the frequent organizational shocks that have greatly impeded continuity of functioning. In addition, emergency management issues should be significantly prioritized in Israel's national security array to meet the multiple multi-faceted challenges.

### ***Legal Aspects***

One of the major challenges that must be faced without delay involves the legal and regulatory foundation for Israel's emergency management system. A key law on this subject is the Civil Defense Law, which was passed in 1951 when the situation was very different and addressed only security-related emergencies. Since the Second Lebanon War in 2006, many attempts have been made to pass the Emergency Management Law, which would provide a comprehensive and updated response to the issue. However, for a combination of political, organizational, and inter-organizational reasons, these efforts have so far failed. Comprehensive, up-to-date regulation and legislation, which may have to consist of several laws touching on different aspects of the emergency management cycle, are crucial for strategic improvement of emergency preparedness in Israel.

### ***Stabbings and Car-Ramming Terror Attacks in 2015***

The stabbing and car-ramming attacks of fall 2015 are a stark reminder that Israel's civilian front could face many, varied, and possibly unpredictable situations. It is thus crucial that the institutions charged with defending the home front prepare concurrently for a large range of possible scenarios and strive constantly for conceptual and operational flexibility and innovation. Emergencies are dynamic and multidimensional. It is therefore extremely important to challenge conventions and to ask questions that demand a reexamination of existing patterns of thinking, conventions, and methods of action that may suit one situation but not another. This pursuit of innovation, flexibility, and critical examination of reality requires ongoing effort, but it provides significant added value for emergency organizations that do it

successfully.<sup>3</sup> To adopt such an approach, Israel's emergency management organizations must promote and develop dedicated units charged with the issues outlined above to serve as a sort of parallel to the "devil's advocate" function in the IDF Intelligence Branch. In addition, there must be close inter-organizational cooperation in the emergency management system.

The current wave of terrorism is increasing the public's anxiety and creating an atmosphere of tension. In such a situation, it is difficult to remain resilient not only functionally, but also morally. Yet these are the very situations that test communities, societies, and nations. It is very important that Israeli society maintain its moral compass and basic values when facing this serious violence. In the face of the current wave of violence, Israelis have shown extraordinary courage, heroism, and solidarity. At the same time, there have been manifestations of unacceptable phenomena, such as racism, intolerance, and cruelty. It is important that Israeli society continue to condemn loudly and clearly any non-normative behavior or bellicose atmosphere. The struggle against terrorism is long and painful, and maintaining high moral standards is critical for coping with it.

### ***Preparedness for Missile and Rocket Attacks***

Israel has made impressive strides in its response to missile and rocket attacks, which became a major issue after the Second Lebanon War. This can be seen particularly in the technological aspects of early active defense: the most prominent evidence is the development of the Iron Dome and the ongoing enhancements to the system. Israel's success in this area has saved lives, provided the political leadership with enhanced executive flexibility, and prevented significant economic damage. The key challenge now in connection with Iron Dome is to expand the number of batteries so as to provide concurrent protection to civilians, IDF facilities, and critical infrastructures. The investment in Iron Dome has clearly proved to be effective, and should be increased to provide a comprehensive response to the wide range of needs. The resources are limited and must be allocated based on agreed (by the National Security Cabinet and the relevant executive agencies) priorities. Historically, civil defense issues were a low priority and received insufficient funding from the defense establishment. In 2006, the Meridor Commission, charged with formulating Israel's national security



policy, recommended that civil defense be made a high-priority issue, given the change in the threats Israel faces. In this context, it would be wise to consider increasing investment in deployment of Iron Dome as part of the current defense budget. The significant aid extended by the United States is extremely useful, but it cannot serve as a substitute for Israel's allocating the resources needed. The expected deployment of David's Sling in 2016 will mean another active defense tool at Israel's disposal.<sup>4</sup> Development of the Iron Beam system, which is designed to intercept mortar bombs and short-range rockets not within Iron Dome's range, is an important advance.<sup>5</sup> Completion of development and operational deployment of Iron Beam will prove very beneficial to residents of the communities adjacent to the Gaza Strip, who have suffered from shelling since 2000 and have yet to receive a technological solution to short-range rockets and mortar bombs. For them, Iron Beam may be a lifesaver, and could help increase the chances of continuity of functioning even in emergencies, as occurred in other regions of the country.

Another important tool that may help people to function in emergencies is rocket and missile early warning systems that allow civilians to enter secure spaces during the brief window available. In recent years, the Home Front Command has devoted much effort to issuing more focused and specific warnings than in the past while increasing the number of warning zones in the country. As part of this plan, zones have been added in the north of Israel. Moreover, an effort is being made to transmit warnings in as many formats as possible, and Israelis can now tune in to the Home Front's silent radio station and receive alerts via their computer speakers.<sup>6</sup> All of these are significant, low-cost measures that contribute greatly to public resilience.

## **The Elephant in the Room: Preparedness for a Major Earthquake**

Traditionally, most of Israel's attention to emergencies has been focused on security threats and war. While security risks are obvious, complex, and dynamic, it is important to remember that Israel could face large-scale emergencies of other types and that it should prepare for them conceptually and operationally. The most prominent risk Israel faces, other than war, is a major earthquake. The earthquakes that struck Nepal in the spring of 2015

highlighted the possibility that such natural disasters could occur in Israel, as well as the nation's level of preparedness to deal with such a complex and multidimensional challenge. It appears that Israel is not yet sufficiently prepared for an earthquake with mass casualties, material destruction, infrastructural damage, and disruption of daily life for the lay citizens.

It is important to recognize that a major earthquake could hit Israel in the near future. In the last few centuries, such earthquakes struck the area every eighty to one hundred years, and the last destructive earthquake took place in 1927 – eighty-eight years ago. In 1995, an earthquake hit the city of Eilat in southern Israel, but the damage was slight and neither the public nor decision-makers experienced the event as traumatic. The last reminder of the very real risk Israel faces came not long ago, on June 27, 2015, with an earthquake measuring 5.2M, without casualties or damage. But given the possible damage from such an event, it is important to understand that a major earthquake constitutes a strategic challenge for the country that should be addressed in a comprehensive and integrated manner.

