ARGAMAN

The Paradigm Project:
A New Strategic Agenda for Israel

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The Paradigm Project: A New Strategic Agenda for Israel

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Introduction

The Simchat Torah massacre of October 7th 2023, was a historic crisis and a formative event for the State of Israel. Its occurrence obligates us to undertake a comprehensive national reckoning that goes beyond an analysis of the tactical failures of that day. We must delve deeper and examine the long-term factors and trends that led to the failure and the war, as well as the shortcomings exposed over the past two years. Only an honest and systematic reckoning with these weaknesses, with the aim of correcting them, can provide Israel with durable security that will allow it not only to survive but also to prosper, grow, and fulfill its rightful place as a sovereign and leading power. In light of the collapse of the security concept of recent decades, it is essential to work toward developing new, broad-based, up-to-date, and well-founded paradigms that will serve us in the generation to come.

To this end, the Argaman Institute assembled a research team within the framework of the "Zion Fellows" program for the 5785 (2024–2025) academic year. The team includes senior experts with decades of accumulated experience in Israel's defense establishment, selected for their unique insights and capabilities. In the course of their work, the researchers consulted with a range of senior policy and security experts in Israel and the United States. Throughout the year, the team revisited the foundations of Israel's security concept as shaped by David Ben-Gurion, and examined how these principles can be adapted to the current conditions and circumstances facing the State of Israel today.

The **Paradigm Project**: **A New Strategic Agenda for Israel** comprises policy papers organized into three parts:

- **The first part** lays the foundations. It analyzes the principles of the classical security doctrine, highlights points of failure and areas where Israel has deviated from its path, and proposes renewed, time-tested principles for an updated doctrine. It also surveys the international arena in which Israel operates and identifies the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.
- **The second part** focuses on force buildup and the institutional and organizational reforms required to improve the functioning of the defense establishment. It highlights the need to establish a "large and smart army," to fundamentally rehabilitate the ground forces, to encourage technological innovation within the IDF, to implement reforms in the intelligence community and in the relationship between the bureaucracy and the political leadership, and proposes a reexamination of the IDF's ethical code.
- **The third part** addresses strategy toward the various arenas: from the inner circle in Judea and Samaria, through Israel's immediate neighbors (Egypt and Jordan), to the outer circle, including Iran and its proxies. In addition, it proposes a new diplomatic approach toward the Abraham Accords states and, in the broader context, toward a world in an era of great-power competition.

Undoubtedly, many important topics remain outside the scope of this work—such as domestic security, IDF manpower recruitment, Israel's relations with the Jewish diaspora, and a quantitative analysis of the defense budget. Numerous important domestic issues are also not addressed here. However, as the sages say: "It is not incumbent upon you to complete the work, nor are you free to refrain from it." Our hope is that the conceptual foundation and practical proposals presented here will serve as a solid basis for follow-up efforts and for translating policy recommendations into actionable plans.

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Executive Summary

Key Messages from The Paradigm Project: A New Strategic Agenda for Israel

Message 1: The need to return to initiative and decisive victory as guiding principles in the security doctrine

The Issue: The conditions that led to the establishment of Iran's "Ring of Fire" around Israel and to the Hamas attack were not the result of a single point of failure, but rather stemmed from a shift away from the fundamental principles of Israel's security doctrine. The classic security doctrine, shaped by David Ben-Gurion based on Ze'ev Jabotinsky's "Iron Wall" concept, emphasized several principles: decisive victory – meaning that in every encounter with an enemy, Israel must strive for an unequivocal victory in its favor; deterrence – which results from such decisive victory; readiness to launch preemptive strikes; self-reliance, meaning that only IDF soldiers fight for Israel's security, not foreign forces – alongside the development of an indigenous defense industry and nuclear capability; securing the support of a global superpower; Jewish settlement as a central security component; and transferring the fighting quickly onto enemy territory through ground maneuver supported by air power.

Current Policy: Since the 1990s, a new set of assumptions has become dominant, centered on ideas such as: the era of large-scale ground wars is over; future conflicts will be limited and mostly against non-state actors rather than regular armies; cross-border terrorism can be contained; territorial concessions are legitimate; diplomatic solutions are always preferable to military ones; and Israel has no real enemies, only "rivals."

The Problem: These new assumptions led to a policy that allowed the formation of the Iranian "Ring of Fire" around Israel from all directions—that is, the presence of organized terrorist armies capable of ground incursions on its borders, alongside the massive rocket and missile capabilities of Hamas and Hezbollah, as well as the Houthis, Iraqi militias, and Iran itself. This constellation ultimately left Israel exposed to the October 7 attack. This policy manifested in:[1]

- Three withdrawals—from Area A in Judea and Samaria, from Lebanon and from Gaza—alongside refraining from establishing settlements in the security periphery as a tool in the security arsenal.
- Avoiding decisive victory in the Second Lebanon War and in the series of operations against Hamas in Gaza.
- Adopting defensive measures as a new principle in the strategic concept: expanding defensive systems (such as the Iron Dome) and technological barriers along the borders.
- Great investment in air-to-ground precision firepower and signals intelligence, while divesting and reducing ground forces and reserve forces—the so-called 'small and smart military.'
- Focused campaigns below the threshold of war, and a tendency to internationalize the opposition to Iran's nuclear program, instead of implementing the Begin Doctrine program until Operation Rising Lion.
- The current IDF ethical code relies on principles that effectively neutralize the national context in favor of presenting the individual as an abstract entity detached from identity. The result is the use of military force in ways that endanger soldiers' lives unnecessarily and impair the IDF's ability to protect the country's citizens.

Policy Recommendations: The current war must serve as a turning point for Israel's security doctrine. To that end, alternative strategic principles must be adopted that will enable Israel to defeat its enemies and shape the strategic environment in which it operates, moving to an initiative-taking, offensive approach in place of a defensive and reactive one. The central principles required for this change are:

1 For more detail, see Chapters 1 and 2 by Roi Tamir, "Israel's Security Doctrine and Its Erosion Since the 1990s"; "Initiative and Victory: Traditional Principles for a Renewed Security Doctrine", and Chapter 8 by Ronen Shoval, " "A Different Spirit": The Moral Distortion in the IDF's Ethical Code and the Path to Correction."

- A return to the foundations of Zionism: encouraging Jewish immigration and promoting Jewish settlement throughout the entire land.
- Recognition that the so-called 'era without wars' has not materialized—the struggle continues at varying levels of intensity.
- Recognition that the enemies' aspiration to destroy the State of Israel stems from ideological roots, not from poor economic conditions.
- Adopting a proactive initiative-taking approach to rising security threats and decisive victory in any warfighting. Reaffirming pre-emption, prevention, retaliation, and moving the battle to the enemy's territory swiftly.
- Security self-reliance – Israel must not outsource its security to external actors such as UNIFIL. It must strive for independence in weapons production to avoid being dependent on a single supplier, act to reduce its dependence on the United States while strengthening its cooperation with it as a partner.
- Reaffirm the critical importance of holding territory and establishing defensible borders – Israel must hold key areas and dominant terrain and be willing to establish long-term buffer zones in order to distance threats from the civilian population.
- Building a military force capable of multi-front warfare, including readiness for long-range maneuver, while preserving the areas of excellence of the Air Force. Israel cannot rely on a "small and smart army" for all types of conflicts.
- A new ethical code is required for the IDF, based on a national moral framework rather than a universalist one. The code should be updated to emphasize the value of victory and national identity as an alternative moral framework, integrating Jewish tradition and republican philosophy as guiding principles for the use of military force.

Message 2: The path to building national power in an era of great-power competition: technology, defense exports, energy, and broad cooperation[2]

The Issue: The major global and regional trends today pose challenges but also opportunities for Israel. They include:

2 For further reading, see Chapters 3 and 12 by Nitzan David Fuchs, "Global Trends and their Implications for Israel: The Changing Balance of Power and Technological Transformations" and "Rebalancing Israel's Global Posture in a Multi-Polar World."

- **Rising challengers to the US leadership** - The international system is becoming more competitive and fragmented. The United States remains the strongest power militarily and economically, but its dominance is being challenged in various arenas, and it is increasingly unwilling and unable to dictate international outcomes. Powers such as China and Russia are undermining elements of the current order, while rising powers like India are seeking a greater role. China seeks to position itself as a global center and to shape the international order to fit its needs, though it cannot significantly challenge U.S. hegemony beyond East Asia. Challenges to American hegemony also come from Russia and Iran, which aim to strengthen their regional and global standing.
- **Diffusion of economic and demographic growth** - European powers find it difficult to translate their economic strength into geopolitical influence, while the continent undergoes major demographic and social shifts, including an aging population and Muslim immigration that threatens to reshape the character of society. In contrast, regions such as Africa and Southeast Asia are experiencing rapid population growth and growing economies. Knowledge and technological means are spreading from the Atlantic basin to the rest of the world, and Western value chains are critically dependent on advanced technological products originating in non-Western states.
- **A new balance of power in the Middle East** - Shiite Islamism has been weakened by Israel's strikes on Iran and its proxies, but there is now growing competition between Sunni Islamism, led by Turkey and Qatar, and traditional Arab monarchism led by Saudi Arabia and the UAE. This struggle is unfolding primarily in Syria, but also in Lebanon and Gaza and domestically in leading states. The coming years will be marked by the continuation of this contest, alongside Iran's efforts to rebuild its strength.
- **Geo-economic and technological competition** – There is a global arms race, including new combat technologies such as autonomous weapons systems, cyber capabilities, missiles, and artificial intelligence, alongside heavy investment in relevant industrial production capacity. Competition also manifests in the development of new infrastructure connecting global powers to world markets – for example, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the India–Middle East–Europe Corridor (IMEC). Artificial intelligence increases demand for advanced chips and energy infrastructure. The power that successfully deploys reliable AI on the battlefield and exploits its potential through efficient force design will achieve a significant military advantage.

- **The Culture War in the West** – In the Western world, there is political polarization and division between socialist-progressive forces and national-traditionalist conservative forces. This polarization hampers policymakers' ability to build consensus on critical issues and has led to inconsistent policy in the U.S. Meanwhile, there is a rise in antisemitism from progressives, to Islamist to far-right movements. At the same time, many in the West have come to realize that anti-Israel and antisemitic actors are often also opposed to the democratic West itself, and that Israel represents a model nation-state that preserves its identity and courageously fights for its survival.

The Problem: Israel is currently overly dependent on the United States, leaving it vulnerable in the face of hostile forces coming to power. In the event of a military crisis in East Asia, the U.S. may be unable, or unwilling, to provide Israel with critical weaponry, potentially putting Israel in a dangerous position. Additionally, the delegitimization of Israel in the international arena is intensifying, supported by both Islamists and progressives in the West.

The changing global balance of power requires the US to focus its attention on its major competitor in East Asia and decrease its direct involvement in the Middle East. Israel cannot rely on the US to oppose hostile forces, including guaranteeing freedom of navigation in shipping lanes, in the Red Sea for example.

Policy Recommendations: In light of the global dispersal of power, Israel must strengthen its independence and diversify its network of security partnerships, while leveraging its advantages as an innovation leader in technology and its location at a geo-strategic crossroads. This approach will reinforce Israel's position as a strategic asset for the United States, ensuring that the alliance remains resilient despite changes in administration. Key pathways for the required shift include:

- Redefine the relationship with the United States, shifting it from dependence to a true partnership by reducing aid grants and deepening cooperation in defense technology. America's need for strong allies and its desire to reduce direct military involvement in the region create an opportunity for this shift.
- Israel's knowledge and experience in fields such as cyber, air defense, and artificial intelligence can constitute a significant asset in the technological race. Israel should leverage this expertise and these developments to forge new alliances.

- Israel's geographic location places it in a favorable position to become a regional hub for energy and transportation. At the same time, the global arms race increases the export potential of Israeli defense technologies.
- Strengthen independence in the production of critical armaments. If expanded domestic production creates surplus beyond IDF needs, Israel should consider exporting to the growing global market.
- Deepen defense and technology ties with a wide range of countries, including established economic leaders (such as Germany and Japan) as well as emerging powers (such as India, Eastern Europe, and Central Africa).
- Develop fiber-optic infrastructure and data centers linking Israel to Europe, the Persian Gulf, and Africa.
- Strengthen Israel's naval forces for regional power projection, using unmanned vessels and integrating intelligence collection, electronic warfare, and precision-strike capabilities. Such assets would enable Israel to protect vital shipping lanes and address distant threats at a reasonable cost.

Message 3: The process of rebuilding and strengthening the ground forces must be initiated immediately, while preserving the Air Force's exceptional capabilities; the goal should be a "large and smart" army.[3]

The Issue: According to Israel's classic security doctrine, only Israeli military superiority will compel its enemies to accept its existence. Accordingly, Israel allocated substantial national resources to its defense, including mandatory conscription and continuous investment of a significant portion of its GDP in security needs. Following changes in the threat landscape, including peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan, Israel shifted toward a "small and smart" army, reducing ground maneuver forces by closing brigades and divisions and drastically downsizing the reserve forces. The emphasis moved to investment in advanced technologies, the Air Force, the Intelligence Corps, and hi-tech defense systems such as the Iron Dome and the "smart" barrier around Gaza, based on the belief that future wars would be fought mainly through sophisticated weapons systems rather than large-scale ground conflicts. Recent wars, foremost among them Iron Swords, revealed the grave consequences of this shift.

3 For further reading, see Chapter 4 by Yehoshua Rivak, "Rebuilding the IDF Ground Forces as the Backbone of Israel's Military Power: A Comprehensive Plan", and Chapter 5 by Maj. D., "Innovation in Force Buildup: Making the IDF a Smart Army."

Current Policy: The Nagel Committee report on the defense budget and force buildup (January 2025) did acknowledge the need to rebuild the ground forces. However, its practical conclusion was to postpone addressing the issue for five years in favor of investing in capabilities required for a regional war with Iran in the near future. The report also did not specify how the ground forces should be structured or what is necessary to make them effective.

The Problem: Although the IDF succeeded in achieving partial ground control and inflicting significant damage on Hamas and Hezbollah, the shortages in maneuver forces created difficulties in urban combat and in achieving rapid and decisive results. Any further postponement of the strengthening of the ground forces is a mistake for several reasons:

- Terror threats do not disappear—they recover: Even after Hamas and Hezbollah suffered heavy blows, they may rebound, as has happened in the past. The reconstruction and strengthening mechanisms of terrorist organizations continue, so the IDF must maintain ready ground forces.
- Focusing on assessments of enemy intentions instead of capabilities has been demonstrated to be a conceptual error. This approach ignores the fact that potential threats—such as Egypt, Jordan, Shiite militias, and radical Islamic forces in the Middle East—could become active adversaries in the future.
- Building ground forces is a long-term process: Establishing a new armored brigade is not a one- or two-year task; it requires many years of investment in personnel, training, and the procurement of appropriate equipment. Building multiple brigades or even divisions takes considerable time, so the process must begin now.
- A strong ground force is a strategic-diplomatic tool: This is not merely an operational necessity. A powerful military projects political strength, reinforces deterrence, and provides Israel with greater room to maneuver internationally. Neglecting the ground forces, by contrast, weakens Israel's standing and reduces its operational flexibility in times of crisis.

Policy Recommendations: To ensure Israel's ability to defend itself, the national security doctrine must be grounded in four principles: initiative, decisiveness, strength, and fighting on enemy territory. Force buildup must rehabilitate and strengthen the ground maneuver forces, to make them capable of conducting offensives across multiple fronts. This includes:

- Expanding the ground force structure: Additional brigades and divisions should be established in numbers that enable simultaneous defense on all fronts and concurrent offensive operations on required fronts, while maintaining full readiness and an appropriate training framework.
- Ground-based firepower: An independent and diverse fire capability must be developed for maneuvering forces. This firepower should cover short- and medium-range engagements, across all levels of intensity, with varying degrees of precision.
- Combat engineering: Engineering units should be expanded so that every brigade combat team includes an engineering battalion, or at minimum a reinforced heavy engineering equipment company. In parallel, improved solutions must be developed for dealing with underground threats.
- Tactical battlefield intelligence: Relevant combat collection capabilities should be built, including the establishment of collection frameworks at different echelons—remotely piloted aircraft equipped with recorders and sensors, drones providing high-quality surveillance, mobile radars, and tactical SIGINT capabilities.
- Combat mobility: Broad mobility capabilities must be restored for all forces, including light vehicles, armored trucks, light armored fighting vehicles, or other solutions appropriate to the operational concept.
- Administrative and logistical support: Alongside the construction of combat forces for all divisions required for defense and offense, the corresponding logistical capabilities must also be built and sustained.
- The airspace close to the ground: Focused effort is required in this domain, including the development of operational concepts for different units and echelons, procurement of various types of drones, and the deployment of drone swarms with diverse capabilities (optical, radar, explosive, and others).
- Night fighting: Extensive procurement of night-vision equipment is required for all maneuvering units across the services. At the same time, dedicated night-fighting training must be conducted to achieve high levels of proficiency and to build confidence among soldiers and commanders in nighttime operations.
- Improving the readiness and preparedness of reserve forces: The reserve system is a critical pillar in a large-scale war, yet it currently suffers from erosion in readiness and equipment levels.
- Reforming the procurement process for new technologies: The integration of new civilian technologies is hindered by excessive centralization, lack of

flexibility, and incentive mechanisms that do not encourage the adoption of innovations in the field. The IDF should decentralize procurement of standard products and add fast-track procurement channels under the control of end users in the field.

Finally, the new approach emphasizes the importance of large-scale ground maneuver as an inseparable component of Israel's overall military doctrine. In the international arena, Israel often faces diplomatic pressure that limits the duration of fighting. Rapid and decisive ground maneuver can secure military achievements that help translate battlefield success into strategic gains. Therefore, ground maneuver should be viewed as a central means for defeating enemies and maintaining long-term deterrence.

Message 4: A reform is needed in the relationship between the professional-military and intelligence apparatus on one hand and the political echelon on the other, in order to strengthen the elected leadership's ability to responsibly guide policy.[4]

The Issue: While civilian oversight of Israel's security apparatus exists at a formal level, in practice, there is a deep dependence of the political echelon on the IDF as an almost exclusive provider of security knowledge, strategic assessments, and analysis of alternatives. The army's control over intelligence, planning capabilities, and issue framing creates a situation of the military's monopoly over security knowledge and strategic analysis.

The Current Situation: Responsibility for defining security policy and making decisions rests with the political echelon. The political leadership relies almost exclusively on the proposals of the security establishment, struggles to offer alternatives—especially regarding force buildup—and is sometimes compelled to approve military-originated plans without engaging in independent strategic discussion. Two institutional mechanisms are intended to bridge this gap: the Prime Minister's military secretary and the National Security Council. The first is subordinate to the military hierarchy, and the second suffers from structural weakness, lack of resources, and insufficient legitimacy as an independent

4 For further reading, see Chapter 6 by Roi Tamir, "Principles and Reforms for Israel's Intelligence Community", and Chapter 7 by Harel Weinberg, "Repairing the Relationship Between the Defense Establishment and the Political Echelon"

actor vis-à-vis the security establishment. As a result, neither provides an effective solution.

The Problem: There is a concentration of operational knowledge and authority in the hands of the military, which often acts beyond the realm of professional military expertise and leads the policy-making process on explicitly political and strategic issues. Alternative positions are rarely heard, and the political echelon remains largely unable to critically assess the recommendations presented to it or to challenge their proponents. This phenomenon became particularly evident during emergencies including the Iron Swords war, when the IDF presented a minimal set of options and the political leadership struggled to implement alternative strategic concepts.

Additionally, the shift toward overreliance on stand-off and precision strikes and the "war between the wars" campaign has increased the role of the intelligence community, but without formally regulating how the intelligence establishment operates at the national-security level. For example, there is no statutory mandate for the Heads of Defense Services Committee nor systematic guidance and oversight by the political echelon over intelligence organizations. At the same time, overreliance on technological collection sources (signals intelligence) has marginalized traditional intelligence capabilities (human intelligence).

Policy Recommendations: To strengthen the decision-making capabilities of the political echelon in the long-term, substantial and fundamental changes are required. These include:

- Strengthen the National Security Council (NSC) and transform it into a professional body with broad authority to obtain independent information and conduct autonomous staff work.
- Reduce military involvement in foreign policy and non-military national affairs, directing primary responsibility in these areas to the civilian echelon, and establish a dedicated framework for political-strategic research and assessment outside the military.
- Require structured security training for the political echelon, to encourage informed discussion with the defense establishment.
- Formally institutionalize the intelligence apparatus by enacting a National Intelligence Law. Consider creating an official body responsible for political-strategic research and assessment for the Cabinet. This body would be

located within the Prime Minister's Office or the National Security Council and be composed of experts from diverse backgrounds, including former intelligence officials, foreign affairs and defense professionals, experienced civilian analysts, and academic researchers. The head of the body would be designated as a director of a national agency.

- Establish a guiding principle to maintain diversity and balance among types of intelligence collection.

In the short-term, establish an independent security team reporting to the Prime Minister—and possibly the Cabinet—composed of civilian experts institutionally separate from the defense establishment. This team would provide the political echelon with "high-quality, impartial advice" on security matters. Members would be appointed personally by the Prime Minister and Cabinet members for short terms aligned with their tenure.

Responsibilities of this team would include:

- Developing recommendations for the Prime Minister and Cabinet on matters requiring attention, or presenting issues deemed strategically significant.
- Independently reviewing—or reviewing in conjunction with the defense establishment—alternatives to the military's proposals on operational matters and force-building, ensuring the political echelon's intentions are represented.
- Initiating dialogue with Israeli and international research institutes, which currently occurs in a limited and marginal fashion through military channels.
- This team is not meant to replace the defense establishment's position, which remains central, but to strengthen the civilian echelon's capacity to oversee, evaluate, and influence strategic decision-making. It would serve as a "light platform" to challenge or support the positions of the defense establishment and NSC ("heavy platforms"), providing parallel, supporting, or opposing assessments to enable informed debate on available options.

The current situation makes it difficult for the political echelon to make independent security decisions and leads to an almost complete reliance on the position of the defense establishment. Strengthening civilian advisory mechanisms, creating knowledge-based alternatives, and ensuring effective oversight of the defense system are essential steps to guaranteeing national security grounded in broad and balanced considerations.

There are historic moments when a nation must seize the opportunity history has placed before it—and act decisively. October 7 serves as a powerful spotlight illuminating the historic opportunity before the State of Israel to demand a new and healthier balance between the defense establishment and the political echelon; to establish conceptual assumptions that correspond to reality; to return to the fundamentals of the intelligence profession; and to maintain constant preparedness for war.

Message 5: An initiative-based policy toward Iran must be offensive and aimed at undermining the regime; toward the circle of neighboring states, it must combine stabilization, leverage, and preparation for extreme scenarios.[5]

The Issue: Over the past two decades, Iran has been Israel's primary existential threat. Its leadership has openly declared its intention to destroy Israel and worked to realize this through the development of nuclear capabilities; the establishment of a broad arsenal of surface-to-surface missiles, unmanned aerial vehicles, and cruise missiles; the activation of proxies such as Hezbollah, Hamas, the Houthis, and Iraqi militias; and through terrorist operations inside Israel and abroad. At the same time, Iran is currently facing a severe internal crisis—an imploding economy, shortages of water and energy, public unrest, and exposure to Israeli-American attacks. This vulnerability creates a window of opportunity for Israel to confront the "outer-circle threat."

By contrast, with respect to the inner circle of neighboring states—Egypt and Jordan—Israel has achieved a cold peace. However, a takeover by Islamist movements in either country would restore the threat of a hostile conventional army or provide fertile ground for terrorist activity. While Israel seeks to preserve the stability of these regimes, given the extensive activity and public support for the Muslim Brotherhood, the possibility of revolution cannot be dismissed.

Current Policy and its Problems: Over the past year, Israel has delivered heavy blows to the Iranian-led axis, targeting its proxies in Lebanon and Gaza, and its missile and nuclear threat. However, the Houthis' missile capabilities have

5 For further reading, see Chapter 10 by Nitzan David Fuchs, "A Strategic Framework for Israel's Peace-Treaty States: Stability, Leverage, and Red Lines" and Chapter 11 by Shai Bantski, "Israel's Iran Strategy: Undermining the Regime and Restoring Deterrence."

not been neutralized, allowing them to effectively blockade shipping routes in the Red Sea. Potential threat from Iraqi militias persists, and the possibility of further direct confrontation with Iran.

Regarding Egypt and Jordan, Israel's current policy suffers from three main deficiencies: a passive, reactive approach to emerging threats; acceptance of violations of peace agreements and hostile behavior by these countries in the diplomatic arena; under-utilization of existing levers of influence and failure to develop new ones, such as support through international economic institutions, technological cooperation, and collaboration in the tourism sector.

Policy Recommendations: Toward the Iranian axis, Israel should act according to two complementary principles –

- **Undermining the stability of the Iranian regime** – The overthrow of the current regime must be the long-term strategic objective, since as long as it exists, it will continue to seek Israel's destruction. This can be advanced through heavy economic sanctions, kinetic activity inside Iran, damage to energy infrastructure, cyber operations, mobilization of internal opposition and support for it and for minority groups, and the conduct of an influence campaign aimed at removing the "fear barrier" among the Iranian public.
- **Imposing direct responsibility on Iran** – It should be established that any hostile action by its proxies (such as UAVs, missiles, or terrorism) will lead to a direct response against Iranian targets. This step would make clear to Tehran that it cannot hide behind its proxies and would force it to restrain them.

To enable this, Israel requires a diverse and complementary firepower capability alongside the Air Force, including surface-to-surface missiles and large quantities of low-cost UAVs. Such capabilities would allow for rapid, sustained responses across varying levels of intensity—up to the point of creating a strategic dilemma for Iran whether to continue activating its proxies even at the risk of sliding into a broader escalation.

Against Iran's main proxies—the Houthis in Yemen and the Shiite militias in Iraq—additional measures are proposed: undermining their control through the elimination of senior leadership, including Abdul-Malik al-Houthi; strikes against economic and governmental infrastructure; the application of international

pressure, especially via Western states and Arab countries that also view these organizations as threats; and, in Iraq, targeting the regime's own centers of power in order to create incentives for the central government to rein in the Iran-backed militias.

Israel stands at a historic strategic opportunity to exploit Iran's weakness. This requires a shift from a policy of limited responses directed at the proxies, to a comprehensive offensive strategy—applying maximum pressure to undermine the regime, while establishing a clear deterrence equation: for every attack on Israel, Iran will pay a direct price.

Regarding the near circle, it is proposed to combine preparedness for extreme scenarios with actions to strengthen the existing moderate regimes; to move from a reactive policy to an initiative-driven policy that shapes the regional environment; and to create leverage to advance Israeli interests vis-à-vis the peace-treaty states and to reinforce them. The proposed policy focuses on four dimensions:

At the diplomatic level, coordinate stabilization efforts with the UAE and Saudi Arabia; coordinate with the United States the conditionality of aid to Egypt and Jordan; and engage both of them in addressing the Islamist threat.

At the economic level, leverage the asymmetric dependence of the peace-treaty states to promote their stability through incentives to improve relations (increased water supply, upgrading energy infrastructure), while preserving pressure levers against hostile actions.

At the intelligence level, develop early-warning and early-detection systems to identify indicators of extreme scenarios. Israel will cooperate with Jordan and Egypt against Islamist networks, primarily through asset sharing.

At the military level, prepare comprehensive operational plans for both extreme scenarios, with an emphasis on ensuring control of strategic areas, defending shared infrastructure, and effectively enforcing the demilitarization of Sinai.

This strategy will enable Israel to better address complex regional challenges, while maintaining the stability of the peace-treaty states and building resilience mechanisms for extreme scenarios.

Message 6: The Palestinian Authority is an enemy, and the situation in Judea and Samaria is not static. A clear end-state goal should be defined: one sovereign state exercising effective control. This objective can be pursued gradually and through varying independent courses of action.[6]

Issue and Current Policy: The Oslo Accords, signed in the 1990s, established temporary arrangements that postponed addressing the central issues of the conflict to the future—issues that later proved to be intractable. These arrangements created a partial status quo on the administrative and security levels. In practice, Israel follows a dual policy: on one hand, it opposes unilateral steps by the Palestinian Authority (PA) and international recognition of a Palestinian state; on the other hand, it refrains from advancing its own sovereignty in the long- term. This dual approach stems, on one side, from recognition of the existential threats a Palestinian state poses to Israel, and on the other, from the desire to leave this path open as a possibility in the distant future.

The problem: The situation in Judea and Samaria (J&S) is unstable, and maintaining the status quo poses a real threat to the State of Israel. The Palestinian leadership does not recognize the legitimacy of Israel's existence, instills deep-seated hatred toward Israel in future generations, and remains committed to the "Phased Plan" for establishing a Palestinian state from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. Consequently, there is no way for a Palestinian leadership that genuinely desires peace with Israel to emerge from the current circumstances.

- Persistent terrorist threats exist, and the PA forces are unwilling to confront them.
- There is a risk that at some point, PA forces may turn their weapons against Israel, creating a real military threat.
- The PA leads international efforts to weaken Israel's diplomatic standing.
- The PA is systematically attempting to seize control over Area C, establishing facts on the ground unilaterally, while exploiting and depleting natural resources.

6 For further reading, see Chapter 9 by Kobi Eliraz, "Beyond Oslo: Israeli Policy in Judea and Samaria."

- These threats have intensified since the Hamas attack, and the difference between the PA and Hamas lies only in their methods of operation, not their goals.
- Most of the Arab population under PA control expresses support for Hamas, which could take over the PA through elections or during the anticipated power vacuum following Abu Mazen's term.

Policy Recommendations: In light of these threats, the complete failure of the Oslo model to create a path to genuine peace, and the Palestinians' inability to establish sustainable pre-state institutions, Israel should define its long-term goal as a single sovereign state – Israel – while maximizing local self-rule for the Arab population. Simultaneously, voluntary emigration channels should be opened, alongside a gradual process for transitioning from residency to Israeli citizenship.

Defining Israel's goal as a single sovereign state represents a strategic shift that requires careful planning to prevent, on one hand, turning Israel into a binational state, and on the other, creating a situation of long-term unjust discrimination that part of the Israeli public would reject, generating diplomatic difficulties. Nevertheless, this goal is achievable and, ultimately, is more realistic than the chimera of a Palestinian state living peacefully alongside Israel.

The practical implementation of this strategic shift toward a single sovereign state does not require immediate application of sovereignty over all of Judea and Samaria; rather, it can be established as a clear goal and pursued gradually and flexibly, according to circumstances and opportunities. Four parallel courses of actions should be pursued, calibrated to political feasibility and the international environment:

First Axis: Gradual application of sovereignty and reform of land management policy – there are areas where the application of sovereignty can be done relatively easily, namely: the Jordan Valley and Greater Ma'ale Adumim. From there, the process can advance to the large settlement blocs and eventually to the entire territory. In parallel, all the lands in the territory should be regularized by renewing the process of formal entry in the land registry (Tabu). This step would provide legal protection, prevent unlawful seizure, and enable a free and economically viable real estate market.

Second Axis: Taking responsibility for infrastructure and upgrading Israeli administrative offices – The State of Israel must assume responsibility for all civilian infrastructure in J&S, which is currently handled inadequately and partially. This includes planning and supervising transportation, electricity, water, gas, renewable energy, air pollution prevention, wastewater treatment facilities, waste collection, and management of key natural resources such as the mountain aquifer and sand and stone quarries. At the same time, the roles of the Civil Administration and the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) should be redefined to operate proactively, efficiently, and focused on maintaining Israeli sovereignty and ensuring stability in the territory.

Third Axis: Dissolution of the Palestinian Authority and transition to decentralized local governance, voluntary emigration or residency process – Local governance will have an interest in avoiding continued funding of terror and incitement against Israel, similar to Arab municipalities within the State of Israel. As part of the transition to local governance, a fundamental reform of educational content is required, removing all incitement and promoting recognition of Israel and its positive benefits. Israel should carefully dismantle security infrastructures that threaten its safety, including PA security forces, while considering incentives. A voluntary emigration pathway should be offered with fair compensation for existing assets, alongside a pathway to residency and eventual citizenship, conditional on abstaining from involvement in terrorism and accepting civic rights and responsibilities. This approach will help achieve a balanced demographic.

Fourth Axis: Effective international advocacy – A well-structured public diplomacy program is required to explain the plan to other countries. While it is not necessary for all to be convinced, Israel must present its rationale and explain why this is a fair measure and the only approach capable of ensuring prosperity and security for all populations.

Acknowledging that no perfect alternative exists, the single sovereign state model is the only one capable of guaranteeing Israel's existence and security for future generations, whereas continuing the current situation carries much higher costs and risks.

Message 7: Israel must develop a confident diplomatic mindset that reflects its biblical identity and its status as a natural, indigenous part of the Middle East—and, on that basis, seize opportunities and lead.[7]

The Issue: The Abraham Accords, signed in 2020 between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan, constitute a historic breakthrough for Israel's diplomatic integration in the region. These agreements stemmed first and foremost from the fact that in recent decades Israel has become a regional power in terms of security, the economy, and technology, and that countries in the region have internalized that their interests require strengthening diplomatic ties with Israel. However, Israel's foreign policy has traditionally focused on the West, primarily the United States, while neglecting the regional potential of the Middle East and Africa. This trend, shaped by hostile relations with the Arab world and a sense of cultural affinity with the West, has led to missed economic, diplomatic, and security opportunities.

Current Policy: Most of Israeli society—including those who lead its foreign policy—operates from a Western-centric mindset. The mental map in the collective consciousness allocates extensive space to the West and very little to our own neighborhood, while Africa remains relegated to a dark corner. The Abraham Accords demonstrated the potential for regional openness, yet the perception of Israel as a "Western villa in the Middle Eastern jungle"—a long-standing Israeli metaphor, continues to prevail to a large extent and is institutionally reflected in Israel's security and diplomatic establishments.

The Problem: The "villa in the jungle" mindset no longer reflects Israel's political, economic, and security interests today or in the coming decade. It prevents Israel from fully realizing its influence as a regional power and blinds it to emerging changes and threats. It may even exacerbate crises due to a lack of understanding of the secondary effects of our actions.

Africa, too, generally remains outside the focus of Israeli attention, despite being a nearby arena of strategic importance in light of its growing population and abundant natural resources, and despite Israel's many interests there. There are additional countries in Central Africa that are interested in formalizing diplomatic

7 For further reading, see Chapter 13 by Raphael BenLevi, "My Heart Is in the West, and I Am in the Middle East: A New Diplomatic Order of Priorities for Israel."

relations with Israel. In addition, there are many Christian communities that support Israel out of religious affinity and a desire for cooperation.

At the same time, negative processes are unfolding in Africa that Israel must not ignore: Iran has been active there and strengthening Israel's ties with African states helps to contain this effort. Africa is also an arena of increasing geopolitical competition involving China and Turkey, and Israel must establish its presence in this context as well. The continent represents a vast potential market for Israeli technologies in agriculture, water, renewable energy, and healthcare, and Israel has much to offer in these fields, as well as in security and economic cooperation.

Policy Recommendations: Israel must internalize its natural belonging to the Middle East and act with confidence and assertiveness, and orient itself toward regional interests. This does not mean Israel should seek acceptance through concessions. The Abraham Accords succeeded because Israel negotiated from a position of strength.

- Israel should internalize and emphasize in its diplomatic language that the Jewish people are an indigenous people of the Middle East—that their language is a Middle Eastern language, part of the region's linguistic mosaic—and that they should feel at home here without the need for apology. The more Israel projects the naturalness of its presence here, the greater the likelihood that other peoples of the region will relate to it accordingly.
- An integrative approach requires an understanding of the interconnections among the Arab states themselves and a clear grasp of their interests. By aligning with the dynamics of regional politics, Israel can undertake larger initiatives, solve problems independently, and reduce the need to turn to Washington for mediation. This approach also means that major initiatives—such as an agreement with Saudi Arabia or a trade corridor from India to Europe—should be designed so that all neighboring states benefit from the process.
- Normalization of relations with Saudi Arabia is a historic opportunity for the entire region, but it must be managed wisely and cautiously. To ensure that an agreement with Saudi Arabia does not cause fractures in other arenas, it is necessary to ensure that all neighboring parties benefit from the process. Saudi Arabia stands to gain greatly from a peace agreement with Israel. Therefore, Israel does not need to "pay" for relations with Saudi Arabia through concessions to the Palestinians.

- Room for faith-based dialogue: religious belief is part of the regional fabric, and therefore Israel should not shy away from faith-based dialogue with the Saudis. Within the Islamic religious tradition, there are pathways through which the Saudis can lead change and recognize Israeli sovereignty over the Land of Israel from an Islamic legal perspective, and efforts should be made to promote them. Israelis, for their part, should present themselves as the biblical people of Israel and emphasize their deep roots in the land.
- It must also be recognized that Qatar is an enemy state of Israel and a supporter of terrorism, and Israel should begin to treat it accordingly. When Israel cooperates with Qatar, as in the case of Gaza, it generates contempt among the Emiratis and Saudis, who do not understand why Israel is willing to do so.

To embed this shift in mindset within the diplomatic system, organizational steps are also required, including:

- Transferring responsibility for managing relations with countries that do not maintain diplomatic ties with Israel from the Mossad to the National Security Council.
- Appointing two ministers within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs—one responsible for the Middle East and the Arab world, and one responsible for Africa.
- Upgrading the status of ambassadors in countries across the region.
- Initiating regular reciprocal official visits and institutionalizing international conferences of regional states in Israel—for example, an Africa Conference in Israel once every five years and a Middle East countries conference every two years.

Israel's Security Doctrine and Trends in the International Environment

Chapter 1

Israel's Security Doctrine and Its Erosion Since the 1990s

Roi Tamir[1]

Executive Summary

The conditions that led to the establishment of Iran's "Ring of Fire" around Israel and to the Hamas attack were not the result of a single point of failure, but rather stemmed from a shift away from the fundamental principles of Israel's security doctrine. The security doctrine formulated by Ben-Gurion, inspired by Ze'ev Jabotinsky's "Iron Wall" idea, functioned successfully until the 1990s. This doctrine emphasized several core principles: decisive victory—meaning that in every encounter with an enemy, Israel must strive for a clear and unequivocal outcome in its favor; deterrence, as an outcome of decisive victory. Willingness to launch preemptive strikes. Self-reliance, meaning that only IDF soldiers fight for Israel's security and not foreign forces, alongside the development of a nuclear capability. Securing the support of a global power. Jewish settlement of the land as an essential security component of the State of Israel. Militarily, this doctrine emphasized the rapid transfer of the battle into enemy territory through overwhelming ground and air maneuver.

However, the signing of peace agreements with Egypt, the PLO, and Jordan, together with changes in the nature of Israel's adversaries, opened the door to the adoption of new underlying assumptions, such as: the era of major wars has ended; conflicts would now be limited and against terror organizations rather than states; there is no longer a conventional military

1 This chapter represents a joint product of the project's research fellows and was written by Roi Tamir.

threat; cross-border terrorism can be contained; holding territory cannot be justified; and that "a political solution is preferable to a military one." These changes reflected a value system that does not recognize the concept of an enemy, but rather only a rival, and a belief that any conflict can be resolved through negotiation and diplomacy.

Israel's Security Doctrine in Its Early Decades

Israel's security doctrine, as it developed from Ze'ev Jabotinsky's thought in the 1920s and through its reformulation by David Ben-Gurion around the War of Independence and the early 1950s, remained dominant throughout the first four decades of the State of Israel's existence. Beginning in the 1990s, however, a process of change emerged in the way Israel's security doctrine was expressed in policy and practice by successive Israeli governments and the defense establishment. Hamas' attack on Israeli territory on October 7—carried out by a force of approximately 6,000 fighters, involving the invasion and conquest of southern Israel surrounding the Gaza Strip for several hours, operational control of the area by the attackers, and unprecedented violence to Israeli civilians and IDF forces within a short time frame—requires an assessment of what went wrong with Israel's security doctrine.

A security doctrine, approach, or worldview (referred to in Hebrew as the "*konseptsia*") is never merely a matter of how military force is built and employed. It is built on a perception of reality rooted first and foremost in values. A change in values—whether in their composition or in their prioritization—leads to a change in the perception of reality.

Ben-Gurion's Security Doctrine

The period prior to the establishment of the State of Israel and immediately thereafter was marked by a palpable and acute sense of an existential threat to the Jews in the Land of Israel and their project to create a national homeland. This sense of existential danger reached its peak around the declaration of the State of Israel and the understanding that it would trigger an invasion by regular armies from Arab states into the territory of the newly established state. In 1947, Ben-Gurion referred to the supreme test for which preparations were required "for a bloody war with all the Arab states." Even after the end of the War of Independence, the sense of threat did not dissipate, and it served as a central factor in Ben-Gurion's thinking, as expressed in the article *"Army and State,"* written in 1953.

Ben-Gurion's article was the culmination of a process of deep reflection and presented eighteen foundational points to the government. To this day, it is regarded as a foundational text of Israel's security concept, even though it is not formulated as a formal doctrinal document. Already in the first part of the document, Ben-Gurion makes a statement at the level of national security, asserting that security does not depend on the military alone and is influenced no less by "non-military" factors, in his words, such as economic and productive capacity, industrial and agricultural capability, growth of the Jewish population (immigration), settlement in vulnerable border areas, the maintenance of reserves (food and raw materials), transportation routes, and above all, national cohesion and spirit.

A central feature of Israel's security environment that Ben-Gurion identifies is the quantitative asymmetry between the IDF and the Arab armies: "It is clear that in manpower we will never be equal to the Arabs, nor in the quantity of weapons…"[2] There is also a disparity in population size and economic capacity, and finally, he notes the small and narrow borders of the State of Israel. From each of these points flow implications that lie at the heart of the security doctrine as it was then formulated. Ben-Gurion determined that military asymmetry required continuous investment in qualitative superiority. This qualitative edge would be achieved through several factors, including human capital—the quality of the soldiers and their training—maximum enhancement of striking power (the air force and armored forces), a focus on combat formations, investment in advanced weaponry, and above all, fighting spirit.

Limited resources forced Israel to rely on reserve forces to balance defense with economic growth. The small territory and narrow waist of Israel make the time factor critical and require rapid reserve mobilization and swift force deployment. Ben-Gurion described this as follows: "Our enemies can attack us with their full force from land, sea, and air, and if, God forbid, they reach Tel Aviv before we have organized and mobilized our full strength—we are lost."[3] In addition, this challenge requires an intelligence warning capability regarding an expected invasion or attack prior to its realization. Without timely warning and rapid mobilization, campaigns risk prolongation—with strategic consequences. At the core of Ben-Gurion's approach stood the need to shorten the duration of the campaign in order to minimize, as much as possible, casualties on Israel's side and damage to its economy.

After 1979, Israeli intelligence needed to detect 'strategic shifts'—changes in Egyptian policy that might violate the peace accords. In this context, a strategic shift refers to a change in Egyptian policy (due to a change of regime or other circumstances) contrary to the peace agreements, and an intention to undertake offensive action against Israel. Warning in this case was intended to allow sufficient preparation time in terms of force buildup and the reallocation of resources in response to the potential Egyptian threat.

The Heart of the Iron Wall: Decisive Victory

The heart of Ze'ev Jabotinsky's "Iron Wall" idea is the creation of military power whose presence and actions generate an impenetrable "iron wall" in the enemy's consciousness. When not even a "spark of hope of getting rid of us" remains in the enemy's mind, and the iron wall has no

2 David Ben-Gurion, *Army and State*, 1953. [in Hebrew]

3 Ibid.

cracks, only then will the enemy lose hope and reconcile himself to Israel's existence. In order to instill such a mindset in the enemy, the architects of Israel's security concept in the early years of the state argued that the IDF must achieve decisive victories in every war and in every encounter with the enemy. To achieve such decisiveness, Ben-Gurion maintained that the core strength of the IDF should be a striking force, with an emphasis on armored forces, supported by the air force.

The principle of decisiveness means that the mode of military action in every encounter with an enemy should yield an unequivocal outcome in Israel's favor. One of the operational expressions of the principle of decisiveness, as it took shape in Israel's security concept, was encapsulated in the idea of transferring the fighting to enemy territory. A rapid and powerful maneuver into enemy territory as quickly as possible was intended both to shorten the duration of the war (as noted, for economic reasons and to reduce casualties), to distance the threat from the civilian population, and to significantly increase pressure on the enemy. Decisiveness cannot be achieved by standoff weapons and aerial bombardment alone. This understanding took root as early as the 1950s, as reflected, for example, in the writings of Yigal Allon, commander of the Palmach, a senior IDF commander in the War of Independence and later a government minister: "Reciprocal aerial bombardments—with conventional bombs—may cause severe damage and do much toward destroying the other side, but under Middle Eastern conditions they are insufficient to bring about a clear decision between victor and vanquished and to end a war."[4]

When not even a "spark of hope of getting rid of us" remains in the enemy's mind, and the iron wall has no cracks, only then will the enemy lose hope and reconcile himself to Israel's existence

Deterrence is the Result of Decisive Victory

The use of decisive force is intended to instill in our enemies a strong sense of deterrence that will prevent—or at least reduce—their desire to act offensively against the State of Israel in the future. Deterrence of enemies from acting against Israel applies both at the tactical level toward short-term use of force, and at the strategic level against a full-scale war or an intense and prolonged campaign. Since the enemies of the State of Israel are numerous and persist over many years, the principle of deterrence is meant to have a cumulative effect. In the early years of the state, Ben-Gurion recognized that Arab states would need decisive defeats before abandoning their goal to destroy Israel.