While it is currently impossible to predict the precise timing of an earthquake, or the exact strength and location, there is some good news: most of the damage a major earthquake could cause can be significantly reduced, with a potential mega-disaster turned into a containable emergency.

For years, and more extensively since 1999, the Inter-Ministerial Steering Committee for Earthquake Preparedness, the Home Front Command, all government ministries, and infrastructure institutions have engaged in a variety of activities designed to improve preparedness for a major earthquake. Nevertheless, the remaining disparities between the actual level of preparedness and the scope and impact of the challenge are very large. They include legislation and regulation, the level of public awareness and knowledge, professional training, awareness of thousands of buildings of significant proportion that cannot withstand a major earthquake, the warning systems, and communal resilience. The following policy measures are intended to close the gap to provide a strategic, comprehensive, and effective response to a major earthquake:

- a. Legislation of the Law on Earthquake Preparedness, which would define areas of responsibility during the preparatory stages, disaster response,

and short-term and long-term recovery, from the individual to the national level.

- b. Development and implementation of the National Building Reinforcement Program with the goal of reinforcing all relevant public and residential buildings in Israel over the next decade, giving clear priority to Israel's periphery and to earthquake-prone areas.
- c. Acceleration of deployment of a national warning system so that when an earthquake occurs, the system will provide with precious extra seconds to take lifesaving action.
- d. Increase of the involvement of Arabs and ultra-Orthodox Jews in search-and-rescue units, which are greatly in need of manpower, as part of their civilian service (this voluntary service options exists for those groups in the Israeli society who are not obliged to serve in the Israeli army).
- e. Inclusion of the earthquake preparedness component in the various programs designed to enhance community resilience in Israel.

## Conclusion

While Israel has come a long way in preparedness for war-related and other emergencies, it has not yet taken a strategic leap forward. There is a significant gap between potential threats and the current response with security-related situations, and an even greater gap with other types of emergencies, such as a major earthquake. Given the variety of threats, it is strategically essential for Israel to promote conceptual, executive, legislative, and budgetary changes so that it is adequately prepared for a variety of emergency situations.

## Notes

- 1 Government Decision 1661 and Government Decision 1662 of June 1, 2014, <http://www.pmo.gov.il/secretary/govdecisions/2014/pages/dec1661.aspx>, and <http://www.pmo.gov.il/Secretary/GovDecisions/2014/Pages/dec1662.aspx>.
- 2 Civil Service Commission Tender for Filling the Position of National Emergency Management Authority Director by August 13, 2015, <http://www.csc.gov.il/Tenders/Jobs/Pages/372-2015.aspx>.
- 3 See, among others, Herman B. Leonard and Arnold M. Howitt, "Acting in Time against Disaster: A Comprehensive Risk Management Framework," in *Learning from Catastrophes: Strategies for Reaction and Response*, eds. Howard

- Kunreuther and Michael Useem (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Wharton School Publishing, 2010), pp. 18-41.
- 4 Yohai Ofer, "An Addition to Iron Dome: Iron Beam Operational," *NRG*, April 1, 2015, <http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART2/687/018.html>.
  - 5 Amir Buhbut, "The Laser System that Will Intercept Very Short-Range Rockets," *Walla! News*, January 19, 2014, <http://news.walla.co.il/item/2713120>.
  - 6 Matan Hetzroni, "The IDF Changes Its Warning System in the North," *Mako*, November 15, 2015, [http://www.mako.co.il/news-military/security-q4\\_2015/Article-c88fea8a94a0151004.htm](http://www.mako.co.il/news-military/security-q4_2015/Article-c88fea8a94a0151004.htm).

# Conclusion

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Five Years Back and Five Years Forward:  
Israel's Strategic Environment in 2011-2015 and  
Policy Recommendations for 2016-2020

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# Five Years Back and Five Years Forward: Israel's Strategic Environment in 2011-2015 and Policy Recommendations for 2016-2020

Amos Yadlin

## **January 2016: Situation Assessment**

With December 2015 marking five years since the outbreak of the “Arab Spring,” a current assessment of Israel’s strategic situation must be based on the perspective of this period. What follows are twelve observations regarding recent political and security developments that impact on Israel’s national security and require the formulation of an overarching strategy for foreign policy and security policy for the coming five years.

### ***1. The weakening of key Arab states, to the point of dissolution***

The regional upheaval that began in 2011 is far from over, and it appears that it will be many years before the region is once again stable. Many Arab states, suffer from political and economic instability, and in five of these states instability has caused the states to dissolve along ethnic, religious, national, and tribal lines, to the point of civil war. Alongside – and in some cases instead of – the states that existed in 2011 are entities and forces whose identities are not based primarily on the nation and the state. The Middle East has become a complex system of armed and violent identity politics with many actors, and an arena of proxy wars between regional powers. In some instances, the states have also become spheres of direct intervention by global powers. Civil wars are underway in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Sudan,

and Libya, with the wars in the former two countries involving the direct intervention of regional and global powers. It is hard to imagine that these states will be able to function as unified entities in the future. In some, the division may become a permanent, unstable reality, whereas in others, if there is insistence on maintaining previous state borders and identities, weak federal frameworks could come into being. To a great extent, the weakness and disintegration of these states helps explain a number of developments described below.

## ***2. The Islamic State (ISIS), a central force shaping the Middle East***

In 2014, the Islamic State burst into public consciousness as a Salafi jihadist group that split off from al-Qaeda and conquered extensive territory in Syria and Iraq. The group harbors the audacious aspiration of destroying the existing regional order and, in the future, the global order as well. Characterized by exceptional brutality, it has set out to establish a new territorial political unit in the form of a caliphate. The state vacuum in Syria enabled ISIS to consolidate its power in Syrian territory, seize control of large parts of Syria and northwestern Iraq, and announce the establishment of the “Islamic State.” Through these actions, ISIS succeeded in challenging regional and international actors and in further complicating the fabric of rivalries in the Middle East and beyond. Jihadist terrorist movements in the Sinai Peninsula, Libya, Nigeria, and Afghanistan have sworn allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of the Islamic State, and have defined themselves as Islamic State provinces.