4 Yigal Allon, *Screen of Sand*, third edition, Hakibbutz Hameuchad Publishing, 1981, p. 68. [in Hebrew]

Not Only the Existence of Power, but the Willingness to Carry Out a "Preemptive Counterattack"

Deterrence is an elusive concept, and it is difficult to determine at any given moment the enemy's precise intentions. One of the fundamental understandings is that the manner in which force is employed would have a greater deterrent effect than the mere existence of IDF capabilities. Yigal Allon articulated this in the 1950s:

> Precisely Israel's capability and willingness to launch a preemptive counterattack, whenever the preparations of the Arab armies take on a threatening and dangerous character, will reduce the need to undertake decisive military measures and will increase the chances for peace. For it is not enough that the IDF exists and possesses power as a means of deterrence; the manner of its use is no less important than its very existence. On this, there is no dispute.[5]

Self-Reliance with Great-Power Support

To strengthen deterrence, Israel's founders pursued two complementary strategies: first, the principle of self-reliance, expressed through nuclear capability and sole reliance on IDF forces during wartime (without foreign forces); and second, the establishment of strategic relations with a global power.

The development of Israel's nuclear capability began in the mid-1950s with French assistance, through the construction of the Nuclear Research Center near Dimona.[6] While Israel has never revealed the extent of its nuclear capabilities, it has attained an image of a nuclear-armed state, and this contributed to strategic deterrence. Moreover, in the 1980s the "Begin Doctrine" was added, stipulating that Israel would act to prevent hostile states from developing nuclear weapons. The doctrine became tangible in June 1981 with the attack on the Osirak nuclear reactor in Iraq; later, in September 2007, when Israel struck the Syrian nuclear reactor; and most recently, in June 2025, with the attack on Iran's nuclear facilities.

The State of Israel's pursuit, from its earliest years, of a close relationship with a global power was intended to add a diplomatic umbrella and an important layer to the "Iron Wall". This was based on the assumption that states tend to think very carefully before attacking a country that enjoys the backing of a global power. In its first two decades, France was Israel's primary arms supplier and key partner in the 1956 Sinai Campaign. These relations deteriorated in the period surrounding the Six-Day War, and France

5 Ibid. p. 77

6 BenLevi, Raphael. "The evolution and future of Israeli nuclear ambiguity." *The Nonproliferation Review*, 29(4-6) (2022), pp. 243-265

even imposed an arms embargo on Israel. After 1967, Israel forged a strategic partnership with the United States that has steadily deepened despite fluctuations. Since the late 1960s onward, Israel began to equip itself with American weapon systems across almost all military domains. Ties between the Israeli defense establishment and its American counterpart steadily strengthened and even became an asset for the United States, particularly in the fields of intelligence and technology. The United States became Israel's primary diplomatic defender, notably preventing anti-Israel resolutions at the UN Security Council. It should be noted, though, that Israel has never signed a formal defense pact with the United States.

Israeli governments and the security establishment viewed settlement as a central element for security

Settlement as an Essential Element of Security

Settlement has been central to Zionism, embodying the Jewish connection to the land. Early security leaders viewed settlement as critical to Israel's territorial defense and strategic depth. As noted, Ben-Gurion spelled out Israel's essential security requirements, including: "…settlement in vulnerable areas, along the borders, at the approaches to Jerusalem, in the Negev, in the 'mixed' Galilee…"[7] Yigal Allon wrote about settlement:

> From the very beginning of the resettlement of the returning exiles, settlement became a security factor of the highest order, and it will continue to be a military factor as circumstances and times change. And conversely: without settlements who are also fighters, defending the land would be impossible, even if the power of the army were doubled; just as without an excellent army the invader would not be defeated. The two are inseparable.[8]

Allon even viewed the settlements as fulfilling a role in the security deployment: "A dense network of settlements, deployed in depth, properly fortified, armed with the best modern weaponry and organized in a solid territorial defensive array, can serve as a kind of strategic depth, as a substitute for the geographic depth that does not exist…"[9]

Thus, from the first decades of Israel's existence and until the late 1980s (when, for example, a government program to establish lookout settlements in the Galilee was implemented), Israeli governments and the security establishment viewed settlement as a central element for security, both in terms of strategic depth and border defense. "The

7 David Ben-Gurion, *Army and State*, 1953. [in Hebrew]

8 Yigal Allon, *A Curtain of Sand*, p. 263. [in Hebrew]

9 Ibid. p. 254

government's policy in favor of settlement is absolutely clear. It speaks both of outposts and of permanent settlements. This policy stems first and foremost from socialist Zionist ideology. We see settlement as a security necessity…"[10] However, from the 1990s onward, a change in policy occurred: the number of new settlements established in the State of Israel was greatly reduced, and the role of the Nahal Corps was changed from settlement to educational activity.

Thus, Israel's national security doctrine in the first decades of its existence was based on the "Iron Wall" idea and expressed through three pillars: decisive victory, cumulative deterrence, and strategic warning. These pillars guided the development and operation of the IDF in its early decades and helped Israel address the challenges posed by its enemies. The goal of decisive action was to create deterrence, keep the threat away from the country's civilians, and shorten the duration of a campaign. Deterrence aimed to increase the time between wars and erode the enemy's motivation to attack Israel. The warning pillar sought to compensate for the lack of geographical depth in Israel's territory and allow the mobilization of reserves while avoiding the need for a large standing army. The three pillars did not emerge out of nowhere; they aligned with the strategic, political, social, security, economic, and value-based assessments of the young national leadership, formed in the face of multiple threats and against all odds. Implementing these principles led Israel successfully to military victories against the surrounding Arab states.

The Changes to the Security Doctrine over the Past Three Decades

The late 1980s and early 1990s marked a transition between two significant periods, both globally and in Israel. The central global driver was the collapse of the Soviet Union (in 1991), which marked the end of the Cold War and the transition from a bi-polar balance of power to a unipolar world—the United States. In the 1990s, Europe, after years of recovery from the World Wars, embraced diplomacy as a substitute for force, relied on American hegemony in world affairs, and laid the groundwork for the establishment of the European Union in 1993.

The Changing Nature of Israel's Enemies: From Pan-Arabism to Pan-Islamism

At the same time, several changes in the Middle East had a major impact on Israel's national security. In 1979, the Islamic Revolution took place in Iran, bringing the

10 Minister Israel Galili's response on behalf of the Golda Meir government regarding the government's policy toward the Gaza Strip. (Knesset Records, Session 289 of the Seventh Knesset, 27.3.1972, pp. 2105–2106). Huberman, Billig, *The Policies of Israeli Governments Toward Jewish Settlement in the Gaza Strip, 1967–2005*. [in Hebrew]

Ayatollahs to power. This event marked the beginning of a broad regional shift from Pan-Arabism to Pan-Islamism. In the 1980s, two Islamist terror organizations were established that would, over the years, become the clearest expression of the changing nature of threats to Israel: Hezbollah (1982), the Shiite group in Lebanon, and Hamas (1987), the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood organization in the Gaza Strip. Both organizations declared the destruction of the State of Israel as their goal. Another important Sunni terrorist organization was al-Qaeda, founded in 1988 in Afghanistan, marking the rise of global jihad against the West.

Against the backdrop of a developing terrorist threat and an increasing capability to launch rockets and missiles into Israel's cities, Israel also saw a decline in the classical threat that had shaped its security doctrine—invasion by regular state armies[1]. The Yom Kippur War (1973) against the Egyptian and Syrian armies and the First Lebanon War (1982) against the Syrian army were the last wars in which the IDF fought against regular Arab armies. Moreover, the "peace agreements" Israel signed with Egypt (1979) and Jordan (1994) reinforced the sense in Israel that the threat of a large-scale ground invasion had passed.[11] This also shaped the narrative of the end of the era of wars, the end of the conventional threat, and the perception that Israel would now face only a sub-conventional threat (terrorist organizations) or a super-conventional one (nuclear).

The Three Withdrawals and their Consequences

During the last decade of the twentieth century and the years that followed, the State of Israel carried out three major military withdrawals. First, Israel signed the Oslo Accords in 1993 with the PLO, dividing Judea and Samaria into Areas A, B, and C, and transferring security responsibility for Areas A and B to the Palestinians. In May 2000, Israel withdrew from southern Lebanon in a rapid and unilateral manner, which led to Hezbollah's immediate takeover of the Lebanese side of the border with Israel. In 2005, Israel unilaterally implemented the Disengagement Plan, which involved the withdrawal of all Israeli presence—both military and civilian—from the Gaza Strip, the demolition of all settlements, and the removal of thousands of residents from the territory. In 2007, only two years after the Disengagement Plan was carried out, Hamas seized control of the Gaza Strip by force, overthrowing Fatah's rule and becoming the de facto sovereign.

The justification given for the withdrawals was that they would provide Israel with international legitimacy to strike its enemies with greater force if attacked from these territories. It was also argued that the

11 Moshe Ya'alon, "50th Anniversary of the Six-Day War Conference" at *Yad Yitzhak Ben-Zvi*, June 5, 2017. [in Hebrew]

withdrawal would remove the enemy's motivation to attack or, at the very least, make it difficult for the enemy to gain public legitimacy for war.

The justification given for the withdrawals was that they would provide Israel with international legitimacy to strike its enemies with greater force

As a corollary of the assumption that the era of full-scale wars had ended, the wars that did occur—or, under the new terminology, the "limited conflicts"—were considered to be against terrorist organizations who were isolated from the states and peoples in which they operate. In this view, Hezbollah is not Lebanon, the residents of the Gaza Strip are not Hamas, and Fatah terrorists are not the Palestinian Authority.

Kidnappings and Prisoner Exchanges

Since the 1980s, Israel agreed to a series of highly disproportionate prisoner exchange deals which portrayed the country as weak and susceptible to extortion. The most notable of these were: the first Jibril deal (1983), in which 4,765 prisoners were released in exchange for six Nahal soldiers; the second Jibril deal (1985), in which 1,150 prisoners were released in exchange for three IDF soldiers; a deal with Hezbollah (2004), in which 450 prisoners were released in exchange for three IDF soldiers kidnapped by the organization on Mount Dov in 2000; and the Gilad Shalit deal (2011) with Hamas, in which 1,027 Palestinian prisoners were released in exchange for the soldier kidnapped by the organization in 2006. These prisoner exchange deals weakened Israel's reputation in the eyes of its enemies, likely encouraged further kidnappings, and filled the Judea, Samaria, and Gaza with numerous released fighters, some of whom joined the leadership of terrorist organizations and other operational roles.

Defense Instead of Decisive Victory

Over the past three decades, efforts have been made to update and delineate Israel's security doctrine. Various committees addressed this issue, but their proposals were never formalized. The most significant change to the security discourse of Israel's political and defense establishment was the addition of the "defense" pillar—alongside decision, deterrence, and warning—proposed by the Meridor Committee in 2006. The defense pillar was in reaction to the development of the rocket threat posed by terrorist organizations to the Israeli home front. This change, together with the processes described above, has produced a de facto shift in Israel's security doctrine over the past three decades. Some argue that the addition of the defense pillar contradicts the principle of decisive victory.[12]

12 Yagil Henkin, *Nuclear Iran: Is Israel Ready for Disaster?*, podcast *"On the Meaning"*, 2024. [in Hebrew]

The protection of the civilian and military rear, whether through passive defense (shelters and reinforced rooms) or active defense (Iron Dome), was intended to provide maneuvering forces with better conditions to act against the enemy and achieve decisive outcomes. In practice, however, the protection measures have become a justification to avoid maneuvering when there are no civilian casualties.

The Fundamental Assumptions of the New Doctrine

Thus, over the past three decades, a process of change has taken place in Israel's security concept, expressed in the following new assumptions:

The end of the era of wars – Worldwide, including in the Middle East, there will no longer be high-intensity wars. For various reasons, dramatic and intense interstate conflicts that require the mobilization of all national resources—including readiness to pay a heavy price, and to extract an even heavier price from the enemy—will no longer occur.

War against terrorists rather than war between nations – As a derivative of the previous assumption, the "limited conflicts" taking place today are against terrorist organizations that are detached from the states and peoples among whom they operate. Over recent decades, the IDF has pursued "guilty individuals" using exclusively tactical military means. Civilian systems that produce, support, and sustain terrorism have remained outside the scope of the struggle. The new doctrine brings to bear immense technological power that enables it to conduct low-intensity wars of attrition while minimizing harm. Because the nature of the threat has changed, a rapid and decisive defeat of the enemy is no longer perceived as a vital necessity.

Terror beyond the border can be managed through a policy of containment – Although terrorist organizations and their increasingly sophisticated capabilities are developing at an alarming pace on the other side of the border (sometimes only meters away from Israeli civilian or military facilities and sometimes deep within the territory), they are not considered an existential or immediate threat requiring continuous action. These organizations can be contained, with the understanding that Israel will be able to block their operative goals when necessary. The conflict with enemies—particularly the Palestinians—can be managed; there is no need to decisively defeat them. Therefore, there is no imperative to hold territory. The conflict can be managed and kept at an acceptable level along borders and lines determined by Israel. Military force will be used only when necessary and to the minimum extent required to preserve the conflict at a controlled level.

An example of this approach can be found in the IDF Strategy document, first published in 2015 and expanded in 2018 by then-Chief of Staff, Gadi Eisenkot[2]. In the document,

Eisenkot describes the "prevention and influence approach" as the IDF's primary approach, whose:

> "…main objective is to preserve the existing strategic situation in the short -term. …According to this approach, the IDF strives to thwart emerging threats and delay war, and to damage the enemy's capabilities in order to create optimal military, state, and cognitive conditions for a future decisive victory should war break out, and to strengthen deterrence. This approach advances objectives of shaping the environment, weakening adversaries, reducing their force buildup, and undermining their legitimacy, and also promotes the building of partnerships and force development, aimed at strengthening Israel's power. Under this approach, the IDF operates defensively, while also carrying out offensive actions within this framework, but seeks a return to calm rather than escalation.[13]

A prolonged occupation cannot be justified—especially in opposition to international pressure. Within Israel's military and political leadership, a cognitive norm has developed that it is never appropriate to control territory through military force (even though international law allows it and it forms an inherent part of military action in war). Moreover, if Israel is not careful in how it exercises its power and implements its policies, it may face international sanctions similar to those imposed on South Africa for its apartheid policy. Implicit here is the assumption, for example, that Israel's control over Judea and Samaria was always illegitimate.

Rationalist management of the struggle – An attempt to manage the conflict based on economic, political, and other interests that serve as decisive factors in the decision-making of leaders in the Western world. This approach ignores differences in the value attributed to human life. Leverage is applied according to this rationale (for example, economic sanctions) to delay the adversary's buildup or even attempt to prevent conflicts. As part of Western thinking, there is an assumption that when individuals or extremist organizations (dictators, revolutionary movements, terrorists, and resistance organizations) assume power, their ideology moderates under the constraints of governance: the need to address the economic interests of the population, employment issues, water and electricity infrastructure, and even day-to-day life, such as garbage collection. As a result, policymakers argued that employing Palestinian workers in Israel and improving the material living standards of the population would moderate Hamas, as it would have something to lose. Similarly, the population itself would resist initiating war to avoid harming their

13 Gadi Eisenkot, *IDF Strategy*, 2018, p. 19-20 [in Hebrew]

standard of living. In this way, Israel analyzed Hamas through a Western lens, which tended to avoid recognizing the strength of its ideological component committed to jihad and the destruction of Israel. In Israel, the prevailing approach held that the solution to the situation was political rather than military.

The idea of nationalism came to be perceived as a cause of the disasters of the World Wars and was therefore deemed illegitimate, on par with Fascism and Nazism

The Ideological Background for the Change in Israel's Security Doctrine

The change in Israel's security doctrine since the 1990s stemmed not only from developments on the ground—such as shifts in the nature of threats, the state of the Israeli economy, and global technological advances—but primarily from shifts in the values in Israeli society, particularly among the institutional elite. These shifts arose from several deep ideological currents in the global intellectual sphere, which gradually gained traction in Israel during the 1990s.

In the aftermath of the World Wars, particularly in Europe, philosophies that emphasized the individual at the expense of the "old institutions" of the state, the nation, and the community gained strength. Moreover, the idea of nationalism came to be perceived as a cause of the disasters of the World Wars and was therefore deemed illegitimate, on par with Fascism and Nazism. As a result, these ideas rejected the frameworks and cultural structures of the past and turned toward creating a new conceptual language based on ultra-individualism that was inherently anti-militaristic. At the same time, postmodernist ideas[14] eroded the notion of absolute truth—particularly in Europe and the United States—and the sense of justice in the Western world began to blur, leaving its mark on perceptions of the international, national, and social spheres[3]. In Europe, a "transnational"[15] identity began to develop, which viewed the existence of supranational institutions, to which states are bound in matters of justice, law, and morality, as a desirable goal[4].

These ideas also began to penetrate Israel's academic and social spheres. Toward the 1990s, alongside changes in the nature of security threats and the growth of economic prosperity, a transformation also occurred in the character and identity of Israeli society. Israeli society shifted from a refugee society defined by survival and a looming existential

14 For further reading, see: Steven R. C. Hicks, *Explaining Postmodernism*, Sela Meir Publishing, 2019; Shmuel Trigano, *The New Dominant Ideology—Postmodernism*, Jerusalem: Carmel, 2020. [in Hebrew]

15 For further reading, see: Robert Kagan, *Of Paradise and Power*, Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2003; John Fonte, *Sovereignty or Submission*, 2011.

threat to a Western society of abundance, possessing technological superiority and lacking a tangible existential threat. This created fertile ground for the embrace of postmodern ideas—including the erosion of the concept of the enemy—at the political level, and from the 1990s onward also within the Israeli security establishment, through internal think tanks and external bodies aimed at instilling values in IDF soldiers in the form of educational foundations and NGOs.

One of the central bodies that came to exert influence over IDF thinking was the Operational Theory Research Institute, headed by Shimon Naveh, which—through the training of the IDF's senior command—created a new conceptual language detached from traditional military doctrine. This new conceptual language pushed the notion of decisive victory to the margins and generated alternative concepts such as limited conflict, systemics, calming [hoga'ah], and levers. In this way, formulations were introduced into IDF discourse such as: "First and foremost, it is necessary to extricate ourselves from the framework in which we were educated, whose foundation rests on the ideas of deterrence, decisive victory, and early warning, and to develop adaptive capacity that will enable coping with the organizing idea of limited conflict and the strategy of calming employed within it."[16] Thus, in practice, Israel's security doctrine was eroded from within the security establishment itself. At the same time, the belief in the impossibility of defeating terrorism gained increasing prominence, which went hand in hand with the belief in the declining importance of ground forces and the lack of purpose in ground maneuver altogether. These ideas surfaced clearly in the manner in which the IDF operated and functioned during the Second Lebanon War, as reflected in the Winograd and Shomron commissions that investigated it.

This new conceptual language pushed the notion of decisive victory to the margins and generated alternative concepts such as limited conflict, systemics, calming [hoga'ah], and levers

The cultural transformation experienced by the West, including Israel, since the World Wars can be summarized through the reaction of the American thinker Lee Harris to the shock that struck his fellow citizens following the September 11 terrorist attacks (many in Israel were likewise deeply shocked by Hamas's actions—militarily, ideologically, culturally, and humanly):

> "They forget, in short, that there has ever been a category of human

16 Shmuel Nir, "Attrition and the Adaptation Test," *Studies in National Security*, 4 (January 2001). For further reading, see Naveh Dromi, *Flowers in the Barrel*, Sela Meir Publishing, 2022 [in Hebrew]

experience called the enemy… That, before 9/11, was what had happened to us. The very concept of the enemy had been banished from our moral and political vocabulary. An enemy was just a friend we hadn't done enough for yet. Or perhaps there had been a misunderstanding, or an oversight on our part— something that we could correct. Our first task therefore is to try to grasp what the concept of the enemy really means. The enemy is someone who is willing to die in order to kill you."[17]

17 Lee Harris, *Civilization and Its Enemies, The Next Stage of History*, 2004, p.xii

Chapter 2

Initiative and Victory: Traditional Principles for a Renewed Security Doctrine

Roi Tamir[1]

Executive Summary

Over the past three decades, the foundational assumptions of Israel's security doctrine have shifted. A weakening of the idea of decisive victory through military action in favor of defensive actions; increased investment in stand-off fire capabilities, precision weaponry, and intelligence—all while reducing the ground forces and weakening maneuver capability and reserve readiness; a significant expansion of active defense systems (such as Iron Dome) and technological barriers along the borders; three withdrawals—from Lebanon, Gaza, and Judea and Samaria—on the one hand, and, on the other, a long-term avoidance of establishing security-oriented settlements in the periphery. This shift also entailed a focus on the "campaign between wars," conducted below the threshold of full-scale war, and a prolonged avoidance of implementing the Begin Doctrine with regard to Iran's nuclear program, until the execution of Operation Rising Lion in June 2025.

The ultimate result of this shift in doctrine was, among other things, the development of Iran's "ring of fire" threat surrounding Israel, as manifested in the Iron Swords War. This war must serve as a new turning point for Israel's security doctrine. To this end, Israel must adopt alternative strategic principles that will enable it to defeat its enemies and shape the strategic environment in which it operates, shifting toward an offensive and initiative-driven approach, rather than a reactive one.

1 This chapter represents a joint product of the project's research fellows and was written by Roi Tamir.

Adopting such an alternative requires a return to the core principles embedded in the Iron Wall of the Zionist enterprise: viewing the struggle against the State of Israel as an ongoing conflict of varying intensity; understanding the ideological roots of the enemies' aspiration to destroy the State of Israel; placing initiative and decisive victory as top priorities; striving for security independence and self-reliance in the use of force; recognizing the military and psychological significance of territorial control and the creation of defensible borders; avoiding territorial concessions; preventing the emergence of threats at their earliest stages; and building force capabilities capable of winning a multi-front war through the execution of ground maneuver at long distances.

Implications of the Transformation

The changes in the security doctrine over the past three decades have manifested in the restructuring of the IDF's manner of operating and its force build-up:

Erosion of the decisive victory component—The "decisive victory" element in the security doctrine has been significantly eroded. As former Defense Minister Ya'alon stated in 2017: *"When conducting a war against Hezbollah in Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza, or suicide terrorism, it is impossible to achieve a clear picture of victory. The concept of decisiveness and victory in the types of threats we face today is different."*[2]

Changes in force structure - With no emphasis on decisive victory, ground maneuver operations deep into enemy territory have been largely abandoned in favor of stand-off fire and minimal ground maneuver. This in turn led to the idea of the "small and smart" military, meaning the reduction of ground forces in favor of intelligence and air power capabilities. Defensive measures were also emphasized, in the form of "smart" barriers along the borders and interception systems such as Iron Dome, David's Sling, and Arrow. Strengthening defensive capabilities further weakened the desire to strive for decisive victory and reduced operational readiness within the military system. In 2020, Herzi Halevi, serving as commander of Southern Command, described the rise in the importance of defensive measures in the current era:

> **The ground maneuver in the Iron Swords War in Gaza and Lebanon unequivocally demonstrated its importance and effectiveness in destroying the enemy, uncovering weapons, and dismantling enemy infrastructure**

The importance of defensive combat has increased because the enemy's offensive achievements on our soil, effectively amplified psychologically, are offset only by the successes of our own attacks. While the critical factor in defining victory in a classical war between states used to be who prevailed, in a war against terrorist armies the size of the offset plays a crucial role due to the asymmetry in capabilities and perception.[3]

Diminished importance of territory – Proponents of the change claimed that it was possible to weaken the enemy through targeted killings and the destruction of infrastructure without territorial conquest. Once enemy casualties reached a certain critical mass and its fighting infrastructure had been destroyed through stand-off

2 Moshe Ya'alon, *50th Anniversary of the Six-Day War Conference* at Yad Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, June 5, 2017. [in Hebrew]

3 Herzi Halevi, "Multidimensional Defense," *Between the Poles,* 28-30 (October 2020), [in Hebrew]

means, the enemy would become deterred and cease aggressive actions against us. The Second Lebanon War serves as the primary example of this approach, in which the air force led, while ground action remained limited. It was also implemented in Gaza operations prior to the Iron Swords War, using precision strikes and technologically based defense. This was reflected in the security doctrine document, written by the Meridor Committee, which states:

"The offensive military doctrine remains in force, but its center of gravity has shifted from large-scale ground maneuver deep inside enemy territory to the employment of precise stand-off fire (from our own territory whenever possible) and to limited ground operations. This shift has proven essential primarily due to the need to reduce the attrition of our forces and to take political considerations into account before undertaking a ground maneuver into enemy territory—if such a complementary move proves necessary. This change has become possible to a large extent as a result of technological developments on the battlefield.[4]"

The ground maneuver in the Iron Swords War in Gaza and Lebanon unequivocally demonstrated its importance and effectiveness in destroying the enemy, uncovering weapons, and dismantling enemy infrastructure.

War against the enemy's force buildup — Out of the desire to avoid being drawn into an undesirable confrontation, Israel refrained from pursuing a decisive campaign against the enemy's force buildup. Instead, the "Campaign Between the Wars" was adopted, meaning efforts undertaken to reduce, delay, and prevent the enemy's acquisition of capabilities that would upset the balance vis-à-vis the IDF, through actions conducted below the threshold of war. This campaign enabled the IDF to demonstrate its high capabilities, ingenuity, and creativity, as well as its achievements in providing real-time intelligence. However, it also absorbed most of the organization's attention and led to a reduction in engagement with some of the essential functions required for the organization to withstand the ultimate test—an actual war. A campaign between wars, and an actual war are two different conceptual frameworks and transitioning between them is not simple. The influence of this mindset on the branches involved in it has been described in the following terms:

These same bodies also experienced an erosion of capabilities, a diversion of attention, and even distortions of reality that aligned with "campaign between the wars" activity. Phenomena such as prioritizing the urgent over the important, and using intelligence intended for war

4 Dan Meridor and Ron Eldadi, "Israel's Security Concept: The Report of the Committee for Formulating the Security Concept (Meridor Committee) and Its Review After a Decade," INSS, 2018, p. 21. [in Hebrew]

for its purposes, blurred the distinctions between the campaign and actual war and created distorted perceptions of the adversary.[5]

The campaign ultimately proved detrimental to the security establishment, which—despite being aware that it did not halt the enemy's broad force buildup—clung to this form of activity as proof that it was addressing the problem. Thus, vis-à-vis both Hamas and Hezbollah, a policy of restraint developed: Hamas and Hezbollah continued to build up their forces, yet Israel did not act against them directly. The justification was that Israel was "deterring" the enemy, which would not dare initiate a full-scale war against it due to Israel's technological superiority. Israel also believed it was preventing the closure of the qualitative gap by proactively striking weapons shipments and infrastructure, whether in Syria or in Gaza.

Avoidance of implementing the begin doctrine[6] – Unlike previous actions in Syria and Iraq, in the case of Iran's nuclear program, for decades Israel refrained from maintaining and executing a military strike option. Despite the progress of Iran's nuclear program and its defiant behavior toward the International Atomic Energy Agency and Western countries, most Israeli governments during this period chose to rely on international efforts to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons. In light of the early discoveries of secret enrichment facilities in Natanz and Arak in the early 2000s, the Israeli leadership at the time, under Ariel Sharon, concluded that, unlike the Iraqi reactor Israel struck in 1981, the Iranian challenge would be difficult to address unilaterally. The government believed that this issue should concern the entire international community, and Israel's only hope lay in mobilizing the world powers against Iran's ambitions. The Olmert government maintained the same approach. In 2009, Netanyahu began to shift policy and instructed the security establishment to build an operational military option. However, once negotiations on the Iranian nuclear agreement began in 2013, Israel stopped maintaining a credible and immediate threat against Iran's nuclear facilities, effectively allowing the world powers to take the lead in addressing the issue.[7]

Cessation of settlement efforts in the Negev, Galilee, and border areas – Since the 1990s, settlement activity has ceased to be considered a security component in the perspective of Israel's political and security

5 Dana Freizler-Swiri, "The Transition from the CBW to the Iron Swords War," *Between the Poles*, 41, pp. 13–28. [in Hebrew]

6 This refers to Israel's long-standing yet unofficial policy of using force to prevent clearly identified enemy actors from acquiring nuclear weapons.

7 Raphael BenLevi, *Cultures of Counterproliferation: The Making of US and Israeli Policy on Iran's Nuclear Program*. (Routledge, 2024).

leadership. The policy shift regarding the establishment of new settlements occurred in the early 1990s and was reflected in the National Outline Plan for Construction, Development, and Immigration Absorption (*TAMA 35*) as well as in the 2004 Attorney General directive (1-1800). Since then, only a very small number of settlements have been established, serving specific purposes such as absorbing evacuees from Gush Katif or creating permanent Bedouin communities.

The Result: The Creation of a "Ring of Fire" Threatening the Existence of the State of Israel

The result of these changes was the development of threats directed by Iran against the State of Israel in both near and distant arenas. Hezbollah, Hamas, Shiite militias in Iraq and Syria, and the Houthis in Yemen—all of these actors grew stronger to varying degrees and together formed, on Iran's behalf, a "ring of fire" threatening the existence of the State of Israel, under the umbrella of Iran's direct missile and nuclear threat.

The clearest example of this process is Hezbollah. Despite thirty years of Israeli efforts to erode its capabilities and achieve deterrence, the organization, driven by a deep ideological and religious worldview of a "long-distance race," steadily built its power toward its ultimate objective: the destruction of the State of Israel. Against Israel's formidable firepower, the organization established a broad and diverse fire array, in terms of both range and warhead size, capable of inflicting significant damage on the Israeli home front. Against Israel's intelligence and precision-strike capabilities, it developed an intelligence-based precision-guided weapons launch capability. Against Israel's ability to strike strategic targets in Lebanon, the organization cultivated the ability to strike Israel's own strategic assets (gas platforms, for example). Against an Israeli naval blockade of Lebanon, it enhanced its capacity to impose a naval blockade on Israeli ports through the acquisition of long-range anti-ship missiles. And against the IDF's maneuvering capability into Lebanese territory, the organization built up its ability to conduct ground operations inside northern Israel. The consequences of this force-build-up became partially evident beginning on October 8, 2023, and for more than a year thereafter. As of the time of writing this document, the IDF has succeeded in degrading a significant portion of the organization's capabilities to an unprecedented extent, eliminating its political and military leadership, and weakening it substantially.

The Path to Reform: Key Changes Required in the Security Doctrine

From the above analysis it becomes possible to establish the conceptual and practical foundations for renewed security doctrine more suited to Israel's future challenges. In this section, we will summarize the

fundamental assumptions and the key elements of the required change:

Return to the foundations of Zionism – The foundation of the vision held by Israel's founding generation lies in Zionism. Zionism did not begin in 1948; it builds on a long-standing tradition of Zionist pioneers across generations. Israel's security doctrine initially developed around the Zionist endeavor, which included three central practical pillars: security, settlement, and immigration. Implementing these pillars carries the potential to signal to our enemies that we have no intention of abandoning the realization of the Zionist vision. In the 1990s, Israel experienced a large wave of immigration from the Former Soviet Union, which sharply increased the country's Jewish population. Preparing for absorption and encouraging immigration from Jews around the world has become increasingly relevant in recent years, especially in light of the war, the spread of antisemitism, and the growth of Muslim populations in Europe and the United States and their increasing anti-Israel influence.

Israel must return to treating settlement of the land as a security-enhancing measure. The abandonment of this policy stemmed from various factors: some related to post-Zionist motives, others to "green" or environmental considerations, and still others to global trends of population densification in defined urban areas. Israel must renew a smart settlement policy that serves security needs in the Galilee, the Negev, the Arava, the Jordan Valley, and Judea and Samaria, thereby strengthening these areas.

Viewing the struggle as a prolonged conflict of variable intensity – Contrary to hopes for the end of the era of wars, unfortunately, conflicts continue to erupt around the globe. A clear example of this appears in the Russia–Ukraine war. Across the world, military confrontations occur continuously at every possible intensity level, and large-scale wars have never truly ceased. Israel has faced a prolonged struggle with its neighbors for over a century. The actors opposing the State of Israel change every few years, as do their style and intensity of warfare; yet at the core, those who reject Israel's existence in the Middle East have not altered their intentions. Only their methods evolve according to the strengths and weaknesses they perceive in us. They continue to aim to grow stronger, and the moment they perceive any weakness on our part, they will strike with full force—potentially igniting a war that demands the complete strength of the IDF, across land, air, and sea.

A corollary of the enemy's perception of the conflict as a prolonged struggle is that the outcomes of any particular battle register in long-term effects. For Israel's enemies, the killing of its fighters, the destruction of its infrastructure, and similar losses are not evaluated solely within the context of the immediate confrontation, but rather as part of a long-term struggle.

From this perspective, even paying a heavy price in a specific battle may be considered worthwhile if it contributes to the long-term weakening of the State of Israel.

Across the world, military confrontations occur continuously at every possible intensity level, and large-scale wars have never truly ceased

The roots of the conflict — Israel must act with the understanding that our enemies seek our destruction for deep-seated cultural and religious reasons. If we assume that the enemy attacks us due to economic or social distress, we may believe that economic assistance will eliminate its desire or need to fight us. However, if the working assumption recognizes that the enemy attacks the State of Israel for religious or cultural reasons and seeks its destruction, then it becomes clear that economic assistance will not remove the motivation to fight, but rather enable the enemy to build the capabilities required to destroy it. A clear-eyed view is therefore required: there is an enemy, and it seeks our destruction. Only from such a premise can Israel find the resolve and resources necessary to wage a sustained struggle against its enemies.

Initiative and decisive victory as top priorities — In contrast to the prevailing conception, which rests on the pillars of defense, standoff operations, influence, and prevention, an updated security doctrine must assign the greatest strategic weight to the concept of decisive victory in direct confrontation with the enemy. Warfare should conclude with decisive defeat, not with the creation of an ongoing sequence of limited rounds. Israel must adopt an offensive, initiative-driven posture rather than a defensive one. Initiative should be seized as early as possible, in direct contrast to a policy of containment.

Security self-reliance — Our security must rest in our own hands to the greatest extent possible. We must defend ourselves independently. Israel should strive to build autonomous resilience in weapons production and in emergency stockpiles. Such resilience cannot rely solely on domestic production (which is almost impossible in today's decentralized global economy). However, Israel can expand critical stockpiles, increase production lines for essential systems, and diversify supply sources to avoid dependence on a single international actor that could sever supply lines in a crisis. As a result, Israel should advance independent strategic stability and a robust economy, while reducing reliance on the United States on the one hand and preserving the strategic relationship with it on the other.

Territorial control and defensible borders — The ability to seize territory and hold it must remain part of Israel's military and political toolkit. This is a practical military issue: holding key areas or

dominating terrain in order to push threats away from civilian population or to create buffer zones that keep threats away from the civilian population. In this context, the size of the territory that must be held (a few kilometers or dozens of kilometers) and the duration of control (a few months or many decades) derive directly from the nature of the threat posed by the adversary.

There are several reasons for the military necessity of seizing and holding territory, but this need acquires particular importance in the type of conflict Israel has faced in recent years. The primary threat to Israel today around its borders comes from an adversary operating with guerrilla and terrorist characteristics, one that hides among the civilian population and shows little restraint in endangering its own civilians. As a result, once it feels threatened, it can simply choose not to fight. It does not even need to go into hiding; it can merely remove its uniform and conceal its weapons. Because the adversary understands that holding territory does not form part of the IDF's operational toolkit, it does not fear territorial loss. Consequently, it faces virtually no time pressure, is never compelled to fight, and therefore can never truly lose. This has a direct impact for the future shape of borders and the nature of IDF presence in Gaza, Syria, and Lebanon.

Prevention of growing threats – As opposed to the Campaign Between Wars approach, which sought to prevent the growth of enemy capabilities below the threshold of war, Israel must adopt a proactive policy in confronting threats at their earliest stages of development. In this context, actions should be oriented toward improving the strategic reality, rather than adhering to the principle of "buying time and postponing decisions." Israel must not be deterred by the enemies' threat of escalation.

Not only must the deterred party believe that the threat is real and that the deterrer may carry it out; the deterrer itself must also be convinced that it possesses the determination and resolve to execute the threat when the moment arrives

Diversification of strategic capabilities and reduction of General Staff centralization — The challenges of modern, technology-saturated warfare, together with the capabilities of Israel's adversaries, require an honest reassessment aimed at expanding and diversifying alternatives to the Air Force's firepower. This includes capabilities such as surface-to-surface missiles, UAVs, and loitering munitions, as well as reducing overreliance on SIGINT- and cyber-based intelligence sensors. In parallel, it is necessary to establish a comprehensive and as independent-as-possible operational capability for the ground forces, with particular emphasis on ground maneuver units.

Military force capable of concurrent multi-front warfare, including the need for deep and broad maneuver— Based

on the understanding that Israel does not fight isolated terrorists who can be neutralized with limited means, but rather state-like organizations or actors backed by states—and at times even by regional or global powers—it becomes clear that a "small and smart" military cannot meet the full spectrum of conflicts the state may face. Defeating an enemy that has built up across the border and threatens Israel with missiles, rockets, and maneuvering forces may require extensive ground maneuver. Beyond this, the military must enable effective confrontation on multiple fronts simultaneously, likely across different strategic circles at the same time: the home front, the first circle (several neighboring states), and the second and third circles (states at greater distances).

Credible deterrence — The concept of deterrence remains elusive and difficult to assess. The success of deterrence lies in its credibility. Accordingly, policy must proceed in light of two fundamental insights. The first: "Not only must the deterred party believe that the threat is real and that the deterrer may carry it out; the deterrer itself must also be convinced that it possesses the determination and resolve to execute the threat when the moment arrives."[8] The second: "As a state's power grows, so does its deterrence vis-à-vis other states… but the reverse also holds true. Even when a state's military power appears unchanged, it effectively declines if fear of it and respect for it diminish. This situation becomes especially prevalent when a state is perceived as unwilling to employ its military power."[9]

8 Yehoshafat Harkabi, *War and Strategy*, Ma'arachot Publishing, Ministry of Defense, 1992, p. 222. [in Hebrew]

9 Donald Kagan, *The Origins of War and the Ways to Preserve Peace*, Sela Meir Publishing, 2021, p. 19. [in Hebrew]

Chapter 3

Global Trends and their Implications for Israel: The Changing Balance of Power and Technological Transformations

Nitzan David Fuchs[1]

Executive Summary

The United States remains the strongest military and economic power globally, but its predominant status is being challenged across multiple arenas, and it is neither able nor willing to manage the international system on its own. Powers such as China and Russia contest key elements of the current order, while rising powers like India seek to define their place within it. The international system is becoming increasingly competitive and fragmented.

While populations in developed countries are aging and shrinking, regions such as Africa and Southeast Asia are experiencing rapid population growth. Economies outside the Atlantic basin are expanding at a fast pace and benefiting from the relocation of manufacturing capabilities to their territories, while Atlantic economies increasingly shift toward financial and service sectors. Knowledge and technological capabilities are diffusing from the Atlantic basin to the rest of the world, alongside a critical dependence of Western value chains on advanced technological products from non-Western countries.

1 This chapter represents a joint product of the project's research fellows and was written by Nitzan David Fuchs.

China seeks to position itself as a global center and to reshape the American-led international order to suit its interests, though it remains unclear whether it can challenge U.S. hegemony beyond East Asia. Challenges to American dominance also come from Russia and Iran, both of which aim to strengthen their regional and global standing. The United States has been and remains the world's most powerful military force, by a wide margin over any rival. However, Washington struggles to forge a new consensus around a coherent strategy for the international system. European powers find it difficult to translate their economic strength into geopolitical power, while the continent undergoes significant demographic and social changes, marked by population aging and Muslim immigration that threatens the character of European societies.

In the Middle East, we are currently witnessing a weakening of the Shiite Islamist camp as a result of the damage to Iran and its proxy forces by Israel during the Iron Swords War. In the resulting vacuum, Sunni Islamist actors, including Turkey, Qatar, and the new regime in Syria, have emerged strengthened, while the traditional Gulf-Arab monarchies compete for leadership and seek to maximize their influence in the emerging order. The coming years are likely to feature the continuation of this contest, alongside Iranian efforts to rebuild its power and the ongoing, quieter struggle within the monarchist states against Islamist currents within their own societies.

A global arms race is underway, with particular emphasis on autonomous weapons systems, cyber capabilities, missiles, and artificial intelligence, alongside substantial investment in relevant industrial production capacity. States are increasingly taking steps to enhance their strategic autonomy. This competition also drives the development of new infrastructure linking major powers to global markets, such as competing initiatives in the Middle East, including China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the India–Middle East–Europe Corridor (IMEC).

Artificial intelligence is expected to transform the economy, society, culture, and politics. Alongside it, new breakthroughs in robotics, biotechnology, and industry are driving growing demand for advanced semiconductors and energy infrastructure. The power that succeeds in deploying reliable artificial intelligence on the battlefield and in fully harnessing its potential through effective force development will gain a significant military advantage.

In Western societies, a deep political polarization has emerged between socialist-progressive, anti-traditional forces and national-conservative, traditionalist forces. This polarization complicates consensus-building on core issues and leads to inconsistent policymaking, particularly in the United States. Antisemitism is on the rise; however, there are also many in the West who recognize that anti-Israel and antisemitic actors also oppose Western civilization itself and view Israel as a model of a nation-state that preserves its identity and bravely defends its existence.

For Israel—a small, technologically advanced state in a strategic location—these trends present both threats and opportunities. Israel will need to increase its strategic value to the United States to ensure that the alliance remains resilient across changes in U.S. administrations. At the same time, scenarios may arise in which the U.S. must concentrate its resources on a limited number of theaters, making it essential for Israel to strengthen its independence in producing critical weaponry. The American need for capable allies, coupled with the desire to limit its direct military commitments, presents an opportunity to transform the Israel–U.S. relationship toward a more balanced, mutually supportive partnership.

The technological shift will strengthen Israel's standing as a leading innovation nation. Israeli knowledge and experience in fields such as cyber, air defense, and artificial intelligence can serve as valuable assets in the global technology race. Israel should also leverage this expertise and these developments to forge new alliances. Its geographic location places it in a favorable position, allowing it to become a regional hub for energy and transportation. The arms race further increases the export potential of Israeli weapons technologies.

Geopolitical Shift – From Unipolarity to Multipolarity

A Soft Multipolar System

Rival powers such as China and Russia are challenging the pillars of the previous order and the international system is becoming increasingly competitive, fragmented, and dynamic. Despite the continued presence of the United States, the system operates without a clear hegemon with both the capability and the will to manage it. In this new world, power balances are becoming more fluid and complex. Alliances and partnerships form and dissolve frequently, while the influence of rising powers—or even regional powers—continues to grow.

Diffusion of Power from West to East

In broad terms, one can say that over the past 500 years, the North Atlantic basin has risen as the center of global power. Political power, economic power, technological power, and, of course, military power all concentrate in this region, which was the origin of some of the world's great empires: the Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch, and, of course, British. The rise of the United States to the status of a major power at the end of the 19th century, and later a superpower in the 20th century, did not change the status of the North Atlantic but only the distribution of power within it: the U.S. became the new center of gravity in the region. Today, it is common to refer to the Atlantic countries as "the West."

Over the past 40 years, we have witnessed a shift of the global center of power from the North Atlantic to the Indo-Pacific region. At the same time, we see the rise of major powers and regional powers willing to act independently and, at times, contrary to the current superpower—the United States. This situation can be described as a "soft multipolar" system. It is "soft" because the U.S. still maintains economic, military, and political superiority over each of its rivals. However, the system is multipolar due to the weakening of American hegemony and the willingness of leading states to align together against the U.S.

Demographic Trends

This shift, which we may call "from West to East," stems from three parallel trends: demographic, economic, and technological. The most significant demographic changes are currently occurring in the developing world. While the populations of developed countries are aging and even shrinking, regions such as Africa and Southeast Asia are experiencing rapid population growth. Europe, which in the 1950s was one of the most populous continents in the world, is being overshadowed by Sub-Saharan Africa. By the mid-21st century, the United States is expected to be the only Western country among the ten most populous nations in the world.