Over the past year, the Islamic State has proven capable of effectively exploiting the attraction of its ideology in Muslim societies throughout the world, and the organization enjoys a steady flow of volunteers joining the fighting on Syrian and Iraqi soil. Subsequently, the “foreign forces” disperse throughout the world with the capability to establish sleeper cells in their countries of origin. By late 2015, however, the Islamic State appears to have been halted on almost all fronts where it was engaged in combat, and has retreated in Iraq and Syria. At the same time, the organization has proven its ability to adapt, enabling it to use sleeper cells and local groups to carry out terrorist attacks against the countries in the region and the world powers that it perceives have banded together to fight it. Thus far, the Islamic State has



carried out terrorist attacks in Turkey and France and shot down a Russian plane over the Sinai Peninsula.

As a result of the organization's growing visibility and its violent actions around the world, many countries, including the United States, Russia, and European states, have increased their pressure on the Islamic State, causing the group to lose territory and sources of income and suffer systematic injury to its chain of command. Despite the lack of desire on the part of the world powers to send ground forces to contend with the Islamic State, the airstrikes, the new capabilities demonstrated by the Iraqi army in Ramadi, and the pressure created by the Russian-Iranian coalition on the ground in Syria suggest that in the end, the Islamic State will lose its territorial base. However, the organization's ideological attraction and the political reality in Iraq and Syria – in which Sunnis feel excluded from state institutions, economically oppressed, and frustrated – will continue to ensure both a broad base of support for the Islamic State and much potential for the recruitment of new operatives. Moreover, even without a territorial base, the organization will presumably maintain the means to reestablish itself at a later point in time; in other words, in the foreseeable future, the Islamic State stands to remain an important actor both inside and outside the Middle East.

### ***3. The superpowers are once again engaged in military action in the Middle East, but are taking care to avoid “boots on the ground.”***

While at the end of the twentieth century the world boasted only one superpower, recent years have given rise to a reality of multiple powers, albeit powers with a range of economic and military strengths. The different policies and leaderships of the world powers have resulted in different types of intervention in the Middle East, which depart in character from the Cold War of the last century. Thus, the United States and Russia can find themselves together on one side of the divide against the Islamic State, but on opposing sides on the question of the continuation of the Assad regime. The United States, which began retreating from direct military involvement in Iraq early in the decade, was forced to return to the region to lead a coalition against the Islamic State. Its return, however, lacked a coherent strategy supported by commitment and resources and has therefore achieved only limited success.

The terrorist attacks in Paris in November 2015 increased the motivation of European countries to join the military activity in the Middle East, although their limited military capabilities mean that increased activity will not change the balance of power. After a year and a half during which this coalition was able to achieve only a partial Islamic State retreat, Russia returned to the Middle East with more decisive military effort that has included the deployment of Russian air power and special forces in Syria and large scale airstrikes. The Russians too, however, have not dispatched ground forces and are relying primarily on the Syrian army, Shiite militias, Iranian forces, and Hezbollah, which despite the Russian air support have failed to bring about a decisive change in the balance between the fighting forces in Syria. Moreover, the military intervention of the foreign powers in this complex environment, with the large number of actors involved, has resulted in an unstable setting, in which tactical incidents can escalate into unwanted strategic confrontations (for example, another Turkish downing of a Russian plane could lead to a confrontation between Russia and NATO).

This substantial Russian involvement transcends the borders of the region and reflects a global Russian perspective based on its desire to resume its role as a world power, as well as its clash with Europe and the United States on the issues of the Crimean Peninsula, Ukraine, NATO's eastward expansion, and the deployment of missile defense systems in Europe. From an Israeli perspective, the Russian-Iranian-Syrian coalition's role in strengthening the radical anti-Israel axis is problematic. Avoiding friction with Russia and coordinating with Russia regarding Israeli activity in Syria are important aims, but they must not be allowed to overshadow the overall negative trend of strengthening Iran and Hezbollah.

#### ***4. Following the JCPOA, Israel stands alone in face of an agreement that is problematic but that buys it time.***

After a decade of slow but determined Iranian progress toward the nuclear threshold, enabling it to produce enough fissile material for one nuclear bomb within two months, the Iranian progress was halted (by the interim agreement of November 2013) and pushed back (by a final agreement with the world powers, signed in July 2015) to a point where it will take it one year to produce enough fissile material for a first bomb. The Joint Comprehensive

Plan of Action (JCPOA), the agreement signed between Iran and the P5+1, is extremely problematic, particularly in the long term (10-15 years), when Iran will receive legitimacy for a broad nuclear program enabling it to break out or sneak out toward a bomb within a minimal timeframe. On this basis, however, the agreement buys Israel time to develop clandestine as well as overt thwarting capabilities for the long term.

The agreement also aggravates dangers outside the nuclear realm. The lifting of sanctions on Iran will place at its disposal substantial financial resources that it can utilize to support terrorist activity, subversion, and conventional military buildup. This buildup can be expected to include the acquisition of advanced weapon systems from Russia and China, and the continued development of Iran's own local weapons industry. However, the nuclear agreement also has positive aspects, and Israel would do well to take advantage of them. In addition, the agreement raises concerns among the United States' traditional allies in the region (Israel, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Egypt) that Washington is distancing itself from them and pivoting toward Iran at their expense. This fear has not been realized thus far, but the countries in question will continue to be suspicious toward the US. It will be necessary to follow the increasing number of civilian nuclear programs emerging in Arab countries, which may be a response to the Iranian nuclear program and an attempt to develop an infrastructure capable of facilitating transition to military programs in the future.

***5. Israel and the pragmatic Sunni world (Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf states) share common interests.***

Both sides regard a nuclearizing Shiite Iran, which aspires for regional hegemony, and radical Sunni terrorist groups, led by the Islamic State, as significant dangers to their national security and their very existence. The peaceful relations and coordination on security issues with the states with which Israel signed peace treaties have passed the test of the regional upheaval and have grown stronger in light of the multiple mutual interests of the parties involved. Relations with the other Sunni countries in the region are developing via covert channels. Still, the lack of progress in the Palestinian track makes it difficult to transition to more intensive, not to mention open cooperation.

***6. Another round of negotiations with the Palestinians regarding a final status agreement has failed. On the ground there is no vacuum, but rather a third intifada of stabbings and car-rammings.***

Since the failure of the negotiations mediated by Secretary of State John Kerry, Israel and the Palestinians have been completely disconnected from one another. The Palestinian strategies of military confrontation, led by Hamas in Gaza, and political struggle in the international arena have failed to yield the Palestinians any concrete progress toward their national goals. Israel, which has adhered to the status quo and hoped to manage the conflict with low costs, has discovered that it is actually being managed by the conflict and has found itself facing an intifada waged on a low flame that differs from those that preceded it. The current uprising is not one of organized terrorism, but rather of isolated initiatives motivated by a sense of despair, frustration with the leadership, and vengeance, which together create a receptive foundation for incitement. These individuals are willing to embark on killing sprees using knives and vehicles. Thus far, this intifada has shown almost no escalation to use of firearms or mass suicide attacks, but it also shows no sign of letting up. As a result, in managing the conflict Israel is paying an increasingly high price in human lives, damage to tourism and the economy, and the ongoing erosion of the country's image around the world. Hamas is trying to exploit this fragile situation by initiating suicide attacks. It has thus far been unsuccessful, primarily due to Israel's ability, with the assistance of the security services of the Palestinian Authority, to dismantle Hamas's terrorist infrastructure in the West Bank.

***7. Additional deterioration in Israel's international standing, especially in Europe and the United States***

Israel's political and moral standing around the world has been steadily eroded by a number of factors, including the personal and ideological confrontation between the Obama-led administration and the government of Prime Minister Netanyahu; the blaming of Israel for the failure of the peace process; disagreements on the issue of the settlements; the clash in Gaza (which resulted in large numbers of civilian casualties); and the perception of Israel as the stronger and less just party. The Europeans'

decision to limit research grants to institutions within the Green Line and the EU recommendation to mark Israeli products manufactured beyond the Green Line are initial manifestations of a problem that, if not effectively addressed, could cause Israel to descend to the status of a pariah state. The transformation of the discourse of boycott into a legitimate discourse in the international arena is another aspect of the same problem. Although BDS has had only limited success thus far, the danger of the boycott's expansion from the non-government organizational world to the heart of the institutionalized West, and its spread to international institutions, should set off a warning light in Jerusalem.

***8. Internal developments in Israel are threatening its resilience and have a negative impact on its international standing.***

Israel is currently witnessing increasing internal division and factionalism that could eat away at national solidarity and resilience. Causes of this dynamic include articulations of extremism from the right and left wings, Jewish terrorism, displays of racism that are sometimes violent (as in the “price tag” campaign and the murders of Palestinian teenager Mohammed Abu Khdeir and the Dawabsheh family in Duma), controversial legislative efforts, and leftist elements joining the incitement campaign against the Israel. These factors likewise have a detrimental effect on Israel's international standing, as at least in the West, Israel's image as a Western democratic country that respects civil rights and represents fundamental values of Judeo-Christian civilization is the basis of support for Israel.

***9. The changes in the energy market are primarily positive developments for Israel that weaken its enemies and their ability to fund military buildup, terrorism, and instruments of political leverage.***

The drop in the price of oil has mixed implications for Israel. As an importer of oil, Israel benefits from the drop in prices. This development also represents a contribution to the world economy, freeing it from the burden of high energy prices, and in this way also represents an indirect contribution to the Israeli economy by stimulating the markets. Israel's main enemy, Iran, is weakened, and in turn, its ability to support subversion, terrorism, and the building of a

military force declines. Now, the Arab “oil weapon” cannot be used against Israel and its allies. At the same time, however, the price of oil could drop so low as to threaten the economic and financial stability of countries in the region and some major economic and industrial centers. Within all of this, the threat to the stability of Saudi Arabia and the deepening poverty and economic stagnation in the Middle East are problematic offshoots of the drop in oil prices. From Israel’s perspective, the production of Israeli gas in the Mediterranean helps strengthen its strategic standing and energy independence. At the same time, Israel’s ability to use the export of gas to countries in the Middle East as a tool for pursuing its strategic goals is not a foregone conclusion, due both to internal constraints and to the saturation of the world gas market.

***10. The threat to Israel is increasingly diverse and multidimensional.***

If the source of the military threat once lay in the capabilities of rival state conventional armies, the threat today is hybrid, based primarily on a combination of multidimensional terrorism and guerilla warfare using the tools of regular armies. In addition, Israel also faces soft threats such as cyber, media, and legal warfare aimed at the delegitimization and boycott of the state. Along with these new threats, the traditional military threats have not disappeared and, like Iran, hybrid terrorist groups are arming themselves with precision long range advanced weaponry that in various scenarios may be used against Israel. The IDF must take action to provide effective solutions for these complex integrated threats.

***11. A new source of power and information: the social networks***

Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, WhatsApp, and other networks have become the largest community in the Middle East. Today, more than 90 million Arabs, representing approximately 35 percent of the overall population of the Arab Middle East, use social networks. Users of these networks are active 24 hours a day, seven days a week. In a world in which knowledge is power, the social networks have broken the monopoly on knowledge and have become the world’s largest information platform, making knowledge accessible to all seekers, free of charge. The architecture of the internet

and the ability to open new pages contributes to the inability of the ruling, intellectual, and security elite to control the content and knowledge available to the public. Moreover, the social networks are the only democratic and egalitarian platforms in the Middle East through which it is possible to see and hear the hopes and desires of the young generation, women, and minorities, who constitute the majority of the population of the region. However, despite their accounting for the majority of the population, their voice is otherwise not heard and has no political representation. The social networks are the only place with no geographical boundaries, and as a result ideas can no longer be censored or buried. The war against the Islamic State, the operation in Gaza, and the recent wave of terrorist stabbings and vehicle attacks highlight the fact that while it is possible to kill terrorists and destroy political infrastructures, no one thus far has been able to “kill” the internet and the social networks. For this reason, sieges, walls, and fences are also unable to stop the flow of ideas virally emerging from behind the closed borders. The web has eclipsed the radio and the mosque in terms of its ability to motivate groups of people to engage in activity and to band together. It is the ultimate tool for indoctrinating large populations and today constitutes the most influential force in shaping public opinion in the Middle East and elsewhere.