The Economic Trend

Accompanying the demographic trend is an economic trend, which is also influenced by

it. Economies outside the Atlantic basin are growing rapidly, partly thanks to impressive population growth. Among these economies are India, China, Ethiopia, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Guinea. This challenges the economic dominance of Atlantic countries, particularly the United States.

A clear example of the shift in global economic power is this data: in 1999, the G7 countries (the U.S., Canada, the U.K., France, Germany, Italy, and Japan) alone accounted for almost 60% of the global economy. By 2020, their share had fallen to 40%.[2] Whereas in the mid-20th century the G7 could steer the global economy on their own, at the turn of the 21st century, they must cooperate with other economies. A first indication of this shift was the establishment of the G20 following the financial crisis in East Asia.

An important component of the economic growth of the non-Western world is the shift of production capabilities outside the Atlantic region. While in the mid-20th century most industrial production was concentrated in the Atlantic region, especially in the U.S., today the bulk of industrial production occurs outside it, particularly in East Asia.[3] Steel production, shipbuilding, metal extraction, plastics manufacturing, oil refining, and the petrochemical industry—all major activities are now centered outside the Atlantic. The dominance of Atlantic countries has shifted to the service sector in general, and financial services in particular, leaving them dependent on non-Western countries for most of their industrial needs. For example, China is the main producer of magnets for industrial and consumer uses and the primary supplier of rare elements for microelectronics.[4]

The Technological Trend

The third trend is the technological trend: the diffusion of knowledge and technological means from the Atlantic basin to the rest of the world, and the critical dependence of Western value chains on advanced technological products from non-Western countries.

In the past, Atlantic countries enjoyed a vast technological advantage, not only in the military sphere but also in industry and science. Today, not only has this gap

2 Author's calculations, based on World Bank data.

3 East Asia is responsible for approximately 40% of total global industrial production. The European Union and North America are each responsible for approximately 16% of industrial production (author's calculations, based on World Bank data).

4 Philip Andrews-Speed and Anders Hove, *China's Rare Earths Dominance and Policy Responses*, Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, June 2023; Damien Ma and Joshua Henderson, "The Impermanence of Permanent Magnets: A Case Study on Industry, Chinese Production, and Supply Constraints", *Macro Polo*, 16 (November 2021); Zongyuan Zoe Liu, "How to Secure Critical Minerals for Clean Energy Without Alienating China", *Council on Foreign Relations* (blog), 25 May 2023, https://www.cfr.org/blog/how-secure-critical-minerals-clean-energy-without-alienating-china.

narrowed, but in certain fields, non-Atlantic countries have become leaders. China is a prominent example: the Chinese lead in areas such as batteries, electronic payments, and even the deployment of advanced communication networks. Countries like China, Russia, and Iran are working to narrow the qualitative military gap in technologies such as electronic warfare, drones, and missiles. While China initially developed its industrial base through imitation, today it leads innovation on its own. Chinese researchers are at the forefront of research in fields like artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and biotechnology.[5]

By the mid-21st century, the United States is expected to be the only Western country among the ten most populous nations in the world

Western countries have also become dependent on non-Western countries for value chains of advanced products. For example, China supplies most of the silicon needed for solar cells and is a major provider of rare elements for chips, magnets, and other devices. Russia supplies the nickel required for electric vehicle batteries and titanium for aerospace systems. South Africa and the Democratic Republic of Congo provide platinum and cobalt, which are essential for magnets and batteries used in a wide range of applications, from wind turbines to mobile phones.

The Rise of Non-Western Powers

All three trends—technological, economic, and demographic—converge toward a historic geopolitical shift in the international system. This geopolitical change is reflected at the state level in the rise of non-Western powers, which exert pressure on and challenge the international order established after World War II. Not all of them do so out of hostility toward the West; some are trying to find their place within this order. A good example is India, perceived as a natural ally of the Western camp. India sees itself as a rising power and seeks recognition as a major power. The fact that India does not have a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, while countries like France and the United Kingdom do, highlights a gap between the structure of the Security Council and the actual distribution of power in the world. Naturally, as India continues to grow in the Indo-Pacific region, it will seek a role with greater influence in the existing order—or may work to undermine it by promoting an alternative order, especially in the Indian Ocean basin.

5 Jamie Gaida et al., 'ASPI's Critical Technology Tracker: The Global Race for Future Power', Policy Brief (ASPI International Cyber Policy Centre, 1 March 2023); Ashwin Acharya and Brian Dunn, 'Comparing U.S. and Chinese Contributions to High-Impact AI Research' (Center for Security and Emerging Technology, January 2022), https://doi.org/10.15193/20210028; China Power Team, 'Is China a Leader in Quantum Technologies?', China Power, August 14, 2023, https://chinapower.csis.org/china-quantum-technology/.

In contrast, China does challenge the global hegemony of the United States. In the Chinese worldview, it is the center, organizing the international system around itself in harmony simply by virtue of being the center. Beijing's goal is to make China the global center—economically, politically, and technologically—recognized by other countries.[6] Practically, this means that Beijing tries to adapt the American-led international order to its needs rather than create a competing order. For example, China works through the UN and the World Trade Organization to promote political decisions that serve its interests, without attempting to replace these organizations.[7]

There are also "classic" aspects of the US-China competition. The two powers compete for technological leadership across various fields, including artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and advanced semiconductors. Each of these technologies has military applications that could shift the balance of military power in favor of one of the powers.[8] They also work to secure their respective value chains from each other, leading to a reorganization of global supply chains based on geopolitical considerations rather than purely economic efficiency. Additionally, they compete for influence—in East Asia, Africa, Europe, or the Middle East. Tensions between these two powers have intensified in recent years, manifesting in flashpoints such as Taiwan, the South China Sea, and the war in Ukraine.

Russia's aggressive policy is also driven by its perception of itself as an empire, with a natural right to territories in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia

It should be noted that China's ability to continue challenging the United States will depend on the future direction of its economy. China's impressive economic growth over the past four decades has not only provided it with resources for diplomatic and military activities but also serves as a source of attraction in itself, as it is seen as evidence of the success of the "Chinese model." However, in recent

6 Salvatore Babones, 'Taking China Seriously: Relationality, Tianxia, and the "Chinese School" of International Relations', in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, by Salvatore Babones (Oxford University Press, 2017), https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.602; Tingyang Zhao, 'Rethinking Empire from a Chinese Concept "All-under-Heaven" (Tian-Xia,)', *Social Identities* 12(1) (January 2006), pp. 29–41, https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630600555559.

7 Ted Piccone, *China's Long Game on Human Rights at the United Nations,* Brookings Institution, September 2018.

8 James Andrew Lewis, "Technology and Power", Center for Strategic and International studies, 3.30.2022, https://www.csis.org/analysis/technology-and-power; Christian Brose, *The Kill Chain: Defending America in the Future of High-Tech Warfare*, First edition, New York: Hachette Books, 2020.

years, questions have begun to arise about whether this growth will continue and what direction the Chinese economy will take. A description of all the factors and problems threatening China's economy is beyond our scope, but broadly speaking, China faces an imbalance between supply and demand, weak private consumption, and an inefficient manufacturing sector.[9] While there is no doubt that China will remain a major power, it is far from certain that it will be able to challenge American hegemony outside East Asia.

The challenge to American hegemony also comes from Russia and Iran, which seek to strengthen their regional and global positions.

Since the early 2000s, Russia has sought to restore its status as a global power and regain influence over the former Soviet space. In the Kremlin's view, NATO's eastward expansion and the emergence of "color revolutions" in its backyard constitute a serious threat to Russia's interests. Russia's aggressive policy is also driven by its perception of itself as an empire, with a natural right to territories in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia.[10] Over the years, Moscow has taken a series of aggressive steps that have only intensified over time—the invasion of Georgia in 2008, the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and, finally, the invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Moscow has also sought to leverage its status as a leading nuclear power, and amid the escalation of the invasion of Ukraine, it exploited Europe's energy dependence as a tool of political pressure.[11]

Against growing American pressure, Iran has turned toward closer cooperation with Russia and China, hoping to reduce U.S. influence in the Middle East. Despite Israel's strategic strikes on proxy forces, missile capabilities, and its nuclear project, Tehran is expected to seek to restore these capabilities. These capabilities serve not only as deterrents to protect the regime from external interference but also as a means to achieve regional hegemony under a nuclear umbrella.[12]

9 Michael Pettis, "The Only Five Paths China's Economy Can Follow", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 27 April 2022, https://carnegieendowment.org/chinafinancialmarkets/87007; Michael Pettis, "Can China's Long-Term Growth Rate Exceed 2–3 Percent?", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 4.6.2023, https://carnegieendowment.org/chinafinancialmarkets/89466; Nicholas Borst, "China's Balance Sheet Challenge", *China Leadership Monitor*, 75 (Spring 2023), https://www.prcleader.org/borst-spring-2023.

10 Stephen Kotkin, "Russia's Perpetual Geopolitics: Putin Returns to the Historical Pattern", *Foreign Affairs*, June 2016.

11 Marc-Antoine Eyl-Mazzega, The Ukraine War and European Energy Dependence and Reconfiguration of Energy Relations, IEMed. Mediterranean Yearbook 2023

12 Michael Doran and Can Kasapoğlu, "Overmatch", Hudson Institute, 11.2.2022; International Institute for Strategic Studies, *Iran's Networks of Influence in the Middle East*, IISS Strategic Dossier, London: The International Institute of Strategic Studies, 2019.

The State of the Western Powers

The picture of the Western powers is not uniform. The United States has been and remains the strongest military power in the world, with a wide gap over any rival. However, Washington struggles to build a new consensus around a coherent strategy for the international system, creating uncertainty and even frustration among its allies, which in turn undermines American influence. This is particularly true in the Middle East, where the U.S. political establishment has been divided over its approach to Iran and to Saudi Arabia and the extent of American military commitment to the region.

Toward China, there is a more established consensus, but even here it is unclear what the proper approach to the Eastern rival should be: should the United States compete with China while seeking to avoid direct confrontation, or should it define a goal of "victory" over China—aiming to avoid military conflict but still challenge the Communist Party, for example, by attempting to undermine the regime?[13]

The European Union and the European powers struggle to translate their economic strength into geopolitical influence, whether due to the decline of their military capabilities or the lack of consensus on key issues and absence of unified political leadership. Moreover, the continent is undergoing significant demographic and social changes, including an aging population, Muslim immigration that challenges the character of society—both culturally and in terms of potential terrorist threats—and increasing political polarization, with right- and left-wing parties gaining at the expense of centrist parties.

Japan, despite its aging population, is actively pursuing military strengthening and maintains an active foreign policy in East Asia. Japan's substantial economic power allows it to challenge China's influence in the region, and it works to build a coalition capable of restraining Beijing. While these efforts are coordinated with the United States, Japan often takes the lead, with the U.S. following its example. For instance, the East Asian Quad initiative originated in Japan, as did the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) strategy adopted by the Biden administration.

The Return of Military Power as a Central Factor in Shaping International Relations

We are in the midst of a global arms race, with an emphasis on autonomous weapons systems, cyber capabilities, hypersonic missiles, and artificial intelligence. Countries are dedicating increasing resources to developing military technology and strengthening their capabilities. This trend applies not only to the Middle East but also to East Asia and Europe. As long as the war in

13 Matt Pottinger and Mike Gallagher, "No Substitute for Victory", *Foreign Affairs*, June 2024.

Ukraine and the rise of China act as triggers, it is likely that this trend will continue into the third decade of the 21st century.

The return of military power to the forefront of international relations poses a serious problem for the West. As noted above, much of their industrial production capacity has shifted to other regions, particularly East Asia. Today, when European countries or the U.S. need to prepare for war on an industrial scale, they lack a strong manufacturing base capable of supporting such efforts. The war in Ukraine exposed shortages not only in the West's ammunition stockpiles but also in its ability to produce munitions and weapons systems. As part of the new arms race, significant investments are being made in relevant industrial production capabilities, including the training of the workforce required for an industrial mobilization.

From Neoliberal Globalization to Top-Down Organized Globalization

As military power becomes central, economic considerations are often pushed to the margins of the agenda, yielding to national security concerns. The COVID-19 crisis and Russia's use of natural gas and oil as leverage exposed the risks of overreliance on globalization and on long supply chains that include unfriendly countries (e.g., China). Today, states are taking steps to enhance their strategic autonomy, particularly in critical sectors such as pharmaceuticals, food, and semiconductors. The hyper-globalization of the 1990s, characterized by the free flow of goods, technologies, and capital, is giving way to a form of globalization shaped by geopolitical considerations, coalition dynamics, and the presence of active conflicts as threats to the movement of goods. The global economy is becoming increasingly fragmented.

It should be emphasized that this does not signify the end of globalization, but rather a new phase of it. No country is trying to produce everything on its own or to halt exports to international markets. At the same time, while the rise of new powers challenges the existing international order, it also encourages the creation of new infrastructure connecting these powers to global markets. Initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the India–Middle East–Europe Corridor (IMEC), or the North–South route linking Iran and Russia are all intended to increase connectivity for new economic hubs, whether in China, India, or Central Asia.

Balance of Power in the Middle East

The actors in the Middle East can be divided into four broad ideological camps: Sunni Islamism—including strong states like Turkey and Qatar, alongside various movements and organizations across the region, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, ISIS, and al-Qaeda; Shia Islamism—led by Iran, encompassing movements and organizations in multiple regions, such as the Houthis in Yemen, Hezbollah in Lebanon, Shia groups in Iraq, and parts of the Shia communities in the Gulf states; Arab monarchial or authoritarian traditionalism—led by Saudi Arabia and the

United Arab Emirates, including Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Jordan, and Egypt; Modern democratic nationalism—Israel is the only state fully embodying these three values, though different elements of these values are present throughout the region.

As a result of the Iron Swords War and the weakening of Iran and its proxy forces, Shia Islamism is being undermined. In the resulting vacuum, the other three camps compete for influence. This struggle is taking place primarily in Syria, but also in Lebanon and Gaza. The coming years are expected to be marked by the continuation of this contest, including Iran's efforts to restore its power, alongside an ongoing quiet struggle within the traditionalist states against Islamist currents within their own societies.

The rise of Turkey— The weakening of the Shia axis, and particularly the fall of the Assad regime in Syria, has strengthened Turkey's position and reinforced its ambition to lead the Sunni Muslim states in the region. President Erdoğan seeks to enhance Turkey's great-power status, with a vision that harks back to the Ottoman Empire. In the coming years, Turkey's objectives in Syria may include: Eliminating Kurdish autonomy in northeastern Syria and disarming the Kurds to prevent any threat to Turkey; Returning Syrian refugees from Turkey to Syria; Participating in Syria's reconstruction, which could channel significant funds to Turkish companies and the Turkish economy through aid directed to Syria (e.g., from Qatar and European countries); Involvement in the rebuilding of the Syrian army, including selling weapons, providing training and instruction, constructing military bases, and maintaining a Turkish military presence inside Syria; Establishing a maritime boundary between the two countries for oil and gas exploration in areas effectively controlled by Turkey.

President Erdoğan seeks to enhance Turkey's great-power status, with a vision that harks back to the Ottoman Empire

Turkey's military power is growing, as are its defense industries, which produce large and advanced platforms for the Turkish navy, air force, and ground forces. In the maritime domain, there is an intention to build, for the first time, an aircraft carrier (beyond the helicopter and UAV carrier already in service). Together with the naval force being built on an unprecedented scale, this will enable Turkey to conduct air operations at great distances from its own territory. Another layer in Turkey's force buildup is the strengthening of its long-range missile capabilities. Turkey intends to expand its inventory of missiles with a range of up to 800 km and to accelerate its program to produce missiles with a range of 2,000 km—ranges that would cover all of Israel, Tehran, Moscow, and large parts of Western Europe.

This force buildup also reflects Erdoğan's intention to expand Turkey's influence into

more distant regions, such as the Horn of Africa—in countries like Djibouti and Somalia—as well as in Libya and Qatar, where Turkish forces are already present. Additionally, Turkey is expected to work toward consolidating control over the eastern Mediterranean basin, driven in part by the desire to dominate areas where gas and oil fields may be discovered. Turkey is even prepared to increase tensions with Cyprus and Greece over this issue.

The decline of Iran – Iran's power is currently at a historic low. Beyond the severe damage inflicted on its proxies, nuclear facilities, missile systems, and senior command echelon, Iran is undergoing a deep economic crisis that intensifies the polarization between the people and the regime. The Iranian rial has plummeted against the U.S. dollar, and inflation is high. Iran is experiencing a severe energy crisis, and in various locations, including Tehran, electricity is unavailable for many hours each day. Factories are closing, students are missing school, and homes cannot be adequately heated during the winter.

However, Iran is expected to draw lessons from the recent war and, to the extent that it is able, will seek to rebuild its proxies through rearmament with weapons, financing, training, guidance, and intelligence. Iran will try to find alternative ways to rearm Hezbollah after the upheaval in Syria severed its main supply corridor. It is working to undermine governmental stability in Jordan, is intervening in developments in Sudan, and—should it detect weakness in the stability of the Egyptian regime—will act to encourage Muslim Brotherhood elements.

The only Iranian proxies along the "Resistance Axis" that have strengthened over the past year are the Houthis, due to their success in launching drones and short-range missiles toward Israel and firing on ships in the Red Sea. Today, the Houthis see themselves as a leading force in the Arab world, capable of exerting pressure even on Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Naturally, the Houthis rely on Iranian technology, financing, and guidance.

The Gulf states are striving for wealth without relinquishing their identity—Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are leading efforts to transition from oil-based economies to more diversified economies based on advanced technology, industry, finance, and tourism. This aims to reduce their dependence on oil revenues, which is expected to become a diminishing energy source. This is particularly evident in Saudi Arabia, with its ambitious development plan, "Vision 2030." Over the past ten years, Dubai has become a global financial hub, and its geographic and political convenience attracts businesspeople to establish themselves there. The UAE and Saudi Arabia are building sovereign wealth funds to hold investment portfolios that will generate profits once oil revenues decline.

The greatest strategic challenge for Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates is security, since a significant security threat could unravel all this economic and social flourishing. Consequently, in recent years, they have adopted a policy of rapprochement toward Iran and renewed relations with Turkey. Moreover, these transformations are driven from the top by a small circle of people, so if anything happens to the leadership, the entire course could change.

The Involvement of External Powers in the Middle East

The Middle East will continue to be a theater of competition among the major powers, with a focus on the U.S., Russia, and China, though it is not the primary arena for any of them. In recent years, the U.S. has sought to reduce its direct military involvement in the region in order to shift strategic attention toward China. The chaotic American withdrawal from Afghanistan left a very negative impression and signaled a desire not to engage in major wars. However, since the Iron Swords War, the U.S. has demonstrated significant diplomatic involvement in the Middle East, deploying forces to assist Israel and deter Iran and its proxies from attacking Israel, and even striking the Houthis in Yemen and Iran directly. Beyond this, the U.S. remains the strongest military power in the region and also leads various economic and political initiatives.

The fall of the Assad regime dealt a severe blow to Russia's influence in the region, forcing it to withdraw forces from Syria. Russia is trying to preserve its bases in Tartus and Latakia and maintain a certain foothold in Syria, but it is unclear whether the new Syrian regime will allow it to retain them over the long-term. In addition, Russia remains preoccupied with the continued war in Ukraine.

China focuses primarily on economic and commercial domains rather than military ones, although it also conducts arms sales to various Middle Eastern countries, including those that purchase large quantities of weaponry from the United States, such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. In any case, whereas in recent years we have seen a perceived "withdrawal" of the United States from the Middle East, the current war has returned the U.S. to a senior and leading role over Russia and China. It is reasonable to assume that the United States will continue to play this leading role in the coming years, albeit without a change in its strategic focus on China and with very limited willingness to employ direct military force.

Conflict Zones in the Middle East

Syria is a devastated state after more than a decade of civil war, culminating in the fall of the Assad regime. Although the organization Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), led by Ahmed al-Sharaa, has emerged as the strongest force, a major question mark hangs over its ability to impose its rule over the entire territory of the country.

Al-Sharaa is expected in the coming years to focus on consolidating and stabilizing his rule in the country, dismantling the various militias and integrating them into a single army, and creating a unified Syria instead of a state of cantons. Another major focus will be the economic sphere—rebuilding Syria, whose infrastructure has been completely destroyed in the fields of energy, communications, water, roads, and housing. To that end, the new regime will need to attract substantial foreign investment. Despite his jihadist worldview, al-Sharaa understands that he must present a "moderate face" toward Western countries and even toward some Arab states, and demonstrate restraint and openness in order to gain legitimacy, resources, and support for rebuilding Syria. In any case, continued clashes are expected between the Sunni majority that dominates the Damascus area and the various minorities elsewhere in the country—the Druze, the Alawites, and the Kurds. As a result, the Syrian arena remains fluid and is subject to ongoing struggles over external influence by all regional actors.

In Lebanon, as a result of Israel's strikes against Hezbollah, the new government seeks to disarm what remains of the organization and to establish its authority in the south and east of the country. However, it is unclear how successful this effort will be, and Israeli involvement—backed by the United States—will be a decisive factor. Here too, Lebanon constitutes an arena in which regional and international powers compete for influence.

Iraq will continue in the coming years to suffer from internal tensions and power struggles among different factions within the Shiite community, particularly between supporters of Muqtada al-Sadr and the pro-Iranian militias that are controlled and supported by Iran. In addition, the civil wars in Yemen, Libya, and Sudan are expected to continue.

The use of force is an inherent and inseparable part of the rules of the game in the Middle East

As a general rule, the use of force is an inherent and inseparable part of the rules of the game in the Middle East. We see extensive violence between states, but also within many states, where regimes—or opposition movements seeking to replace them—massacre civilians without hesitation. Almost anything is permitted within this framework of violence, and there are virtually no red lines when it comes to repressing rebelling civilians, or even those who are not rebelling. It is enough for civilians to be perceived as a potential threat to the regime, or to belong to a different sect, for their lives to be in danger. The majority of the population in these Arab and Muslim states accepts these rules of violence with understanding or silent consent. Some even admire the use of force and glorify acts of cruelty and war crimes—against one another, and certainly against Jews and the State of Israel.

The Technological Shift: The AI and Cyber Revolution

Artificial intelligence is expected to transform the economy, society, culture, and politics. Alongside it, new breakthroughs are emerging in robotics, biotechnology, and industry. Autonomous systems are already shaping the battlefield and are expected to become increasingly lethal and sophisticated over time. Both the United States and China are investing vast resources and effort in developing such capabilities. In biotechnology and medicine, genetic editing (such as CRISPR) holds the promise of genome-level cures, while tissue printing may enable the production of transplantable organs. In manufacturing industries, the integration of sensors, advanced robotics, and artificial intelligence is driving dramatic changes in industrial production.

The artificial intelligence revolution does not free the world from the need for fuels, electricity, or—of course—semiconductors. It adds a fourth resource: information. Data are essential for training advanced algorithms, improving them, and refining their performance. For this reason, information has become a strategic resource for states and corporations alike. Many countries, such as China and France, are promoting legislation aimed at "nationalizing" the data generated within their borders. As a result, companies' ability to extract and transfer data out of countries is increasingly restricted.

The need to process vast amounts of data and perform rapid computations is also reflected in the growing demand for advanced semiconductors. Computer chips are the fundamental component of most information and electronic systems today, from "smart weapons" to mobile phones and cars. In a world in which everything is becoming "smart" and saturated with processors, investment in semiconductor manufacturing and the innovation associated with it is critical to securing the future of states. Today, the core of the confrontation between China and the United States lies in the development and production of advanced chips. The United States is seeking to restrict China's access both to manufacturing technologies and to cutting-edge semiconductors. As a result, the importance of countries that possess critical industrial technologies—such as Taiwan (TSMC) and the Netherlands (ASML)—has increased on the international stage, and they are subject to growing geopolitical pressure to align with the United States in the "chip war."

Geopolitical Implications of the Technological Revolution

The geopolitical implications of these changes are enormous. The first country to successfully develop new technologies or implement them effectively will gain significant advantages. First, artificial intelligence, robotics, and automation will play an increasingly important role in the military domain – as decision-support tools, autonomous platforms operating in swarms, or advanced offensive cyber tools. A power that can deploy reliable AI on the battlefield

and harness its potential through proper force structuring will achieve a substantial military advantage.

Second, technological leadership will allow a country to "set the rules" for new markets. Ownership of key digital platforms or critical communication infrastructure will provide economic and political advantages. On the labor and cultural levels as well, technologies like artificial intelligence and automation are expected to transform the job market and lifestyles, increasing the importance of capital relative to labor and enabling individuals to operate as leaner, more independent enterprises. The countries and companies at the forefront of these changes will shape their very nature.

Third, the development of advanced technologies requires enormous investments of capital, time, knowledge, and talent. For this reason, the countries that first develop new products are likely to establish oligopolies in emerging markets, benefiting from advantages of scale, experience, and high barriers to entry. We already see this happening in the world of search engines and social networks.

For this reason, it is only natural that technological competition has become part of the broader geopolitical struggle—a competition that can be called the "war of tomorrow"—aimed at achieving or maintaining leadership in strategic technological fields. Countries are harnessing their resources to support companies in these sectors, and in some cases, they intervene directly, for example, by funding research and development. The United States, China, the European Union, and India dedicate substantial budgets to R&D, focusing on areas such as artificial intelligence, robotics, biotechnology, aerospace, advanced materials, and quantum computing.

Naturally, technological competition affects the relationship between the public and private sectors, particularly how governments interact with firms within their borders. Given the strategic importance of technological developments, companies in relevant fields—from established multinational corporations to startups—find themselves as actors with strategic influence. Their importance stems not only from their products but also from their presence at critical civilian and security nodes. Companies like Amazon and Microsoft control a significant portion of global cloud infrastructure and play a crucial role in national cybersecurity. Firms such as DJI and SpaceX develop civilian platforms and services that also serve military purposes. DJI drones became a critical force in the Russia–Ukraine war, and SpaceX's satellite internet supports the Ukrainians in their command and control systems.

It should be noted that in the military domain, technological changes do not alter the fundamentals of warfare. Maneuver and firepower remain the core components of

military victory. Surprise, concentration of effort, and territorial control continue to guide commanders, even on the modern battlefield. As the war in Ukraine demonstrates, combined arms maneuvering remains an essential capability for any army, enhanced by the use of drones, artificial intelligence, and precision weaponry.

The Energy Shift—Changes in the Global Energy Sector

Today, the world remains almost entirely dependent on fossil fuels, with all renewable energy technologies supplying only about 2.2% of global energy consumption. However, significant investment is being made in research and development to improve existing renewable technologies for profitability and to develop new energy sources. The coming decades may therefore bring a shift in the energy mix of many countries, with major geopolitical implications, even if it is not a complete transition. The technological powers, led by China and the U.S., are competing for control over the technologies and resources that will shape the future energy market, while countries that produce energy through traditional means must adapt to this new reality.

The Technological Aspect of Energy Transition

In practical terms, the growing competitiveness of new energy technologies, combined with the sharp rise in electricity demand, requires unprecedented investments in infrastructure. Estimates indicate that by 2050, there will be substantial growth in energy infrastructure investments, particularly in renewable energy. The structural changes in the market can be divided into three main aspects: the digital revolution and its impact on electricity demand, technological developments in energy production, and changes in the global energy mix.

The digital revolution, and particularly the growth of the technology industry, serves as a major driver of growth in the energy market. Data centers and cloud infrastructures, which power the development of artificial intelligence and advanced computing, place unprecedented demands on electricity supply systems. Tech giants like Google, Amazon, Meta, and Microsoft have become key players in the energy market, investing billions of dollars in electricity generation infrastructure and in the development of new technologies for managing power grids.

On the technological front, significant developments in the energy sector are driving changes in the global energy mix. In the nuclear field, small modular reactor (SMR) technology promises to provide stable electricity at low costs, offering important advantages in operational flexibility and risk management. The energy storage market is also expected to grow, with advancements in battery technologies, alongside developments in hydrogen (green or blue), enabling hybrid solutions to improve the reliability and efficiency of renewable electricity supply systems.

Progress in battery technology is also necessary to increase the range and lifespan of electric vehicles.

Non-uniform Changes in the Energy Mix Between Developed and Developing Countries

Changes in the global energy mix manifest differently across countries.[14] In developed countries, the expected growth in electricity demand is relatively moderate. In contrast, developing countries are experiencing rapid increases in electricity consumption. This rising demand will require massive investments in infrastructure, including power lines and power plants.

The dynamic also creates new competition. The most prominent of these is the competition for strategic resources needed by the renewable energy industry.[15] Renewable energy production requires a variety of metals, such as lithium, cobalt, and rare earth elements. These are available in only a few countries, some of which are non-Western (like Chile, Bolivia, or the Congo) or even hostile to the West, such as China.[16] Dependence on these metals makes the supply chain of the renewable energy industry vulnerable to geopolitical shocks.

Renewable energy production requires a variety of metals, such as lithium, cobalt, and rare earth elements. These are available in only a few countries, some of which are non-Western or even hostile to the West

The Geopolitical Impact of the Energy Transition

The transition to advanced energy technologies is gradually shifting the focus from traditional oil-producing countries to nations leading in technology and industry. China, having invested heavily in the development of advanced energy technologies, is positioning itself as a dominant player in the future market. Its control over supply chains of critical raw materials, combined with advanced production capabilities in batteries and solar panels, provides it with significant leverage and influence. In the first year of the second Trump administration, it has taken steps to reduce this dependence on China for raw materials.

The relations between the West and the traditional energy producers in the Middle East are also undergoing change. The anticipated decline in oil demand in developed countries is forcing these traditional oil

14 Jason Bordoff and Meghan L. O'Sullivan, "Green Upheaval", *Foreign Affairs*, 30 (November 2021), https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2021-11-30/geopolitics-energy-green-upheaval.

15 Liu, "How to Secure Critical Minerals for Clean Energy Without Alienating China".

16 André Månberger and Bengt Johansson, "The Geopolitics of Metals and Metalloids Used for the Renewable Energy Transition", *Energy Strategy Reviews* 26 (November 2019): 100394, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.esr.2019.100394.

producers to seek new markets and diversify their economies. The Gulf states are responding with strategic investments in advanced energy technologies and closer cooperation with China, which is expected to remain an important oil consumer in the coming decades. The result is a more complex relationship between the West and the Gulf countries, with historical economic and security cooperation being challenged by competing economic interests.

The technological competition in the energy sector is also becoming a central arena in the geopolitical struggle between the great powers. The United States has launched a program for developing advanced energy technologies, with the stated goal of maintaining its technological edge over China. The European Union has announced a similar program, focusing on energy storage technologies and smart grid management. The objective is clear: to ensure technological independence and reduce reliance on foreign players in this critical sector.

Cultural Changes: Political Polarization and the Rise of Antisemitism

In Western societies, a deep political polarization has emerged between socialist-progressive, anti-traditional forces and national-conservative, traditionalist forces. The tension between these worldviews creates profound divides and an inflamed public discourse. Politics has become a battleground of "us versus them," making it harder than ever to bridge opposing positions. At the same time, distrust in institutions and traditional media has reached record levels: only 22% of Americans say they have “trust” in the federal government, and 32% say the same about the media.[17] Political polarization makes it difficult for decision-makers in Washington to build a bipartisan consensus on core issues such as the economy, immigration, and foreign policy. Instead, the parties clash with one another, which at best leads to inconsistent U.S. policies that shift with changes in the composition of Congress and the White House, and at worst results in complete paralysis.

Another worrying phenomenon is the rise of antisemitism. A 2024 study by the Anti-Defamation League revealed that about one in four Americans believes in one or more traditional antisemitic stereotypes (for example, that “Jews have too much power in the business world”).[18] In the first half of 2024, the United Kingdom recorded 1,978 antisemitic incidents—the highest number

17 Pew Research Center, "Public Trust in Government: 1958-2024", *Pew Research Center*, 6.24.2024, https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2024/06/24/public-trust-in-government-1958-2024/; Megan Brenan, "Media Confidence in U.S. Matches 2016 Record Low", *Gallup*, 19.10.2023, https://news.gallup.com/poll/512861/media-confidence-matches-2016-record-low.aspx.

18 Center for Antisemitism Research, "Antisemitic Attitudes in America 2024", *ADL* 2.242.2024, https://www.adl.org/resources/report/antisemitic-attitudes-america-2024.

ever documented by the CST (Community Security Trust).[19] Similar trends are evident in other European countries, and hostility toward Jews is gaining momentum on social media. The reasons are varied, including Islamist incitement, delegitimization of Israel in mainstream progressive circles and on the growing edges of the political right. The growing Muslim population in the West, particularly in Europe, also contributes to the increase in antisemitism, alongside the strengthening of anti-Israel attitudes and voices.

About one in four Americans believes in one or more traditional antisemitic stereotypes

However, for many in the West, the Iron Swords War has sharpened their views on Israel and the Islamist world, and many have come to the understanding that anti-Israel and antisemitic actors are also opposed to the democratic West. This clarification is already leading to a trend of distancing from these actors among moderate Democrats and to clearer support for Israel among most Republicans in the U.S. A similar trend is observed in countries threatened by Islamism, such as India.

Threats and Opportunities for Israel

The growing complexity in Israel–U.S. relations requires a reassessment of the special relationship with Washington. Due to social and demographic changes within the U.S., partisan polarization, and the shift of segments of the American left against Israel, U.S. support for Israel can no longer be taken for granted in the way it has been. Israel will need to enhance its value in the eyes of the U.S. so that the alliance between the two countries remains resilient despite changes in government.

The strengthening of anti-Western powers makes it harder for the U.S. to act freely around the world and could create situations in which the U.S. must concentrate all its resources on a limited number of theaters—or even just one. Israel's reliance on American military supplies could then prove to be a critical vulnerability, as the U.S. might not be able to supply the material requirements for Israel's war effort. A lack of American attention could also expose Israel to new threats, primarily the threat to maritime routes. Until now, Israel, like many other countries, relied on American hegemony at sea. Today, there is a real possibility that the U.S. will be unable or unwilling to maintain this hegemony everywhere, especially in the Middle East, where it faces challenges from both state and non-state actors. Israel can no longer take the security of its shipping routes for granted.

In order to reduce the potential damage from this shift, Israel must work to minimize

19 Community Security Trust, "Antisemitic Incidents Report January-June 2024", *CST*, 8.8.2024, https://cst.org.uk/news/blog/2024/08/08/antisemitic-incidents-report-january-june-2024.

its reliance on American supplies, further diversify its foreign relations, and strengthen ties with other powers, including rising states such as India, not as a replacement for the U.S., but as a complementary strategic safety net.

For Israel, a small and technologically advanced country, the accelerated technological change carries both opportunities and threats. The diffusion of advanced capabilities to sub-state actors and weaker state actors (such as Iran) erodes Israel's qualitative edge and challenges the construction and employment of its military power. Threats from drones, missiles, and advanced cyber tools all require operational responses.

The knowledge and experience Israel has accumulated in areas such as cyber, air defense, and artificial intelligence can serve as important assets in the technological race. Israel must also leverage this expertise and these developments to forge new alliances. Developing a global-level science and innovation ecosystem will allow Israel not only to enhance its security but also to increase its diplomatic and economic influence.

Moreover, the changing energy reality presents Israel with both challenges and opportunities. The geopolitical and economic weight of countries such as Iran and Qatar, with which Israel has tense relations, is expected to decline in the long-term. Israel's geographic location places it in a favorable position to **forge a role as a regional energy hub**, either through further development of natural gas reserves or by serving as a key link in electricity and transmission networks connecting the Persian Gulf to Europe.

Social changes in the West threaten Israel's room for maneuver and its ability to rely on other advanced countries for support. A growing rift between Israel and the progressive currents in Europe and the U.S. jeopardizes its standing and its relations with traditional allies. Demographic shifts—primarily the increase in the Muslim population in Western countries—also bolster anti-Israel positions and voices. At the same time, for much of the European and American right, despite the presence of anti-Israel currents, Israel serves as an example of a nation-state that preserves its identity and fights courageously for its survival.

Israel faces a challenging and changing global environment. Great power competition, technological change, and the energy transition all present new opportunities for Israel. Its military capabilities are once again valued in Europe, given the looming threat of war on the continent. The U.S. need for strong allies, along with its desire to reduce direct military commitments, both create an opportunity for a fundamental shift in Israel–U.S. relations. Technological change will further enhance Israel's standing as a leading innovation hub.

Force Buildup and Institutional Reforms

Chapter 4

Rebuilding the IDF Ground Forces as the Backbone of Israel's Military Power: A Comprehensive Plan

Yehoshua Rivak

Executive Summary

The State of Israel faces a challenging security environment, shaped by a prolonged conflict with the Arab–Muslim world from the beginnings of Zionism to the present day. Since its establishment, Israel has sought to ensure its survival through a high-quality military force designed to defeat its enemies in every encounter and to project military power. According to the classic security doctrine, based on Ze'ev Jabotinsky's "Iron Wall" doctrine as adopted by David Ben-Gurion, only by demonstrating military superiority will Israel's enemies come to terms with the state's existence. Accordingly, the State of Israel has allocated substantial national resources to its defense establishment, foremost among them compulsory conscription and the sustained investment of a significant share of GDP in security needs.

However, over the years the state's security doctrine changed, a shift reflected in the reduction of resources allocated to the IDF's ground maneuver forces. In response to changes in the threat environment—including the signing of peace agreements with some former enemy states—a prolonged transition to a "small and smart" military unfolded. As part of this process, the size of the ground forces declined due to the closure of brigades and divisions, and the reserve force was eroded. The emphasis shifted toward investment in high-end technologies, the Air Force, military intelligence, and technological defensive systems such as the Iron Dome and "smart" border barriers, based on the belief that

future wars would be conducted primarily through sophisticated weapons systems rather than large-scale ground combat.

Recent wars, foremost among them the Iron Swords War, exposed the severe consequences of this shift. Although the IDF succeeded in achieving partial ground control and inflicted significant damage on Hamas and Hezbollah, the lack of sufficient maneuver forces led to difficulties in urban warfare and in achieving a rapid, decisive outcome. At the root of this change lay a failure in defining the reference threat, which focused on the enemies' intentions rather than on their actual military capabilities. This scenario did not adequately account for the possibility of multi-front warfare, nor did it include preparedness for surprise ground attacks within the territory of the State of Israel.

This document argues that the severe damage sustained by Israel's adversaries in the most recent war—including Hamas, Hezbollah, Iran, and the Syrian regime—does not justify delaying the strengthening of the ground forces, as proposed by recent government committees. There are four main reasons for this:

1. **Terror threats do not disappear—they recover:** Even after Hamas and Hezbollah have absorbed heavy blows, they may recover, as has happened in the past. The rehabilitation and rearmament mechanisms of terrorist organizations do not come to a halt; therefore, the IDF must maintain ready and capable ground forces.
2. **Focusing on intentions rather than capabilities is a conceptual failure:** For years, Israel's reference scenario was based on analyses of the enemy's intentions rather than on assessments of its capabilities. This approach overlooked the fact that potential threats—such as Egypt, Jordan, Shiite militias, and radical Islamist forces in the Middle East—could become active adversaries in the future.
3. **Building ground force capability is a long-term process and must not be left to the last minute:** Establishing a new armored brigade is not a one-or-two-year endeavor; it requires many years of investment in manpower, training, and the procurement of suitable equipment. Building several brigades—and certainly divisions—takes a great deal of time, and therefore the process must begin now.
4. **A strong ground force is a strategic-political tool:** This is not just a necessity at the operational level. A powerful military projects national strength, reinforces deterrence, and provides Israel with room to

maneuver on the international stage. Neglecting the ground forces, on the other hand, weakens Israel's standing and limits its freedom of action in times of crisis.

To ensure Israel's continued ability to defend itself, this document proposes a fundamental change to the current nature of Israel's force deployment and, consequently, in its force build-up. The force deployment concept rests on four principles: initiative, decisiveness, power, and the conduct of combat on enemy territory. As a result, a force build-up is required that will restore and strengthen the ground forces, while developing the capability to defend on all fronts and to conduct offensive operations on multiple fronts simultaneously. This is not meant to replace the current excellent long-range capabilities of the Air Force—which should be maintained- but rather that rebuilding the ground maneuver forces should be prioritized over further expansion and continued over-emphasis on air power.

In order to rebuild Israel's capability for decisive ground maneuvers, a series of changes in force build-up must be implemented:

1. **Expanding the order of battle of the ground forces:** Additional brigades and divisions must be established in numbers sufficient to enable simultaneous defense on all fronts and concurrent offensive operations on the required fronts. These divisions and brigades must possess full operational readiness and an appropriate training framework.
2. **Ground-based firepower:** An independent and diverse fire capability must be developed for the maneuvering forces. This firepower should cover short- and medium-range engagements, across the full spectrum of intensity and with varying levels of precision.
3. **Combat engineering:** Engineering units must be expanded so that every brigade combat team includes an engineering battalion, or at least a reinforced heavy engineering equipment company. In addition, improved solutions must be developed—within the Engineering Corps or elsewhere—for dealing with underground threats.
4. **Tactical battlefield intelligence:** Relevant combat collection capabilities must be developed, and collection frameworks established at multiple echelons.
5. **Combat mobility:** Broad mobility capabilities must be restored across all forces. This may include light vehicles, armored trucks, light AFVs, or any other solutions suited to the operational concept.

6. **Administrative and logistical support:** It must be ensured that, alongside the buildup of the combat forces, the logistical support capabilities of those forces are developed as well.
7. **The near-ground airspace:** The project should include an operational concept as well as the acquisition of drones, drone swarms, and additional aerial platforms—each with distinct capabilities (visual, radar, explosive payloads, and others).
8. **Night fighting:** Extensive procurement of night-vision equipment must be undertaken for all maneuvering units across all branches.
9. **Improving the readiness and preparedness of the reserve forces:** The reserve system is a critical pillar in a full-scale war, yet it currently suffers from erosion in both operational readiness and equipment levels.

Moreover, the new concept emphasizes the importance of extensive ground maneuver as an integral component of Israel's overall military doctrine. In the international arena, the State of Israel often faces diplomatic pressure that limits the duration of war-fighting. Rapid and decisive ground maneuver can secure military achievements that help translate battlefield success into political gains. Ground maneuver should therefore be regarded as a central means of defeating adversaries and preserving long-term deterrence. This does not mean raising the defense budget to extraordinary levels of GDP as was mistakenly done following the Yom Kippur War, but rather a rise of a few percentage points relative to Israel's GDP, similar to that recommended by the recent government committee, and as a specific, time-limited, multi-year defense plan, so as not to harm Israel's credit rating.

This policy poses significant implementation challenges, yet it is vital to ensuring Israel's combat capability in the face of unpredictable future threats. Israel must acknowledge that the struggle for its existence is far from over, and that it must build a military force that is strong, resilient, flexible, and constantly prepared for any possible scenario. The document calls upon the nation—its citizens and its leaders—to once again adopt a mindset of resilience and continued preparedness, alongside the enduring aspiration for prosperity and growth, grounded in the understanding that the challenges facing the State of Israel are not transient. A state with a deep Jewish national identity, combining strength and determination with economic success and innovation, is the key to our success and prosperity.

Introduction

Background

The State of Israel is situated at the heart of a hostile environment. From the very beginnings of the Zionist enterprise in the Land of Israel, the Arab–Muslim population—both that residing between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea and that along the borders of this region—did not accept the idea of a Jewish state. Consequently, from the birth of the pre-state community and up to the present day it is clear that the fundamental condition for Israel's existence is a high-quality military force—capable of protecting the country's borders and its citizens, and projecting military power toward all who would seek to harm it.

According to the "Iron Wall" concept, formulated by Ze'ev Jabotinsky and adopted by David Ben-Gurion as the security doctrine of the State of Israel, only when its neighbors understand that they cannot defeat Israel by force of arms will they reconcile themselves with its existence and establish normal relations with it.

A direct outcome of this concept is the allocation of substantial national resources to Israel's security establishment. Foremost among these is the compulsory military service law, which provides the IDF with the best human capital in the State of Israel. Beyond that, a significant share of GDP—higher than that of developed Western countries—is devoted to security needs.

However, the amount of resources allocated to the defense budget and the way the "pie" is divided among various security needs have changed over the years. Old threats have been replaced by new ones, enemy states have signed political agreements with Israel, and shifts in Israeli society and its priorities have all affected the security establishment in general and the IDF in particular.

The cornerstone of Israel's security doctrine, as shaped by David Ben-Gurion, was rapid decision and victory. More precisely, it entailed blocking of the enemy, transferring the fighting to the enemy's territory, and achieving a swift defeat. The reasons for this are clear: Israel's geographic size and lack of strategic depth do not allow it to conduct a war within its own territory. Israel's demographic situation relative to its adversaries requires the mobilization of reserve forces in wartime and the shutdown of the economy, and therefore necessitates shortening the duration of war. To meet these conditions, there is a need for ground forces capable of defending, attacking, and rapidly defeating the enemy.