***12. Israel is militarily strong, has witnessed a decline in the direct military threat it faces, and is able to avoid large scale conflicts and wars.***

Despite the nearby civil wars, the regional instability, the deployment of terrorist groups on its borders, and clashes in Gaza approximately every two years, Israel has successfully avoided being drawn into a large scale war. Its refraining from attacking Iran, its policy of non-intervention in Syria, its stable peace with Egypt and Jordan, and the deterring image of its military capabilities have enabled continued economic growth and strategic stability. In the meantime, the conventional threat posed by the regular armies of the neighboring countries has all but vanished. Israel now must focus on generating effective solutions for dealing with the hybrid semi-state groups that possess advanced terrorist and guerilla capabilities, most notably the use of rockets and missiles. Israel remains the strongest



and most technologically advanced army in the Middle East and possesses extremely high quality offensive and defensive capabilities. The Israeli public continues to hold high expectations of the IDF, requiring it all the while to increase its substantial qualitative edge over its potential rivals with defensive and offensive capabilities on a number of geographic fronts, on the home front, and vis-à-vis a variety of threats. The change in the map of threats also implies that the primary campaign is the “campaign between wars,” whose importance has increased relative to preparation for a future war with attributes that are still unknown.

## **Looking Ahead**

With these observations in mind, the Israeli political and military leadership must formulate an updated strategy for the next five years. Both in the international arena, which is undergoing drastic changes, and in the region itself, which is fraught with uncertainty and problematic developments, it is ostensibly logical to pursue a policy that strives to freeze processes and decisions until a clearer overall understanding of the state of affairs is achieved. This has been Israel’s policy since the outset of the Arab Spring, when the Israeli government strategically chose the status quo and viewed itself as a “villa in the jungle” that could and should disengage from its surroundings. After five years of regional upheaval, with unstable outgrowths that will persist for many years to come, the primary contours of the change can be identified, and a comprehensive, multidimensional, and proactive policy can be formulated, which will contend more effectively with the up-to-date threats facing Israel and identify and leverage the opportunities created by ensuing developments. What follows are twelve recommendations, including one final statement regarding the overall policy that Israel would do well to adopt under the current circumstances.

### ***1. The Iranian nuclear threat may no longer be on the immediate agenda, but it nonetheless constitutes a potential future existential threat to Israel.***

Israel must prevent the nuclear arming of the extremist Iranian regime that calls for the destruction of Israel. The extended timeout, during which Iran’s nuclear program has been frozen to a point that takes it one year to produce



a bomb, provides Israel with ample room to plan five, and perhaps even ten years into the future. Israel must have a plan that will enable it to contend with the different possible scenarios, including violation of the agreement, its annulment, or an overt or clandestine Iranian breakout toward a bomb. Israel must make preparations to ensure that it makes the best possible use of the “JCPOA timeout” by building new and reinforced capabilities for dealing with Iran and all dimensions of its activity.

***2. Israel must initiate parallel agreements with the United States that will enable the two allies to remain coordinated on the Iranian issue.***

Israel was not party to the nuclear agreement, and therefore should reach understandings and agreements with the United States on several relevant critical issues. It is important to agree on a common response to violations of the nuclear agreement; the improvement of intelligence coverage vis-à-vis Iran; the manner of contending with the non-nuclear aspects of Iranian activity in the region, such as terrorism and subversion; an enhanced security package to Israel; and retention of its qualitative advantage. It is also important to establish a strategic review forum that will meet regularly to discuss developments regarding Iranian activity and coordinate activity vis-à-vis Iran. Such a review committee would enable the countries to contend with the continuation of malevolent Iranian activity in the region and find a way to deal with the Iranian nuclear program, even after the lifting of many of the restrictions in 10-15 years. At the same time, it should be able to assess whether a process of internal reform is underway in Iran and whether there has been a positive change in its conduct.

***3. The major strategy for weakening Iran lies in Syria.***

Syria is Iran’s corridor to the Arab world and the channel through which it strengthens and maintains contact with Hezbollah and Palestinian extremist groups. The weakening and ousting of the Assad regime is a clear Israeli interest, as only this can level a severe blow to Iran and Hezbollah. Israel must determine how to support efforts that will end with the Assad regime not playing a dominant role in Syria, while at the same time refraining from strengthening extremist Sunni factions and, most prominently, the Islamic

State. From Israel's perspective, these two negative forces can be dealt with sequentially, with a continuous reexamination of their correct prioritization. To achieve these goals, Israel must develop more creative and active tools through cooperative efforts with strong global allies such as the United States and Europe, as well as with Turkey and Saudi Arabia, which are also interested in ejecting Iran from Syria and replacing the Assad regime.

***4. Israel must prepare itself militarily and politically for the possibility that Syria will not resume functioning as a unitary state and that the civil war will continue for many years.***

Israel must ensure that the forces of the radical axis are weakened as much as possible in the future Syria and are removed from the Golan Heights to the greatest extent possible. If Syria is divided, the Syrian elements with which Israel can cooperate include the more moderate Sunni organizations and the states supporting them, such as Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf states, Jordan, and Turkey. Israel must continuously assess whether the Saudis and the Turks are truly supporting moderate Sunni elements or whether they are repeating the mistakes of the past by supporting radical elements that will later join the Islamic State or al-Qaeda. In any event, Israel must try to design an updated security plan for the Golan Heights, whether as an extension of the already existing separation of forces agreement, or under different rules of operation and deterrence vis-à-vis the forces that will establish themselves in the Syrian Golan Heights.

***5. Israel must prepare itself for a full scale military conflict with Hezbollah.***

The JCPOA has frozen the Iranian nuclear threat for a number of years, and the armies currently on Israel's borders are either at peace with Israel or enervated by exhausting civil wars. Israel's primary military threat at the present time is posed by Hezbollah. This organization continues its buildup with offensive and defensive weaponry produced by Iran, Russia, and Syria. The range of the rockets and missiles at its disposal cover the full territory of Israel, and their precision and lethality continue to increase. Hezbollah is even developing an offensive capability to seize control of some Israeli territory. Israel must make sure that it possesses effective offensive and

defensive responses that are both deterring and decisive against Hezbollah. In the event of such a conflict, Israel must relate to Hezbollah and Lebanon together, as a single state entity attacking Israel, and must strike at targets of national infrastructure in Lebanon as part of an overall campaign.

***6. Israel must embark upon self-initiated, independent measures in the Palestinian arena.***

Israel must present a comprehensive initiative aimed at moving forward toward its desired solution. Israel has four possible tracks, which should all be pursued in parallel to one another, or one after another in the event that the previous one fails: a) direct negotiations with the Palestinians with the aim of reaching a final status agreement; b) a regional settlement in cooperation with the moderate Arab states; and c) a series of interim arrangements with progress on issues that can be implemented in parallel. If none of these approaches are successful, Israel must take the fourth path of independent steps toward the proactive shaping of its future borders. The plan must include a suitable security plan and ensure international support, which will be garnered after Israel presents moderate positions regarding the framework for a two-state solution through bilateral and multilateral channels. These are all necessary conditions for a successful independent effort.

***7. Following the lessons of Operation Protective Edge, Israel must prepare the IDF for another round of fighting in the Gaza Strip.***

Israel cannot allow itself another round of hostilities that lasts 50 days and that ends in a strategic draw with its weakest enemy. Israel, which did not conclude the last confrontation in a manner that prevented Hamas from engaging in subsequent buildup, must make sure it possesses the operative tools necessary to conclude a confrontation with the group more quickly and with a better outcome than in the past. Most importantly, Israel must find a way to prevent Hamas from engaging in military buildup following the next round of fighting, in order to prevent another round shortly thereafter. At the same time, Israel must engage in non-military activities to prevent a confrontation or, at the very least, delay it. This must be done through Israeli

contributions toward a better economic and political reality in the Gaza Strip, which will make it more difficult for Hamas to violate the ceasefire.

***8. Israel must prepare for struggles, clashes, and warfare in non-kinetic dimensions.***

Cyberspace, lawfare, the battle of wits and opinions on the social networks, and BDS require that new efforts be made and new organisation be created for the use of “soft power.” Soft power is a dimension of power whose influence in the twenty-first century is no less essential than the IDF’s traditional use of kinetic power. The Goldstein Report, the charges against Israelis in the International Criminal Court in The Hague, the labeling of products, BDS, and the incitement on the social networks draw attention to a clear weak point in Israeli national security. It is important to analyze the attributes of the “soft battlefield” and adapt the traditional principles of warfare accordingly, but also to design and enhance fresh principles derived from the new dimensions, capabilities, and character of this warfare. It is also important to define the organizations that will operate against these threats and determine whether any specific new bodies should be created. Suitable strategies must be formulated, balances in the allocation of resources must be adjusted, and specially adapted activity must ensure a combination of “soft power” and traditional “hard power.”

***9. Israel must deepen its alliance with the pragmatic Arab states.***

Readiness to deal with mutual threats opens a window to cooperative efforts between Israel and Arab states. Current common interests constitute an unprecedented basis for the development of meaningful relations with the Sunni bloc that will serve Israel both in the short and long terms. The ability to work together to thwart Iranian subversion and Iran’s aspirations to acquire a nuclear bomb and achieve regional hegemony, and Israeli assistance in fighting the Islamic State, are important to both sides. However, forging such relations is dependent on progress on the Palestinian track.

***10. Israel must improve relations with its allies, first and foremost the United States and Europe.***

Relatively simple Israeli measures could change the atmosphere vis-à-vis the countries of the West. A building freeze in the isolated settlements located

outside the settlement blocs, measures to stimulate the Palestinian economy, and in particular, a political initiative along the lines described above could go a long way in creating a dramatic change in the relations between Israel and its allies. Once the world is convinced that Israel is serious and sincere in its approach to the peace process and the two-state solution, Israel will benefit from political and economic dividends.

***11. The State of Israel must renew and reestablish its moral superiority.***

The State of Israel must operate from a strong moral position, which can be achieved by activity reflecting a sincere desire for peace, ceasing its rule over another people, and ensuring the continued role of enlightened democratic principles in the country.

***12. The Overall Strategy***

Israel has the ability to maneuver and seek opportunities to improve its political, security, and strategic status as a result of the stormy developments in the Middle East in recent years. Particularly salient are the timeout regarding the Iranian nuclear program, the threat posed by ISIS, and the broad understanding, in the world and the Middle East alike, that the Palestinian issue is not the major cause of problems in the region. These factors open a window to potential alliances with pragmatic elements in the Arab world and facilitate the formulation of an overall comprehensive and proactive strategy. This strategy is based squarely on moderation and flexibility in the Palestinian arena for the sake of strengthening Israel's relations with the pragmatic Sunni states and improving Israel's relations with Europe and the United States. Better coordination and cooperation with the United States will facilitate measures to prepare effective responses vis-à-vis an Iran that may achieve military nuclear capability in the long term and vis-à-vis the short-term threats already posed by Hezbollah and the Islamic State. The combination of strong and advanced military power, diplomatic and political wisdom, and international legitimacy will result in Israel's significant strengthening, which will enable the country both to contend effectively with the future threat scenarios and to establish sustainable peace arrangements with its neighbors.



# Contributors

## Editors

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**Anat Kurz**, a senior research fellow, is director of research at INSS and editor of *INSS Insight*. She has lectured and published widely on insurgency-related issues, sub-state political organizations, and conflict resolution, and her current research focuses on the Palestinian national movement and Israeli-Palestinian relations. Among her publications are *Fatah and the Politics of Violence: The Institutionalization of a Popular Struggle* (2005) and *The Palestinian Uprisings: War with Israel War at Home* (2009), and she is co-editor of *Negotiating in Times of Conflict* (2015) and a contributing author to the volume. Dr. Kurz is co-editor of the *Strategic Survey for Israel* series; *Arms Control Dilemmas: Focus on the Middle East* (2012); *Arms Control and National Security: New Horizons* (2014); *The Interim Deal on the Iranian Nuclear Program: Toward a Comprehensive Solution* (2014); and *The Lessons of Operation Protective Edge* (2014).

## Authors

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**Udi Dekel** is the Managing Director of INSS. He served as head of the negotiating team with the Palestinians under Prime Minister Ehud Olmert during the Annapolis process. In his last position in the IDF he served as head of the Strategic Division in the Planning Directorate of the General Staff. Brig. Gen. (res.) Dekel headed the Israel-UN-Lebanon committee following the Second Lebanon War and was head of the military committees with Egypt and Jordan. He also served as head of the working groups on strategic-operational coordination with the United States; on developing a response to the threat of surface-to-surface missiles; and on international military cooperation. He was a member of a committee to update Israel's security concept in 2006 and coordinated the formulation of IDF strategy. Brig. Gen. (res.) Dekel is the co-author of *Syria: New Map, New Actors Challenges and Opportunities for Israel* (2015).