From these same factors and for these same reasons, according to this doctrine, when the opportunity arises, a preventive operation—or at least a preemptive strike—should be carried out in order to deny the enemy the capability to invade Israel and defeat it. In recent decades, as part of the changes noted above, fewer and fewer resources have been allocated to the ground

maneuver capabilities of the IDF. As a result, the ground forces have shrunk, and the ability for decisive maneuver has been considerably reduced.

The ground forces have shrunk, and the ability for decisive maneuver has been considerably reduced

A State's Military Power

A state's military power is measured through an integration of parameters such as the type, size and composition of its armed forces, including infantry, armor, artillery, air force, navy, and special forces; its type of weaponry and the level of technological advancement; the defense budget and its share of GDP; the logistical system—supply capabilities, mobility and deployment capacity, and domestic defense-industrial production; military alliances, international ties, and cooperation; human and physical resilience, including the level of training, discipline, and fighting spirit; military experience and success on the battlefield; and additional factors.

When building military power, a state must define the reference threat it faces and invest in force development and military strength in those parameters that will help it prevail over the potential adversaries comprising that threat. A state whose enemies are distant and threaten it only with stand-off fire is fundamentally different from a state whose enemies reside along its borders. A state confronting terrorism and guerrilla threats operating with simple means and small formations differs from one facing large armies employing heavy weapons and divisional frameworks. Likewise, a state possessing geographic depth, economic depth, or other forms of strategic depth differs from one that lacks them. Each of these states will invest its resources in different components of military power in order to deter its enemies and prevent war, or to defeat them should they choose to fight.

Over the past thirty years, the IDF has undergone a process whose central focus was the transition from a large army to a "small and smart" force. Based on an analysis of threats in the regional and global environment facing Israel, military and state leadership decided that it was both possible and appropriate to reduce the size of the army and invest more in the Air Force, intelligence, technologies, and advanced systems. As part of this process, brigades and divisions in the ground forces were disbanded, combat platforms and weapons systems were reduced, and training was scaled back.

But is the analysis of reality, the threats, and the reference scenario accurate? Does the size of the ground forces provide the military power required by the State of Israel in light of the reference threat? What should be the guiding principles in building its land power? These are the critical questions that must be addressed.

The IDF's Strength in Light of the Iron Swords War

This document was written while the Iron Swords War was still ongoing. Nevertheless, it is already possible to state that the strength of some of Israel's adversaries—particularly those nearest its borders—has been significantly reduced. Hamas in the Gaza Strip has lost a substantial portion of its capabilities, both in terms of commanders and fighters, and in terms of weaponry and combat infrastructure, including large sections of its underground network that were destroyed. The IDF has also achieved ground control over parts of the Gaza Strip. Hezbollah was likewise weakened: its command chain, especially senior leadership, has suffered severe losses, hundreds of fighters were killed, and a significant portion of its long and medium-range missiles, weapons depots, production facilities, and other infrastructure were destroyed. The Israeli strikes on Iran, in response to its missile attack in October 2024, hit long-range surface-to-surface missile production facilities, advanced air-defense systems (S-300), and intelligence and logistical installations, affecting Iran both physically and psychologically. Finally, following the attacks by rebel forces in Syria and the destruction of Syrian army weaponry by Israel's Air Force, the Syrian military effectively ceased to exist. Equally important, Hezbollah's supply line from Iran was cut off.

In the next phase, during Operation Rising Lion in June 2025 Israel expanded its direct actions deep into Iranian territory. The IDF struck key nuclear sites, missile launchers, and air-defense batteries, as well as logistical facilities and sensitive governmental infrastructure. Senior figures in the Iranian military and nuclear establishment were eliminated, production and development capabilities were disrupted, and the regime's sense of invulnerability was severely undermined. Although Iran responded with a massive barrage of hundreds of missiles and UAVs targeting Israel, the air-defense systems intercepted most of them, and the damage to Israel remained relatively limited. The results of the operation made it clear that Israel is capable of projecting significant strategic power even into the heart of Iran, and that the cost Tehran must pay for its actions has increased substantially.

The Current Policy

As noted above, military force is built in light of a threat analysis and the determination of a reference scenario for which the armed forces must prepare. It is clear that the manner in which the threat analysis is conducted and the reference scenario is defined directly affects force development in practice.

The Process of Defining the Reference Scenario in the State of Israel

The IDF's reference scenario is approved by the Political–Security Cabinet. This scenario serves as a working tool for preparedness (force building) and for the development

of operational plans. Its approval is a structured process involving military and security bodies as well as political decision-makers. The main stages of this process are as follows:

1. **Situation assessment and threat characterization (IDF):** The Intelligence Directorate conducts an analysis of the strategic threats facing Israel, including enemy states, terrorist organizations, changes in the international arena, and the enemy's technological capabilities. The Planning Directorate and the Operations Directorate translate the intelligence into operational assessments and formulate the reference scenario in accordance with Israel's national security doctrine. The Chief of the General Staff reviews the proposed scenario and forwards it for further discussion within the defense establishment.
2. **Review of the scenario (Ministry of Defense):** The Ministry of Defense reviews the scenario presented by the IDF, incorporating diplomatic, economic, and strategic considerations. If necessary, the Ministry of Defense and the IDF update the reference scenario accordingly.
3. **Presentation of the scenario to the government:** The Minister of Defense, the Chief of the General Staff, and senior intelligence officials present the reference scenario to the government. The government discusses the scenario within the framework of the Political–Security Cabinet and, at the conclusion of the process, reaches a decision that includes principled approval of the scenario, which then guides the IDF and the defense establishment in their operational preparedness.
4. **Implementation and budget approval (Knesset):** Once the government approves the reference scenario, the resulting force structure and operational plans are translated into budgetary requirements. The Knesset, through the Ministerial Committee on Armaments and budgetary discussions, approves the defense budget based on the reference scenario and its implications.
5. **National Security Council (NSC) oversight of the process:** The NSC plays a central role in the process. Its task is to coordinate and synchronize all the different actors, aligning national strategic interests with the IDF's reference scenario. The NSC is responsible for preparing Cabinet discussions and ensuring that the security authorities present complete and relevant data, and at the conclusion of the process, to formulate opinions and recommendations for the Prime Minister and the Cabinet. After the reference scenario is approved, the NSC supervises the implementation of Cabinet decisions in accordance with the scenario.

Assumptions Underlying the Current Policy

As with any policy formulation, the analysis of threats and the definition of the reference scenario are influenced by the worldview of the decision-makers. The worldview that

underpinned the determination of Israel's reference scenario in recent decades was that the State of Israel would no longer fight "major wars." This document does not address whether this worldview arose from the assumption that Israel, its citizens, and its leaders were unwilling or unable to bear losses in lives and property—leading to the adoption of the "end of major wars" perspective—or whether it was influenced by a broader Western and developed-world perspective, which emphasized the futility, illegitimacy, and lack of necessity of wars, and consequently viewed the Israeli public as unwilling to pay the price of conflicts. In practice, the approach underlying the development of Israel's national military force was that the country would not face a full-scale war in the foreseeable future.

The understanding that we are not going to face a "major war," and moreover, that we are not willing to wage wars that incur significant losses, led to a security concept centered on other elements:

a. **Diplomatic Agreements** – Reliance on diplomatic agreements, based on the belief that they provide a higher level of security than military power. These agreements were made with states and sub-state entities, some grounded in concrete actions and others based on future expectations. This reliance deeply influenced force building vis-à-vis these actors and the potential threat they posed. For example, the peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan completely eliminated the IDF's force development against them, both in terms of combat force structure and in intelligence gathering.

The worldview that underpinned the determination of Israel's reference scenario in recent decades was that the State of Israel would no longer fight "major wars."

b. ***MABAM* – The Campaign Between Wars** – This campaign became the primary operational effort of the entire defense establishment. Its goal was to continuously reduce the capabilities of Israel's enemies, maintain the balance of power in Israel's favor, and thereby delay or deter their desire and ability to initiate war against the country. Most of the IDF's resources and force development were directed toward the units relevant to this effort—primarily the Intelligence Corps, including the special operations units, and, of course, the Air Force. However, with a caveat: it was defined that *MABAM* would always be conducted below the threshold of war and must not drag the country into an unplanned conflict. As a result, enemy capabilities were never reduced to the required level. At the same time, within the IDF itself, the forces not participating in *MABAM* gradually eroded.

c. **Technological Defense** – As part of the desire to minimize losses, vast resources were invested in the most advanced defensive capabilities in the

world. This includes a multi-layered air-defense system, smart border fences and obstacles, spatial monitoring networks, and excellent intelligence capabilities. The role of this defense was to reduce the ability of Israel's enemies to inflict damage and to provide flexibility for the decision-makers.

Finally, there was the assumption that the only potential existential threat against the State of Israel is Iran's attempt to develop nuclear weapons. If Iran were to acquire nuclear weapons, the strategic balance in the region would be disrupted, placing Israel's very existence at critical risk. Consequently, a significant portion of the defense budget was directed toward efforts to halt Iran's nuclear program.

The Reference Scenario

Aside from the campaign against the Iranian nuclear threat through various means, the primary reference scenario for which the IDF prepared—and to which the ground maneuver forces were oriented in recent years—was a limited and constrained one. The main adversaries in this scenario were Hezbollah and Hamas, and the working assumption was that the IDF would conduct an offensive in one arena while remaining on the defensive in the other. According to this scenario—which also downplayed the intensity of fighting against these semi-military terrorist organizations—the conflict would last no more than 30 to 45 days, and munitions, stockpiles, spare parts, and related resources were prepared accordingly. Throughout the most recent multi-year plans, this scenario was adjusted slightly upward or downward: the number of fronts on which Israel would attack or the duration of the fighting varied somewhat from period to period. However, the essence remained the same—a war against relatively weak semi-military terrorist organizations, one that could be concluded within a few weeks to a few months, without a multi-front campaign involving all actors in the region.

Current Ground Force Development Policy

In light of this reference threat and the operational concept that maneuver forces would be employed only for limited operations, the bulk of the maneuvering power relied (de facto) on the regular forces. While in the early decades of the state, the operational doctrine held that "the regular army will stop an invasion and the reserves will take the decisive offensive action," in recent decades, plans and force development were based on the assumption that "the regulars will stop an invasion, be relieved in defense by the reserves, and then go on offense." Beyond this, the plans were primarily designed for short attacks, both in terms of maneuver distance and duration, and the force was organized accordingly. Although these definitions were never formally stated, they were implemented in practice.

Within the Ground Forces, several flagship projects were undertaken over the past decades:

1. **Digital Ground Army:** An advanced command and control (C2) system that provides a shared situational picture and connectivity for all ground forces.
2. **"Namer" – Merkava Armored Personnel Carrier:** A vehicle for transporting infantry troops, among the most advanced of its kind in the world.
3. **Merkava Tank:** Continuous development of the Merkava tank, from Mark 3 to Mark 4 and more advanced variants.
4. **Trophy – Active Protection System:** An active defense system for advanced armored vehicles, including Merkava tanks and Namer APCs.
5. **Keshet Mortars:** New 120 mm mortars at the battalion level, providing significantly greater lethality and much higher accuracy compared to the older 81 mm mortars.

Beyond these projects, the IDF also procured a range of additional new capabilities, from advanced munitions to night-vision and observation systems.

Support fire for maneuver forces did not improve significantly within the Ground Forces during these years (beyond the Keshet mortars) and largely relied on the Air Force, which received substantial investment in all multi-year plans. To compensate for this gap, the connectivity between the Air Force and maneuver units gradually improved over the years, and during the Iron Swords War, cooperation reached a high level, providing close support to the ground forces.

The IDF's regular divisions in 2023 looked completely different from the divisions of the 1990s. The equipment and technology at their disposal were far more advanced.

However, it is important to emphasize that only the regular divisions were equipped in this way. The first reason is that these projects and equipment are extremely expensive, making it a major resource challenge to similarly outfit the entire Ground Forces. The second reason is that the IDF never truly planned for a wide-scale, deep maneuver involving all forces and all divisions. Evidence of this can be seen in the Iron Swords War, into which the IDF entered with no plan to seize the entire Gaza Strip with multiple divisions, but only a limited plan to attack the northern sector. As a result, the reserve divisions were not intended to carry out significant maneuver missions like the regular forces, and therefore, there appeared to be no need to equip them in the same manner.

Moreover, the reserve forces have steadily diminished in size over the past three decades. Divisions and brigades were disbanded, the number of tanks has been reduced to roughly one-third of its original size, the artillery inventory has also decreased, and additional units and formations were either disbanded or downsized.

In line with the policy described and with the aim of equipping and organizing the forces that would actually fight in the best

possible way, a "Ground Force Readiness Structure" was established. Under this structure, readiness and equipment levels were defined for all IDF brigades, each according to its expected role. The regular brigades were prioritized at the forefront and thus fully equipped as required. The elite reserve brigades came next in the priority order, receiving less equipment and being assigned lower readiness levels than 100%. The remaining reserve brigades were designated solely for defensive and routine security missions, with very low levels of both equipment and readiness. Many additional brigades were disbanded.

Further cuts also stemmed from this policy. The Reserve Service Law enacted in 2008 greatly limited the number of service days for each reservist per year. Before this law, reservists could be called up for up to 36 days of service annually. The new law established a three-year model: a non-officer, non-commander could serve up to 54 days over three years; a non-officer commander up to 70 days; and an officer up to 84 days. While this reduced service model benefited the economy and the reservists themselves, it negatively affected operational readiness and unit cohesion. In addition to reducing annual reserve days, the law also lowered the exemption age from reserve service. Previously, the exemption age was 54 for men and 38 for women. The new law lowered the exemption age to 40 for soldiers, 45 for officers, and 49 for certain positions as determined by the Minister of Defense.

In this context, it is worth noting that, following the same policy, the regular army was also affected by Amendment No. 19 to the Security Service Law, which reduced mandatory service from 36 months to 32 months. This change made it very difficult to maintain full staffing in combat units and, more importantly, harmed the professional level of the units, as the most skilled and effective human resources were lost at the peak of their experience.

Failures and Problems in the Current Policy

Failures in Process

The first and most significant failure in the reference scenario approval process is that it begins with an intelligence assessment by the Research Division of Aman (IDF Intelligence Directorate). Israel's intelligence bodies have excellent capabilities in tactical and operational intelligence, but very limited ability in strategic intelligence and overall strategic assessment. Several factors contribute to this gap. First and foremost, it is inherently more difficult to assess an enemy's strategic intentions than to gather tactical information on personnel or weaponry for targeting purposes. Beyond that, there exists a deep cultural gap between the predominant mindset of Aman personnel in Israel and the culture and perceptions of Israel's adversaries. This fundamental gap negatively affects the ability to predict the enemy's strategic mindset and intentions. Adding to the problem, the political-cultural diversity

within Aman and other intelligence bodies is minimal, limiting its capacity to bring multiple perspectives to strategic analysis. In practice, over the years, Israel's intelligence community has demonstrated a limited ability to provide reliable strategic forecasts—whether due to objective challenges or subjective biases.

Only large-scale maneuver, the seizure of territory, and the clearing of areas of enemy forces and infrastructure can decisively defeat an adversary

The Security Cabinet, which is meant to bring the strategic perspective to the discussion, is not exposed during the reference scenario approval process to the full spectrum of threats or to the capabilities of all actors in the arena. It receives the reference scenario from the IDF only after the scenario has undergone processing and situational assessment. In other words, a regional actor—no matter how powerful—will not be considered in cabinet discussions, or its weight will be downgraded, if the IDF's situational assessment has determined that it does not constitute a threat due to a lack of perceived threatening intentions.

The Ministry of Defense and the National Security Council (NSC) do not have the appropriate staff to critically examine Aman's and the broader intelligence community's situational assessments. As a result, in practice, there is no effective oversight of the formulation of the IDF's reference scenario, and instead of the scenario being subjected to review and further deliberation, it is most likely approved as is.

Failures in the Pre-Iron Swords War Reference Scenario

The reference scenario for which the army was built in the decades preceding the war, relied largely on an analysis of the enemies' intentions according to the IDF's assessment, and as a result, some threats were downplayed while others were removed from consideration altogether.

1. The expected campaign did not include a multi-theater scenario involving more than two simultaneous fronts. The threat analysis was lenient and did not assess that the enemies could be highly coordinated.
2. The scenario did not include a large-scale, surprise invasion into Israeli territory.
3. The strength of Hezbollah and Hamas was not assessed correctly, and so we planned for a shorter operation than would be required to defeat them. This may also stem from the defined objective vis-à-vis these organizations: if the goal was not decisive victory but rather raids and strikes, a shorter time frame could be deemed sufficient.
4. States such as Egypt and Jordan were not taken into account—certainly not Turkey and Yemen—with all the implications that follow from this.

Failures in Building the Ground Maneuvering Force

The central failure was the relinquishment of a powerful maneuvering force. Only large-scale maneuver, the seizure of territory, and the clearing of areas of enemy forces and infrastructure can decisively defeat an adversary. When the IDF gave up these capabilities, it effectively gave up its ability to achieve decisive victory.

When a comprehensive war is required and the forces are insufficient—whether in terms of readiness, capabilities, or numbers—the war becomes far more prolonged, exacting a heavy toll on the economy, the home front, and morale. For this reason, one of the cornerstones of Israel's national security doctrine has been rapid decision and swift victory.

The reduction of maneuvering forces, based on the assumption that in the foreseeable future there would be no need for large maneuver formations, missed two very important elements. First, we could never guarantee that we truly understand the enemy's intentions. Second, force-building processes take a very long time. Major projects of the kind mentioned above take a decade or more. Once certain projects are abandoned, or units and force structures are disbanded, this cannot be remedied within two or three years.

Within the maneuver force–building that did take place, there were several additional shortcomings. We will briefly note them here and expand on them later in the proposed policy:

1. The maneuver force order of battle (OOB) was smaller than required, and within it there was excessive differentiation between the various forces.
2. Within this order of battle, an excessively low level of readiness was defined for a substantial portion of the brigades.
3. An independent fire-support array for the ground forces was not developed, leaving maneuver operations dependent on the Air Force and its availability relative to other missions assigned to it. In urban combat environments, and especially when the Air Force is required to operate across multiple fronts—including a "third circle"—a gap emerges in the intensity and availability of fire support for maneuvering ground forces.
4. Without relevant supporting forces across all domains, it is impossible to conduct a broad and effective campaign. The development of force structure in combat support and logistical support elements—such as intelligence collection, engineering and heavy engineering equipment, mobility, and transportation—did not match the requirements of modern warfare in the urban environment.

The Proposed Policy – Strengthening the IDF's Capacity for Decisive Victory

We must adopt the working assumption that in the foreseeable future, the State of Israel will continue to exist in a state of struggle against forces which do not accept its basic legitimacy to exist. The roots of this struggle are ancient, but the current form has existed since the beginning of Zionism, the return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel, and the establishment of the state. The opposition of the Arab/Muslim world to the State of Israel stems from a wide range of reasons and is not limited to the question of where precisely Israel's borders are drawn. The struggle is deep-rooted—cultural, ideological, religious, economic, territorial, resource-based, and more. The forms of the struggle and the actors participating in it have changed over the years, but its essence has not changed, that is: a profound opposition on the part of the Arab, Muslim, regional environment to Jewish political independence anywhere between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. At times, the actors in this struggle were states with organized armies; at other times, they were armed popular militias. In certain periods, terrorist and guerrilla organizations led the struggle, and at other times states from a "third circle" did so with long-range weaponry. The active players in the struggle and their methods have changed from time to time, but the essence has remained the same.

Therefore, the nation—its leaders and citizens alike—must live with a national consciousness of resilience and constant preparedness, alongside the aspiration for prosperity and growth. The combination of security strength with economic success and innovation forms the key to national resilience, rooted in a deep Jewish-national identity. This is not a struggle we choose, but one imposed upon us by history, and it demands that we sharpen our awareness, strengthen our resolve, and ensure that Israel's military capability enables the state to survive, prevail, and thrive.

Principles for Analyzing the Security Reality and Potential Threats

There is an inherent problem in defining a reference scenario. When we attempt to simulate the operational situation against which the IDF will have to fight—even if we take into account the most extreme scenario—we are forced to assume that we know what the future could or might hold. This assumption is highly problematic, as a review of Israel's short history and the longer history of wars in general shows that a significant portion of wars have erupted by surprise, both in terms of the outbreak of war itself and the way the enemy organized and fought it. The timing, location, intensity, weaponry, and other components were unpredictable in a large part of conflicts between nations. The Iron Swords War, the Second Lebanon War, and the Yom Kippur War are clear local examples. In the Yom Kippur War, we were surprised

by the Egyptians' and Syrians' initiation of the war, and equally surprised by their method of fighting and the new anti-tank capabilities. In the Second Lebanon War, although we initiated the war, we did not plan it in advance; rather, we responded to a surprising move by Hezbollah, which attacked an IDF patrol and abducted three soldiers. We were also surprised by Hezbollah's method of fighting in the nature reserves. Finally, in the Iron Swords War, we were surprised both by Hamas's initiation of the war (and subsequently Hezbollah) and by the method of fighting and the extensive use of underground infrastructure.

Nevertheless, the political leadership must define for the IDF against what threats it should build its force. Without a compass guiding force development, the security establishment—and the IDF within it—risks either failing to prepare for the required threats or preparing for threats that do not align with the priorities envisioned by the political leadership.

The reference scenario must include, as a fundamental working assumption, the fact that war will break out by surprise and that its intensity cannot be predicted in advance

In light of all the above, the methodology for determining the threat against which the state builds its military power must be improved. First and foremost, the reference scenario must include, as a fundamental working assumption, the fact that war will break out by surprise and that its intensity cannot be predicted in advance. Moreover, since force development is a multi-year process, it must not focus solely on the set of immediate threats, but rather on the full spectrum of potential threats in the region.

The assessment that determines the threat against which preparedness is required must be based on clear empirical criteria, rather than on general assumptions that cannot be verified or measured. For example, an adversary's intentions are not a measurable variable and are almost impossible to assess reliably; by contrast, the military power of a potential adversary is a clear and unambiguous datum.

Therefore, the process should not begin with Aman's assessment, but rather with a survey of all regional forces that could potentially threaten the State of Israel. Presenting these facts at the outset of the process will help decision-makers gain a broader perspective and more professionally evaluate priorities. Based on this picture, they will be able to assess short- and long-term threats, weigh the likelihood of threats against their severity, and, above all, critically and comprehensively review the military situation.

Beyond this, there should be an additional body, outside of Aman, whose role would be to provide an alternative perspective on the assessment of the threats facing the State of Israel. This body could be a department

within the National Security Council, or another entity (such as the "*Ipcha Mistabra*" body proposed by legislators), but it must be separate from the formal intelligence community, so as to avoid groupthink.

These two elements—a broader picture of the potential threats facing the State of Israel, and an additional professional body examining the adversary system from a different analytical angle—would provide decision-makers at the political level with better tools to properly guide and direct the defense establishment.

Principles for the Reference Scenario

Recognizing that we do not have of comprehensive access to all the necessary information, we will attempt to outline several principles that should guide the process of threat assessment, upon which the security system must build its capabilities:

a. Potential threats should include all military actors and terrorist organizations that are hostile to the State of Israel in practice or in potential. From Judea and Samaria and the Gaza Strip, through the states bordering Israel—most notably Lebanon and Syria, but also Jordan and Egypt—as regime changes in these countries could undermine the stability of existing agreements and open dangerous, high-intensity fronts against us. Beyond these states, Israel must also prepare for threats from more distant circles—Iran, Iraq, and even Turkey (which could threaten Israel in the maritime domain, the air domain and land domain via Syria, or in other dimensions), as well as Yemen.

b. The threat should assume a synchronized system operating against Israel—a multi-front, multi-domain, and simultaneous war. This means that the State of Israel could find itself confronting multiple armies and terrorist organizations conducting coordinated and integrated attacks across the land, air (aircraft, missiles, and rockets), maritime, and cyber domains, simultaneously striking the various fronts including the home front.

c. Accordingly, the IDF must first and foremost possess the capability to defend all fronts simultaneously, against ground, air, and maritime attacks, as well as in the additional operational domains.

d. In such a scenario, the IDF will be required to attack and destroy the enemy on multiple fronts, both near and distant. Therefore, the IDF must build a decisive force capable of shortening the duration of the campaign as much as possible. It must develop capabilities to strike the enemy across all fronts using a variety of means—aircraft, missiles, cyber capabilities, and, of course, maneuvering ground forces. The IDF must not put all its eggs in one basket. It is entirely possible that a particular capability will be neutralized or fully engaged on one front and thus unable to contribute to defense or offense on other fronts.

e. It is important to emphasize that since there is no substitute for powerful ground maneuver in defeating the enemy, the defense establishment must build a military force that enables combat across the full spectrum of operations, including deep and wide maneuver. The strength of this maneuver force must allow for both offensive and defensive operations on multiple fronts simultaneously.

Principles for Building a Decisive Force – Ground Maneuver Capabilities

Introduction: the relationship between the operational concept and force buildup

After defining the central threats against which the state must prepare, the operational concept must be clearly defined, since it directly influences the manner in which the forces are built.

An operational concept outlines the principles for the use of force. For example, a defensive operational concept will lead to the allocation of substantial resources to the construction of fortifications, obstacles, and defensive weapons, whereas an offensive concept will emphasize the need for maneuvering forces and offensive firepower. An operational concept focused on wars of attrition will require entirely different resources than one aimed at rapid decisive battles, and a state whose operational concept seeks to neutralize threats at their formative stage will build a force fundamentally different from that of a state that acts only once a threat has fully materialized.

Israel's operational concept: fundamental principles

Israel's principal threats are from its land borders, therefore, its ability to defeat its enemies depends on its capacity to prevail in ground combat. Given Israel's limited geographic size and lack of strategic depth, its defense strategy is based on transferring the fighting to enemy territory rather than conducting prolonged battles within its own borders. The operational implication of this approach is preventive war, or at least preemptive strikes, when an appropriate window of opportunity arises.

However, political, legal, and policy constraints make the option of launching a preventive strike complex and difficult to implement in practice. In most cases, the ability to initiate a preventive war or a preemptive attack depends on the emergence of an opportunity and on international timing; therefore, it is not always possible to exploit such a window when needed, and certainly not with ample time for preparation. Consequently, the IDF must be prepared at all times for immediate and decisive action—both defensively and offensively—without reliance on external factors.

The Importance of the Maneuvering Force

The importance of the maneuvering force is amplified in light of Israel's unique

political circumstances. In most wars in which Israel has been involved, a "political hourglass" has been operating against it—a limited window of time in which fighting can be conducted before international pressure forces Israel to stop. Wars based solely on stand-off fire do not lead to rapid decision; rather, they create prolonged wars of attrition and fail to produce meaningful strategic change. By contrast, ground maneuver enables the achievement of tangible military gains, such as the seizure of territory, the destruction of enemy infrastructure, and physical control of the battlespace. Only concrete, sustainable achievements—such as the seizure of territory, the destruction of the enemy and its infrastructure, and control of the battlespace—carry real weight at the end of the fighting, and these can be delivered only through ground maneuver.

The influence of values on the operational concept

The IDF's operational concept is shaped not only by operational constraints and professional doctrines but also by values. The following are two central factors influencing the army's mode of operation:

- A stringent interpretation of the laws of armed conflict – In recent years, a particularly stringent interpretation of international conventions and laws has taken hold in Israel, going beyond what is legally required. This approach mandates highly precise, "surgical" strikes (which require very costly intelligence resources and munitions) and affects maneuver warfare—its intensity, its speed, and the safety of maneuvering forces. An overly strict interpretation of international conventions and laws—beyond sometimes being mistaken, self-righteous, and even immoral toward the state's own citizens—reduces the IDF's operational effectiveness.[1]
- Balancing the life of the individual versus collective security – Public discourse that has penetrated the military regarding the loss of soldiers' lives and its impact on Israeli society directly influences the planning of military campaigns. The more cautious the political and military leadership becomes in employing ground forces out of concern for casualties, the more the ability to carry out effective offensive maneuvers diminishes. Moreover, the aspiration to protect soldiers through advanced technological means entails heavy costs for every

1 For example, the failure to relocate the entire civilian population to "humanitarian islands" already in the early days of the fighting in the Iron Swords War, and to declare the entire Gaza Strip a combat zone (except for those islands), imposed severe constraints on every offensive action undertaken—both in the timing of attacks (each time requiring the evacuation of civilians from a specific area prior to the start of the attack) and in fire-employment policy (since additional approvals were required for any preparatory fire or extraction fire). Not to mention the simple fact that in every attack the enemy knew we were coming to the area, because we had announced to the population that it needed to evacuate.

armored or protected weapons system, a factor that ultimately leads to a reduction in the size of the forces planned for maneuver.

Public discourse that has penetrated the military regarding the loss of soldiers' lives and its impact on Israeli society directly influences the planning of military campaigns

Core principles of the operational concept

Based on all of the above, four key principles can be identified on which the IDF's operational concept should be based:

1. **Initiative** – striving to eliminate threats before they materialize (through a preventive war or a preemptive strike).
2. **Decisive victory**[2] – striving for a deception-based[3] decision in every engagement with the enemy, rather than conducting prolonged wars of attrition.
3. **Fighting on enemy territory** – Israel cannot afford to conduct a war within its own territory; therefore, the fighting must be transferred to enemy territory.
4. **Overwhelming force** – the application of maximum force in engagements with the enemy in order to shorten the duration of the fighting and reduce harm to our forces.

Summary: adapting the operational concept to a changing reality

The State of Israel faces mounting security challenges that require updating and adapting its military operational concept. Israel must break free from the prevailing notion of the "end of major wars" and build a force capable of confronting multi-front wars, surprise attacks, and prolonged fighting.

According to the new operational concept, the IDF's force-building will be based on strengthening ground maneuver capabilities, empowering the reserve forces, and enhancing engineering, logistics, and independent fire capabilities. Only through a strong and ready ground force will Israel be able to ensure its ability to defend itself and achieve decisive outcomes when necessary, while preserving political and strategic freedom of action.

Force Building – Principles and Capabilities

a. Redundancy and robustness

The primary directive for defending the country's borders, on every front and from

2 *Decisive victory* means the breaking of the enemy's capacity to resist and to operate effectively against us. A state of decisive victory is usually evident when the enemy has lost its ability to act effectively against us.

3 This means is a military approach to achieving a decision over the enemy through deception, surprise, and the intelligent use of existing resources, rather than a reliance on massive firepower alone. The approach focuses on exploiting the enemy's weaknesses, employing deception, and creating a relative advantage through unexpected maneuvers, operational friction, and sophisticated battle management.

every regional command, is to defend its sector independently against all threats using its own forces. To achieve this, each regional command must have organic forces built with robustness and redundancy.

In this context, robustness means that the forces are resilient and maintain operational capability even under difficult and unexpected conditions, such as enemy attacks, communication disruptions, or loss of resources. Redundancy means having backups and duplicates of critical forces and resources (such as combat units, ammunition, and transportation), so that the command can continue functioning even in the event of partial loss of available assets.

In warfare in general, and in defense in particular, forces must be built with resource redundancy, which is required due to the friction and inherent uncertainty of the battlefield. For example, the assumption that forces can be redeployed from one sector to another on the basis of predefined plans may be sound in theory, but in practice numerous disruptions are likely to occur: the enemy may block routes, the number of vehicles available for troop transport is limited, and vehicle drivers are not necessarily soldiers subject to military orders. Therefore, each command must prepare sufficient defensive forces in every region, without relying on the rapid movement of forces. Past experience shows that redeploying a full brigade combat team between fronts may take about a week, and the ability to move several combat teams simultaneously is limited.

Due to the chaos expected in war, ground forces must be built with redundancy and robustness so that they can defend the state and preserve its territorial integrity even without prior or accompanying intelligence and without support from air forces. Therefore, while in combined operations it is possible to rely on cooperation among ground, air, and intelligence forces, there is a need to build a ground force capable of independently defending its sector even without external support.

b. The divisions

The fundamental unit of maneuver in the IDF's ground forces is the division. It represents the highest tactical echelon, and within it the entire ground force is organically integrated: the maneuvering forces – infantry, armor, and combat engineering; the combat support forces – artillery and ground fire, intelligence and reconnaissance, communications and cyber; and administrative support, including a logistics battalion, medical units, rear-echelon forces, military police, and more.

In any large campaign, the forces operating under the regional division commander are the divisions, not lower echelons. Occasionally, the commander may operate the divisions through a corps, but the corps serves as a command headquarters, not as an operational force. The forces actively

conducting the ground military campaign are the divisions themselves.

In the IDF, there are three main types of divisions:

1. Multi-domain divisions – Divisions whose role is to maneuver, attack, or defend across all sectors and on all required fronts. These divisions form the spearhead of IDF maneuver forces and are therefore the best equipped, organized, and trained units in the IDF. The regular IDF forces constitute a significant part of these divisions, but they also include reserve brigades and numerous reserve support units integrated into the headquarters and regular forces.
2. Single-domain divisions – These divisions are also intended to maneuver, attack, or defend, but only within a specific sector. Their structure is similar to that of the multi-domain divisions, but their level of organization and training is lower. These divisions are composed entirely of reserve forces.
3. Regional Divisions – The primary role of these divisions is to defend a specific sector on a given front. The brigades within these divisions are also regional brigades, and during periods of routine security, the battalions under their command are not necessarily organic to the brigade or division. In times of war, these divisions mobilize their reserve battalions, whose readiness levels and combat equipment are relatively limited and intended solely for defensive purposes in a specific sector.

As of today, the number of existing divisions and their readiness levels are significantly below what the IDF requires to fulfill its designated mission, as outlined above. According to data published over the past thirty years, the number of divisions in the IDF has been drastically reduced.[4] The number of tanks dropped to less than 30% of what it was before the Oslo process in the early 1990s (from over 4,500 to fewer than 1,300).[5] Artillery brigades were disbanded, more than 100,000 reserve soldiers were released from the system, regular service was shortened from 36 months to 32 months, permanent staffing levels were cut, and more. Among the multi-domain divisions—the spearhead of maneuvering—only 50% have independent artillery capabilities, and some have no tanks at all or fewer than required.

It is important to emphasize that it is possible to reduce certain weapons systems based on the assumption that new technology allows one to achieve more with fewer platforms. One can reasonably assume that, with advanced command-and-control systems, a modern tank can engage more

4 IISS, *The Military Balance* 1991, 108–9; *The Military Balance* 1995, 136–7; and *The Military Balance* 2013, 383–384

5 According to the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies

targets at longer ranges than an outdated one, and that with its advanced protection systems it will also be less vulnerable to enemy fire. Based on such assumptions, it is possible to adapt the tank force structure to the requirements of modern warfare. However, forces must not be reduced on the assumption that there is no longer a threat and that they will not be needed, at a time when the potential threat around us has not diminished. Equally flawed is the notion that intelligence and stand-off fire alone can prevent enemy maneuver against us or can suffice to attack and defeat the enemy. Certainly, one must not rely on agreements of any kind as a substitute for military power in ensuring the security of the state.

In light of the necessity for each regional command to function independently and for a decisive force capable of joining an offensive on any front—the following principles are required:

1. The Battalion Combat Team (BCT) – The BCT is a battalion organized for combat, and it constitutes the basic building block of the maneuver force's core formations. Each battalion must be authorized and organized so that it is capable of carrying out the defensive and offensive missions assigned to it. A sufficient standard must be established, and it must be ensured that all maneuvering BCTs meet this standard—a condition that does not exist today. Differentiation may be maintained among battalions with different roles and missions, but there cannot be a situation in which a BCT is unfit to carry out its missions.
2. The Brigade Combat Team (BRCT) – When organizing for a mission, the brigade should include one armored battalion and three infantry battalions, engineering forces and a fire support unit. The basis for a high-quality brigade combat team should be one armored battalion, one mechanized infantry battalion, and two wheeled infantry battalions. Variations on this force structure may be required, depending on a specific sector or mission.
3. The Division – The division's combat forces should include four maneuvering BRCTs and a fire brigade with an artillery grouping. In addition, the division should have the capability to absorb special forces for designated missions. These four BRCT would enable the division to operate along two main efforts while maintaining continuity and operational endurance. It may be possible to build divisions on the basis of three infantry brigades and one reinforced armored brigade with four battalions, allowing the formation of four balanced BRCTs from these four brigades, each including an armored battalion.
4. Required Number of Divisions – Assuming that all battalions in the IDF, including those in the regional divisions, are properly organized for combat, and that all BRCTs are built accordingly, the IDF should be organized as follows:

Northern Front – Two divisions in defense (the Galilee and the Golan Heights) and one in reserve.

Eastern Front – Two divisions in defense (north and south of the Dead Sea) and one division in reserve.

Western Front – Three divisions in defense (two opposite Sinai and one opposite Gaza) and one division in reserve.

Central Front – One reinforced division (Judea and Samaria) and one brigade in reserve.

General Staff Reserves – Three decisive maneuver divisions, capable of joining any sector as required.

The General Staff Reserves would be able to split between more than one sector, and together with the local reserve divisions and the defensive divisions, it would be possible to conduct offensive maneuver warfare on two fronts simultaneously (and even more), while maintaining defense on all other fronts. These divisions must provide the IDF with the capability to conduct deep maneuvering (over hundreds of kilometers) and wide maneuvering (with several divisions operating in parallel), to defend against or attack organized armies or terrorist armies and defeat them, to seize territory and maintain control over it for an extended period of time. This is essential in order to enable the State of Israel to decisively defeat its enemies within a relatively short time frame and to achieve concrete political gains.

Today, the IDF lacks a significant number of components required to meet the above framework. Hundreds of tanks are lacking, nearly ten artillery brigades, and large numbers of engineering forces are lacking. Therefore, a structured process of organizing and equipping the forces appropriately must begin immediately. Differentiation between divisions can be defined based on sector-specific characteristics or the immediacy of the threat, but this differentiation must be far smaller than the disparity that currently exists between divisions. Not all divisions need to be equipped with identical systems, but every division must possess all the capabilities required for its mission. Its soldiers and commanders must be trained and fully proficient at all times in operating the weapons systems at their disposal and must master all required combat, command, and control (C2) techniques.

c. Ground-based firepower

Maneuver, by definition, is the integration of movement and fire. Combat forces maneuver across terrain, close in on the enemy, destroy it, and seize territory, while synchronizing with fire-support units. Fire missions may include destroying enemy forces in areas into which ground forces will not maneuver; striking the enemy in maneuver areas prior to the arrival of forces or during the maneuver itself; and "softening" and fixing enemy targets as a preparatory and accompanying phase to maneuver. There is no maneuver without fire—hence the historical designation of artillery as the "King of the Battlefield."

Israel's ground maneuver force suffers from a significant lack of independence in the realm of supporting fire.

In the modern battlefield, offensive and supporting fire does not come solely from artillery. It is also delivered by fighter aircraft, attack helicopters, RPAs, rockets and missiles launched from various platforms, loitering munitions, armed drones, and of course cannons and mortars. Beyond the new units and platforms that comprise the modern fire-support system, the munitions themselves have also changed. The demand for specialized munitions has grown significantly, particularly in urban warfare (which now constitutes a very large proportion of contemporary conflicts). On the one hand, precision munitions are required to engage enemy forces in civilian environments; on the other hand, very high firepower is required to destroy fortified and built-up infrastructure in urban terrain.

Israel's ground maneuver force suffers from a significant lack of independence in the realm of supporting fire

Currently, only mortars, artillery, and a limited number of armed drones belong directly to the maneuvering divisions. All other assets are part of the Air Force and are allocated to commands and divisions for specific operations by the Operations Directorate of the General Staff.

The mortars and artillery organic to the maneuvering divisions fail to meet operational requirements in almost every respect. First, their numbers are insufficient: not every maneuver battalion has a mortar platoon with four tubes, and not every division has an organic artillery brigade (at the brigade level, there is no fire-support unit at all). Second, these systems lack sufficient firepower to destroy enemy positions and infrastructure in urban terrain. In addition, they do not provide the capability for precise, surgical strikes when such accuracy is required.

While the Air Force indeed possesses all these capabilities, and the Operations Directorate allocates them to the maneuvering forces, the allocation-based support model involves significant complexities. Such allocation is not guaranteed in advance, which greatly complicates planning. The method also lacks flexibility, making it harder to respond to unforeseen events. When the supporting and supported forces do not belong to the same unit, coordination becomes longer and more complex, and less suited to the realities of the battlefield. In addition, the approval process for fire required by Air Force personnel is dual-layered—subject both to Air Force regulations and to the directives of the supported echelon—resulting in frequent and unnecessary friction on the battlefield. Finally, maneuver support under this system must always compete in prioritization with General Staff–level and other Air Force missions,

a dynamic that naturally works to its disadvantage.

To illustrate, a battalion commander who wishes to destroy a building threatening his forces at a range of 350 meters, and who for operational reasons decides to do so using fire support rather than maneuvering forces, has no organic means capable of carrying out this mission. If the target is deemed "urgent," he may scramble a fighter aircraft through the brigade headquarters for a so-called "flash" strike. At best, such an attack will arrive no earlier than half an hour after the request is made. This stands in sharp contrast to the employment of organic battalion mortars, where less than ten minutes after an order is given—by the battalion commander or one of the company commanders—the fire mission can be executed.

In recent years, the target-intelligence units of the maneuvering brigades have been disbanded, reconnaissance companies in the brigades have largely become commando companies, and the brigades' observation companies have been left with outdated and irrelevant equipment

Another example: a brigade commander who wishes to destroy fortified positions, dominant structures, and enemy staging areas in a neighborhood into which his brigade is maneuvering will be forced to plan an Air Force strike package prior to the attack. He has no means at the brigade or division level to deliver such a preliminary "fire strike." Planning such an air strike must reach the Air Force at least four hours before execution; the number of targets that will actually be attacked becomes clear only shortly before the strike, and the ability to alter preplanned targets is almost nonexistent.

Therefore, it is necessary to build an independent, diverse, and robust fire-support capability for the maneuvering forces. This fire capability must cover short and medium ranges (up to roughly 20 km), across the full spectrum of firepower and with varying levels of precision. These capabilities should include high-explosive rocket systems, UAV and loitering-drone capabilities, and an attack-helicopter force providing direct support, among others.

As part of the ground fire-support array, the establishment of an "attack-helicopter battalion" in support of the maneuvering forces should be considered. An attack-helicopter battalion, combined with reconnaissance and strike drones (for observation and fire), could provide significant firepower in certain sectors. The cost of such a force should be weighed as an alternative to a tank force—for example, in the Sinai theater—where its effectiveness in halting an enemy maneuvering force might be greater. Naturally, such a force has operational limitations in severe weather, which do not apply to a ground maneuver

force. On the other hand, it has distinct advantages, and when combined with other forces it may prove more effective, more economical, and more flexible.

In concluding the discussion on ground-based firepower, it should be emphasized that in order to enable broad procurement, significant portions of these capabilities can be relatively low-cost, by lowering requirements for precision or special effects, provided they enable powerful and effective fire support for maneuver in the modern battlefield. The regional commands and divisions require these fire capabilities immediately.

d. Combat engineering

If in the past artillery was defined as the "King of the Battlefield," in the recent wars fought by the IDF, combat engineering is the arm that may be more deserving of this title. A combat team without heavy engineering equipment at its forefront is exposed to enemy sabotage and its destructive capability is significantly impaired. The rate of destruction of enemy infrastructure in urban terrain or in the subterranean domain, without sappers and without forces from the Special Operations Engineering Unit (Yahalom), is low to nonexistent; likewise, the ability to investigate and exploit enemy infrastructure exists only within engineering forces. In recent years, the IDF has wisely quadrupled the Yahalom unit but the regular combat engineering battalions, the sappers, and the heavy engineering equipment operators have not received the same level of attention. The shortage of combat engineering machinery in the IDF is severe, and for a large portion of brigade combat teams, no engineering battalion is allocated at all, simply because there are not enough such units available.

The IDF must add combat engineering units so that every brigade combat team has the required capabilities to conduct maneuver warfare, as follows:

1. In each division there will be three combat engineering battalions, mechanized to the same standard and quality as the armored fighting vehicles within the division.
2. In every BRCT that does not include an engineering battalion, there will be an expanded heavy engineering equipment company.

Subterranean domain – Currently, responsibility for operations in the subterranean domain rests with the Engineering Corps. The IDF's level of preparedness to handle large-scale subterranean operation are insufficient. This factor was one of the major impediments during the Iron Swords War. Just as urban warfare emerged at the beginning of the current millennium and has only grown in intensity over the years, it is reasonable to assume that the subterranean domain is "here to stay." Therefore, broader and more effective solutions must be found to address it, whether within the Engineering Corps or externally. This issue has evolved from a tactical problem into

a strategic one, and it must be addressed accordingly.

e. Field intelligence

The IDF possesses excellent intelligence capabilities. Despite the gaps revealed on October 7, 2023 (which stemmed mostly from perception and operational issues rather than insufficient capabilities), it is important to emphasize that during the Iron Swords War —both in Gaza and Lebanon (and perhaps even more acutely in the north)—Israel's intelligence community demonstrated extraordinary capabilities, not seen anywhere else in the world. However, even though intelligence in the General Staff is strong, the field intelligence capabilities of maneuvering units have gradually weakened over the years, and some of the units responsible for providing this intelligence have even been disbanded.