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**Meir Elran** has been a senior research fellow at INSS for over a decade. Brig. Gen. (ret.) Elran is head of the INSS Homeland Security Program and co-head of the INSS Israeli Society and National Security Program. His main area of interest is resilience in various fields, particularly social resilience and the resilience of national infrastructures. He is co-editor of *Military Service in Israel: Challenges and Ramifications* (2015).

**Oded Eran** is a senior research fellow and a former director of INSS. In his most recent post before joining INSS, he served as the World Jewish Congress representative in Israel and Secretary General of the WJC Israel branch. Dr. Eran has served as Israel's ambassador to the European Union (covering NATO as well), Israel's ambassador to Jordan, and head of Israel's negotiations team with the Palestinians (1999-2000). Other previous positions include deputy director general of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the deputy chief of the Israeli embassy in Washington. He also serves as a consultant to the Knesset Subcommittee on Foreign Affairs.

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**Zipi Israeli** is a research fellow at INSS and a lecturer at Tel Aviv University, as well as at the Lauder School of Government of the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya. Dr. Israeli, who has published widely in academic journals in Israel and abroad, specializes in media and public opinion in national security; media and the military; civil-military relations; national resilience; bereavement and casualties; and protest and national security. Previously, she managed research institutes in the Department of Political Studies at Bar Ilan University and served as a faculty member at Ariel University, Shenkar, and the Academic College of Emek Yezreel.

**Ephraim Kam**, a senior research fellow at INSS, served as assistant head of the research division of IDF Military Intelligence and retired at the rank of colonel. Dr. Kam's main fields of expertise are the Iranian challenge, the security of Arab states, the US entanglement in Iraq, strategic intelligence, and Israel's national security issues. His most recent studies are *From Terror to Nuclear Bombs: The Significance of the Iranian Threat* (2004); *A Nuclear Iran: What Does it Mean, and What Can be Done* (2007); and *Israel and a Nuclear Iran: Implications for Arms Control, Deterrence, and Defense* (editor, 2008).

**Emily B. Landau** is a senior research fellow and head of the Arms Control and Regional Security Program at INSS. Her principal fields of research are new trends in arms control thinking, Middle East regional security, the Iranian threat, and the challenge from North Korea. Dr. Landau is active in Track II meetings and conferences and teaches at Tel Aviv University, the Interdisciplinary Center, Herzliya, and the University of Haifa. Dr. Landau is the author of *Arms Control in the Middle East: Cooperative Security Dialogue and Regional Constraints* (2006) and *Decade of Diplomacy: Negotiations with Iran and North Korea and the Future of Nuclear Nonproliferation* (2012). Her most recent publications (co-editor) include *The Nuclear Nonproliferation Regime at a Crossroads* (2014); *Arms Control and National Security: New Horizons* (2014); and *The Interim Deal on the Iranian Nuclear Program: Toward a Comprehensive Solution?* (2014).

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**Zvi Magen**, a senior research fellow at INSS, joined the INSS research staff following a long career in Israel's intelligence and foreign service. From 1993-1997 he served as Israel's ambassador to Ukraine, and in 1998-1999 he served as Israel's ambassador to Russia. From 1999-2006 he served as head of Nativ, the liaison group for the FSU and Jewish diaspora affairs at the Prime Minister's Office, and in 2006-2009 he was head of the Institute for Eurasian Studies at the Interdisciplinary Center, Herzliya. He is the author of *Russia and the Middle East: Policy Challenges* (2013).

**Kobi Michael** is a senior research fellow at INSS, and was formerly on the faculty at Ben Gurion and Ariel Universities and a guest lecturer at Northwestern University. His main fields of research include strategy and security studies, politics and the military, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and peacekeeping and state building campaigns. He has published and edited twelve books and monographs, and some fifty articles in his fields of expertise. Dr. Michael served as a senior officer in GHQ Intelligence Branch, and following the Oslo Accords, was one of the founders and commanders of the Israeli-Palestinian Security Coordination Mechanism in the Gaza Strip. Among his other positions, he also served as Deputy Director General and head of the Palestinian and Neighboring Countries Branch in the Ministry of Strategic Affairs.

**Assaf Orion** joined INSS in late 2015 as a senior research fellow, following a long career in the IDF. Much of his work at INSS will be in the Institute's research program on China. In his final posting in the IDF, Brig. Gen. Orion served as head of Strategic Planning in the Planning Directorate in the IDF General Staff (2010-2015), responsible for strategic planning and policy formulation, international cooperation and military diplomacy, and ties to neighboring militaries and peacekeeping forces in the region. For more than two decades he served in Israel's National SIGINT Unit 8200 and Israeli Defense Intelligence, in SIGINT, OSINT, and international intelligence cooperation command positions. His fields of interest include national and regional security, applied strategy, human learning systems, and leadership challenges in a fast changing world.

**Carmit Padan** is a Neubauer research associate at INSS. A doctoral candidate in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the Hebrew University, she is writing her dissertation on command in times of crisis in IDF combat units. Before joining INSS, Ms. Padan worked at the IDF School for Leadership, where she worked on knowledge development in military leadership and command, and has presented her research findings in international forums. She holds a B.A. in behavioral science and an M.A. in sociology from Ben-Gurion University.

**Yoram Schweitzer** is a senior research fellow and director of the Program on Terrorism and Low Intensity Conflict at INSS. In the IDF he served in the Intelligence branch, and he was an advisor to the Prime Minister's Office and the Defense Ministry on strategies for combating terrorism. He also served as head of the International Counter-Terrorism Department in the IDF and as a member of a task force dealing with Israeli MIAs and POWs. He is editor of *Palestinian Female Suicide Bombers: Dying for Equality?* (2006) and co-author of *The Terrorism of Afghanistan "Alumni": Islam vs. the Rest of the World* (2000); *An Expected Surprise: The September 11th Attack and Its Ramifications* (2002); *Al-Qaeda and the Globalization of Suicide Terrorism* (2005); and *Al-Qaeda's Odyssey to Global Jihad* (2014).