When the Intelligence Directorate or other intelligence bodies gather and process information, they rely on certain sources and collection agencies that do not exist at the tactical level and are sometimes irrelevant to it. Tactical intelligence collection was previously carried out through observation with binoculars and by interrogating prisoners of war and enemy civilians. Modern Israeli battles, however, often take place in areas where binocular observation is ineffective. Urban areas, subterranean spaces, and complex terrain all reduce the effectiveness of horizontal observation.

As a result, in recent years, the target-intelligence units of the maneuvering brigades have been disbanded, reconnaissance companies in the brigades have largely become commando companies, and the brigades' observation companies have been left with outdated and irrelevant equipment. At the battalion level, observation sections remain—now renamed "Enemy Detection and Destruction", but even these have mostly not been used for their intended purpose due to inefficiency. Reliance on General Staff intelligence has thus become absolute even at the tactical level.

This reality weakens maneuver capability and makes it dependent on the General Staff level and on continuous "broadband" communications. This situation must change. Relevant collection capabilities must be built for maneuvering forces, and appropriate frameworks must be established at the various echelons—UAVs equipped with recorders and diverse sensors at the division level and possibly also at the brigade level; drones with high-quality observation capabilities and additional sensors at the brigade and battalion levels; mobile radars for forces in the field; and tactical Signals Intelligence capabilities distributed among maneuvering battalions. All of this, of course, should be in addition to strengthening traditional capabilities such as binocular observation, higher quality night-vision systems and organic prisoner interrogation teams in every battalion. While some of these capabilities already

exist and serve maneuvering forces, significant further development is required, along with wider distribution and the institutionalization of a multi-echelon operational concept.

All of these observation capabilities must be highly networked with command-and-control (C2) systems, so that information emerging from the field can be processed rapidly and transformed into a clear enemy situation picture—one that enables decisive action and generates targets for destruction by the fire-support elements of the maneuvering forces.

f. Combat mobility

Effective maneuver in wartime requires a high level of mobility. In the IDF, as the concept of maneuver was gradually abandoned, the capability to transport infantry forces (and other non-mechanized forces) was also reduced. In armored units, mobility is inherent, as it is in infantry brigades equipped with Namer or Eitan APCs (highly advanced Merkava-based armored personnel carriers on tracks or wheels). However, there are only a few such infantry brigades. Most forces, which in the past were transported on M-113 APCs were left without an independent mobility capability. For many years, the IDF maintained only a single mobility unit, assigned to one of the light divisions, capable of moving a force smaller than a brigade in a single night. Recently, additional units of this type have been established, but their capabilities are more limited than those of the original unit. Even so, these units remain a small handful—far from sufficient to meet operational needs.

From the understanding that mobility is an elementary requirement for conducting deep and wide maneuver, the IDF must restore broad mobility capabilities for all forces, including those that are not mechanized on advanced armored fighting vehicles. Light vehicles, armored trucks, light armored platforms, or any other solution compatible with the operational concept should be considered—provided that mobility capability is maintained at a high level of readiness and is widely and reliably available.

One of the key factors in increasing the pace of operations is the ability to fight continuously, day and night

g. Administrative support

A deep and wide maneuver requires strong logistic capabilities. Without the delivery of ammunition to the spearhead of the maneuvering force, combat will halt after only a very short advance; the same is true without fuel, food, and water. The ability to repair damaged or malfunctioning equipment and return it to service is what enables the preservation of offensive momentum. Casualty evacuation, control of supply routes, and the rotation and replacement of personnel—all of these are complex and critical elements of deep maneuver into enemy territory. Over the years, as the IDF ceased to believe in such

forms of maneuver, its combat logistics capabilities steadily declined and certainly were not upgraded in line with advancing technologies.

The trucks assigned to each battalion gradually wore out and became unserviceable; the number of combat ambulances steadily declined; armored and unarmored evacuation platforms are not available in every battalion; fuel supply is highly problematic; and there are additional shortcomings as well.

It must be ensured that, alongside the buildup of the combat forces of all divisions required for defense and offense, the logistical capabilities of those forces are also developed. Combat support is an integral part of maneuver warfare, yet it has been severely neglected in recent years. A combination of simple means deployed widely as required, together with advanced systems (such as large drones and autonomous vehicles), will provide the capabilities necessary to sustain maneuver continuity.

h. The near-ground aerial domain (low-altitude airspace)

The domain of aerial platforms—loitering systems, fixed-wing aircraft, and drones—is a rapidly evolving field that opens up new and far-reaching possibilities that were unimaginable in the past. Although Israel is among the world's leading countries in unmanned aerial systems (UAS), this capability resides almost entirely within the Air Force, while a significant gap exists at the level of maneuvering ground units. Brigade and battalion-level observation UAVs exist in insufficient numbers, and the drone domain lags far behind. The IDF entered the Iron Swords War with a lower level of drone capability than its adversaries—an almost inconceivable situation given the qualitative differences between the sides and the disparity in their budgets. During the war itself, and thanks to a great deal of improvisation, various systems (many of them civilian rather than military) were introduced, capabilities were developed, and operational and coordination techniques were established.

The Russia–Ukraine war is illustrative of the power of mass employment of drones. The IDF's maneuvering forces must become a global spearhead in this field. This capability can serve as a force multiplier that fundamentally changes the nature of ground maneuver warfare. Efforts should be concentrated in this domain as a flagship project within the Ground Forces (similar in scope and importance to the Merkava and Namer projects or the Digital Army Program). The project should include an operational concept for different units and echelons, the development and codification of command-and-control and employment techniques, and the procurement of drones of various types, drone swarms, and additional aerial platforms—each with different capabilities (visual, radar, explosive payloads, and more). The technologies in this field already exist, and the potential is enormous.

i. Robotics

The field of robotics has gained significant momentum during the Iron Swords War. The use of robotics was primarily through remotely operated systems that carried out missions at the front lines of combat without exposing maneuvering forces to risk.

Robotics on the battlefield can serve diverse roles—advance reconnaissance for maneuvering forces, route clearance, the employment of demolitions or other forms of firepower, logistics along rear supply routes, and more.

This is a nascent field, and it is reasonable to assume that it will develop significantly in the near future. The integration of robotic capabilities with AI capabilities could provide a major advantage on the battlefield. The addition of robotic systems to every brigade combat team, across a wide range of capabilities and uses, would constitute a highly significant force multiplier.

j. Night fighting

Israel's size and population, its geographic isolation among hostile states, the international "hourglass" pressure that begins the moment fighting starts, and the large reserve army that must eventually return to the civilian economy—all of these require a high operational tempo in wartime. One of the key factors in increasing the pace of operations is the ability to fight continuously, day and night (naturally, combat units require rest, but headquarters can operate in shifts and maintain continuity, while combat units rotate among themselves, preserving an uninterrupted sequence of operations). Beyond shortening the duration of the war, a high operational tempo places constant pressure on the enemy and accelerates its defeat.

There are IDF units whose level of night-fighting proficiency is very high. However, this is not a characteristic of the force as a whole, and certainly not of the reserve units. A broad procurement effort is required to equip all maneuvering units, across all corps, with night-vision capabilities—ranging from night-vision systems for drivers and operators of all types of platforms, through night-vision devices for fighters and commanders and sights for all weapon systems, and up to advanced, long-range observation systems. Extensive training in night combat must be mandated, despite the risks involved. In addition, systemic challenges that hinder night fighting—such as coping with explosive devices in darkness—must be addressed and resolved.

High confidence among commanders and soldiers in their night-fighting capabilities is a critically important factor in creating operational continuity and a high tempo of operations, and a strategic tool for shortening the duration of the war while achieving objectives and defeating the enemy.

k. Weapons systems

As noted above, the IDF strives to equip itself with some of the best and most advanced

weapons systems and combat-support systems in the world. This characteristic, however, has created a gap: these systems are extremely expensive, and their cost does not allow for widespread distribution across the force. Therefore, procurement policy in this domain must be refined. Expanding the IDF's overall "muscle mass" by fielding additional ready divisions will require the acquisition of simpler systems that provide the necessary operational response—even if that response is not optimal, but merely sufficient. This does not mean that the IDF should forgo its quality or its technological edge. Rather, alongside "boutique" capabilities allocated to specific units according to their operational requirements, other units should be organized and equipped with cheaper systems that are nevertheless adequate for their assigned missions.

The ability to carry out missions using alternative means is closely linked both to the concept of operations and to the mentality of the fighters, commanders, and decision-makers. For example, the exclusive use of precision-guided munitions is effective and reduces collateral damage, but it is also extremely expensive. Procuring a larger quantity of unguided munitions is far cheaper, but it requires a different operational concept. Another example concerns (near-) absolute protection of armored fighting vehicles. Such protection is highly advantageous, but it is not feasible for all types of armored platforms. Employing forces that are not fully armored requires appropriate operational planning and a willingness to absorb casualties. Moreover, in certain sectors—due to the nature of the terrain and the enemy—it may be operationally preferable to use a platform other than the Merkava tank, one with greater mobility and sufficient firepower, even if its level of protection is lower.

To increase the IDF's "muscle mass," there will be no choice but to decide on procurement at different levels of equipment quality, in accordance with the resources available to the IDF and based on an adapted concept of operations.

No less important is the fact that maintaining expensive equipment is itself extremely costly. As a result, a situation often arises in which forces are equipped with very expensive systems but do not train with them, because training and maintenance are too costly. Operationally and professionally, it is better to have a weapon that is "good enough" but operated with a high level of proficiency than an excellent weapon operated with low proficiency.

l. The reserve army

David Ben-Gurion (in the famous "18-Point Document") explained the essence of Israel's reserve army: *"We cannot maintain a standing army like the Arabs, both for budgetary reasons and economic reasons. Therefore, our combat power relies on reserves, and preparing the reserves to withstand the test—this is our primary concern."*

This meant that Israel's decisive force would be its reserve army. In recent years, however, plans have increasingly been written on the assumption that the standing army will block an invasion, be relieved by reserve forces in the defensive mission, and only after that will the standing forces go on the offensive. In a world of raids and limited operations, the standing forces were assumed to be sufficient to complete the mission on their own.

The IDF's character as a "people's army" based on compulsory conscription carries many advantages, but also poses challenges that must be addressed

To build the number of divisions required in order to defend against an attack by a broad coalition of enemies across all theaters, to conduct offensive operations on multiple fronts simultaneously, and to decisively defeat the enemy, the IDF must rehabilitate and rebuild the reserve force. The guiding principles for building reserve units should be:

1. Conceptual – The reserve force is for both offense and defense, on all fronts, on the front lines as well as in the rear. It constitutes the main component of the decisive capability of the ground maneuver forces.
2. Force Structure (Order of Battle) – In order to increase the number of divisions and fill them with all the required capabilities, it is necessary to strengthen the existing reserve units and also establish new reserve units.
3. Equipment – The level of differentiation between the equipment available to regular units and those available to reserve units must be reduced. There will always be distinctions, and not all units will be equipped in the same way, but it must be ensured that even units equipped at a lower level still possess all the means and equipment required to carry out their missions.
4. Training – In order to preserve the readiness of reserve units to carry out their missions in war, they must be trained better than they are today. Genuine readiness must be defined and enforced both at the individual level (the reservist) and at the organizational level (company, battalion, brigade, etc.). This readiness must be rigid and non-negotiable. The Reserve Service Law must be adapted to the number of training days and routine security duties required to maintain readiness and unit cohesion, and this readiness requirement must be anchored in law, so that budgets cannot be diverted from it.
5. The Regular Army Builds and Sustains the Reserves – According to Ben-Gurion, the primary role of the regular army is to train the reserve army. While this has changed somewhat over the years—the regular army today has broader missions and a higher relative share of the combat forces—training the reserve army remains one of the most important

roles of the standing army. To this end, every effort should be made to ensure that soldiers are trained during their regular service on the same weapons systems with which they will fight in the reserves. For example, today armored corps soldiers are trained on the Merkava Mark 4 tank, while most reserve armored brigades do not have tanks of this type. It is therefore essential to ensure that training and force generation are conducted with a long-term view toward extended service in reserve units, and not solely according to the immediate needs of the regular army.

As a complementary effort, a national prioritization for reserve service members must be established, including through legislation. This prioritization should not serve merely as symbolic recognition of their contribution, but as a genuine response to the gaps and disadvantages created by reserve service, including proper compensation, and tax discounts.

m. Expanding the combat force structure and improving its quality

The ability to increase the number of combat divisions depends first and foremost on the ability to expand the number of soldiers—both combat and non-combat personnel—in the standing army and the reserves. In addition, the IDF's character as a "people's army" based on compulsory conscription carries many advantages, but also poses challenges that must be addressed. One of the central challenges inherent in the compulsory service model is the lack of professionalism in roles filled by conscripts who serve for only a short period of time.

The scope of this document does not allow for an in-depth discussion of these topics, but the following principles can be outlined:

1. Recruitment Model – A tiered, adapted model should be developed in which everyone serves, but for varying periods of time, and receives different compensation according to the nature and duration of their service. This ranking and adaptation will improve the situation so that, on one hand, the quality of personnel and the duration of specialization for combat forces are higher, and on the other hand, the waste of resources on underutilized personnel is prevented.
2. Length of Service – In combat roles and other critical positions, the length of service should not be less than 36 months. This is required for three reasons: To achieve a high level of proficiency and professionalism; To prevent inefficiency, as combat soldiers who have just reached the required professional and operational experience would otherwise be discharged after only a few months; To increase the number of active-duty combat personnel.
3. Increasing the Reserve Force – To establish the new brigades, the IDF will need to reduce the number of exemptions that have been granted to soldiers in recent years. This could return tens of thousands of soldiers who were released

from reserve service for various reasons but are still capable of serving.

4. Extending the Length of Reserve Service – The exemption age for reserve duty, which has decreased over the years, should return to 46 (25 years of reserve service). Beyond this period, for those serving in combat units, combat roles, command, or support units, there will be an additional service period of about 10 years in rapid-response units and Home Front Command units. At the end of this period, reservists will be transferred to the "unassigned" pool.
5. Strengthening the Permanent Staff Component in Combat Units – In professional armies worldwide, the cadre of combat non-commissioned officers (NCOs) is one of the most central elements of a military's operational readiness. For example, in the U.S. Army, NCOs are the backbone of the force, playing a crucial role in maintaining the operational and professional readiness of units. At the platoon level, NCOs serve as squad leaders and platoon sergeants; at the company level, they act as First Sergeants; and at the battalion level, the senior role is Command Sergeant Major, who assists the battalion commander directly. These NCOs lead small teams, conduct tactical and professional training in weapons, advanced equipment use, and operational scenario exercises. They foster teamwork and morale, maintain discipline and order, and ensure soldiers' physical and mental readiness for the field and operational activity. In the IDF, there is currently no established culture of combat NCOs, and there are virtually no permanent positions for non-commissioned combat soldiers. This gap significantly weakens the professional capability of combat units. Strengthening this permanent cadre—even without converting the entire maneuver force into a professional army—would greatly improve professionalism and maneuvering capacity. These soldiers, integrated into the reserve system as well, would be invaluable in maintaining readiness and ensuring a high level of preparedness for executing reserve unit missions in combat.
6. **Strengthening the civilian component** – There are many roles, particularly combat-support positions or staff functions, that are better performed by civilians rather than enlisted soldiers. The major advantage of civilianizing these roles lies in knowledge retention: a civilian performs their job over many years, whereas a soldier—whether in the regular army or permanent staff—typically changes roles every one to two years. Command and administrative positions staffed by civilians can manage long-term projects, preserve institutional knowledge more effectively, and improve the overall quality and professionalism of the military. Moreover, transferring military roles to civilians frees up officers and soldiers to focus on field and combat positions.

Beyond all of the above, it is possible to think more broadly and explore "outside-

the-box" ideas that could fundamentally change the service model. For example, Ben-Gurion suggested that the Border Guard, established in 1953 as part of the Israel Police, serve as a central security force for border protection, particularly in civilian areas, in order to relieve the IDF and allow it to focus on broader military missions. The idea was for the Border Guard to function as a force handling security threats close to the country's borders and dealing with routine security issues, such as infiltrations, smuggling, and local raids. It may be worth reconsidering this idea today to relieve the burden on the reserves and to allow the maneuvering units to focus on core operational missions.

It may be possible to adapt this idea to the current reality by recruiting the maximum number of potential soldiers for training as basic riflemen (without high-profile requirements), having them initially serve in home-front security roles, and then assigning them to various units, possibly even outside the IDF (such as the fire and rescue service, ZAKA, national service, etc.).

Such an approach would serve several purposes:

- Broader training of riflemen, who could also serve in rapid-response units and regional defense within their communities during civilian life.
- Reducing the home-front security burden both on the regular units, which could focus more on combat maneuver training, and on the reserve units.
- Allowing differentiated service durations and rewards according to the different units.
- More efficient and effective allocation of manpower.

Without deep maneuvering, territorial conquest, and operational control over enemy territory, the enemy is neither defeated nor willing to abandon its aggression against the State of Israel

Of course, these are only initial suggestions that requires further development, but they demonstrate the potential for alternative approaches that balance the need for a "people's army" with the need for efficiency and professionalization.

Advantages of the Proposed Policy

The proposed policy requires the State of Israel to reestablish its decisive military power. Such decisiveness can only stem from the existence of a force capable of ensuring ground defense across all theaters, while simultaneously possessing sufficient offensive capability to maneuver into enemy territory in order to seize ground and destroy the enemy and its infrastructure on multiple fronts. The existence of such a force will ensure that even if we are surprised by our enemies (which should

be the working assumption in the national security concept), we will not be defeated. Moreover, following the initial surprise, we will know how to turn the situation around and to defeat the enemy within a reasonable timeframe, and improve our overall security situation.

Any policy that holds that it is possible to continue to forgo the strength of maneuver forces and rely instead on superior intelligence and standoff firepower endangers Israel in the following scenarios and ways:

1. A surprise attack in which the enemy succeeds in deceiving Israeli intelligence and also manages to disrupt the Israeli Air Force's ability to stop it would endanger the State of Israel through the loss of territory and the killing of many civilians, as occurred on October 7, 2023.
2. Even in a situation where Israel is not fundamentally surprised, but the enemy attacks simultaneously on several fronts, reliance on the Air Force and standoff fire to halt the attacks is a very dangerous assumption, one that could easily fail.
3. The civilian economy—by virtue of its size and structure, which requires the rapid return of reservists to civilian life—depends on a swift decision on the battlefield. Exchanges of standoff fire (by the Air Force or other fire-support systems) are a classic form of attrition warfare and do not lead to a rapid conclusion of hostilities. Likewise, weak maneuvering forces, lacking power and robustness, cannot bring a multi-front war to an end within a reasonable timeframe. Failing to build a large and capable maneuvering army puts the civilian economy at risk when entering a war.
4. Most importantly, without deep maneuvering, territorial conquest, and operational control over enemy territory, the enemy is neither defeated nor willing to abandon its aggression against the State of Israel. Fighting that does not end with the seizure of enemy territory does not produce a military achievement that the political leadership can leverage. Moreover, with a significant portion of the enemies surrounding us, there is no realistic prospect for a political settlement; therefore, only the military outcome of the fighting will define the political reality that follows. Consequently, ending a conflict without territorial conquest leaves the State of Israel without a tangible achievement at the conclusion of the struggle. A war of attrition based on standoff fire may indeed inflict severe damage on the enemy and its infrastructure, but its outcome will merely be the end of one round and a wait for the next—without any real improvement in the state's security situation.

The proposed policy is capable of addressing these challenges. A stronger, larger, and better-trained ground force will be able to repel a surprise attack effectively, even in the absence of advance intelligence warning and with only partial support from the Air Force.

If this policy is implemented, larger ground forces will defend the country's land borders and prevent enemy penetration, even if the enemy attempts to do so on multiple fronts simultaneously. More importantly, the construction of maneuvering divisions—in appropriate numbers and in accordance with the quality principles outlined above—will enable the State of Israel to transfer the fighting into enemy territory on several fronts at the same time, while allowing the Air Force to continue addressing aerial threats and third-circle states. Such action, implemented through a sound operational concept and an appropriate doctrine of warfare, will yield a significant military achievement within a reasonable timeframe and will enable the political leadership to reach an agreement from a position of strength.

The Challenges of the Proposed Policy

There is no perfect policy, nor one that does not pose difficulties for those tasked with implementing it. The policy proposed here as well—whose core lies in a different assessment of the threat environment for which the State of Israel must prepare and of the manner in which military force should be built—also entails challenges for its decision-makers:

A. The manner of force build-up has little meaning if the force employment concept of the state's and military's leadership is not aligned with it. The core of the force employment concept rests on a central principle of decision: decisively defeating any threat that emerges in the region against the State of Israel before it reaches full maturation, and achieving decision when war is imposed upon us—through the seizure of territory and the destruction of all enemy forces present therein. If this offensive approach is not adopted, even the construction of a decisive force will not translate into victory in war.

B. Beyond this, the state's leadership will have to facilitate a change in national priorities, demonstrating leadership, determination, and responsibility. The defense budget, which in recent years has declined to approximately 4.5% of GDP, will need to increase in order to meet the country's security needs. It does not need to rise to 40% of GDP, as it did after the Yom Kippur War—an increase that led to what economists refer to as the "lost decade". Rather even a rise in accordance with the Nagel Committee's recommendations of at least 6.5% of GDP may suffice. Perhaps the increase should be somewhat higher, but in any case, it could be time-limited as part of a specific multi-year defense plan, so as not to harm Israel's credit rating. In any event, such an increase does entail giving the build-up priority over some other public spending, and leaders must know how to communicate this to the public and mobilize public support for it.

C. With regard to mobilizing public support, the leadership will also need to once again instill in the public consciousness of all its

citizens that we are a country engaged in a struggle that, unfortunately, has never truly ceased, and whose end we do not know. Therefore, we must all live with the awareness of being a "nation in arms," a reality that requires from us—not only a significant investment from the state budget, but also a personal investment from every citizen—both in the number of reserve duty days performed each year and in the total number of years spent in active reserve service.

D. This policy also poses challenges for the IDF. Even if all the required budgets are allocated and the concept of force employment is adapted to be decisive and initiative-driven, implementing the policy will still not be simple—first and foremost because establishing new frameworks within the IDF takes time. Staffing the required manpower, both in the standing army and in the reserves, and carrying out the necessary procurement are far from straightforward tasks. It is easier to establish a new air squadron and acquire aircraft than to establish a new division with all of its constituent components.

E. In addition to these challenges, the IDF will need to change its internal organizational culture in a way that allows for a shift in how resources are allocated within the military. A new distribution will be required—one that enables the maneuvering ground forces to grow much more rapidly than other force components. This organizational change will also require transferring some centers of power (such as firepower), which are currently concentrated almost entirely in the Air Force, to other parts of the military. The cultural change will also need to take place within the Ground Forces themselves, which in recent years have grown accustomed to thinking in terms of "boutique excellence" rather than a system that is "good enough" but large and robust. This issue is closely tied both to the employment of force and to force buildup.

We must all live with the awareness of being a "nation in arms," a reality that requires from us—not only a significant investment from the state budget, but also a personal investment from every citizen

F. It is essential to ensure that these changes are implemented responsibly, so as not to lose relative advantages that Israel has enjoyed to date. Excellent intelligence capabilities, the strategic arm of the Air Force, and similar assets are all relative advantages of the State of Israel over its adversaries, and they must not be weakened under any circumstances. The effort to expand and strengthen ground maneuver capabilities must not come at the expense of other outstanding force elements.

G. Maintaining a larger force structure also entails higher sustainment costs and requires a multi-year budget that includes the costs of maintenance and the replacement of some of the equipment.

Afterword

The State of Israel faces a complex security reality, in which its enemies do not rest for a moment, but continuously develop capabilities and seek opportunities to undermine its sovereignty and harm its citizens. In recent decades, the IDF has reduced its ground maneuvering force, based on the belief that standoff firepower and advanced intelligence would suffice to neutralize threats. This approach led to excessive reliance on deterrence and remote warfare, but reality has shown that without substantial ground maneuver, it is impossible to decisively defeat the enemy and provide genuine security for the State of Israel. To ensure national resilience, a fundamental change in force buildup is required, and the capability for decisive victory must be restored—a strong, powerful, maneuvering ground force.

However, beyond questions of manpower, equipment, and maneuver, lies the core issue—the most important of all: spirit. Israel is a nation in struggle, and the fight for its existence has not yet ended. The role of Zionism in human history is not merely to establish a Jewish state, but to ensure that it is strong, powerful, and capable of defending itself for generations to come, so that the Jewish people may always make their voice heard in the broader human arena. To achieve this, a strong military alone is not enough—there must be a culture of initiative, a willingness to take risks, and offensive-minded leadership, both on the battlefield and in the political sphere. IDF soldiers and commanders, as well as the nation's elected leaders, must internalize that responsibility for Israel's security does not end with the management of defensive wars, but rather with the creation of conditions in which the enemy does not dare to attack—and when it does, it is defeated decisively, swiftly, and lethally.

Israel cannot afford to be drawn into prolonged wars of attrition. It must initiate, achieve decisive victory, and build a force that denies its enemies both the capability and the will to attack. This is the call of the hour, and it is the obligation of every generation, renewed time and again, for the future of the people and the state.

Appendix: Comments on the Nagel Committee Report

The Nagel Committee report presents an optimistic approach regarding Israel's security reality. The committee identifies two possible approaches: a "pessimistic" approach, according to which Israel's enemies—chiefly Hamas, Hezbollah, and Syria—will recover and again pose a threat; and, by contrast, a "success-oriented" approach, which the committee recommends. According to this approach, it is possible to formulate a less intensive security policy based on the assumption that Israel's enemies are on a trajectory of weakening, and that the IDF will be able to deal with them primarily through a continuous campaign between wars.

The committee states that "one must not be tempted… to assume an extremely severe reference threat and build a complete response to it, at an enormous and unnecessary economic cost." Instead, it advocates building an "appropriate response," which, according to the committee, should be evaluated "in light of history." This approach ignores potential strategic dangers and rests on assumptions about regional security trends that lack a solid foundation.

The main gaps between the committee's approach and our position:

1. **Threat assessment** – The committee's report downplays the significance of major threats, such as Egypt, Jordan, Shiite militias, and radical Islamic forces east of Jordan and from Syria. Relying on the enemy's intentions rather than its capabilities creates strategic blindness that could lead to a security surprise similar to historical failures.
2. **Ground force build-up** – The committee recommends postponing the strengthening of the ground forces to the second half of the multi-year plan. We, by contrast, believe this process must begin immediately. Establishing an armored brigade or a division is not a one- or two-year effort, but one that takes many years. Waiting could leave Israel critically unprepared for the next confrontation.
3. **Readiness of the ground forces** – The committee claims that during the Iron Swords War a "deep and successful maneuver" was conducted. In practice, however, this was not a genuine deep maneuver but a limited operation. Even today, the IDF does not possess a sufficiently large maneuvering force capable of operating deep in enemy territory and decisively defeating adversaries on multiple fronts simultaneously.
4. **Dependence on other branches** – The committee's recommendations emphasize the integration and connectivity of ground forces with the Air Force and intelligence elements. In practice, however, such dependence is not always feasible on the battlefield.

There is a need for ground forces with independent operational capability, able to operate deep in enemy territory without absolute reliance on air support.

5. **Decisive power and its political implications** – A strong ground force is not only a critical component of defense and battlefield decision, but also a tool that projects political power. The State of Israel must maintain a well-trained, large, and powerful ground army not only for combat purposes, but also to preserve deterrence and strengthen its strategic standing in the international arena. Neglecting this component weakens Israel's power vis-à-vis its enemies and the international community alike.

Therefore, the position of this document is clear – the time has come to invest in building up the IDF's ground force, and not to wait until it is too late. We must prepare for every scenario, including a multi-front conflict, and ensure that the IDF possesses a genuine maneuver force capable of deciding wars and winning them.

Chapter 5

Innovation in Force Buildup: Making the IDF a Smart Army

Maj. D.[1]

Executive Summary

Security needs have traditionally been the driving force behind many technological innovations, but today this relationship has become reversed. The production of technology has become easier and more accessible, shifting the technological cutting edge from state-funded institutions to the general public. Civilian technology companies have begun to flood the market with innovations at an ever-accelerating pace.

However, the existing method of technology procurement in the IDF is causing our weapons systems to lose their qualitative advantage. The phenomenon of private donations for procurement of civilian technologies for the IDF, which became widespread during the Iron Swords War, points to the need to renew existing methods in order to preserve military superiority. In recent years, the IDF's force-buildup programs were oriented to deepen its "smart" advantage. However, procurement processes were not adapted to the new realities of the rapidly developing technological market. As a result, instead of a "small and smart army," we have ended up with a small army that is nevertheless not at the forefront of tech.

The procurement processes themselves have largely remained unchanged: while most of the technological development world has shifted to rapid, lean, and agile methodologies, the IDF continues to manage most of its

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development projects exclusively through the Waterfall method. This process is characterized by excessive centralization, a lack of flexibility, and an incentive structure that does not encourage the adoption of innovations at the field level. For force buildup to succeed, the system of interactions must be designed so that the best technologies are selected for use and disseminated regardless of where they were developed, and norms of rapid, relevant adoption and learning are established.

The proposed policy will improve procurement processes by focusing on four areas:

Decentralizing processes – There is a need to decentralize the procurement of off-the-shelf products and to add short-cycle procurement channels in the hands of the end user. Procedures must be adapted to the fast-paced world of innovation by updating the language, methodologies, and work processes in line with a market that dictates the tempo.

Decentralizing information – The pace of action is largely determined by the organization's communication systems. Policy should promote a technological and behavioral shift in which the preferred communication is digital and asynchronous. Such a change has practical implications for faster feedback loops and soft implications for connecting and engaging partners.

Resource allocation mechanisms – The current allocation of resources creates incentives that encourage waste and harm projects. Budgetary oversight must operate according to four principles: transparency, certainty, flexibility, and effectiveness. A system is needed that encourages maximizing resources for operational value.

Human capital – This area requires technological, business, operational, and human understanding. The quality of training for force-building officers must be improved, and their assignments extended so they can gain experience and master the profession. Additionally, the incentive structure for personnel should be managed to encourage actions that are operationally and technologically sound. Employment frameworks should also be diversified and expanded so that the military system can benefit from the high-quality human capital available in Israel's technological sectors outside the army.

Introduction

The existing method of procurement in the IDF causes our weapons systems to lose their qualitative advantage. Beyond what occurred during the fighting—namely, the massive scale of donations and ad hoc procurement—several articles have accumulated on this subject which seek to diagnose the problem and outline specific solutions for the IDF technological needs.[2] To complement the discussion of *what* should be built, in this chapter I address *how* the IDF builds its force. The ability to build force and to innovate methods of warfare and technological weapons systems has become a fundamental component of maintaining military superiority. I will first explain the change that has taken place, then briefly review the solutions that have been implemented in the IDF and the problems that remain, and finally, and most importantly, detail a policy for implementation across four domains.

Background—Why Effective Innovation Matters

Until a decade or two ago, security needs were the driving force behind many technological innovations and the overwhelming majority were the result of state-funded investment. For example, the Roman general Appius Claudius paved a road that evolved into the Roman road system and ultimately grew into the asphalt highways we know today[3]—continuing through the invention of the horseshoe for warhorses in the Middle Ages, and up to the development of the personal computer in the Enigma project. These three examples illustrate developments that originated as responses to security needs, were funded by governments, and today serve us in everyday civilian use.

The production of technology has become easier and more accessible, shifting the technological cutting edge from state-funded institutions to the general public

Today, this relationship has been reversed. In recent decades, a process often referred to as the "democratization of technology"[4] has taken place. That is, the production and renewal of technology have become easier and more accessible than in the past, effectively wresting the technological

2 Guy Paglin, "The Innovation Race," *Between the Poles*, 18 (2018), pp. 15–30; Erez Naaman, "Building the Branch's Strength – The Development of Research and Development in the Air Force," *Between the Poles*, 9 (2016), pp. 85–98; Eran Ortal, "Paradigmatic Innovation in the IDF," *Ashtonot*, 2 (2013), pp. 9–24; Aharon Haloya, "More of the Same," *Between the Poles*, 9 (2016), pp. 9–23; Perry Motat and Eyal Danino, "Review: 'Much, Small, and Cheap' vs. 'Few, Large, and Expensive,'" *Defense R&D Worldwide – July Issue* (2023), pp. 4–9.

3 Yisrael Schatzman, *History of the Roman Republic* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1991), p. 90.

4 Tomer Simon, *"What Is the Democratization of Technology and How Does It Work?"* https://www.pc.co.il/featured/306770/

cutting edge from a small number of actors (state-funded institutions) and transferring it to the general public. As a result, the security "locomotive" has been upended: civilian technology companies—large and small alike—are flooding the market with innovations. For example, whereas in the past it was possible to produce a prototype of an electronic product only in a well-equipped laboratory, today one can order raw materials online, watch instructional videos on the internet, and develop sophisticated products for a wide range of uses. This reality, in which knowledge, materials, and hardware are widely available and abundant, is a central factor driving the increased pace of innovation.

The loss of technological exclusivity by state institutions has created a new challenge: keeping pace with change. In 1997, Professor of Business Administration Clayton Christensen published *The Innovator's Dilemma*, in which he sought to answer the question: how is it possible that organizations with high-quality management, excelling by accepted metrics, nonetheless fail dramatically to maintain their position within just a few years, even to the point of collapse. According to Christensen, one of the key factors that determines whether an organization will survive and thrive over time is its ability to respond effectively to the pace of change in the market.[5] Whereas in the past maintaining technological superiority required ambitious development programs and massive budgets, today—according to Christensen—it requires continuous awareness of developments in the market and, above all, excellence in learning, evaluating, and adopting ideas originating both inside and outside the organization.

Thus, in recent years, defense organizations have been compelled to adapt in order to preserve their strength. For an organization to change effectively and at a relevant pace, it must update the way it evolves across all components of force buildup: doctrine, training, maintenance, infrastructure, and weapons systems. An example of this can be found in the words of Ashton Carter, U.S. Secretary of Defense under the Obama administration:

> Whereas during the Cold War the arms race was characterized by conventional power—in which leadership belonged to whoever possessed bigger, better, and more accurate weapons—today's technological arms race is defined by the speed and flexibility with which innovation is implemented on the battlefield. It is no longer only a matter of what we buy. Equally important are how we buy things, how quickly, from whom, and the extent to which innovative implementation of acquired capabilities is expressed in diverse and

5 Clayton M. Christensen, *The Innovator's Dilemma* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 1997).

creative ways. All of this is essential in order to stay ahead of future threats.[6]

Carter's remarks encapsulated a central element of the U.S. Department of Defense's "Third Offset Strategy." A core assumption of this strategy is that, in order to maintain security superiority, the Department of Defense must frequently update its understanding of developments in the market and among its competitors, encourage entrepreneurship, and excel at integrating innovations into its capabilities across a wide range of domains.[7]

Implications of the Change for the IDF's Force-Buildup

The IDF's foundational security doctrine—largely based on Ben-Gurion's "Eighteen Points" document—stipulates that the IDF must generate a qualitative advantage to overcome the quantitative advantage of its enemies. Consequently, force buildup is aimed at creating technological superiority, meaning that the systems available to soldiers and force operators should be an order of magnitude better than those of the adversary. According to this concept, and consistent with the nature of developments throughout most of the state's existence, force-buildup organizations are directed to create and lead technological innovations for military use themselves, without relying on free-market processes. In other words, the Iron Wall relies to a large extent on relative technological advantage, and the role of the force-buildup system is to produce it. In recent years, the IDF has reshaped itself with the aspiration of becoming a "small and smart army." Force-buildup programs were updated to deepen its "smart" advantage, but they were not adapted to the new realities of the evolving technological market described above. The result was that instead of a "small and smart army," we have ended up with a small army that is nevertheless not at the forefront of tech vis-à-vis its adversaries.

At this point, one could argue that the advantage has not been lost: the air defense systems (AD) handle most threats; our aircraft operate freely over enemy territory; our soldiers destroy adversaries on and below the ground. This is true, but it is important to note several specific yet significant examples that illustrate the gap. First, from the beginning of the fighting of the Iron Swords War, IDF soldiers received an unprecedented volume of donations. Among these donations were drones—equipment that any battalion commander in the field will clearly acknowledge changes the situation. Without the donation mechanism, it is unclear how many years

6 Ash Carter, Remarks at Defense One Tech Summit, Washington D.C., 2016. https://www.defense.gov/News/Speeches/Speech/Article/796800/remarks-at-defense-one-tech-summit

7 Shmuel, Shmuel, *The Journey Toward the Third Offset Strategy in the American Defense Establishment, 2012–2016*, p. 12. [Hebrew]

it would have taken to reach the current operational levels, since having drones in the field was a key accelerator for the IDF. Second, the response of air defense systems to new threats was sometimes partial and, in most cases, not economically sustainable over time. To summarize the point with a metaphor: it is like a leak in a dam. The dam still holds the lake, but that does not mean a wide-ranging renovation is unnecessary.

In the book *UnitX*, American fighter pilot Raj Shah describes how, in 2006, he solved a navigation limitation in his F-16 by flying with a civilian GPS device he purchased for $300, which worked better than the aircraft's own navigation system.[8] Similarly, at the beginning of the Iron Swords War, thousands of civilian car camera kits were installed on tanks to quickly generate panoramic video; our enemies use inexpensive internet cameras to surprise our forces with IEDs, and they acquire civilian night-vision devices (NODs) for night combat. In these cases and others mentioned above, civilian technology—GPS, cameras, drones, NODs, and UAVs—temporarily bypassed the military technology available to the fighting force. In all instances, the military system was forced to catch up with the changes already occurring on the battlefield. The shift in how technological innovations emerge and the speed at which they occur necessitate updating the IDF's technology procurement policy. While the Iron Swords War highlighted this issue more sharply, the gap continues to grow.

The IDF's technology procurement ecosystem is designed to create technology and guide development. It is not structured for rapid, systematic learning of technologies or for their effective and agile adoption. To fulfill its mandate, the ecosystem must be designed so that the best technologies are selected for use and dissemination regardless of where they were developed, and norms of rapid and relevant adoption and learning are established. As a matter of policy, it is important to recognize that whereas in the past a completed project could provide a clear technological advantage for a decade or more, today it may become outdated within just a few years, or even much less. A clear example of this is the clash between explosive UAVs and the Iron Dome. In other words, whereas in the past the competition was to create high-quality technology, today the competition is infinite: it is about adopting constantly updated technology.

Within the IDF, the pace of technological change is understood in some areas but is not adequately reflected across all units. Evidence of this could be seen on October 6, 2023, when several important insights were known in certain parts of the army but were not translated into relevant force buildup. An example is the

8 Raj M. Shah, *UnitX: how the Pentagon and Silicon Valley are transforming the future of warfare* (New York: Scribner, 2024), p.1

lack of integration of knowledge regarding drones in both offensive and defensive operations. In offense, this was evident with observation drones that had existed in the civilian market for several years; it was only under strong pressure from reservists and civilians—through donations and independent procurement of weapons systems, as described above—that the IDF system began acquiring these off-the-shelf products. The drones currently in use were first acquired in large volumes via civilian donations, and only afterward did the institutional force-buildup system formally procure them through IDF tenders. In defense, an accelerated learning process also occurred, but belatedly. The enemy was able to challenge the IDF's air defense systems and operational doctrines in ways that highlighted how insufficiently the threat had been understood. In other words, the army did not fully comprehend the new technology that simultaneously threatened its missions and created important opportunities. The force-buildup chain largely ignored civilian observation drones.

Innovation is a capability that requires rapid and effective change across all levels of force buildup. In light of the fast pace of change, it is essential to identify new technology, test it quickly, learn its characteristics, and integrate the insights gained into combat methods. Recent events have demonstrated in practice that the system responds too slowly, and this comes at a cost.

The Current Situation—How the IDF is Organized for Innovation

The IDF invests heavily in maintaining its relative advantage over the enemy. Numerous bodies deal with building force, advancing technology, updating combat doctrines, and completing processes quickly to achieve effective operational capability. Only recently were the Air Force Space Directorate and the Robotics and Autonomy Directorate in the Administration for Weapons Research and Development and Technological Infrastructure (MAFAT) inaugurated. Moreover, Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi recognized the need for adaptability and acted accordingly. He established a General Staff department focused on change—Combat Methods and Innovation (Shiloach)—which published the "IDF Innovation Strategy."[9] The core of the strategy is to enable entrepreneurship throughout the IDF at all levels and to teach it. The strategy assumes that if the organization encourages, stimulates, and allows initiative among its personnel, it will enhance the organization's ability to adapt and innovate. In addition to investing in entrepreneurship, this General Staff department sponsors innovative areas with a long-term perspective, promotes them,

9 *IDF Innovation Strategy*, September, 2022, Available here: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1QN7GqOxVmRadTS69X3oDIcNigmAZZw0D/view [Hebrew]

and breaks new ground that challenges the status quo. Several successful changes have been made in recent years that should be reinforced and replicated. For example, MAFAT's policy of working with startups rather than only large industries, creating engagement channels tailored to the characteristics of these companies ("green lane"), establishing numerous committees open to receiving initiatives and investing in them, and more.[10]

In light of the fast pace of change, it is essential to identify new technology, test it quickly, learn its characteristics, and integrate the insights gained into combat methods

The changes are positive and bearing fruit, but they are not sufficient, because while the strategy is sound, the organization is not structured to implement it. The force-buildup processes themselves have largely remained unchanged: whereas most of the technological development world has shifted to rapid, lean, and agile development methodologies, the IDF still manages most of its development projects exclusively through the Waterfall method. According to this method, a project is divided into stages, and only in the final stage does the product reach full use by the end user. There is a lack of a broad policy applied across the entire ecosystem—including Ministry of Defense (MOD) units and the services—that would allow rapid and effective responses to changes and innovations. Along the existing value chain from a good idea to its implementation on the battlefield, many obstacles remain that require adaptation—barriers arising from norms, management, culture, and bureaucratic processes.[11] Some of these developed over the years for efficiency, some to prevent corruption, some as byproducts of other processes (e.g., the permanent service model), and others from constraints that could now be overcome with technological solutions.

To understand the barriers discussed, one must take off the senior-strategy glasses and step into the shoes of the average procurement officer. From this perspective, one can see exhausting bureaucratic processes, confusing and cumbersome information flows, orders issued under irrelevant pressure to avoid losing allocated budgets, and more. In addition, personnel working on procurement turnover at a high rate and face incentives that steer them away from serving their core purpose. As a result, those attempting to drive change encounter structural barriers that prioritize process over procedure. Not all processes require correction—the questions are: when should the formal procurement procedure be applied? What other familiar

10 Paglin, pp. 12–13. [Hebrew]

11 For a more detailed discussion of the organizational barriers, see Paglin's article, particularly the chapter titled "Barriers." [Hebrew]

processes exist besides it? The lack of a shared language and tools to answer these questions within the IDF underscores the urgent need for a systemic update.

In my assessment, the problems I've described will sound to most senior officers as already solved. After all, Shiloach addresses these issues, MAFAT has added engagement channels, the Chief of Staff's financial advisor (Yokhal) opened an efficiency track, and the list goes on. That is true. The problem is that these issues are only resolved at those senior levels; most problems never reach them, and the field is left without solutions.

In contrast to the senior officers, I believe most Majors and Lieutenant Colonels would agree: we are extremely inefficient, to the point of significantly harming operational capability. The system is riddled with near-insurmountable failures that require deep policy changes. If the system were functioning properly, how is it possible that a Hamas drone destroyed an IDF "*Ro'e-Yoreh*" observation post, even though a drone defense team had been established in the Air Force four years earlier, responsible for border protection against drones? These questions cannot be asked of the officer who built the force in this area. He is a product of the force-buildup system and confined to the framework within which he operates. I argue that this framework suppresses the creation of real, sustainable solutions and, under its constraints, produces patchwork measures that, in some cases, manage to function.

Looking Ahead—Policy for Innovation

Typically, when discussing rapid processes, the focus tends to shift to exceptional authorities associated with special units. In the proposed policy, I aim to improve institutional force buildup (not just the special units) by focusing on four areas: (1) processes, (2) information flow, (3) resource allocation, and (4) human capital.

1. Structured Processes

The IDF is a large organization that operates through structured processes. These processes establish a common language and standard methodologies to enhance coordination between its various bodies.

Make the development and implementation processes more flexible and swift – One of the central processes in force buildup is the force-buildup directive known as "10 over 1." This directive is based on the assumption that each project should be allocated enough resources for establishment, integration, and implementation over several years. Its conceptual framework is similar to, and likely based on, the methodology that was prevalent in the market according to the Project Management Institute (PMI).

Since the directive was written, the market has evolved, and new methodologies

have emerged. The most well-known of these is the Agile methodology, for which PMI published a guidebook. From the introduction of the book:

> Innovative technologies are rapidly changing the technological playing field by lowering barriers to entry. Increasingly, established organizations struggle with their internal complexity and find it difficult to deliver new solutions within relevant timeframes. Such organizations find themselves competing with small, agile entities that provide fast and effective solutions to their clients. The pace of change will continue to drive organizations to adopt the Agile mindset in order to remain relevant and maintain their position.[12]

Alongside Agile, other methodologies have emerged, but what they all share is the effort to formulate a language and stages that allow controlled management of rapid processes with the ability to respond effectively to change.[13] The IDF's force-buildup system must be adapted through updates to directives, language, and management methods. These updates should be applied both in the work methods of senior management—Colonels and above—and in project-level practice at the Major level.

For these changes to succeed, they should be implemented with the guidance of successful venture capital experts and executives from large companies who have applied such models in organizations of comparable scale. To refine the language and methods, management levels can be structured according to market standards, fostering cross-pollination between civilian and military sectors.

In other words, Colonels and above would work alongside successful venture capital managers from organizations of similar scale; Lieutenant Colonels would work in parallel with managers of small companies with a few departments; and Majors and below would engage with experienced entrepreneurs familiar with the various stages of launching ventures. Officers involved in IDF force buildup must be trained to become skilled entrepreneurs and effective venture capital managers. This is because entrepreneurs and VC managers use tools that allow them to make decisions and drive effective innovations in a constantly changing environment—skills that are equally necessary in the military. An example of such a learning practice would include: learning how to collaborate with a startup or a large company developing a new product that creates value for both parties (Design Partner partnership);

12 Agile Practice Guide, P.18

13 Two other well-known methods are Lean Management and Design Thinking. For further reading: *Gartner Research, "Enterprise Architects Combine Design Thinking, Lean Startup, and Agile to Drive Digital Innovation," June 25, 2019.*

acquiring additional methodologies and terminology beyond what currently exists in the IDF (e.g., "pilot" and "full project"); and understanding how to develop a resource-allocation model that supports flexibility and necessary changes.

Decentralizing off-the-shelf product procurement – Policy changes are also needed in the procurement of off-the-shelf products. Currently, most of this procurement is done centrally by staff officers for the end user in the field. Instead, procurement capabilities should be decentralized to the units themselves and even to individual soldiers. For example, in the field of combat support equipment, such as sights or assault handles, rather than having a single staff officer responsible for the entire supply chain of a specific item, that officer could certify that a given product meets standards. From that point onward, the end user would interact directly with the supplier through structured, independent procedures. In other words, instead of buying and allocating assault handles for a battalion commander, the commander would receive a resource allocation based on the number of soldiers under his command and could implement it according to his understanding, issuing orders for his soldiers to procure the equipment they need. This could be done using a points card system—such as the "Gray Card" or "Battalion Commander Card"—or through unit-level procurement with the supplier. Such a policy change would reduce staff workload, free staff officers for more important tasks, and ensure that combat equipment better fits the mission[14]—because it would be selected by the end user, who would ensure that all components are compatible, while commanders could enforce compliance.

The pace of information flow is limited by individual communication speed or each person's calendar constraints. It only takes one person in the chain being abroad to delay or even interrupt the entire process

2. Information Flow

Information flow refers to the transfer of any type of information—messages, documents, or presentations—between people within the organization. This may sound administrative or minor—after all, there are emails, phones, and meeting calendars—but information flow determines the organization's pace of work and strongly influences the sense of personal responsibility. In the operational domain, dramatic improvements have been made through tools like "H-Chat" and various applications on classified networks. These tools have enhanced the ability of operational control cells to build situational awareness and make decisions quickly, effectively, and efficiently.

14 A credit card for battalion commanders for restricted uses.

In contrast, in the area of procurement, no significant change has occurred for decades. Information is scattered across dozens of networks and organizations, there is no unified digital environment, and there are major collaboration barriers. In the private sector, this problem was solved by companies such as Monday, Slack, Trello, and others, which treated improving collaborative work within complex, multi-departmental organizations as a technological challenge and brought technological solutions to the market.

The current situation is serious and must not be underestimated, as it is a key cause of opacity and disconnect between procurement bodies, which delays projects and frustrates personnel. For example, issuing a purchase order (regardless of the amount) requires coordination among at least four entities: the budget holder, the technical supervisor, the contracting body, and the executing industry. Moreover, within each entity there is a chain of command. Coordination therefore occurs both horizontally and along the chain, usually through meetings and emails, so the pace of information flow is limited by individual communication speed or each person's calendar constraints. It only takes one person in the chain being abroad to delay or even interrupt the entire process. What may seem like a minor issue carries a huge cost for procurement: it slows the pace of work, impairs performance, reduces personnel motivation, and results in projects that are far less effective and less suited to their operational purpose.

Flattening and decentralizing information across stakeholders – several solutions exist in the IDF, but there is no policy that translates them into systemic improvement. The LOTEM Division in the C4I Directorate has introduced several civilian technologies into IDF networks that could be used, but most users of these applications are programmers rather than other personnel involved in force buildup. Additionally, there is the "Klick" platform within classified networks, which allows collaboration similar to WhatsApp, but its user base is very small. Some software also exists within the services, such as "Amenday" in Aman and "Olympus" in the Air Force, and it is likely there are others. A platform that has seen intensive use in the IDF in recent years is, of course, WhatsApp on smartphones. New WhatsApp groups are constantly being created around projects, accelerating work by flattening information and decentralizing it among all relevant stakeholders. The use of these existing solutions should be expanded and officially integrated across all force-buildup processes.

To achieve systemic improvement in this area, policy must address two layers: the technological and the behavioral. At the technological layer, accessibility must be enabled. At the immediate level, this could mean providing access to software currently available only to programmers in classified networks, such as MatterMost and Jira.

At a deeper level, a digital environment accessible to all the services, the General Staff, and the Ministry of Defense should be selected, hosting several software applications for different purposes and allowing information to be synchronized across all stakeholders. Additionally, the adoption of classified systems within the IDF's Klick-Net environment—such as Teams, OneDrive, and others—should be improved. This can be achieved by deploying supervised civilian internet stations widely for staff personnel and increasing awareness of the accessibility of these software tools.

At the behavioral layer, communication priorities should be established—similar to communication priorities in operational activities—to support an efficient information-flow mindset.[15] Under such prioritization, preferred communication would be multi-participant, asynchronous, and digital (within classified networks), while less preferred communication would be synchronous, physical, classified, and multi-participant. In other words, there would be more project-focused messages in WhatsApp groups and fewer in-person discussions. This is not about replacing one method with the other but about balancing them according to need. This must be institutionalized as a method rather than being practiced informally as it currently is. The policy can be issued by the Planning Directorate (Agat), both through formal requirements and by fostering a model example, since Agat controls the allocation of resources to most Ministry of Defense entities. In my view, anyone seeking resources for their projects will operate according to the directorate's directives. Alternatively, internal campaigns could be conducted to encourage efficient organizational communication practices.

3. Resource Allocation

The current method of resource allocation is burdened with bureaucratic obstacles and creates a negative incentive structure. Budgets that are not quickly utilized are swept back into "the system" without prior notice or transparency. While there are attempts to notify, these messages pass through long chains and are often unreliable. From the perspective of a budgeting or procurement officer, available funds are like a "hot potato": they must be spent immediately, or they will disappear. This behavior is not conducive to effective budgeting because it creates disproportionate pressure that is difficult, and sometimes impossible, to anticipate, as the timing and amount of budget allocation are uncertain. Furthermore, a procurement officer who does not fully utilize resources by the end of the fiscal year automatically receives a

15 The conceptual foundation for the proposed policy is based on the book *Team of Teams* and the working methods of the Bridgewater hedge fund: McChrystal, G. S. A., Silverman, D., Collins, T., & Fussell, C., *Team of Teams*, Portfolio Penguin, 2015; Interview with Nir Bar-Daya, Senior Manager at Bridgewater, https://soundcloud.com/user-459490827/tkeoostmwia7

smaller budget the following year. This adds to the flawed incentive structure that encourages last-minute spending. An officer who generates operational value while saving resources should—in some cases—receive more funding if it is shown that the savings resulted from high efficiency and proper budget use. A renewed budgetary control system should be developed around four principles**: transparency, certainty, flexibility, and effectiveness**. Effectiveness here means a budgetary method that measures how efficiently resources are used and allows decisions to shift resources toward those who can create greater value at lower cost.

The primary driver for individuals in the defense system is often a sense of mission, this alone is not always sufficient—especially when bureaucratic paperwork requires tedious attention far removed from operational realities

4. Human Capital

Like the IDF as a whole, force buildup relies heavily on its human capital. This is a broad topic that deserves extensive examination, so I will focus on issues requiring policy changes, specifically in the context of force buildup and the personnel who carry it out. In my view, four areas need attention: **training, duration of assignment, incentive analysis, and employment diversity**. Force buildup is a complex profession that requires proper training and experience to perform efficiently. Therefore, career development and promotion pathways for force-buildup officers should be created to foster continuous learning and personal growth in the field. In the current model, a force-buildup position is often seen as a staff role that can be performed after a short handover. In my view, this is a complex and demanding field requiring technological, business, operational, and human understanding. The career path should include training stations, opportunities for extended assignments, and clear development and advancement channels. In line with the process improvements discussed above, training should incorporate extensive learning from the civilian market. This could include integrating courses from product management schools—focusing on business or technology—or specialized learning tracks in tech companies, venture capital firms, and programs in business management, innovation, and entrepreneurship.

Alongside training, it is essential to manage the motivation and engagement of force-buildup personnel throughout the entire chain of activity. While the primary driver for individuals in the defense system is often a sense of mission, this alone is not always sufficient—especially when bureaucratic paperwork requires tedious attention far removed from operational realities. Therefore, an incentive policy is needed to support and encourage the desired behavior. Building on the discussion in the

resource allocation chapter, consider how the organization's personnel might respond if they were rewarded for accelerating project timelines or for saving resources. For example, in previous years, commanders seeking to incentivize development and innovation established the **Technological Research Rating (TRR)**, which provides a salary bonus in technical roles. This rating is earned through independent, documented technology development. However, today, in some cases, this rating has become a barrier. During periods when much of the effective and necessary work involves procurement and implementation, a rating that incentivizes independent development does not help. To obtain the rating, project officers must produce numerous documents and presentations that are often unnecessary for the project, turning this incentive into a hindrance and distraction. In an organization as large as the IDF, the issue of incentives is complex but crucial and requires updated attention. For example, alongside the TRR, a **"Deployment or Operational Use Rating"** could be added, granting a salary bonus similar to the original TRR, thereby rewarding officers for successfully implementing and operationalizing technologies rather than just developing them.

A third aspect of this issue is the **diversity of staffing options**. Currently, force-buildup work is carried out by a very wide range of personnel: civilian IDF employees, officers, consultants under various employment tracks, and industry partners. In this area, Israel has a **significant comparative advantage that is not fully leveraged**. One reason for the technological surge during the Iron Swords War was the sheer number of reservists who work in technology in their civilian professions and who took part in military operations during the war. To put this in perspective, the high-tech sector accounts for roughly 15% of GDP and employs about 10% of Israel's workforce.[16]

Therefore, the IDF should **expand its policy for employing civilians with military backgrounds in force-buildup roles**. This is justified both because reservists have already demonstrated their value and because the skills required for force buildup overlap, to some extent, with those needed by business professionals. It would be advisable to open key positions for **external staffing** and to create **hybrid employment models**. For example, why shouldn't an officer who previously served as a Captain in the munitions department and later developed civilian expertise in management and tech venture capital be eligible for a Major or Lieutenant Colonel role, if deemed suitable by the appointing commander? Currently, such an idea would seem radical, but this type of staffing could inject the IDF with the speed and working methods

16 "The Israeli Labor Market 2022 – Status Report," https://www.gov.il/BlobFolder/news/employment-report-2022/he/employment-report-2022.pdf [Hebrew]

relevant to today's market. Alternatively, flexible employment arrangements should be allowed to enable force-buildup officers to employ reservists in a **systematic and accessible way**, maximizing operational effectiveness.

Afterword

The pace of technological change requires the IDF to respond efficiently and rapidly in order to maintain its technological advantage. While positive changes have already been made within the IDF and the Ministry of Defense, these must be expanded, and remaining structural barriers must be addressed. The work methods and language of military force-building need to be refreshed and updated to allow for more sophisticated approaches and more effective management. Information flow between personnel must be improved through technological infrastructure upgrades and behavioral changes, directed either by the Planning Directorate or locally within force-building units. Fast and efficient information exchange is essential to prevent unnecessary project delays, enable cross-fertilization of ideas, and increase a sense of ownership and responsibility for projects. Resource allocation policies should be updated so that collective funds achieve more while minimizing waste. Finally, the human capital executing force-building must be more professional. This requires relevant training, attractive career development paths, and carefully designed incentives that influence motivation. By implementing these measures, the IDF can become a more flexible and agile organization, equipping its soldiers with technological superiority that saves lives and decisively defeats the enemy in every encounter.

Chapter 6

Principles and Reforms for Israel's Intelligence Community[1]

Roi Tamir

Executive Summary

To create genuine security, Israel's security establishment, including the intelligence community, must adopt a strategic posture of readiness at dawn. This posture reduces the extent to which operational preparedness is dependent upon specific intelligence information and instead focuses on the enemy's capabilities independent of assessments of its intentions.[2] This approach should be pursued in parallel with a sustained and broad effort to preserve the strength and qualitative superiority of Israel's intelligence community and its ability to provide effective strategic, operational, and tactical intelligence.

An "intelligence paradigm" is the manner in which a state chooses to develop, organize and employ its intelligence bodies so that their intelligence outputs address the requirements of national security. A sound intelligence paradigm is critical to national security.

The changes that have taken place in Israel's security concept over the past three decades have also led to a fundamental transformation in the national intelligence paradigm, which contributed to the formation of the Iranian "ring of fire" around Israel and to the catastrophic intelligence failure of October 7th, 2023.

1 All content in this chapter is unclassified and based on open-source publications.

2 This does not mean that intentions are ignored, but rather that the military builds its forces and prepares based on the potential of the enemy's military threat.

The changes in Israel's security concept have increased the relative weight of Israeli intelligence, making it the most dominant element. The shift toward over-reliance on "counterfire," "precision," "influence," and "interwar campaigns" raised the reliance on the intelligence community.

The existing intelligence paradigm embodies several fundamental problems, including:

- There is no formal regulation governing the operation of the intelligence community at the national security level.
- The Heads of Services Committee (VaRash) has no statutory basis.
- There is a lack of systematic guidance and oversight by the political echelon over the intelligence organizations.
- The Israeli cabinet is highly dependent on the intelligence establishment for "reality assessment," particularly regarding strategic evaluation.
- Intelligence activity is primarily oriented toward interwar campaigns, with excessive reliance on technological collection sources and the marginalization of "classic" collection capabilities that are not perceived as technologically cutting-edge.
- Units and collection capabilities intended mainly for wartime have been closed.

The Required Reforms: The changes needed in Israel's intelligence paradigm involve establishing conceptual clarity, regulating the intelligence establishment through the enactment of a National Intelligence Law, granting statutory authority to the Heads of Services Committee (VaRash), creating a dedicated framework for political-strategic research and assessment outside the military, establishing a guiding principle of maintaining diversity and balance among collection sources, ensuring continuous preparedness and readiness for wartime, shifting the operational concept toward emerging threats, and creating new balances in "peace arenas."[3]

3 Ittai Baron, *Intelligence Research – Reality Assessment in an Era of Transformations and Changes*, updated edition, The Institute for the Study of Intelligence Methodology, The Center for Intelligence Heritage and The Institute for the Study of Intelligence Methodology, January 2021.

Introduction

An intelligence paradigm is the way in which a state chooses to develop, organize and employ its intelligence bodies so that their outputs address the requirements of national security. This includes the types of intelligence organizations, the division of responsibilities among them, their relationships with other state institutions, the scope and allocation of technological resources and human resources, the types of required intelligence products and their prioritization. In order for an intelligence paradigm to truly meet national security needs, it requires continuous assessment of its suitability in light of the constantly changing reality and the human influences of psychology and organizational culture.

The changes that have occurred in Israel's security concept over the past three decades have also affected Israel's intelligence community. The catastrophic intelligence failure that allowed Hamas' invasion into Israel to occur is a warning sign indicating the need for a reassessment of Israel's intelligence paradigm. These events present a significant opportunity to revise the concept and adapt it to the current needs of the State of Israel. Within the scope of this chapter, we will not be able to address every aspect of the intelligence paradigm; instead, we will focus on several topics of significance based solely on open-source information.

One of the enduring foundations of Israel's security concept over the years has been the warning component. The limited economic capacity of the young state necessitated reliance on a reserve army, which would allow continued economic growth on the one hand and provide a military response in the event of a large-scale invasion on the other. Israel's small territory and narrow borders made time a critical and decisive factor, requiring the ability to rapidly mobilize reserves and deploy forces. As Ben-Gurion described: "Our enemies can attack us with their full force from land, sea, and air, and if, heaven forbid, they reach Tel Aviv before we have organized and mobilized our full strength—we are lost."[4] This challenge required intelligence warning capability regarding an expected invasion and attacks before they materialized. If warning did not occur and reserve forces were not mobilized quickly and on time, it would likely lead to a lengthening of the military campaign, whereas at the core of Ben-Gurion's approach was the need to shorten the duration of the campaign to minimize casualties on Israel's side and reduce the impact on the economy.

Since 1979, and in light of the peace agreement with Egypt, the warning effort acquired an additional dimension, whereby Israel's intelligence community was required to provide warnings of a "strategic shift." In this context, a strategic shift means a

4 David Ben-Gurion, *Army and State*, 1953. [Hebrew]

change in Egyptian policy (due to a change in government or other circumstances) contrary to the peace agreements, with the intention of taking offensive action against Israel. The purpose of such a warning was to allow sufficient preparation time in terms of force development and the reallocation of resources in response to the potential Egyptian threat.

Over the years, the intelligence community has attained a dominant role in matters of national security, and in decision-making. A healthy system uses the crises it experiences for learning and improving performance. This holds true for routine crises, and all the more so for colossal, unique national-level crises, which demand an honest examination of fundamental concepts and adaptation as needed. October 7th represents an eruption at the surface-level of deep currents that altered the national intelligence paradigm and contributed to the outbreak of war. The State of Israel and must reassess its intelligence paradigm. This chapter will present the principles and necessary reforms to Israel's intelligence paradigm.

The Current Concept and Its Problems

Israel's intelligence paradigm is interwoven with Israel's broader security concept and has evolved along with it. Israel's security concept adopted new assumptions, such as the end of the era of major wars, conflicts being limited and primarily against non-state organizations, the absence of a conventional threat, and the belief that terrorism can be controlled across borders and contained.

October 7th represents an eruption at the surface-level of deep currents that altered the national intelligence paradigm

The change in Israel's security concept was reflected in practice in the IDF force structure and operational employment, including: the weakening of the concept of decisive action in military operations; investment in standoff and precision strike capabilities, reliance on intelligence, reduction of the ground forces, and a weakening of maneuver capability and reserve readiness; a significant increase in active defense measures (such as the Iron Dome and technological border fences); a focus on interwar campaigns below the threshold of full-scale war; the development of influence and awareness efforts; and the avoidance of implementing Begin's doctrine regarding Iran's nuclear program for many years.

The changes in Israel's security concept greatly increased the relative weight of Israeli intelligence, making it overly dominant. The shift toward reliance on standoff and precision fire, influence operations and interwar campaigns positioned the intelligence community in a more central role for implementing the new ideas.

The Intelligence Establishment at the National Security Level[5]

Several models exist for organizing a country's intelligence establishment, with variations usually stemming from differences in forms of government (presidential, parliamentary, or republican systems). Nevertheless, there is a common basic pattern in most countries, in which the intelligence establishment is divided into three main areas: military intelligence, foreign intelligence, and domestic intelligence. In Israel, this is reflected in the division among AMAN, Mossad, and Shin Bet, respectively. The head of AMAN reports to the Chief of Staff, who in turn reports to the defense minister, while the heads of Mossad and Shin Bet report directly to the prime minister. There is also the Heads of Services Committee (VaRash), which includes all intelligence agency heads and the prime minister's military secretary, and whose role is to coordinate activities among the agencies. This committee has no formal status and operates based on the goodwill of its participants. When the Prime Minister attends a VaRash meeting, the National Security Council (NSC) head joins him. In Israel's system of government by coalition, the Security Cabinet is often crowded with political interests and subject to leaks; VaRash has occasionally become, informally, a kind of alternative cabinet.

This Reality Creates Several Essential Gaps in Israel's Intelligence Paradigm at the National Level:

1. There is no statutory definition of how Israel's intelligence establishment should operate, its responsibilities toward the government and other state bodies, or the manner in which it produces intelligence and resource integration.[6] This situation leaves too much to goodwill, undermines the ability of the NSC to exercise its responsibilities and leaves intelligence and resource integration efforts without proper oversight. The Intelligence System Investigation Committee, established following the Iraq War and headed by Knesset member Steinitz, phrased it well:

   > The committee finds that, in practice, the intelligence organizations and secret services enjoy considerable autonomy, and the degree of control and oversight exercised by the political echelon over them is insufficient. The committee asserts that this situation is unhealthy and does not serve the long-term ability of the organizations to achieve the objectives for which they exist. The committee believes that the Prime Minister lacks the optimal tools and conditions both for operating and guiding the heads of services, for examining their approaches and monitoring their activities, and for

5 In the Israeli context, this term refers to the core of Israel's intelligence community—AMAN, Shin Bet, and Mossad.

6 The only body for which a dedicated law exists is the Shin Bet—the General Security Service Law (2002).

determining important intelligence assessments and long-term force development. Prime Ministers throughout Israel's history tended to rely on the services and generally adopt their positions and act according to their recommendations. This reality is the result of historical development in a state constantly at war for its survival, and the need to maintain the high level of secrecy characteristic of the services' work, through compartmentalization and limiting the circle of those who know the secret. The committee agrees that operating intelligence services under a heavy veil of secrecy is a necessary condition for their success. However, the **committee determines that this legitimate need does not exempt the intelligence services, on the one hand, and the government, on the other, from exercising the necessary control and oversight to ensure the correctness, efficiency, and success of the services 'work**."[7]

2. There is no entity that coordinates the ongoing dialogue between the intelligence establishment and the Prime Minister, but rather the service heads report directly to the prime minister. This arrangement has advantages in terms of the direct dialogue it allows; however, given the prime minister's numerous responsibilities, it significantly undermines routine oversight. This is also true in the broader context of VaRash. "However, despite these facts, known to all, the state has never regulated by law the operation of its intelligence system and secret services, nor has it solved the problems of oversight, coordination, and management that arise from the heads of services reporting directly to the Prime Minister without any intermediate authority."[8]
3. The Israeli government is highly dependent on the intelligence establishment for "reality assessment,"[9] with particular emphasis on political situation analysis and strategic evaluation. This stems from the concentration of this function within AMAN's Research Division and, in some arenas, within the Mossad's research body. Currently, there is no civilian body that can provide the political echelon with an additional perspective on the intelligence assessments produced by the IDF. Such a body could enrich the understanding available to political decision-makers and enable more informed, evidence-based decision-making.

7 *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Intelligence System Following the War in Iraq*, Knesset, Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, Nisan 5764 (March 2004). Emphasis added.

8 Ofer Shelah, Yaakov Perry, and Meir Cohen, *Explanatory Notes to the Proposed Law on the Secret Services*, 2017. [Hebrew]

9 Ittai Brun, *Intelligence Research*. [Hebrew]

The Conceptual Layer

One of the central components of Israel's security concept over the past fifteen years has been the idea of prevention and influence, a key element of the "Campaign between the Wars" (CBW). The CBW (mabam) became the central framework for Israel's actions against the threats in its environment. Israel's intelligence agencies have played a key role in shaping and implementing this concept. Over these years, the CBW has been defined as the sum of routine efforts aimed at reducing, delaying, and preventing the enemy from acquiring weapons and capabilities that disrupt the balance against the IDF. In the IDF Strategic Document drafted during Gadi Eisenkot's tenure as Chief of Staff, the objectives of the Mabam were defined as follows:

> To reduce existing and emerging threats, to postpone the next war and create better conditions for victory in it, to preserve and strengthen deterrence, to increase the security of the State of Israel in general and of the IDF in particular, to maintain the IDF's freedom of action and reduce that of the enemy.[10]

In the context of the CBW, there is a difference between the IDF and AMAN within it, and the Mossad and Shin Bet[2]. Israel's two civilian intelligence agencies, Mossad and Shin Bet, operate by their nature within a CBW framework, by definition, they do not play a central role during wartime. In contrast, the IDF and AMAN are required, as part of the army's fundamental definitions, to be the primary entity prepared for war. Despite this, the CBW concept has gradually attained a central position within the operations of Israel's intelligence establishment. By its nature, the CBW depends on extensive intelligence activity.[11]

CBW absorbed the bulk of attention and led to the erosion of engagement in some essential functions, such as preparedness for war

Over the past decade and a half, the Israeli intelligence establishment, and particularly AMAN, has been drawn into the CBW, which served as a convenient arena for demonstrating its capabilities, with an emphasis on real-time intelligence and creativity. Operations within the interwar campaign thus enhanced the status of the intelligence establishment and gave it an aura of omnipotence. According to foreign-media publications, the Israeli campaign over the years has dealt with attacks on "high-value" weapons transfers from Iran to Hezbollah via Syria, disruption of the Shiite axis's entrenchment in Syria, delaying and disrupting Iran's nuclear program,

10 Gadi Eisenkot, *IDF Strategy* (2018, 2015).

11 Ibid.

elimination of centers of expertise, assistance to Egypt in fighting ISIS in the Sinai,[12] and more.

The increasing reliance on intelligence collection based on advanced technology has created a cultural and conceptual "overdependence," which has led to a systemic disinterest in efforts that are not perceived as being sufficiently sophisticated and hence not valuable

The CBW differs in its nature from war in many respects. Activity within the CBW is conducted primarily against time-bounded incidents, real-time developments, some of them eruptive and unexpected, and the intelligence required is tailored accordingly. The CBW is carried out almost entirely at the General Staff level. By contrast, war by its nature requires a constant, broad, and sustained system of preparations, conducted across all echelons. The intelligence required for war relates to multiple dimensions, including comprehensive knowledge of the adversary—its locations, doctrine of warfare, forces and their readiness, weapons and capabilities, as well as delivering intelligence to operational forces. The CBW does not seek absolute victory, but rather focused, point-specific disruption; in this sense, it is in tension with the concepts of victory, maneuver, and decisive outcome.

Alongside many operational successes, CBW absorbed the bulk of attention and led to the erosion of engagement in some essential functions, such as preparedness for war.[13] CBW and war are two distinct conceptual frameworks; the transition between them is complex, and the impact of the CBW on the central bodies engaged in it has often been described in the following terms:

> Those same bodies (such as AMAN and the Air Force) also experienced an erosion of capabilities, a diversion of attention, and even distortions of reality that were aligned with Mabam activity. Phenomena such as prioritizing the urgent over the important, and using intelligence intended for war for Mabam purposes, blurred the distinctions between Mabam and war and created distorted perceptions of the adversary.[14]

It should be recalled that, by its very nature as a dynamic campaign with a dominant reliance on real-time intelligence, the CBW

12 See, for example, an update on YNET regarding an interview given by the President of Egypt to the American program *60 Minutes*, in which he addressed the matter: Ynet, "President of Egypt: Israel Cooperates with Us in the War Against ISIS in Sinai," Ynet, January 4, 2019. [Hebrew]

13 Preparedness for war in the intelligence context has many dimensions, some of which will be described in the paragraphs on the required corrections.

14 Dana Freizler-Sweiry, "The Transition from the Interwar Campaign (MABAM) to the 'Iron Swords' War," *Bein HaKetavim*, 41 (January 2024). [Hebrew]

required the investment and allocation of very substantial resources—including intelligence manpower, collection assets, and the attention of senior commanders.

Thus, over the years, the CBW has become detrimental to the intelligence establishment and its assessments. Although the intelligence community knew that it did not prevent the emergence of threats around Israel, but only delayed and disrupted them, it clung to CBW activities as proof of its action against these threats. As a result, the capabilities of Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas, Shiite militias, and the Houthis continued to develop and strengthen. Similarly, regarding both Hamas and Hezbollah, a policy of restraint evolved: these organizations grew stronger, yet Israel refrained from acting against them. The justification given was that Israel was "deterring" the enemy, preventing it from initiating a full-scale war against the state.

The gap created regarding the threat to the State of Israel can be illustrated through the use of the CBW versus wartime action, as a distinction between the concepts of "sense of security" and actual security. A "sense of security" is a soft concept that reflects the psychological stance of an individual or public, shaped by a representation (whether true or false) that generates a "security provider". In contrast, actual security represents a clear and measurable standard, based on professional parameters, indicating the existence or non-existence of a threat and the capability to address it.

The Capabilities Layer

In recent decades, the world has experienced enormous technological development across multiple fields: computing capabilities, communications, optics, data storage, algorithms, and more. This development has not bypassed the Israeli intelligence community, creating deep-level processes that transformed how intelligence efforts are implemented. Sensors, observation systems, computing and communication networks, and a range of technological innovations have been integrated into intelligence operations, enhancing their outputs. The intelligence community has entered the era of big data, which has challenged some traditional methods of work in the field. The vast volumes of information provide significant intelligence potential but simultaneously generate new challenges: storing and retrieving information, separating the intelligence "wheat from the chaff," and prioritizing data processing.

The increasing reliance of the Israeli intelligence community on advanced technology for its operations, alongside changes in the nature of threats and in the assumptions underpinning Israel's security concept, has led to several negative phenomena, including:

1. Marginalization of "classic" collection capabilities that are not perceived as technological.
2. Closure of units and collection capabilities primarily intended for wartime operations.

3. Erosion of core skills in intelligence professions.[15]

Marginalization of "Classic" Collection Capabilities that are not Perceived as Technological

A fundamental principle of intelligence is the pursuit of the broadest possible diversity of collection sources. This is required to form an accurate picture of reality, the enemy, and threats, as no single source provides all the required information. The greater the number and variety of sources—such as satellites, signals interception, human intelligence, and others—the richer, corroborated, and more complete the intelligence picture. The higher the quality and completeness of the intelligence picture, the greater the ability to analyze threats, assess them, and act against them. Naturally, a national intelligence effort always operates within some resource framework. The aspiration to maintain the widest possible portfolio of collection sources is always in tension with the capacity to sustain them, both in terms of human and technological resources.

Over the past two decades, reliance on technological collection sources has steadily increased, particularly on cyber collection capabilities.[16] Cyber collection is highly attractive because, in many cases, it allows a glimpse into the enemy's core secrets and enables the extraction of vast amounts of information. Cyber collection operations often require advanced technological capabilities and significant state resources. Israel is recognized as one of the three leading cyber powers in the world.[17]

However, the increasing reliance on intelligence collection based on advanced technology has created a cultural and conceptual "overdependence," which has led to a systemic disinterest in efforts that are not perceived as being sufficiently sophisticated and hence not valuable.[18] One likely contributing factor was the leadership of Israel's intelligence establishment in recent years by operational officers (as opposed to intelligence analysts), particularly in Aman and the Shin Bet (the head of Mossad has consistently been an operational officer). This reality has led, in recent years, to a reduction or cessation of reliance on basic yet crucial collection efforts within the intelligence apparatus, including collection from open-source information and communications "OSINT" and even human intelligence "HUMINT".

In the field of OSINT, in 2021 the "Hatzav" unit, which had operated for decades and

15 For more information, see Roi Tamir, "AMAN – Outlining the Nature of the Breach," *HaShiloach*. [Hebrew]

16 This refers to the capability to penetrate adversaries' computer systems and collect information from them.

17 Metania Rapaport, *Cyber Mania*, Kinneret Zmora Publishing, 2021. [Hebrew]

18 see Roi Tamir, "AMAN – Outlining the Nature of the Breach." [Hebrew]

served as the primary framework within Israel's intelligence community for collecting information from open sources—including Arab media networks and social media—was closed. As noted: "Hatzav's significant achievements were highly appreciated by field commanders, but, as in the case of the signals specialists within Unit 8200, they were disregarded internally; automated systems were introduced, and later positions for language experts were reduced."[19] Moreover, as part of the reliance on technology:

The Israeli intelligence community's rush into the technological and cyber era led to a decline in the status of HUMINT efforts

> ...at the top of Aman, artificial intelligence—the 'machine' that translates content in various formats and at large volumes—was preferred over human processes, which provide insights and depth that the machine can never replicate. Some of the criticism among Aman veterans focuses on the loss of basic capabilities of the Hatzav unit...[20]

Historically, the ability to gather intelligence from individuals on the enemy's side—civilians, security personnel, and those with visible freedom of movement in enemy territory—has been one of the basic intelligence activities. HUMINT has both advantages and limitations, yet it remains a foundational element of intelligence operations. Israel's intelligence community has historically invested significant effort in collecting intelligence from human sources. In certain intelligence organizations, such as the Shin Bet, HUMINT has been the primary area of specialization.

However, the Israeli intelligence community's rush into the technological and cyber era led to a decline in the status of HUMINT efforts. This occurred alongside the inherent difficulties of recruiting sources within major terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah and Hamas, which maintain very high information security awareness and ongoing counterintelligence efforts.[21] For example, during a crisis affecting Aman's HUMINT Unit, "there were voices calling for the unit to be closed, along the lines of 'HUMINT's time has passed. The world has moved to digital, to 'SIGINT'."[22]

19 Guy Asif, "Our Nickname Is 'Audio Monkey': The Dangerous Disregard for 8200's Radio Operators," *Ynet+*, May 31, 2024. [Hebrew]

20 Roy Kaiz, "If the Hatzav Intelligence Unit Had Not Been Closed – Would October 7 Have Looked Different?", *Kan – Israeli Broadcasting Corporation*, October 9, 2024. [Hebrew]

21 Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005 made recruiting sources there even more difficult.

22 Commander of the IDF Special Operations Division in a first interview, Ben Caspit, *HaGvura* website, February 4, 2017. [Hebrew]

Even in the Shin Bet, which is by its nature a HUMINT organization, a change has occurred in recent years, reflected in the observation that: "In general… the Shin Bet's 'ship' has increasingly shifted toward technological directions, rather than HUMINT."[23] This has resulted in "an imbalance developing within the Shin Bet between different intelligence sources… the organization moved increasingly toward technological domains—data mining, SIGINT, VISINT, cyber, etc."[24] This assessment does not imply that Israel's intelligence community has ceased HUMINT operations; rather, it highlights that at the conceptual level, a perceptual shift has occurred over recent years regarding this domain.

The Closure of Units and Collection Capabilities Intended Primarily for Wartime

One of the primary national tests for any state is its readiness for war and its performance during conflict. The effectiveness of various intelligence efforts and their preparedness has a significant impact on the quality of this readiness and performance. One of the corollary outcomes of the broader shift in Israel's security concept has been the closure of intelligence frameworks and collection capabilities whose primary purpose is wartime operations.

To illustrate the consequences of this change, one can cite the decision to close the Technical and Captured-Material Collection Unit (Amshat) and the dismantling of the organic collection arrays of the Combat Maneuvering Division.[25] It should be emphasized that these developments are a tangible outcome of an organizational and cognitive mindset that regards war as largely obsolete.

The technical and captured-material intelligence effort (Amshat) constitutes a fundamental component of warfare worldwide. It involves the ability to extract intelligence from all material seized in the enemy's territory and infrastructures—both military and civilian—during and after hostilities. This includes written and printed materials (operation diaries, maps, schematics, etc.), digital media (mobile phones, computers, communication systems, etc.), and weapons (from which technological intelligence can be derived). This unit operated within AMAN for many decades and influenced various wars and operations.[26] The organizational framework responsible for the Amshat effort in AMAN underwent numerous transformations

23 Itai Ilnai, "Service Awareness: From Complete Intelligence Blindness to the Valor of the Operatives – What Happened to the Shin Bet on October 7 and in the Months Before?", *Israel Hayom*, December 5, 2024.

24 Ibid.

25 This mainly refers to observation and visual collection units.

26 Noam Shapira, "The DOCEX Unit: Then and Now," *Unit 8200 Association Website*, March 1, 2024. [Hebrew]

over the years until it was closed several years ago.[27] The clearest evidence of the capability's importance was its immediate re-establishment at the outbreak of the Iron Swords War.

In every maneuver by ground forces into enemy territory, several widely accepted fundamental military efforts are involved, such as fire, logistics, and intelligence collection. These efforts are intended to enable the maneuver of divisions, brigades, and battalions, and to ensure the highest possible degree of functional independence and flexibility for the maneuvering formations. In this domain as well, as part of a prolonged, multi-year process of erosion in the concept of maneuver and the ground forces, the organic intelligence-collection capabilities of the maneuvering divisions were closed. This "resulted in severe damage to the competence and readiness of the ground forces."[28] In contrast to this process of erosion, fixed, overt combat intelligence collection along the borders became increasingly entrenched as part of a defensive concept of border security. "Border collection relies on the capabilities of fixed collection, which is responsible for detecting the enemy in the area adjacent to the barrier and for preventing infiltration, using radars and observation means mounted on masts along the border. However, fixed collection has difficulty dividing attention and collecting information about areas distant from the fence. Moreover, fixed collection tends to be damaged by the enemy during fighting and cannot be relied upon exclusively."[29] The central principle that was harmed by the closure of the maneuvering echelon's combat-collection capabilities was the organic nature and operational independence of these frontline units.

The Principles and Required Changes in Israel's Intelligence Paradigm

Israel needs to **redefine its national intelligence paradigm**. This necessity arises not only in light of the traumatic events of October 7th but also from a pressing need to correct the shifts in the intelligence paradigm that have taken place since the 1990s.

The first and critical step in this change is to rebalance the relationship between intelligence and the political echelon, the military leadership, and the General Staff branches. To create genuine security, Israel must adopt for itself and its defense establishment—including its intelligence community—a strategic posture of

27 See ibid.

28 Quote from a 2023 duty summary letter by a Major from the Tashlul Department at the Ground Forces Command, cited in: Guy Hazut, *The High-Tech Army and the Cavalry Army*, Modan Publishing and Ma'arachot Publishing, 2024. [Hebrew]

29 Ofir Avraham, "The Need for Evolving Mobile Combat Collection," *Ma'arachot*, no. 497, June 29, 2023.

"readiness at dawn," which reduces the conditioning of operational preparedness on intelligence assessments of enemy intentions and instead focuses on enemy capabilities. This is to be done alongside, and without contradicting, a broad and ongoing effort to maintain the intelligence community's strength and superiority and its ability to provide strategic, operational, and tactical intelligence.

A central working assumption required of the intelligence paradigm must be that war is a plausible, persistent, and enduring fact within Israel's national security reality for decades to come. Accordingly, the intelligence paradigm must define processes and actions that will generate continual readiness of the national intelligence system for the outbreak of war.

A new intelligence paradigm should address the following essential aspects:

1. Conducting all intelligence efforts with conceptual clarity.
2. Regulating the intelligence establishment at the national level.
3. Enhancing and diversifying the political–strategic assessments presented to the political echelon.
4. Establishing a guiding principle of preserving diversity among intelligence collection sources and maintaining balance between them.
5. Continuous readiness and preparation for a state of war.
6. Revising the operational concept vis-à-vis emerging threats.
7. Creating new balances in relation to "arenas of peace."

There is a clear need for an intelligence staff that does not belong to any of the secret services

Conducting all Intelligence Efforts with Conceptual Clarity

In the field of intelligence, there are efforts of various types: warning intelligence, research on the enemy's doctrine of warfare, targets, terrain research, collection in its various forms, operations, and more. All of these efforts are intended to address the needs of different consumers, from the political echelon down to the maneuvering battalion. The intelligence establishment must instill conceptual **clarity** in two central issues: first, the inability to predict with certainty how reality will develop, and therefore the understanding that the possibility of surprise is part of the basic patterns of reality; and second, the uniqueness of the religious–cultural component of Israel's enemies, which defines the destruction of the State of Israel as the essence of their existence, since the very existence of the State of Israel contradicts their religious worldview. Establishing conceptual **clarity** on these issues, alongside uncompromising adherence to the foundations of the intelligence profession, will ensure a higher-quality and more balanced national intelligence product.

Regulating the Intelligence Establishment at the National Level

The challenge

The core of the challenge in this issue relates to two critical aspects of democratic governance: guidance and oversight. That is, how the elected political echelon in Israel exercises its responsibility and directs national intelligence activity (such as determining the national critical intelligence assessments, or defining the reference threat)[30] and how it oversees the implementation of this guidance, the utilization of resources, and the existence of inter-organizational synergy. However, despite the immense substantive importance of the issue for national security and the extensive attention it has received over the years, the issues of formal guidance and oversight have not been resolved.

The current situation

This informality, is however, not entirely accidental. Both the prime ministers and the intelligence organizations have preferred the informal status quo to the alternative functional rigidity under the law. Over the years, alternatives have been proposed, such as a Minister for Intelligence who would "supervise, on behalf of the Prime Minister, the operations, organization, and budgets of the secret services and the appointment of senior personnel in these services… [and would be responsible] for managing the Prime Minister's daily contact with the heads of the secret services, and for overseeing the actual implementation of the Prime Minister's policy regarding them."[31]

Others have proposed an Intelligence Staff: "There is a clear need for an intelligence staff that does not belong to any of the secret services. This staff, headed by the 'Intelligence Secretary,' would coordinate the work of the intelligence organizations with the Prime Minister or the Cabinet Committee for Intelligence, review the intelligence outputs, centralize work regarding the determination of the critical issues for Mossad, Shin Bet, and Aman, as well as work with the Prime Minister on intelligence force-building and five- and ten-year plans. The staff would also present integrative working papers to the Prime Minister and ministers, drawing from the full scope of the intelligence organizations' activities."[32]

Others have proposed appointing a head of the Israeli intelligence community, who would report to the Prime Minister and whose responsibilities would include, among other things: "assisting the Prime Minister in shaping the intelligence

30 These two examples mainly illustrate the political leadership's ability to define priorities for the intelligence establishment.

31 Shelach, Perry, and Cohen, *Proposed Law on the Secret Services*.

32 Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Intelligence System Following the War in Iraq.

community and formulating policies for its operation in support of national security… developing strategies and work plans for the intelligence community, to be approved by the Prime Minister, the Defense Minister, and the Intelligence Cabinet; as well as preparing an annual and multi-year budget for the community… assisting the Prime Minister in learning, guidance, management, coordination, and operation of the intelligence community."[33]

None of these ideas, or others, came to fruition for various reasons, some of which are related to the political and public culture of institutions in the State of Israel.

Recommended reform

It is clear that this is not an ultimate solution; it should be regarded as a measure to improve the current reality and as a foundation for possible future reforms, should a decision be made.

National intelligence law – Israel should enact a National Intelligence Law that regulates the formal definition of the intelligence establishment's responsibility toward the state's various institutions. In this context, the law would transform the conduct of intelligence organizations from a voluntary, "goodwill"-based practice into one grounded in legal obligation and accountability.

The law would define the interface between the intelligence establishment and the state's institutions, improving the oversight capabilities of the government, the Knesset, and the National Security Council over national intelligence operations and resource utilization. Lawmakers would do well to set only general principles rather than hundreds of detailed provisions that could become a burden. For example, the law could require that the intelligence establishment present, jointly to designated authorities, every six months, its response to the priorities outlined in the national intelligence assessment (Tziyach). Additionally, intelligence organizations would be required to show how they synchronize their resources to achieve maximal efficiency. Properly drafted, such a law would strengthen Israel's national security, improve the interface between the political echelon and intelligence organizations, enhance the efficiency of the intelligence establishment, and provide better security for Israeli citizens.

Heads of Services Committee (VaRash) – The VaRash is an existing entity that is not statutorily anchored. It appears that, in order to improve work processes and synchronization between the organizations and the political leadership, particularly the Prime Minister, it is necessary to formalize the VaRash's status[34] within the framework

33 Shmuel Even and Amos Granit, *The Israeli Intelligence Community – Where to? Analysis, Trends, and Recommendations*, INSS, Memorandum 97, March 2009.

34 As of today, the head of the Mossad is designated as the head of the VaRash .

of the National Intelligence Law. Likewise, the position of the VaRash head should be formalized as responsible for presenting the joint operations of the organizations in response to priority intelligence requirements and for coordinating resources. Even if this arrangement is not optimal, it would improve the situation and circumvent the challenges inherent in placing an external authority above the heads of the organizations. This step would also strengthen the dialogue between the intelligence establishment and the political leadership, reinforce internal functional commitment among the organizations, and enhance intelligence at the national level.