**Pnina Sharvit Baruch**, a senior research associate at INSS, retired from the Israel Defense Forces in 2009, after serving in the International Law Department there for twenty years, five of which she was head of the Department. In this capacity, Adv. Sharvit Baruch was a senior legal advisor responsible for advising IDF commanders and decision makers at the governmental level on a wide variety of issues relating to international law and administrative law, among them: the laws of armed conflict and occupation of territory; naval law; counter-terrorism; security liaison; border demarcation; and conflict resolution. Adv. Sharvit Baruch served as a legal advisor in Israel's delegations to negotiations with the Palestinians, and participated in the negotiations with Syria. Following her retirement from the IDF with the rank of colonel, Adv. Sharvit Baruch joined the faculty of the Tel Aviv University Law School, where she teaches courses related to public international law and conflict resolution, and also teaches international law at the National Security College.

**Gilead Sher** is a senior research fellow at INSS where he also heads the Center for Applied Negotiations. He was the Head of Bureau of former Prime Minister Ehud Barak and was one of the chief negotiators with the Palestinians at the Sharm el-Sheikh agreement (1999), Camp David (2000), and the Taba talks (2001). Prior to that, he served under Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin as delegate to the 1994-95 Interim Agreement negotiations with the Palestinians. Mr. Sher was a visiting professor on conflict resolution and negotiations at the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania and is a visiting professor in the Master's program in conflict resolution at Tel Aviv University. Mr. Sher, an attorney and senior partner in Gilead Sher, Kadari & Co. Law Offices, is the author of *The Israeli-Palestinian Peace Negotiations, 1999-2001 – Within Reach* (2005) and co-editor of *Negotiating in Times of Conflict* (2015). He holds the rank of colonel (res.) in the IDF and is a former brigade commander and deputy division commander in the Armored Corps, as well as a military judge.

**Carmit Valensi** is a research associate at INSS and a researcher in the Military Intelligence Research Division. Dr. Valensi specializes in the study of the contemporary Middle East, terror organizations and political violence, and strategic studies. Her doctoral thesis at Tel Aviv University deals with the appearance of “violent hybrid actors” and the test cases of Hamas, Hezbollah, and FARC. She has published on the regional upheaval in the Middle East, the development of military concepts among extreme Islamic organizations, and the governance capability of armed groups.

**Amos Yadlin** was appointed Director of INSS in November 2011, following forty years of service in the IDF, nine of them as a member of General Staff. From 2006-2010 Maj. Gen. (ret.) Yadlin served as head of Military Intelligence, following a term as IDF military attaché to the United States. In 2002 he earned the rank of major general, and was appointed commander of IDF colleges and the National Defense College. Maj. Gen. (ret.) Yadlin served as deputy commander of the Israel Air Force. Prior to that he was a commander of two combat squadrons and two IAF bases, as well as head of the IAF Planning Department. He served as a fighter pilot in the Yom Kippur War, Operation Peace for Galilee (the First Lebanon War), and

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**Eran Yashiv**, a faculty member of the Eitan Berglas School of Economics at Tel Aviv University, is a macroeconomist, specializing in labor market issues, including labor search and matching, financial markets, immigration, and exchange rate economics. A former chair of the Public Policy Department at Tel Aviv University, he founded the Center for Regulation Policy at Tel Aviv University and was its first director. For the past decade, Prof. Yashiv has been a research fellow at the Centre for Economic Policy Research at the Centre for Research and Analysis of Migration (CREAM) at University College, London and at IZA, Bonn. In recent years, he has been a consultant to the Bank of England and to the Bank of Israel on labor market issues. He is the academic director of the Sapir Forum for Economic Policy, a consultant to the Economics Ministry, and chair of the steering committee of the Vacancies Survey of the Central Bureau of Statistics. He joined INSS in March 2014 as a senior research fellow and heads the Neubauer Program on Economics and National Security.





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- No. 151, December 2015, Udi Dekel, Nir Boms, and Ofir Winter, *Syria: New Map, New Actors – Challenges and Opportunities for Israel* [Hebrew].
- No. 150, October 2015, Arik Rudnitzky, *Arab Citizens of Israel Early in the Twenty-First Century*.
- No. 149, October 2015, Gabi Siboni and Ofer Assaf, *Guidelines for a National Cyber Strategy* [Hebrew].
- No. 148, September 2015, Meir Elran and Gabi Sheffer, eds., *Military Service in Israel: Challenges and Ramifications* [Hebrew].
- No. 147, June 2015, Zvi Magen and Tatyana Karasova, eds., *Russian and Israeli Outlooks on Current Developments in the Middle East*.
- No. 146, April 2015, Shmuel Even, *The Cost of Defense in Israel: Defense Expenditures and Recommendations for Drafting the Defense Budget* [Hebrew].
- No. 145, December 2014, Yoav Zacks and Liran Antebi, eds., *The Use of Unmanned Military Vehicles in 2033: National Policy Recommendations Based on Technology Forecasting Expert Assessments* [Hebrew].
- No. 144, November 2014, Oded Eran, Dan Vardi, and Itamar Cohen, *Political Feasibility of Israeli Natural Gas Exports to Turkey*.
- No. 143, November 2014, Azriel Bermant, *The Russian and Iranian Missile Threats: Implications for NATO Missile Defense*.
- No. 142, September 2014, Emily B. Landau and Anat Kurz, eds., *The Interim Deal on the Iranian Nuclear Program: Toward a Comprehensive Solution?*
- No. 141, September 2014, Emily B. Landau and Anat Kurz, eds., *The Interim Deal on the Iranian Nuclear Program: Toward a Comprehensive Solution?* [Hebrew].
- No. 140, July 2014, Oded Eran, Dan Vardi, and Itamar Cohen, *Exporting Israeli Natural Gas to Turkey: Is it Politically Possible?* [Hebrew].
- No. 139, July 2014, Arik Rudnitzky, *Arab Citizens of Israel at the Start of the Twenty-First Century* [Hebrew].
- No. 138, June 2014, Pnina Sharvit Baruch and Anat Kurz, eds., *Law and National Security: Selected Issues*.