Enhancing and Diversifying the Political–Strategic Assessments Presented to the Political Echelon

A political–strategic situation assessment contains insights regarding countries and entities in the environment (including those not formally defined as enemies) that influence and are influenced by the state's national policy. Its components generally include an analysis of the policies, politics, economy, and society of these countries and entities.

Unlike military research and terrorism research, large portions of building a political–strategic situation assessment rely on open or relatively accessible information. This was true in the past, and it is even more so in the current era, which is rich in online information.

The process of developing a political–strategic situation assessment requires continuous analysis of the interaction between Israel and other actors. As a result, military intelligence (specifically, Aman's research division) has no relative advantage here as it goes well beyond its primary role of analyzing military and terrorist threats. Furthermore, this overlap can detract from the focus on military research and invite the involvement of military actors in policy-making, which is unhealthy for democracy.

Various actors have dealt extensively with this issue in the past and emphasized the need for change. For example: "The historical development of the Israeli intelligence community assigned to the IDF's intelligence branch tasks and areas of operation that do not fall within the responsibilities of military intelligence as is customary and accepted in most Western countries. For instance, responsibility for intelligence research in the political realm… in doing so, military intelligence also assumed functions for which it is neither the natural nor the obvious responsible entity."[35]

It was further stated: "National intelligence assessment, currently handled by the IDF's intelligence branch—a body which, in terms

35 Report of the Committee to Investigate the Intelligence System Following the Iraq War. [Hebrew]

of worldview and areas of responsibility, should not be the 'national assessor.'"[36]

In light of the above, and to enable the political echelon in Israel to rely on a diverse political–strategic assessment—not only through the security–intelligence prism—it would be appropriate to create a new capability within the national intelligence paradigm to allow for this. In any case, military intelligence can continue to conduct research and political assessment as a derivative of military research. For example, one cannot separate research on Hezbollah from research on the Lebanese state. This differs, for instance, from research and assessment of the policies of Turkey or more distant states.

After seven and a half decades, the State of Israel needs to move to a new stage regarding the structuring of the framework of its national security. Evolutionary developments and reliance on relative advantages that were appropriate in the early years were legitimate until now; the maturation of national development processes, combined with the clarity arising from formative shocks such as October 7, lays the groundwork for the beginning of change.

To provide Israel's national security echelon and the political leadership at its head with the full range of tools to make informed policy decisions and reduce the likelihood of errors, it is necessary to establish the capacity for political–strategic research and situation assessment in a civilian framework independent of the military. Regarding possible solutions, the task could (as has been proposed multiple times in the past) be assigned to the Mossad. The advantages of the Mossad include its very nature as a civilian agency, its ongoing involvement in political research and situation assessment in certain arenas, the fact that its head serves as chair of the heads-of-intelligence committee (VaRash), and its built-in accessibility to the Prime Minister. The drawbacks in this context stem from its being part of the broader intelligence establishment, which may contribute to organizational biases, its operational DNA, and its limited research engagement in some arenas.

In light of this, there is another option with significant potential advantages that could provide an optimal solution to the national need. Mechanisms of this type exist in similar forms in various countries, with the most prominent example being the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) in the United Kingdom. We will present the idea and its principles adapted to Israel's needs.[37] The concept is to establish a dedicated, official, civilian framework responsible for

36 Shelach, Perry, and Cohen, Explanation of the *Proposed Law on the Secret Services*.

37 The principles were adapted from: Colonel Richard Kemp, *Integration in British Intelligence – The Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC)*, *Intelligence in Practice*, November 7, 2021. Naturally, it is impossible to

political–strategic research and assessment for the Cabinet. This is not intended to be a reactive or ancillary body (as suggested in the bill proposed by MK Halevi[38]), but rather the main body responsible for research and for presenting assessments to the national security echelon. This body would be positioned within the Prime Minister's Office or the National Security Council and would emphasize composition from a diverse pool of researchers with varying professional and social backgrounds, including former intelligence personnel, former officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense, experienced civilian analysts not from the intelligence establishment, academic researchers, and others. The head of this body would be designated as the head of a national agency.

The agency for political research and assessment will utilize classified intelligence provided by intelligence agencies and foreign intelligence allies, diplomatic reports from embassies around the world, and open-source intelligence.

The agency's central mission will be to provide assessments regarding strategic matters, events, and situations related to policy and foreign relations, as well as economic and societal issues in the Middle East and worldwide, and other international matters. In addition, the agency will be responsible for monitoring the development of direct and indirect threats and opportunities on the political level and issuing warnings about them.

The agency's assessments will be sent routinely, and in relation to special events, to the cabinet ministers and the National Security Council (NSC). The documents will provide government ministers with clear, concise, and straightforward evaluations (regardless of the complexity, scope, or significance of the issue) based on intelligence from all available sources, in order to assist them in formulating policy.

The advantages of establishing a Strategic Political Research and Assessment Agency for the national security echelon are:

1. The assessments intended for cabinet ministers are conducted separately from the intelligence-collecting agencies, taking into account the knowledge added at every stage of the intelligence evaluation process by agency representatives. This means that the assessments are likely not influenced by agency pride, long-term thinking about the collecting agency's own interests, or effects arising from the enormous efforts, risks, and financial investments involved in obtaining the intelligence itself.

replicate the British mechanism exactly, given the differences in operation across several dimensions.

38 Proposed Law for the Establishment of a Department for Formulating an Alternative Intelligence paradigm ("Ipcha Mistabra") from the Intelligence Bodies, 2024.

2. Improved diversity of opinions and pluralism in assessments (both inter-agency and in the human composition).
3. Proper democratic functioning.
4. Optimal utilization of unclassified intelligence (open-source information, social media, political information, research).

The disadvantages:

1. Additional resource investment.
2. The strong backing of the political echelon is required for the agency to position itself effectively within the existing framework.

Establishing a Guiding Principle of Maintaining Source Diversity, Their Collection, and the Balance Between Them

A core element of a national intelligence paradigm is the responsibility for implementing a diverse array of collection channels and sources. This ensures the most comprehensive and reliable intelligence picture possible and reduces the likelihood of intelligence failure stemming from overreliance on a single collection channel. Israel's national intelligence paradigm should define and establish mechanisms to monitor the existence and utilization of collection sources, as well as to balance investment across them. Decisions regarding the reduction or closure of collection capabilities should be made at the level of the Heads of Services Committee (VaRash) with presentation to relevant government authorities as determined. Since Israeli intelligence agencies often operate in overlapping areas and across multiple collection disciplines, it is especially important to maintain a national-level picture of collection sources in relation to various threats. The quality of this picture directly affects decision-making at the political echelon, underscoring the importance of presenting it regularly and effectively. It is recommended and appropriate that the source picture and national intelligence accessibility be regularly presented by the Head of the Intelligence Community to the Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and National Security Council Chief.

Constant Readiness and Preparedness for Wartime Conditions

The phenomenon of war is real, persistent, and constitutes a supreme test at the national level. Israel's national intelligence paradigm must define its state of readiness for war at all times, the manner in which supporting efforts are implemented in routine and emergency situations, the order of priorities vis-à-vis issues that are not war, and the capabilities required to meet the mission in wartime. Here too, decisions to reduce or close capabilities dedicated to war should be made at the level of the Heads of Services Committee (VaRash) and transparently presented to the relevant political echelon. The advantage of a "war compass" lies in the fact that it draws the system's preparedness toward its highest

threshold, from which adjustments can also be derived for lower or different levels of need. The argument that the frequency of war is very low and that it is therefore preferable to focus intelligence activity on the campaign between wars or on routine security is incorrect. This is because processes of preparedness, readiness, and force buildup for war take a long time and require ongoing maintenance in light of constant changes in force structure, and therefore war preparedness must be at the top of the priority list. Orientation toward war should project onto many dimensions of the intelligence establishment's activity, including influencing collection plans, types of operations and their prioritization, prioritization of research topics, accessibility and depth of analysis, training and exercising of personnel, and more. The existence of a target bank against a specific enemy is not, in itself, a sufficient expression of organization-wide readiness for war. Intelligence organizations must maintain close, joint action in routine times in light of the war compass, so that the capabilities built against the various threats will be optimal, resource-efficient, and synergistic in nature.

Changing the Operational Concept vis-à-vis Emerging Threats – the Intelligence Context

One of the most necessary conceptual changes in Israel's intelligence doctrine is a renewed focus on the ability to identify threats in their formative stages and to lay the intelligence groundwork for their destruction. This stands in contrast to the CBW, which failed to prevent the military buildup of Hamas and Hezbollah. The CBW, derived from a logic of prevention and influence, demanded extensive intelligence resources, diverted strategic attention, and weakened preparedness for war. In formulating a new intelligence doctrine, it is necessary to shape operating principles adapted to the new Middle Eastern reality in light of the outcomes of the Iron Swords War. This requires continuous tracking and the provision of operational intelligence to strike a spectrum of threats, including at significant geographic distance. In addition, the evaluative component regarding the consequences of Israel's use of force must reflect the substantial increase in the IDF's freedom of action and flexibility in the wake of the war.

War preparedness must be at the top of the priority list

Creating New Balances vis-à-vis "Peace Arenas"

Arenas in which the State of Israel has peace agreements, such as Egypt and Jordan, are strategic assets. However, an updated intelligence doctrine should define the principles and balances required to ensure that potential threats—at both the strategic and operational levels in these arenas, such as a governmental coup, Egyptian military activity in Sinai, or Iranian efforts in Jordan—are properly monitored and reflected to the IDF and the government.

The claim that these arenas can continue to be managed with minimal intelligence investment, collection, and research is mistaken and dangerous. A supervised intelligence outlook on these arenas, which strengthens the intelligence picture and preparedness for changes in the situation, is clearly required.

Afterword

The national intelligence paradigm of the State of Israel is of critical importance to its future and its security. There are moments in the life of a nation when it must seize the reality that has emerged in its historical journey, identify the opportunity for growth and development, and realize it to the fullest. October 7 is a powerful spotlight illuminating the historic opportunity before the State of Israel across many dimensions. Among them is the need to correct the changes that have taken place over the past three decades and to formulate a sound national intelligence paradigm, properly adapted to the national security needs of the State of Israel. The required change calls for a new and healthier balance between the intelligence establishment and the political echelon and military command, the establishment of conceptual baseline assumptions that correspond to reality, a return to the foundations of the intelligence profession, and continuous preparedness for war.

Chapter 7

Repairing the Relationship Between the Defense Establishment and the Political Echelon

Harel Weinberg

Executive Summary

Civilian oversight of Israel's defense system exists at the formal level, but in practice, the political echelon is deeply dependent on the IDF as the almost exclusive source of security knowledge, strategic assessments, and alternative analyses. The military's control over intelligence information, planning capabilities, and the framing of conceptual approaches creates a situation of epistemic hegemony, which weakens the capacity of the elected leadership and narrows its real space for choice.

While responsibility for defining security policy and making decisions is supposed to rest with the political leadership, in practice it relies almost exclusively on proposals from the defense establishment, struggles to generate alternatives—particularly with regard to force buildup—and at times is drawn into endorsing plans originating in the military without conducting an independent strategic dialogue. The institutional mechanisms meant to bridge this gap—the prime minister's military secretary and the National Security Council—do not provide an effective solution: the former is subordinate to the military hierarchy, while the latter suffers from structural weakness, a lack of resources, and a lack of legitimacy as an independent actor vis-à-vis the defense establishment.

The result is a concentration of knowledge and operational authority in the hands of the military, which at times extends beyond the sphere of professional military expertise and leads it to shape policy processes in

explicitly political as well as strategic domains. Alternative viewpoints are scarcely heard, and the political leadership remains without a genuine capacity to scrutinize the recommendations placed before it or to challenge those who advance them. This phenomenon was especially pronounced during emergency periods such as the Iron Swords War, when operational rigidity was evident, and the political echelon struggled to advance alternative conceptions.

In the long-term, in order to strengthen the decision-making options of the political leadership, a genuine shift is required. Major steps include:

1. Strengthening the National Security Council and transforming it into a professional body with real influence and broad authorities to obtain independent information and conduct autonomous security staff work.
2. Reducing the military's involvement in shaping foreign policy and in non-military matters, and redirecting primary national engagement in these areas to the civilian echelon.
3. Requiring the political leadership to undergo structured security training, enabling informed and substantive deliberation vis-à-vis the defense establishment.

Beyond these critical steps for long-term reform, this article proposes that in the short-term an independent security advisory team should be established for the Prime Minister—and possibly for the Cabinet as well—composed of civilian experts who are institutionally detached from the defense establishment. Such a team would provide the political leadership with professional advice in the security domain that is free of institutional bias. The members of the team would be appointed by the Prime Minister and Cabinet members as personal appointments and would serve for short-terms, aligned with the tenure of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet. The team's role would be to formulate recommendations for the Prime Minister and the Cabinet, as needed, on issues under consideration, or to bring to the political leadership's attention matters that, in its view, require their engagement. In addition, the team would independently—or in dialogue with the defense establishment—examine alternatives to the defense system's proposals on operational matters and force buildup, while giving expression to the preferences of the political leadership.

In addition, the team would be able to engage in dialogue with Israeli and international research institutes on these matters. Currently, such dialogue

occurs at the military level only to a limited extent and on peripheral issues. This team would not replace the position of the defense establishment—that would remain central—but would serve as a "light platform" for challenging the plans and situation assessments of the operational planning bodies and the National Security Council (the "heavy platforms") and could present a parallel position—supportive or opposing—to that of the defense establishment, enabling informed discussion of the alternatives under consideration.

The current situation makes it difficult for the political leadership to make independent security decisions and leads to an almost complete reliance on the defense establishment's position. Strengthening civilian advisory systems, creating knowledge-based alternatives, and ensuring effective oversight of the defense establishment are essential steps to secure national security grounded in broad and balanced considerations.

Introduction

The defense establishment is subordinate to the civilian-political echelon. This is explicitly established in legislation,[1] formed as such in the army's foundation,[2] and reflected in prevailing practice—at least apparently. Central decisions concerning force buildup and the employment of the IDF are supposed to be made by the Minister of Defense, the Prime Minister, the Political-Security Cabinet, and, in cases where necessary, by the entire government,[3] while the military echelon is meant to translate the government's and the Minister of Defense's decisions into military action plans.[4] The purpose of civilian-political oversight of the military is to "delineate or limit the influence of the military echelon and ensure its alignment with the objectives of the political echelon, in a manner that guarantees the supremacy of the elected political leadership and the fulfillment of its defined goals and objectives."[5] While this system may be more complex and can

1 See Sections 2 and 3 of the Basic Law: The Army – "(2)(a) The army is subject to the authority of the government; (2)(b) The minister appointed by the government to oversee the army is the Minister of Defense; (3)(a) The highest command echelon in the army is the Chief of General Staff; (3)(b) The Chief of General Staff is subject to the authority of the government and subordinate to the Minister of Defense; (3)(c) The Chief of General Staff shall be appointed by the government upon the recommendation of the Minister of Defense. [in Hebrew]

2 "The army does not determine the policy, the regime, the laws, or the governmental arrangements of the state. The army does not decide on its own even its structure, organization, or lines of operation, and of course it does not decide on war and peace. The army is only the executive arm, the arm of defense and security, of the government of Israel. The regime in the state—that is, policy both domestic and foreign, the declaration of war and the making of peace, the organization of the army and shaping its character—these are all under the sole authority of the civilian authorities: the government, the Knesset, and the voters—according to the majority decision in free elections. The government bears full responsibility for the army before the representatives of the people in the Knesset; the army is fully subordinate to the government and is only the executor of the political line and the directives it receives from the legislative and executive institutions of the state: the Knesset and the government" (Document by David Ben-Gurion to Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Yigal Yavin, "The Structure of the Army and Its Path," cited in Amram Oren and Kobi Michael, *Civilian Oversight Tested by the Territorial Dimension of Security in Israel – A Critical Conceptual Framework Tested in Practice*, Jerusalem: Hebrew University, Florsheimer Studies, 2013, p. 11). [in Hebrew]

3 David Ben-Gurion had already emphasized the need for security decisions to be made by the civilian rather than the military echelon. In his article in the newspaper *Davar* titled "The Problem of Authority over the Palmach," Ben-Gurion described that during his first 15 years leading the Jewish Agency he did not take on "any portfolio," and that after 15 years he was forced to assume the defense portfolio. "I took on the defense portfolio not because I am a general or a military expert—I was far from any of that—but because in matters of the army, as in any other complex practical matter, it is not the professional experts who decide, although their advice and guidance are essential, but rather those with clear vision and common sense, and these qualities exist in any normal person" (*Davar*, April 2, 1962). [in Hebrew]

4 IDF General Staff Regulations 2.0101, General Headquarters, Section 7(a). [in Hebrew]

5 Kobi Michael, "When Authority Bows to the Source of Knowledge," in Gabriel Sheffer, Oren Barak, and Amiram Oren (eds.), *An Army That Has a State? A Renewed Look at Civil–Military Relations in Israel*, Jerusalem:

also be seen as "shared responsibility",[6] ultimately, with regard to political intent and central decisions on force buildup and employment, authority must reside entirely with the political echelon.

In practice, as numerous scholars[7] have pointed out over the years, the defense establishment,[8] and the army at its head, holds a unique and almost exclusive position in formulating security

Carmel, 2008; see also: "Therefore, beyond the formal and procedural essence, whose purpose is to ensure the compliance of the military echelon with the elected civilian echelon and its full subordination to its directives, civilian oversight must also be purposeful and ensure the supremacy of civilian–political thinking over military thinking, so that it reflects the primacy of civilian objectives over military objectives" (Oren and Michael, *Civilian Oversight Tested by the Territorial Dimension of Security in Israel*, p. 14). This article also provides a concise review of the existing theoretical perspectives regarding models for civilian oversight of the military echelon (pp. 14–22). [in Hebrew]

6 "The definition of the relationship between the political echelon and the military echelon cannot be shaped on the basis of a one-way logical hierarchy, from a guiding body to an executing body... **shared responsibility** is not reflected in the question of who holds the source of authority, since the source of authority is always asymmetrically in the hands of the political echelon, but rather in the question of how the idea is generated, who is the initiator, and who is the architect. Both have a place to express themselves in the creation of the idea, and both are in this field with shared responsibility" (Gershon HaCohen, *What Is National in National Security?*, Ben-Shemen: Ministry of Defense, 2014, Chapter 5). See also the words of Yitzhak Rabin regarding the Agranat Committee report: "In the future, every Chief of Staff will say to himself: I place all the material in my possession on the government's table, along with my recommendation. Until now, it was beyond any doubt clear that from the moment the political echelon relied on my recommendation and instructed action based on it, the political echelon bore, together with me, responsibility toward the situation and toward the executor of the action. Any other division of authority between the military and political echelons, which obligates the first and exempts the second, is impossible and carries extremely serious dangers. If there is no shared responsibility between the two echelons, I, as Chief of Staff, since all responsibility would rest on me and the military, would manage alone the foreign and security policy of the state, because if there is no shared responsibility for the outcomes, there is also no shared responsibility for decision-making" (Yitzhak Rabin, *Service Notebook*, Tel Aviv: Maariv Library, 1979, Part B, p. 414). However, even according to this model, primacy in decision-making is supposed to lie with the political echelon, and the military echelon must present to it all the information in its possession relevant to the matter. [in Hebrew]

7 See, for example: "Civilian oversight in Israel stems from one of the central characteristics of civil–military relations, namely the prominence of the military echelon and its influence on the decision-making processes of the political echelon" (Oren and Michael, *Civilian Oversight in Light of the Territorial Dimension of Security in Israel*, p. 22); "The tireless desire of these leaders to ensure the interests of the various organizations they headed—and of themselves—has caused the actors originating from the security sector to cast, and still cast, a heavy shadow over the leaders of the civilian sector. In doing so, they also cast a heavy shadow over Israeli democracy as a whole" (Gabi Shafir, "The Israeli Security Network and Its Influence," symposium *Between Militarism and Politics in Israel*, 2008); see also Yagil Levy, *Who Controls the Army? Between Oversight of the Army and Control of Militarism*, Jerusalem: Magnes, 2010. Later in the article, we will mention additional critics of this dependency. [in Hebrew]

8 The defense establishment and the military are not identical. However, there is no doubt that the IDF is the most influential actor in Israel's security, and its relative weight is far greater than that of the

recommendations, and to some extent even policy recommendations. In the absence of another body possessing the knowledge and capability to formulate alternative recommendations, the position of the defense establishment effectively directs the actions of the political echelon and limits the flexibility it requires. This has created a situation in which "the only place where work on national security is prepared is the IDF Planning Division."[9] Moreover, the political echelon's lack of sufficient knowledge in the military domain—both generally and in areas requiring its own decision-making—prevents it from exercising substantive[10] oversight over the military echelon's activities and from ensuring their alignment with the political objectives that must be achieved.

We will first examine the current situation and the challenges it creates for both the military and political echelons. We will then review the strengths and weaknesses of the two central institutions operating within the framework of civil-military relations—the Military Secretary and the National Security Council[11]—and finally, we will propose measures to improve the situation in both the long and short-term.

other parts of the defense establishment. Against this background, we will primarily focus on the actions of the IDF; nevertheless, these observations are also valid, with the necessary qualifications, for the other bodies within the defense establishment.

9 Kobi Michael, *"When Authority Bows to the Source of Knowledge."* The reasons why most of the IDF's planning outputs are short-term and do not reflect deep professional knowledge require a separate article. It should be noted, however, that there is a profound problem both in the training of planners for in-depth strategic planning and in the planning process itself, which typically evaluates alternatives only at the end of the process rather than at its outset. Nonetheless, in recent years there has been a noticeable trend toward more thorough staff work conducted at the National Security Council (NSC), and it is to be hoped that this indicates that the NSC is beginning to establish its position as a central leader in comprehensive staff work in the security–political domain in the State of Israel. [in Hebrew]

10 Unlike institutional oversight, that is, the formal-legal subordination of the military echelon to the political echelon (see Yagil Levy, Kobi Michael, and Asaf Shapira, "Extra-Institutional Oversight of the IDF – A Conceptual Framework," *HaMerchav HaTziburi*, 4 (2010), pp. 45–74; for the different approaches regarding the principles of civilian oversight, see Kobi Michael, *Civilian Oversight in the Context of Civil–Military and Military–Society Relations*, in *National Security – A Critical Perspective*, Abraham S. Daniel Center for Strategic Dialogue, 2012). [in Hebrew]

11 It is also worth mentioning the Committee of the Heads of the Services (VaRash). The VaRash is a committee that includes the head of Mossad, the head of the Shin Bet, and the head of Military Intelligence (AMAN), with the Military Secretary to the Prime Minister—and occasionally the head of the National Security Council—attending as observers. The committee is intended to discuss operational activities related to the defense establishment and to coordinate among the various intelligence bodies. Without addressing the committee's authorities, it is clear that it deals solely with specific operational activities. Accordingly, despite its importance, its influence on the routine activities of the defense establishment, force building, or even the conception of national security, is limited.

Knowledge and the Bias Toward the Military Echelon

There are many bodies[12] involved in assessing Israel's security and operational situation, but the IDF is the central actor among them. As a result, and due to the public trust it enjoys, its influence on the functioning of the defense system is considerable. However, the IDF's unique position[13]—particularly the fact that it holds the majority of the country's operational and intelligence knowledge—tilts the balance in the relationship between the political and military echelons.

In the absence of another body possessing the knowledge and capability to formulate alternative recommendations, the position of the defense establishment effectively directs the actions of the political echelon and limits the flexibility it requires

It seems to be generally agreed that the decision-making echelon must have at its disposal the tools to conduct professional and independent evaluation of the plans and positions presented to them for decision by professional actors. The political echelon has "the duty to determine the purpose of the services and branches and the capabilities required of them to carry out their missions. Moreover, it is at this level that the resources allocated for this purpose are determined. Therefore, a branch or service cannot hold the status of an exclusive advisor."[14] This point was also emphasized by the Winograd Committee, which stated:

> When policy-making at the political echelon is based on the recommendations of a single body (such as the IDF or the defense establishment), it is essential that the decision-making forum also has access to a "second opinion" from another body, and that a structured process of challenging the proposers regarding their recommendations takes place before the decision-makers. Presenting differing positions on complex issues contributes significantly to a thorough examination of alternative courses of action, ensures deeper deliberation, and reduces the risk of "groupthink"

12 Among them are the Shin Bet, Mossad, the various directorates of the Ministry of Defense such as the Political-Military Directorate or the Defense Establishment Security Officer, the National Security Staff, the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, the Research Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and many other bodies.

13 It is worth noting that this trust was damaged during the Iron Swords War (see, for example, Moshe Cohen, "A Headache for Zamir: About Half of Israelis Lost Trust in the IDF | Maariv Survey," *Maariv* website, March 8, 2025). Nonetheless, the IDF remains the institution that enjoys the highest level of public trust among the Israeli population.

14 State Comptroller, *Annual Report 38*, Part B, 1988, p. 873. [in Hebrew]

> failures. In political-security matters, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Defense, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs should be exposed to such presentations earlier and in greater detail.[15]

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also emphasized this point: "It is dangerous for the Prime Minister to be in a situation where, on almost every issue I mentioned, he receives a single opinion or one person who centralizes the opinions for him."[16] Nevertheless, over the years, and even after the establishment of the National Security Council, in practice the IDF has remained the central—if not exclusive—advisor to the political echelon in the military domain.[17]

This is the situation in several key respects, as detailed below.

At the level of decision-making regarding the use of force and the analysis of enemy activity, the military is the central actor determining which operational alternatives,[18] which raw intelligence, and which interpretation of that intelligence will be presented to the political echelon.[19] The IDF's exclusivity in presenting alternatives and interpreting intelligence is well known to all involved in military affairs and in the relations between the senior

15 Winograd Committee, *The Committee for the Examination of the 2006 Lebanon Campaign – Partial Report*, 2007, p. 146. [in Hebrew]

16 State Comptroller, *Implementation of the National Security Council Law*, 2012, p. 24. See also: "The key point, regarding the decision-making process of Israeli Prime Ministers, is that they do not make use of professional advisory bodies that present possible alternatives to them. As a result, Prime Ministers generally remain with the alternative they formulated based on intuition, personal beliefs, personal preferences, or feelings. These, as noted, are not necessarily good advisors for making the optimal decision" (Reuven Pedatzur, "National Security in Israel – Who Decides and How," in *National Security – A Critical Perspective*, p. 22, 2012).

17 On cognitive biases and prevailing approaches in the field of civil–military relations, see, for example, Alon Paz, "Generals from Mars, Statesmen from Venus," *Ma'arachot*, 437 (2011), pp. 28–33. It is worth noting that the problems described below are also relevant to other areas in which the government is engaged. For example, this emerges from the State Comptroller's report on the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic by government ministries, and the absence of a body that challenged decision-makers on the matter (State Comptroller, *Managing the COVID-19 Crisis at the National Level – Decision-Making Processes and Their Implementation*, 2021). [in Hebrew]

18 Israel Tal describes that in the past there was an idea to establish a "Minister's Staff" that would examine, on behalf of the Chief of Staff, the data presented by the military and analyze the IDF's recommendations. However, the various Chiefs of Staff argued that the General Staff is the staff of the Defense Minister. As a result, the Defense Minister was found to be "neutralized, dependent on the Chief of Staff, and lacking any tools of his own that would allow him to make independent judgments in various areas and reach decisions. The Minister is left only to choose between the alternatives and recommendations of the Chief of Staff and the Director-General of the Ministry of Defense regarding the Ministry" (Israel Tal, *National Security – Few Against Many*, Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1996, p. 111). [in Hebrew]

19 On the existing and desired relationship between the intelligence bodies and the political echelon, see the article by Col. (Res.) Roi Tamir in this book.

IDF leadership and the political echelon.[20] As a result of its control over military and intelligence knowledge and the manner in which it analyzes this knowledge, over the years—both during wars and in peacetime—numerous claims have been raised by the political echelon that the IDF did not present sufficient alternatives or ones consistent with political directives. Naturally, in such a situation, "the military echelon must be cautious of manipulations of the options presented to the political echelon, even if done unintentionally, thereby effectively leaving the political echelon with no real freedom of choice."[21] Moreover, "in practice, over the years the military echelon in Israel has become the ultimate authority on knowledge regarding the very definition of security threats and the formulation of responses to address them."[22]

The same applies to the IDF's force-building infrastructure. The military remains the exclusive actor presenting alternatives in the areas of force development, in the absence of an independent civilian body with comparable professional capability (at

20 See, for example, *Maariv Online*, "Criticism of the IDF in the Cabinet: 'You Did Not Present Enough Alternatives, There Were No Offensive Plans,'" *Maariv* website, November 13, 2018; "The role of the Cabinet is primarily to discuss in advance and not during combat, in different scenarios, and to map the end-state... The Cabinet is supposed to deal with policy questions... Such discussions did not take place in the current Cabinet... The National Security Council should hold discussions on the strategic purpose, and the IDF should be one of the proposers on this matter. The reality today is that the IDF leads staff work both in strategic and operational aspects" (Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon, quoted in State Comptroller, *Decision-Making Processes in the Cabinet Regarding the Gaza Strip Before and at the Start of Operation "Protective Edge,"* 2017, p. 53). [in Hebrew]

21 Ehud Barak, "The Exit from Lebanon: A Case Study in Echelon Relations," in *Civil and Military Echelon Relations in Israel: Interactions and Oversight Mechanisms*, Jaffe Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, 2003, p. 30. "There are claims that the military manipulates through its presentation skills to promote only the decision proposal that it and the Defense Minister favor. When dilemmas for a decision are presented, one option is good but costly, one is inexpensive but not sufficiently effective, and one is reasonable in terms of outcome and cost—and this last option is usually adopted, which is the one the military intended from the outset" (Aviezer Ya'ari, *Civilian Oversight of the Military in Israel*, Memorandum 72, Jaffe Center for Strategic Studies, 2004, p. 34). On the influence of the information presented by the IDF on the political echelon, see State Comptroller, *Decision-Making Processes in the Cabinet Regarding the Gaza Strip Before and at the Start of Operation "Protective Edge,"* where the Comptroller extensively addressed the implications of the defense establishment's choice not to present existing information on the tunnels crossing from the Gaza Strip to the political echelon. [in Hebrew]

22 Kobi Michael, "Military Statesmanship or Statist Militarism in Israel: Who Actually Determines What Constitutes an Existential Threat and Why?" *HaMerchav HaTziburi*, 4 (2010), p. 112. See also: "The political echelon in Israel lacks (by choice) a sufficiently developed civilian institutional capacity that generates knowledge, and that can systematically and thoroughly develop competing alternatives to the knowledge infrastructure of the military in the context of violent conflict and its management" (Kobi Michael, "Civilian Oversight in the Context of Civil–Military and Military–Society Relations: The Essence of Civilian Oversight – Processes and Principles in a Comparative Perspective," in *National Security – A Critical Perspective*, Abraham S. Daniel Center for Strategic Dialogue, 2012, p. 16). [in Hebrew]

times, it is actually the Finance Ministry that challenges the defense establishment's force-building plans).[23] Similarly, the "Subcommittee on Security Concept and Force Development" of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee stated that:

> the IDF's multi-year plan is designed almost entirely 'from the bottom up,' meaning it is produced through the army's own staff work and without a security concept approved and known to the State of Israel, or an operational concept drafted and approved by the political echelon for the army's activities. An army that plans for itself tends to focus on projects and technology, rather than shaping them in light of a clear concept, endorsed by the political echelon, of what is to be achieved and how… The entire process should be reversed: political-level directives, implemented through IDF staff work under the deep oversight and involvement of the National Security Council.[24]

Moreover, recurring claims have been made that "the material presented to the government and the manner in which it is presented determine the outcome of the discussion, which becomes the military's position—not because alternatives are not presented, but because the participants lack the capacity to contend with the way matters are presented by the military representatives. The military's status in the discussion is greater also due to its prestige and its skill in presenting its concerns."[25] These statements, made some twenty years ago, were recently expressed sharply in the testimony of the then Prime Minister, Naftali Bennett, before the State Commission of Inquiry regarding naval vessels ("The Submarine Committee"), in which he noted that no alternatives to the IDF's force-building in the air domain (aircraft or missile corps) had been presented to him.

Over the years the military echelon in Israel has become the ultimate authority on knowledge regarding the very definition of security threats and the formulation of responses to address them

23 "The General Staff acts, indeed, with the approval of the political echelon—but this echelon lacks the tools to judge and decide accordingly, and therefore it almost always approves the General Staff's recommendations, except regarding budget size… Hence, the decisions are not the result of a comprehensive national assessment, but rather temporary compromises. The budgetary debate does not focus on needs and security conceptions, but on the extent of the ability to meet the military's demands" (Tal, *National Security – Few Against Many*, p. 113). [in Hebrew]

24 Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, IDF Ten-Year Plan 'Gideon' – Special Report of the Subcommittee on Security Concept and Force Building (Public Version), 2017, pp. 3-4

25 Ya'ari, *Civilian Oversight of the Military in Israel*, p. 32. [in Hebrew]

Former Knesset member Ofer Shelah, who served on the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, similarly noted: "In the absence of foundational documents and decisions from the political echelon, and given the inherent weakness of the Ministry of Defense vis-à-vis the IDF—manifested, among other things, in the fact that the military provides the Defense Minister with the information and analysis on critical aspects, such as planning and finance… fundamental organizational changes related to force-building are carried out in the military based on the individual decisions of Chiefs of Staff, each according to his own perspective."[26]

The Loker Committee on Defense Budgeting sharply summarized the situation: "In budgetary terms, there is no effective oversight of the military's demands within the framework of work plans. Likewise, there is no significant supervision over budget implementation. Moreover, the Ministry of Defense generally tends to accept the military's demands almost in full and sees itself as the military's representative before the government and the Prime Minister. In this regard, the military and the Ministry of Defense are one. The result is a lack of sufficient critical discussion regarding the military's annual and long-term work plans."[27]

Moreover, in practice, the IDF's planning bodies deal with issues that clearly extend beyond purely military capabilities and also touch on political questions and foreign relations ("diplomacy in uniform"),[28]

26 Ofer Shelah, "Force-Building Following Iron Swords – Not to Repeat Past Mistakes," *Bein HaKetavim*, 41 (2024), p. 139 [in Hebrew]

27 Report of the Committee on Defense Budgeting, 2015, p. 11. See also: "Once the work plan is approved by the Chief of Staff, discussions take place at the Ministry of Defense, headed by the Ministry's Director-General and the Defense Minister. The Committee noted that the discussions at the Ministry of Defense are limited and do not serve as a counterweight to the military. In most cases, the changes made to the work plan as a result of these discussions are minor. Although, in principle, as the civilian echelon it bears responsibility for oversight and control of the military, in practice it functions only as an approver of the plans presented by the military" (p. 21), and "In the absence of a database and the ability to independently analyze the Ministry of Defense's budget data, and lacking sufficient transparency on key points, it is impossible to conduct a meaningful discussion of the work plan presented and its budgetary implications. The budget ultimately determined is, in most cases, the result of negotiation rather than substantive discussion" (p. 23). [in Hebrew]

28 "Another point regarding the militarization of politics concerns the military's involvement in the policy-making process. An undesirable pattern has emerged in which ideas and plans developed recently were created or examined within a military framework—for example, the 'Roadmap.' It is unclear why the examination of the 'Roadmap' needed to be conducted at a military level. A second example is the heated discussion regarding Arafat's status and Israel's policy toward him, in which security establishment figures—the head of intelligence, the head of the Shin Bet, and the head of Mossad—played a central role. The question arises as to why the opinions of military actors are considered more important than those of civilian governmental officials" (Uzi Dayan, "The Actual and the Desired in Civil-Military Relations," in Ram Erez (ed.), *Civilian and Military Relations in Israel: Interactions and Oversight Methods*, Tel Aviv:

including many areas where it is highly questionable whether the IDF should be the leading actor. In effect, the IDF holds the position of the central and almost exclusive actor in shaping information, analyses, and policy recommendations for the political echelon. "Civilian bodies are unable to compete with the capabilities of the IDF's intelligence, planning, and operations departments to produce sophisticated and rapid staff work around the clock".[29] This situation raises questions about the necessary balance between military knowledge—particularly on issues not central to core military activity—and the need for a diversity of opinions and expertise.

Some argue that due to the weakness of knowledge and planning processes within civilian bodies, the political echelon is left without effective alternatives to evaluate the information and options presented by the military, leaving it "helpless vis-à-vis the military-security sector during discussions and decisions on foreign and security matters."[30]

Dr. Kobi Michael provides the following explanation for this:

> At certain stages, it appears that the advantage of the military echelon and the public's perception of it in Israel as reliable, professional, and free of political bias created the conditions for the military to become an epistemic authority in the eyes of both the public and the political echelon, even leading to an informational dependence of the public and the political echelon on the military. The firm and elevated

Jaffe Center for Strategic Studies, 2003, p. 25); "Excessive reliance by Prime Ministers on IDF staff bodies—a phenomenon clearly reflected in the Planning Branch's role in political matters far beyond the IDF's appropriate area of expertise" (Yitzhak Dror, *We Will Have a Leader!*, Tel Aviv: Maschel, 2011, p. 614); "Diplomacy in uniform: Over the years, many diplomatic contacts with Arab countries and other states were conducted by the IDF. This phenomenon began with the 1949 armistice talks, and since then the IDF has played a central role in all peace talks with the Egyptians, Palestinians, Syrians, and Jordanians. In addition, military cooperation serves as an important tool for developing relations with foreign countries" (Moshe Berda, *Decision-Making Processes in Israel on National Security Issues*, Knesset – Center for Research and Information, 2006, p. 10). [in Hebrew]

29 Berda, *Decision-Making Processes in Israel on National Security Issues*, p. 10. "Almost all discussions in the Ministerial Committee for Security Affairs are outcome-driven and cause-and-effect oriented. For many years, the IDF Planning Branch has been the one preparing work on national security issues, yet it lacks a sufficiently integrative approach to national security—an approach that combines political, economic, and social aspects" (Michael, "Civilian Oversight within the Military-Civil and Military-Society Relationships: The Essence of Civilian Oversight," p. 14). [in Hebrew]

30 See Asaf David, "Civil-Military Relations in Israel: The Dispute and the Missing Link," *Theory and Criticism*, 41 (2013), p. 332, which reviews a collection of articles published in the book *A Military with a State? A Renewed Look at Civil and Security Sector Relations in Israel* (2009). [in Hebrew]; Michael, "When Authority Bows to the Source of Knowledge."

> social standing of the military in Israel (contrasted with the low standing of the political echelon), combined with a political leadership that chose to "take a leave" and leave responsibility for managing conflicts to the military, resulted in a functional arrangement in which the military serves as the thinking, planning, and executing echelon. While all of this is carried out with the authorization—and ostensibly under the guidance—of the political echelon, the directives of the political echelon are, in most cases, derived from the military knowledge infrastructure, a form of hegemonic knowledge for which there is often no substitute.[31]

It is worth noting that this is a general observation and does not necessarily apply in every detail. Within Israel's political echelon, there are senior, highly experienced figures who do intervene in the judgment of the professional, including military, echelon. However, their ability to influence such decisions stems from their extensive experience. Most members of the political echelon lack this level of experience and are therefore forced to rely solely on what is presented to them by the military echelon.

It should be emphasized that this is not a criticism of the system itself, but rather a description of a factual situation that has developed gradually since the founding of the state, with roots deeply embedded in the evolution of Israel's governmental institutions. However, if there is any finger to point, it is directed at the political echelon, which has not created for itself—perhaps out of convenience, a desire to retreat behind the broad shadow of the military in security matters, or for other reasons such as knowledge gaps, political challenges (and fear of leaks), and more—sufficient structural tools that would allow it to develop the required knowledge and to challenge the IDF's planning processes. Instead, it has often been content with informal "kitchen-table" arrangements. In practice, even the most basic steps regarding the provision of fundamental military knowledge to all members of the government participating in the Security Cabinet have generally been avoided by the political echelon. Training programs prepared by the National Security Council and the IDF Planning Directorate have remained unused, and most ministers and cabinet members have refrained from dedicating the necessary time for the required training.

In the final analysis, it can be said that the political echelon relies almost entirely on the IDF as an advisory body, and in practice as an entity shaping policy in the security domain, and at times even in foreign affairs. The absence of the necessary professional and practical knowledge prevents the political echelon from proposing practical alternatives to the military's proposals,

31 Ibid.

and therefore "the result is the military's dominance over the space of discourse between the echelons, and the near-complete weakening of substantive civilian oversight in the face of the military's well-founded, reasoned, and persuasive arguments."[32] The Iron Swords War highlighted these gaps in an extreme manner. Even without addressing the intelligence and military assumptions that led to the colossal failure of the security system at the onset of the conflict, a military monotony was evident in the conduct of operations. On numerous occasions, it was reported that only a limited number of options were presented in Cabinet discussions, which aligned with the military's perception of how the campaign should be conducted, while operational alternatives generally proposed by the political echelon were dismissed outright by the defense establishment and not examined in depth. Throughout the campaign to date, the political echelon has struggled to oversee military activity and to ensure that its operations align with political directives and achieve the strategic objectives outlined by the political leadership.[33]

Intermediary Bodies and Staff Work

The need for intermediary bodies between the political and military echelons is a well-known fact worldwide, and many countries have established official institutions whose purpose is to minimize the negative consequences that can arise from decisions by political leaders who rely solely on personal experience or on the military echelon alone. In the United States, the National Security Council (NSC) functions as a buffer between the political and military echelons. It is an independent body composed of civilian experts that allows the President, who is also the Commander-in-Chief, to receive independent strategic assessments based on all security-related sources available within the U.S. security system, including civilian intelligence agencies such as the CIA, the NSA, and military intelligence.Similarly, in the United

32 Michael, "Military Statesmanship or Statist Militarism in Israel," p. 124

33 And as is well known, there is no absolute presumption that the military echelon will act fully in accordance with the directives of the political echelon, and there have already been cases in which the military acted contrary to the political echelon's instructions for various reasons: "It should be noted that there have already been cases in which senior officers acted based on ethical and political considerations, knowingly or unknowingly, which had significant political implications and at times were contrary to the position of the political echelon. Examples: Chief of Staff Dan Shomron during the First Intifada, who publicly argued contrary to the political echelon's stance that there was no military solution to the Intifada; Chief of Staff Shaul Mofaz and the senior officers of the IDF, who acted in the early months of the Second Intifada in direct contradiction to the political echelon's position and directives; and Major General Oren Shachor, who met with opposition leader Shimon Peres behind the Prime Minister's back" (Kobi Michael & Gabi Siboni, "The IDF and Protest: The Israel Defense Forces and Not 'Defense Forces for Democracy'," INSS, 9.3.2023).

Kingdom, a National Security Council (NSC-UK) was established in 2010, composed of the Prime Minister and key ministers, and tasked with national security. This council is advised by the National Security Adviser, whose role is to provide independent advice on national security and to integrate the various security agencies within the government. Comparable institutions exist in other countries, such as the General Secretariat for Defense and National Security in France, the Office of National Assessments in Australia, and similar bodies elsewhere. What these entities have in common is the goal of ensuring that the political echelon is not forced to accept the positions of security actors in the absence of sufficient alternatives, and of providing the political leadership with a broad, integrative range of options.

In Israel, several attempts have been made to formalize the decision-making process at the political level[34] and to establish bodies that mediate between the military and political echelons and bridge the gaps. At the head of these bodies are the National Security Council (NSC) and the Military Secretary to the Prime Minister. We will outline the main aspects of their roles, both formal and practical, and examine why they are currently unable to provide a sufficient response to the gap described above.

The political echelon relies almost entirely on the IDF as an advisory body, and in practice as an entity shaping policy in the security domain, and at times even in foreign affairs

The military secretary to the prime minister (MilSec)[35] – The roles of the Military Secretary to the Prime Minister are not defined in legislation, nor even in IDF regulations; however, it is generally accepted that "the MilSec is the Prime Minister's liaison to the security establishment, and primarily to the IDF. He is an officer in the Israel Defense Forces and is appointed by the Chief of Staff.[36] He serves as the Prime Minister's personal secretary and his responsibility is for coordination, connection, and updating between the Prime Minister and the security establishment.[37] The MilSec "also handles reading routine intelligence and security

34 See, for example, the Lipkin-Shahak Committee, Recommendations of the Steering Team for the Implementation of the Partial Report of the Winograd Committee, Jerusalem: Knesset, 2007, pp. 30–33, where the committee detailed the stages of preparation for discussions requiring security decision-making by the political echelon. [in Hebrew]

35 There are also military secretaries to the Minister of Defense and to the President of the State; their roles are not substantially different, and therefore we chose to focus on the main military secretary—the military secretary to the Prime Minister.

36 With the approval of the Prime Minister.

37 Lipkin-Shahak Committee, Recommendations of the Steering Team for Implementing the Partial Report of the Winograd Committee, p. 15; see also the Committee for Examining the Prime Minister's Office Staff, Report, 2012, p. 36. [in Hebrew]

material for the Prime Minister and serves as the liaison with all security bodies. The MilSec is also the sole participant in the personal working meetings of the heads of the security bodies with the Prime Minister, and serves as the Prime Minister's representative on the Heads of the Services Committee (VaRash)."[38] The role of the MilSec has gradually evolved over the years, and in parallel, his rank has also risen. In the first decades of the State, military secretaries held the ranks of Lieutenant Colonel and Colonel; however, since the 1990s, with the increasing importance and authority of the Military Secretary, officers are generally appointed at the rank of Major General, as is still the case today.[39]

The role of the Military Secretary is highly influential, as he holds "considerable power over determining which issues will be raised and when they will be discussed in the various forums before the Prime Minister."[40] Nevertheless, at least on a formal level, he remains purely a liaison, without "responsibility for staff work in foreign and security matters, nor the organizational capability to perform such work."[41] Some military secretaries over the years have seen themselves as security advisors to the Prime Minister and have been personally active[42] in the decision-making process. However, it is clear that the role of the Prime Minister's military advisor, in the formal systemic sense, is to serve as a "professional messenger and not an independent advisor."[43] The central function of the MilSec is to act as a link between the Prime Minister or Minister of Defense and the IDF and other security bodies. They can, when required, provide the Prime Minister and Minister of Defense with in-depth information on certain topics, but only according to the line of the security establishment—due to the very nature of their role as liaisons. Ultimately, the character and conduct of the

38 "State Comptroller, Audit Report on the National Security Council", 2006, p. 46 [in Hebrew]

39 Ibid. p. 45

40 Ibid.

41 Lipkin-Shahak Committee, Recommendations of the Steering Team for Implementing the Partial Report of the Winograd Committee, p. 15. [in Hebrew]

42 See the statements of Major General Yoav Galant, who "saw his role as an advisor to the Prime Minister on security matters," as quoted in the State Comptroller's report, Audit of the National Security Council, p. 46. Also see the words of Major General (res.) Danny Yatom: "I think it is a duty to express your opinion and position, and one must remember that the military secretary is with the Prime Minister more than any other aide. There are almost endless opportunities to influence the decision-maker in discussions. This is a position where the potential for influence is enormous" (quoted in Shmuel Even, "The Military Secretary to the Prime Minister at the Crossroads of Security Decisions in Israel," *Tzava ve-Strategia*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2013, p. 74). Additionally, see: "Unclear status and also excessive power of 'liaison officers' of various kinds, such as the Prime Minister's military secretary, who sometimes effectively became a senior security advisor" (Dror, *Manhig Tihyeh Lanu!*, p. 613). [in Hebrew]

43 Aviezer Yaari, *Lemi Meya'ayetzet HaMo'atsa? A Call for a "New Order" in the Status of the National Security Council*, Tel Aviv: Jaffe Center for Strategic Studies, 2006, p. 10. [in Hebrew]

MilSec depend on his personal capabilities and decisions regarding how he performs his role, and he may reflect layers in his actions that are not merely a reflection of the IDF's position. Nevertheless, both formally and substantively, he is supposed to be a liaison representing the stance of the security establishment, not an independent advisor to the Prime Minister. It is also worth noting that the MilSec is usually a "young" Major General for whom this is the first position at that rank, and who has not received dedicated strategic training or specialized training for advising the political echelon. Beyond personal skills, he has no relative advantage over the IDF General Staff personnel, and certainly lacks an appropriate staff apparatus. In light of all this, hearing the opinion of the Military Secretary—whose professional future and subordination are subject to the Chief of Staff—should not pose a significant challenge to the military position already determined. Paraphrasing Ludwig Wittgenstein, at least on a formal level, this would be akin to purchasing the same newspaper twice to ensure that the content of the first copy is accurate.

The National Security Council (NSC) – The National Security Council (NSC) was established in 1999. In 2008, following criticism from the Winograd Committee, which noted that "despite broad recognition of the need for a fully functioning NSC, and various attempts to improve it, this has not yet been successfully achieved,"[44] the NSC's status was formally anchored in law. Sections 1 and 2 of the **National Security Council Law** stipulate that "the National Security Council shall serve as the staff body for the Prime Minister and the Government on matters of foreign affairs and security of the State of Israel,"[45] to be operated by and under the guidance of the Prime Minister.

The roles of the NSC include:

- Coordinating staff work for the government, the security–political cabinet, and other ministerial committees on foreign and security matters;
- Presenting the positions of security bodies regarding issues under examination by the government and its committees, and recommending a chosen alternative;
- Monitoring the implementation of government and committee decisions;
- Conducting inter-agency and inter-ministerial staff work on foreign and security matters;
- Preparing staff work for the prime minister ahead of budgetary discussions on defense;
- Examining Israel's national security concept and proposing updates, among other responsibilities.

44 Winograd Committee, Committee for the Examination of the Events of the 2006 Lebanon Campaign, p. 147. [in Hebrew]

45 National Security Council Law, 2008 (Hebrew Year: 5768). [in Hebrew]

To fulfill these roles, the law establishes that the head of the NSC shall receive "all information concerning foreign and security matters submitted for the attention of the Prime Minister," and that the NSC may request from any government ministry or security system body "information, documents, and reports within the authority of that ministry or body."

More than twenty-five years after its founding, it can be said openly that the National Security Council does not function as a body that effectively challenges the security establishment

In theory, the role of the NSC is precisely to bridge the gap between the directives of the political echelon and the security establishment.[46] However, in practice, doubts arose regarding the NSC's ability to fulfill this mission from the very moment of its establishment. Even today, more than twenty-five years after its founding, it can be said openly that the National Security Council does not function as a body that effectively challenges the security establishment, and there are very few cases in which the NSC has presented an effective alternative that is substantially different from the options put forward by the security system.[47] It appears that the 2012 determination of the Kucik Committee regarding the NSC still holds true: "The NSC has not yet established its professional standing and constitutes a new body in its current configuration, still in stages of formation and development, partly due to the dense map of security bodies surrounding the Prime Minister, with various agencies competing over their degree of influence in the security arena."[48] The fact that this situation persists even more than twenty-five years after the NSC's establishment, according to Darshani, demonstrates that the NSC does not fulfill the role of the "missing link" required between the political echelon

46 "Over the years, the decision-making processes of the government and the Prime Minister have relied to a large extent on the staff work prepared and presented by entities within the defense establishment, primarily the IDF... As of the conclusion of the audit in April 2006, the defense establishment's staff bodies still constituted the dominant force in preparing staff work as part of the decision-making process, while the National Security Council (NSC) generally did not function in practice as a staff body for the Prime Minister and the government alongside the defense bodies, and still lacked appropriate and significant weight as an objective entity representing the Prime Minister and the government, despite the government's 1999 decision." (State Comptroller, Audit Report on the National Security Council, 2006, p. 11) [in Hebrew]

47

48 "The Prime Minister's Office Review Committee, Report, p. 76. See also the conclusions of Dan Meridor and Ron Eldadi in 2018: 'According to the committee, the National Security Council (NSC), which is currently not being allowed to properly fulfill the primary role appropriate to it, is suitable to perform this function...'" Dan Meridor and Ron Eldadi, *Israel's Security Concept – The Committee Report on Formulating the Security Concept (Meridor Committee) and Its Review a Decade Later*, Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, 2018, p. 36. [in Hebrew]

and the military echelon. It is therefore unsurprising that the State Comptroller concluded regarding the NSC's activity during Operation Protective Edge that:

> From the stenographic records of the cabinet discussions examined in the audit, as well as from statements by ministers in the cabinet and senior IDF officials, it emerges that only in a portion of the cabinet meetings held prior to Operation Protective Edge did the NSC present alternatives to the plans and proposals put forward by the IDF, or highlight gaps and problems in these plans. At most, the NSC provided background information on the issues already presented by the IDF. As a result, the plans or proposals put forward by the IDF were sometimes accepted by the cabinet as presented, without the NSC offering alternative plans or proposals to the cabinet ministers. This meant that the ministers were not given the opportunity to understand the potential problems and gaps in the plan they were approving.[49]

The reasons for these difficulties have already been extensively analyzed, both by the State Comptroller and by other sources.[50] In brief, the NSC does not enjoy the trust of the security system's agencies, which create obstacles to providing information to the NSC—particularly raw, unprocessed intelligence—and do not include it in key discussions where positions are formulated. The NSC is viewed by most security agencies as a body whose role is to consolidate various positions and present them to decision-makers, but not as a body capable of presenting independent alternatives, or as a "research entity that conducts in-depth and foundational work without needing to be involved in immediate operational matters."[51] Moreover, there is considerable doubt as to whether it has the tools to carry out such in-depth work; currently, the NSC relies on external research bodies.

The role of the National Security Council (NSC) in force buildup is very limited, and generally it carries very little weight in assessing procurement issues. Due to the heavy workload placed on the NSC, a

49 State Comptroller, *Decision-Making Processes in the Cabinet Regarding the Gaza Strip Before and at the Start of Operation "Protective Edge"*, p. 7. [in Hebrew]

50 See, for example, the State Comptroller's report on the implementation of the National Security Council Law (2012). [in Hebrew]

51 Uzi Arad and Limor Ben-Har, *The NSC – The Struggle to Establish the National Security Council and Anchor It at the Top*, Tel Aviv: Kinneret Zmora-Bitan, 2016, p. 284; see also the State Comptroller's report, *Implementation of the NSC Law*, which noted that both the political and military echelons refrained from involving the NSC in preparations for the "Marmara" flotilla, since it was considered solely a "military operation" ("a specific military incident unrelated to policy formation"), and Yehezkel Dror's critique of this—Yehezkel Dror, *The National Security Council – Reflections Following the State Comptroller's June 2012 Report*, Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 2012, p. 29. [in Hebrew]

significant portion of security discussions is led by other actors, such as the MilSec. The head of the NSC, who is a close confidant of the Prime Minister, is sometimes tasked with responsibilities that require extensive time investment (for example, the NSC's involvement in the Abraham Accords), which makes it difficult for the NSC to focus on its regular security-related duties. Moreover, the professional level of the council is questioned, due to the fact that positions within the NSC are generally considered "interim positions" for individuals who have completed service in the security system or seek to return to it. In this situation, there is considerable doubt as to whether those holding positions in the NSC are capable of—or even interested in—challenging the security system.

In summary, there are many reasons and justifications for why the NSC has not succeeded in fulfilling its role. However, in practice, it is evident that in major crises over the past decade—including the COVID-19 crisis and Operation Guardian of the Walls—the NSC's role was limited, and it failed to challenge the security establishment or establish an independent standing in the central areas under consideration.[52] This point was emphasized by former Chief of Staff Gadi Eizenkot, a member of the political-security cabinet, regarding the NSC's activity during the Iron Swords War: "The NSC is present but absent in Israel's strategic reality. I saw efforts, I did not see their impact in millimeters… so it was more improvisation, office improvisation, and cut-and-paste by the NSC under a lot of pressure."[53]

Long-Term Measures

So, what is the correct way to establish a structured mechanism to strengthen the political echelon's ability to formulate informed policy, and to reduce epistemic dependence on the security system? There is no "magic solution" for this; it requires a combined effort, primarily from the political echelon, but also from the security system bodies, which must ensure that their influence on Israel's political and security reality does not exceed the army's proper role. To this end, we will outline below several initial steps, both

52 On this matter, the State Comptroller wrote in 2017, 18 years after the establishment of the NSC, that "the Prime Minister, who is charged with implementing the NSC Law, must act to ensure that the NSC receives, as required by law, full cooperation from the relevant bodies—particularly the IDF—by taking measures that will obligate these bodies, among other things, to provide information to the NSC without delay. This is especially important given that problems in the area of cooperation between the NSC and the defense system bodies have persisted since its establishment" (State Comptroller, *Decision-Making Processes in the Cabinet Regarding the Gaza Strip before and at the Beginning of Operation 'Guardian of the Walls'*, p. 35). It can be said emphatically that this situation persists even approximately 25 years after the NSC was established. [in Hebrew]

53 Protocol of the Knesset State Control Committee (or Knesset Oversight Committee), dated December 2, 2024, p. 32.

long-term and short-term, necessary to reduce these gaps.

Strengthening the National Security Council

In recent years, much has been written about the need to enact practical mechanisms that will empower the NSC[54] and compel the security agencies to fully cooperate with it. In this context, legislation alone is not sufficient. Mechanisms must be established to ensure that in every interaction between the political echelon and the military echelon, the NSC's essential role is not bypassed. This is in line with the view that "the central figure who must and can make this happen is the Prime Minister."[55] If the Prime Minister decides that the NSC is an essential actor in his work and enforces cooperation from the other bodies, the situation will improve. Within this framework, consistent efforts must be made to eliminate approaches that seek to minimize practical civilian oversight of the defense system.[56] At the same time, steps should be taken to transform the NSC into an "enclave of quality" within the state system, so that its personnel are defined as "high flyers, those destined for greatness… The NSC's reputation as an elite unit will generate a dynamic in which the best civil servants aspire to serve in this organization as part of their career path."[57] Furthermore, it is necessary to ensure that the NSC is legally defined as an independent security body with a unique status in legislation, rather than being subordinate to the Civil Service Commission.

This represents the desired long-term solution. Ideally, the State of Israel should have a fully-fledged security council that addresses central security issues and enables the political echelon to perform its

54 For example, the Misgav Institute stated the need to "immediately staff the NSC and the General Staff with individuals possessing appropriate education in the art of warfare, its principles and rules, and with knowledge and experience to plan and manage decisive systems and wars" (Prof. Kobi Michael & Prof. Gabi Siboni, *Israel 2.0*, Misgav Institute, March 2025, p. 34); see also Shmuel Even, *The National Security Council – Will the New Law Bring Change?*, *Strategic Update*, Vol. 11 (2009), p. 84. [in Hebrew]

55 Arad & Ben-Har, *The NSC*, p. 288. "One possible reason for the NSC's situation is the lack of interest shown by past prime ministers in this body and its development. The fact is that they had no difficulty employing political advisors, assistants, and chiefs of staff whenever they wished. Had they been interested in the NSC, they would have tasked it with preparing government discussions and required all relevant parties to operate through it. In such a case, the new law would not have been necessary at all" (Even, *The National Security Council – Will the New Law Bring Change?*). [in Hebrew]

56 "The 'security network' operates against any real separation or divergence between the military and civilian spheres in Israel, which, in turn, could lead to the professionalization of civilian agencies in security matters, and consequently, to increased efficiency and oversight capability over the defense system" (Gabi Sheffer, "'The Israeli Security Network' and Its Impact," symposium "Between Militarism and Statesmanship in Israel," 2008). [in Hebrew]

57 Arad & Ben-Har, *The National Security Council (MALAL)*, p. 293.

role in the most effective manner. However, as noted, attempts to strengthen the NSC over the past twenty-five years have not succeeded in elevating it to the desired status, and therefore, this appears to be a solution only for the long-term.

The military's involvement should be limited to professional security domains while its engagement in political issues should be significantly reduced

Reducing the Scope of Military Activity

In addition, the military's involvement should be limited to professional-security domains, and, above all, its engagement in political issues and international cooperation—even when directly or indirectly related to security matters—should be significantly reduced. "Excessive military involvement in foreign policy is often the result of a lack of engagement by the political echelon, when the political echelon relinquishes responsibility for strategic planning and policy analysis and becomes a rubber stamp for the military's proposals."[58] It is preferable that the military's international collaborations and foreign activities be reviewed and prioritized by civilian foreign-policy authorities, in order to ensure that the military's international work remains focused on professional-security matters. Limiting these areas of activity will inevitably strengthen civilian oversight of the military and reduce the military's influence in political domains. This, by necessity, requires strengthening the professional bodies in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the NSC, in order to create a professional staff that is exposed to the extensive information held by the defense establishment and capable of integrating these positions with those of external experts, thereby developing expertise and specialization in the relevant topics.[59] Just as a security fence requires responsibility on both military sides to protect the citizens of Israel, so too does Israel need a buffer zone with a clear and sharp line between the military echelon and the political echelonwith national-civilian responsibility and leadership on both sides, for the sake of securing democracy in the Jewish-democratic nation-state.[60]

58 Ben Meir, Yehuda, *Civil-Military Relations in Israel*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, p. 169.

59 It should be noted that the military has an inherent disadvantage in this context. Due to the frequent turnover of positions within the military, it often happens—even in the Planning Directorate—that the officer required to assess what a foreign state might do is a "new" officer whose expertise on the subject is based on knowledge acquired over only a few months or years and who cannot analyze the international system over a long period. Accordingly, the knowledge infrastructure of the Planning Directorate is easily influenced by short-term developments and tends to attribute various tendencies of international systems based on recent events. In addition, the military tends to rely on a relatively closed group of experts and, as a rule, is not exposed to a significant portion of perspectives on the international spectrum. A detailed analysis of this is required, which is beyond the scope of this short article.

60 Dayan, "The Actual and the Desired in Civil-Military Relations," p. 27.

Strengthening the Professional-Security Knowledge Base

In addition to all of the above, there is a clear necessity to require political decision-makers involved in security matters to undergo structured security training to acquire basic security concepts, thereby promoting a **"deepening of the state's core strategic issues through workshops, seminars, and in-depth discussions."**[61] Currently, members of the Security Cabinet do not receive sufficient professional-military training on the matters under discussion, and it is doubtful whether they even desire such training, relying instead on whatever prior military experience they may have had. A comprehensive program of essential security training must be developed for all members and observers participating in Cabinet discussions, in order to establish a shared basis for security discourse.[62] Auditor reports indicate that such a program was already prepared by the Planning Directorate (Agat) and the National Security Council (NSC), but it was not implemented in practice, primarily due to the political echelon's unwillingness to devote the necessary time. Mandating participation in such a program would ensure a baseline level of knowledge among all decision-makers in security matters and would facilitate meaningful dialogue between the political and military echelons.

Personal-Professional Security Staff as a Temporary Solution

In practice, all of the above has already been tried and tested. While some may argue that past attempts were not carried out sufficiently, it suffices to say that the measures presented are primarily long-term, and it is doubtful whether they will provide assistance in the more immediate timeframe.

For this reason, it would be helpful to consider as a temporary solution, the creation of a personal-professional staff for the Prime Minister, including a security advisor for the members of the Security Cabinet. This staff would consist of independent security experts, detached from institutional obligations to any body within the defense establishment,[63] and would be able to fulfill the role of "excellent professional advice" recommended by the Winograd Commission. This team, intended as a "light and agile platform," would allow the Prime Minister and Cabinet ministers to independently review the proposals of the defense establishment

61 Winograd Committee, The Committee for Examining the Events of the 2006 Lebanon Campaign, p. 147.

62 See, for example, State Comptroller, *Decision-Making Processes in the Cabinet Regarding the Gaza Strip Before and at the Start of Operation "Protective Edge"*, pp. 39–43. [in Hebrew]

63 This is in addition to the need to establish an intelligence body ("Ihcha Mistabra") external to the defense establishment, which this chapter will not address.

and challenge the system with new concepts not generally accepted within it.[64] Team members would be former defense establishment personnel or researchers in the security field,[65] with relevant experience and tenure, appointed personally by the Prime Minister and Cabinet members, based on the understanding that their political and military perspectives are fundamentally aligned with those of the Prime Minister. Team members would serve for short periods, corresponding to the tenure of the political leadership, and for a maximum of four years. The team would include at least one person with experience and knowledge in force building and two people with experience and knowledge in operational force employment. The role of this team would be to formulate recommendations for the Prime Minister and Cabinet, as needed, on matters under consideration, or to present issues to the political leadership that they consider require attention. The team would also independently, or in coordination with the defense establishment, examine alternatives to defense proposals on practical operational matters and force-building issues, reflecting the political leadership's objectives. Furthermore, the team would be able to engage with Israeli and international research institutes on these matters—a type of dialogue that currently almost does not occur at the military level.

To this end, this team must be granted clear authorities, enabling it to engage in direct dialogue, without requiring approvals, with any entity within the defense establishment, whether senior or junior, and to review any relevant intelligence—processed or raw—or operational information, as needed to fulfill its role. It is not sufficient to rely on the current "request for information, documents, and reports" mechanism used by the NSC; rather, the team must have access to any source whose perspective has not been adequately heard within the IDF or other security bodies, without prior approvals, and be able to present alternative approaches to the political leadership that may have been overlooked within the defense establishment. This, of course, requires adopting a balanced approach that also considers the reasons why these perspectives were not emphasized in the regular staff work.

64 It is interesting to note that already in the Bible King David appointed a special adviser, who was not a military man, to decide on security matters — namely Ahithophel (known from the phrase "the counsel of Ahithophel," perceived as bad advice, although in the sources it is actually professional and sound advice (Berakhot 3b).

65 "Advisers who are temporarily attached to your staff units, whose future depends on the organization they come from and to which they will return, are—subject to individual differences—more influenced by the positions of the organizations on which their future depends than an adviser who comes from a research body that has no organizational interests or policy positions" (Dror, *We Shall Have Leadership!*, p. 612). [in Hebrew]

Additionally, the team will be able, at the request of Cabinet members, to delve deeper into various issues, drawing on the support of different research bodies, and to instruct the political leadership on the main points.

It should be clarified that this team will not replace the position of the security establishment, which will remain the central authority,[66] nor will it replace the NSC or the MilSec. The role of the team is also not to conduct in-depth staff work, but rather to review staff work produced by other bodies or to generate the basic knowledge required to understand the advantages and disadvantages present in those staff analyses. The team is expected to examine the position of the security establishment, support it, or challenge it based on its experience and expertise.[67] The team is expected to present perspectives different from the existing security consensus, in line with the approaches the political leadership seeks to advance. The team is not expected to conduct independent staff work on broad issues, but rather to challenge existing staff work and identify threads for alternative examination of the issues at hand. As noted above, this constitutes a "lightweight platform," designed to fill gaps in real time, but not to replace the "heavy platforms"—that is, the NSC and the planning bodies.

Such a team would allow for independent, autonomous judgment, uninfluenced by organizational culture, internal hierarchies, or personal dependencies within the security systems. A team not bound by the military hierarchy could raise doubts, present alternative scenarios, and ask questions that commanders in the army might hesitate to raise for fear of damaging their relationships with senior officers. The fact that the team would serve for only a few years would enable it to examine issues without being constrained by the perspectives of its predecessors in the role and could help prevent the entrenchment of ideas through inertia.

Such a team would be able to view the security reality beyond the narrow military

66 As the Meridor team stated: "The importance of the decision-making system in the fields of national security is growing both due to the increasing criticality and complexity of national conduct in these matters, and due to the heavy price that any mistake could exact, as well as the controlled access to information sources, the secrecy of discussions, and the lack of transparency in the system. Decisions of the cabinet... in the fields of national security should rely primarily on the background and professional experience of the professional systems that regularly support the decision-making processes" (Meridor & Eldadi, *Israel's Security Concept*, p. 36). [in Hebrew]

67 "In matters of importance, there are advantages to relying on multiple advisory bodies to ensure positive pluralistic redundancy. For both principled and utilitarian reasons, the Prime Minister's right to consult whomever he wishes should not be restricted, provided that this does not impede the work of the main staff bodies" (Dror, *The National Security Staff – Reflections Following the State Comptroller's Report of June 2012*, p. 29).

point of view, taking broader national considerations into account. The team could also assist in calibrating the tactical considerations that are highly valued at the military level but sometimes overshadow the overall perspective, and reduce the hesitation[68] of the political echelon to reject the military's positions. In this way, the team could help the Prime Minister ensure that overarching national interests take precedence over purely tactical or strategic military considerations. The team would enable political leadership to see a broader picture, integrating military, political, diplomatic, and economic elements.

Moreover, as it is a personal appointment by the Prime Minister, it is likely that this team would be granted the ability to direct security activity more precisely in line with the policy desired by the political leadership. This is particularly relevant given that, in many cases, such policy cannot be stated explicitly to the security establishment due to political considerations or fear of leaks.

For example, suppose not all security actors accept the Chief of Staff's assessment regarding how to deal with Hamas in the Gaza Strip, yet the voices of those who dissent are not heard. It seems that an independent security advisor could have challenged this assessment, based on their knowledge of the field and understanding of the military reality, thereby providing the political leadership with a wider range of options to consider. Alternatively, if the Prime Minister's personal security advisor accepts the military's position in cases where other alternatives are not realistic, this would facilitate the political leadership in making an informed decision, while receiving detailed explanations of why the other alternatives are not relevant. (It goes without saying that the advisor's ability to influence the political decision-making process would also allow them to secure greater cooperation from the security actors seeking to advance their own positions.)

It is correctly noted that even today, senior political actors often assemble informal advisory teams for consultations on security decisions. However, these intimate fora are usually not authorized to view the full staff work and cannot independently verify, either with the military or other entities, points that raise difficulties in their proposals. In practice, such forums can only "echo" the thinking of their own members or the consulted party, but cannot accurately ascertain the situation or formally challenge the military's position. Such fora

68 "Such claims recur repeatedly over the years, and this is just one of many examples of allegations that the IDF mobilizes the power of its skilled systems to steer government decisions in the direction it desires—what was once called 'Little Red Riding Hood stories'" (Yaari, *Civilian Oversight of the Military in Israel*, p. 35). [in Hebrew]

are expected to continue existing even after the establishment of the advisory team we have described, for reasons of trust and convenience. Nonetheless, the expectation and intention are that their use will be limited, serving primarily for brainstorming and nothing beyond that.

In his article, the current MilSec to the PM,[69] Major General Roman Gofman, highlighted the qualities and traits of an independent commander, who has the ability to advise the political echelon even on non-military matters. The traits of such a commander require, among other things, that he develop "a perception in which he sees himself as an autarkic actor. Only his perception of himself as an independent entity, existing separately from the system to which he is subordinate, allows him to employ analytical tools and critical thinking, formulate insights, and ultimately exert influence and effect change on the prevailing mindset imposed on him and around him." Gofman immediately adds that "the commander's perception of himself as autarkic is somewhat contrary to the hierarchical military reality, yet on the other hand, it is a necessary condition for exercising his leadership." Moreover, Gofman states that "a certain paradox exists regarding the commander's influence: it is precisely being a disruptor of the system that grants him a position of influence. What gives the commander the right, and perhaps even the duty, to influence the system so profoundly, stems from the fact that he does not identify with the system's perception of reality. Challenging the perception of reality at its core is what positions the commander in a place of influence."

In practice, it is very doubtful that the military climate allows commanders—except for rare exceptions—to develop such traits. Furthermore, it is evident that the IDF makes significant efforts to prevent any commander from engaging in direct dialogue with the political echelon. Since commanders in the military present reality to the political echelon from a one-sided perspective and do not allow them to learn the reality as it is or influence it, it is necessary to create a "reality-disrupting commander" through external advisors. In our view, this is the primary role of the advisory team to the Prime Minister.

Afterword

The balance between the political and military echelons in Israel lies at the heart of strategic and practical discussions concerning the shaping of national security policy. Despite the clear advantages of the IDF as a professional body, it is evident that decisive steps are required to strengthen the political leadership's ability to address security challenges independently, through deepening knowledge, improving existing

69 Roman Gofman, *The Theater of Commanders – The Learning and Influence Space of the Commander on the Political Echelon, Between the Poles*, 33 (2021), pp. 42–72. [in Hebrew]

mechanisms, and creating professional, independent alternatives. Strengthening these processes will ensure not only informed decision-making but also the preservation of democratic principles and civilian oversight. The path to change is certainly fraught with challenges, yet gradual and continuous progress will allow the creation of a balanced framework in which political leadership can fully exercise its responsibility for the state's security and resilience.

Chapter 8

"A Different Spirit": The Moral Distortion in the IDF's Ethical Code and the Path to Correction

Dr. Ronen Shoval

Executive Summary

This chapter examines the moral conceptions that guide the IDF, through a critical analysis of the current ethical code and the principles on which it is based. The existing ethical code relies on universal principles influenced by the philosophy of John Rawls, particularly the principles of "justice as fairness" and the "veil of ignorance."

These principles seek to neutralize an individual's national, cultural, and social contexts, presenting an egalitarian and ostensibly objective morality. This approach portrays the human being as an abstract individual, detached from social and cultural frameworks, thereby weakening communal cohesion and the ability to articulate a moral hierarchy. Within the IDF, these principles shape the use of military force, endanger the lives of combat soldiers, and impair the IDF's ability to protect the state's citizens.

In contrast to this approach, the article proposes a moral alternative grounded in the Jewish tradition and republican philosophy. This perspective emphasizes the importance of social contexts and commitment to moral circles. The chapter develops alternative moral principles to the Rawlsian tradition and advances the idea of "justice as loyalty" — a commitment to justice rooted in communal affiliation and mutual responsibility, which serves as the foundation for informed moral action.

The concept of "justice as loyalty" holds that primary responsibility is owed to one's immediate community—family, community, and nation—and only thereafter to humanity as a whole. Jewish principles such as "the poor of your own city take precedence" and "your life takes precedence over the life of your fellow" reflect this approach, which views communal cohesion as a necessary condition for meaningful moral existence.

To clarify the circles of responsibility underlying the principle of "justice as loyalty," the chapter proposes the principle of "lifting the veil," which inverts Rawls's approach. Rather than concealing social and cultural contexts, these contexts should be fully exposed in order to define precisely the moral obligations of each individual. This approach enables informed moral decision-making that balances loyalty among different social affiliations.

This approach does not negate universal values; rather, it integrates them within particularistic contexts. In doing so, it resonates with an intellectual tradition that emphasizes the individual's belonging to a collective project oriented toward the universal common good. Values such as loyalty, comradeship, and love of country thus acquire practical meaning as part of the obligation to preserve the community, which itself constitutes a component of the human mosaic.

Accordingly, the article proposes an update to the IDF's Code of Ethics, including emphasizing victory as a central value alongside other values such as responsibility, comradeship, and human dignity. These proposals are intended to balance national commitment with universal morality, while strengthening the foundations of the national community. This approach seeks to address the moral challenges of operational reality in the modern era through the implementation of practical moral principles based on human and collective affinity, integrating Jewish tradition and republican philosophy as guiding principles for the use of military force.

Armies, Ethical Codes, and the Policy on the Use of Force

Over the years, armies have developed ethical codes, stemming from the inherent tension between the need to employ military force to defend a state or community and the requirement to uphold moral principles during the use of that force. While combat is, by its nature, a violent and destructive activity, the existence of an ethical code within the military reflects the recognition that even in times of war, moral boundaries must be maintained to protect the values of humanity and the dignity of the individual.

Concern for enemy civilians at the expense of IDF soldiers is presented as a lofty moral value, but in practice, it constitutes a moral failure

The idea of moral rules in warfare is not new. Its roots can be traced to ancient cultures, for example in the laws of war found in the Torah and Jewish tradition, such as the verse: "When you approach a city to fight against it, you shall first offer it terms of peace" (Deuteronomy 20:10), or in rabbinic restrictions on destroying trees and unnecessary use of the enemy's resources. Similarly, in ancient Greece and Rome, principles of morality in war were written, including requirements to avoid unnecessary harm to civilians. During the Middle Ages, the Christian tradition of the "Just War Theory" developed, aiming to define when it is legitimate to go to war and how one should conduct it.

However, the modern ethical code for armies only began to take shape in the 19th and 20th centuries, alongside the rise of nation-states and national armies, and the corresponding need to regulate military activity. The development of international law and the formulation of the Geneva Conventions marked a significant turning point. These documents sought to establish universal rules to limit the horrors of warfare, such as protecting the wounded, prisoners of war, and civilians. The central idea was that the unchecked use of military force is not only immoral but also ineffective, since even in war, the combatants must agree on certain rules that they have a shared interest to uphold.

Ethical codes for armies thus seek to fulfill three central functions:

1. **Morality and limitations**: They establish a framework that defines the boundaries of combat.
2. **Maintaining public legitimacy**: A code of ethics ensures that the actions of the military receive the support of the civilian population.
3. **Identity and heritage**: The code of ethics strengthens the sense of purpose in military service by framing it not only as a means of defense but also as a mission grounded in values.

The demand for a code of ethics also stems from the complexity of modern warfare. Unlike past wars, which were characterized by clear frontlines, contemporary combat often takes place in civilian environments. These situations present new moral dilemmas, requiring a balance between the need to protect the country's civilians, preserve the lives of soldiers, and minimize harm to innocent bystanders.

Pseudo-morality and Its Implications for IDF's Use-of-Force Policy

The Israel Defense Forces' use-of-force policy currently relies on moral principles that present an appearance of high ethical standards but, in practice, create a dangerous distortion of values. This approach is based on an ideal of universal equality that disregards the fundamental moral obligation of any state toward its citizens and its soldiers. Instead of ensuring the security of Israel's civilians and the lives of IDF soldiers, the current policy blurs the boundaries between the parties in a conflict, thereby undermining the state's role in protecting its population.

As Professor Avi Sagi, one of the drafters of the IDF's ethical code, has stated:

> Victory does not justify the use of force. If 'victory' meets the standard of self-defense, fine; if not, we should reserve the concept of victory for basketball or chess… In 2000, when we were drafting the ethical code, the Chief of Staff at the time, Shaul Mofaz, wanted to incorporate the value of victory into the IDF Spirit document. The drafting team, of which I was a member, told him no: victory is not the purpose of defending the citizens of the State of Israel. The IDF was established as the Israel Defense Forces… When the Government of Israel uses the term 'victory,' it exceeds the bounds of morality.[1]

This approach, which rejects the concept of victory as an objective, is not merely a moral or strategic flaw; it undermines the state's very ability to fulfill its primary duty of protecting its citizens. Rejecting the value of victory is not a semantic debate but a consequential ethical error that leads to a deliberate avoidance of clear and decisive outcomes. It affects the goals of war, its strategy, and imposes constraints that prevent decisive action, leaving the State of Israel in a state of prolonged conflict and security instability. The absence of victory as a goal alters enemy behavior, as they draw encouragement from the lack of resolution, allowing them to strengthen themselves both operationally and psychologically. In this way, the principle of self-defense is transformed from a strategic effort

1 Toby Pollack's podcast, "Episode 418: Avi Sagi on the Ethics of Combat and Warfare, Dealing with Feelings of Revenge, and the Difficulty of Maintaining Human Dignity," *YouTube*, July 27, 2024. [in Hebrew]

intended to achieve decisive outcomes and ensure long-term security into a passive, ongoing mechanism, leaving the state and its citizens chronically vulnerable to emerging threats.

This pattern manifests itself at the operational level. As (then) Major General Gadi Eizenkot described regarding the Second Lebanon War:

> This dilemma arose on the second day with regard to striking two very important targets in Beirut: one was the building that housed Nasrallah's offices, and the second was the building in which Nasrallah's home was located. It would have been possible to strike both of these structures swiftly and by surprise, with a reasonable likelihood of hitting him. That question did not arise at all.
>
> Instead, a rapid pattern was established that required all the people living in that security block to evacuate it. Leaflets were dropped there, Radio al-Manar was informed that we were going to strike. Eight hours before the attack, we struck the surrounding area, and only after eighteen hours—after all these events had taken place—did we strike the two buildings. I think this attests to the morality of the IDF… and this was the pattern by which the IDF operated in Lebanon throughout the entire period.

Likewise, Lieutenant General Benny Gantz, following Operation Protective Edge:

> And then they (the Golani Brigade) wanted to attack, and I was there on the ground and said: wait! And we took a risk with the soldiers of Golani—I personally did so—and indeed no one was harmed in the attack, meaning no civilians were harmed… but I endangered the soldiers of Golani in order to achieve that.[2]

Concern for enemy civilians at the expense of IDF soldiers is presented as a lofty moral value, but in practice, it constitutes a moral failure. A state's primary moral responsibility is toward its own citizens, then toward its soldiers, and only thereafter toward the enemy's civilians, with the enemy combatant at the very bottom of the moral hierarchy. Ignoring this order is not an expression of morality but a grave ethical flaw.

When the state places the safety of enemy civilians above the security of its own citizens and soldiers, it directly undermines its ability to act against the enemy combatant. In practice, the very military force being fought gains a significant operational advantage by being given time and space to regroup. Moreover,

2 Shurat Hadin, Law of War Conference: Former IDF Chief Benny Gantz, *YouTube*, 5.13.2015, m. 20:30 [in Hebrew]

such conduct provides the enemy with a clear and immoral incentive to embed itself within the civilian population.

The current conception of force, based on abstract universal considerations, confuses the proper moral order. It does not reflect moral nobility but rather creates a value distortion that undermines the state's fundamental duty to protect its citizens. The result is ongoing harm to civilian security, unnecessary endangerment of IDF soldiers' lives, and a sustained advantage for the enemy.

These conceptions are not relics of the past but continue to shape IDF operations today. During the Iron Swords War, this distortion was reflected in the words of a lieutenant colonel from the IDF Legal Advisory Department, who stated: "A four-year-old in Gaza is like a kidnapped Israeli child."[3] This statement, masquerading as a humanitarian gesture, effectively erases the necessary distinction between the state's primary obligation to its own citizens and its humanitarian consideration for enemy civilians. Such an assertion undermines the foundations of a sovereign state, whose fundamental purpose is to ensure the security of its citizens. A policy based on an abstract universal principle of equal human life value creates an internal contradiction: it weakens the IDF's ability to carry out necessary operations and compromises both its operational effectiveness and its moral standing.

Finally, I would like to illustrate the conception of the current IDF ethical code through the description by Second Lieutenant Yotam of how military force was employed under his command during the events of October 7, 2023:

> And it is truly astonishing how unique our army is, how exceptional our soldiers are, that we witness such an overwhelming amount of chaos without fully understanding what they are doing—looting, taking equipment, assaulting women in the vicinity—yet we do not fire upon the vast majority because we see they are unarmed. It is remarkable how our army, even in what is called a surprise war, still maintains a sense of morality…[4]

Regarding the question of why they did not open fire, Second Lieutenant Yotam responded:

> Our tank did not open fire; we were acting morally at the time—we saw civilians. From our perspective, we had not yet understood that everyone who entered was in fact a terrorist, and only

3 Yoav Zeitoun, "Eliminate Everyone Who Infiltrated, Secure Funerals with Tanks and Aircraft: A Glimpse into the Attack Operations Rooms," *Ynet*, October 21, 2023. [in Hebrew]

4 "Testimony from a Soldier During the Breach of the Fence: The Soldiers Did Not Fire at the Infiltrators Because They Thought They Were Civilians," *Kol Barama* website, October 23, 2023. [in Hebrew]

> when we saw weapons in their hands did we give the order to open fire and eliminate them. It was only then that we understood whom we were fighting against, and then we made a switch in our mindset.[5]

The remarks of Second Lieutenant Yotam sharply illustrate the moral and operational dilemma to which the IDF's current ethical conception leads. The "morality" that guided him resulted in an operational failure. His description of the hesitation over whether to open fire on hostile elements as they crossed the fence in order to carry out unprecedented atrocities reflects the influence of the ethical code on battlefield judgment. The phrase "we were acting morally at the time" highlights the gap between moral intent and its practical consequences. This restraint, which was based on a momentary assessment of outward appearance—whether or not weapons were visible—led to a delayed response that exacted an intolerable human cost.

The cost of this conception was expressed in the murdered, the massacred, and the abducted in Be'eri, Kfar Aza, and the other communities of the Gaza envelope. The reluctance to employ immediate force on the morning of October 7 was not merely a tactical error, but an integral part of the moral paradigm that prevails in the IDF—a paradigm that contributed to the failure to defend civilians. The moral outlook that guided the soldiers at that moment prevented them from responding in real time to a concrete threat, and as a result, a catastrophe on a historic scale unfolded.

The use of the term "moral" exposes the fundamental flaw in this conception and illustrates how abstract moral principles, detached from the concrete context of the conflict, distort the understanding of reality. Individuals who breached the fence and streamed into the border communities, even if they were not holding weapons at that moment, were not innocent civilians but murderers and rapists seeking to massacre and abduct innocent people. This conception ignores the fact that in conflicts of this kind the enemy deliberately blurs the boundary between civilian and combatant, exploiting the IDF's pseudo-moral values as a tool to advance its murderous objectives.

Moreover, Yotam's account clarifies the extent to which this approach places an excessive burden on combat soldiers in the field. The requirement to wait until a physical weapon is identified in the hands of the enemy creates a reality in which soldiers are forced to take needless risks and to operate under constraints that are ill-suited to the nature of the conflict. These constraints are not only operationally debilitating; they also undermine the soldiers' confidence in their ability to protect themselves and the state's citizens.

5 Ibid.

The need to "flip a switch in their head," as Yotam describes, illustrates the inherent rift between the ethical directives derived from the current code of ethics and the brutal reality in which soldiers operate. This rift leads to a loss of the true meaning of morality and imposes impossible dilemmas on the combatants, stemming from ethical concepts that are ill-suited to the complexities of modern warfare. In such a situation, morality becomes an obstacle rather than an anchor, preventing the IDF from fulfilling its central mission: the effective defense of the State of Israel and its citizens.

We do not wish to reject the ethical intent underlying the IDF's code of ethics, which aims to preserve human dignity and moral values even in the context of military conflict. However, it is important to emphasize that morality is not inherently at odds with operational effectiveness. On the contrary—a moral approach that takes into account the operational and strategic realities can contribute to a more effective defense of the state and its citizens. Morality that incorporates an understanding of the complexities of modern conflicts allows for rapid and focused decision-making while minimizing harm and casualties.

The philosophical foundation underlying the current IDF code of ethics emphasizes abstract universal values, which overlook the complexities of asymmetric conflicts and the primary duty of a state to prioritize the security of its citizens and soldiers. Therefore, there is an urgent need to update the code so that it balances the preservation of moral values with their practical adaptation to the operational challenges of modern warfare, while underscoring the state's primary obligation toward its population.

The Flawed Philosophical Foundation of the Current Code of Ethics

In 1971, John Rawls published his monumental work *A Theory of Justice*. Under Rawls' influence, a new era emerged in the history of ethics in general and political thought in particular. Rawls' highly influential arguments reshaped Western discourse and created a new zeitgeist whose impact extends far beyond military ethics. His ideas permeated not only conscious legal arguments but also the very framework of modern social thought, often unconsciously, affecting all modes of social and cultural behavior and manifesting in the mechanisms of civil, national, and international institutions.

The core arguments of Rawls, which were internalized in the zeitgeist, relate to two principles. The first is the principle of **Justice as Fairness**. This idea is based on two central components:

1. **Liberty**: Every person, by virtue of being human, has an equal right to a system of basic liberties, such as freedom of expression, freedom of religion, and

the right to political participation. These rights must be equal for all and cannot be compromised.

2. **The Difference Principle**: Social and economic inequalities are permissible only if they meet two conditions:
   - They benefit society as a whole, particularly its most disadvantaged members.
   - They pertain to positions and roles that are open equally to everyone, based on merit rather than privileges.

To achieve the principle of Justice as Fairness, Rawls developed his famous second concept, the **veil of ignorance**. The veil of ignorance is an intellectual exercise that asks people to imagine a thought experiment in which they decide on principles of justice without knowing their own social status, gender, religion, or position in society. In this way, they would choose just principles for everyone, reasoning as if they might belong to the weaker groups in society.

In 2005, the Israeli Supreme Court ruled that the use of the "Neighbor Procedure" (*Nohal Shakhen*) was illegal. The Neighbor Procedure had been a longstanding military and moral practice in the IDF, developed to address the unique complexities of fighting in populated areas. Under this procedure, local residents were enlisted to assist military forces by approaching militants and urging them to surrender, with the goal of saving lives and protecting soldiers. The underlying assumption of the procedure was that civilian involvement could reduce casualties while providing an opportunity to prevent violence through non-lethal means. However, it is important to note that the use of the Neighbor Procedure exposed enemy civilians to significantly higher risk.

The Supreme Court ruling marked a profound shift in Israel's moral and legal framework, particularly regarding the balance between operational considerations and abstract principles of justice. Beyond the practical questions, the decision implicitly reflects John Rawls' theory in two main ways.

First, the Supreme Court adopted the veil of ignorance principle. Moral judgment was conducted by abstracting the individual from all social, national, and personal contexts. When a person is stripped of their identity, no distinction can be made between soldier, civilian, or enemy—they are all equal in moral value. The "Neighbor Procedure," which relied on distinguishing between local civilians (whose lives were at high risk) and IDF soldiers, becomes illegitimate from this perspective, since the value of human life cannot be influenced by national context or operational role.

Second, the ruling reflects the principle of Justice as Fairness, according to which justice requires a basic moral equality, even in conflict situations. In the traditional perspective, the life of an Israeli soldier is considered more valuable than that of enemy civilians or combatants, based on

the obligation to protect Israeli citizens and soldiers. The annulment of the procedure removes this hierarchy and applies equal moral value to all human beings. In an era where international morality emphasizes universal rights, the decision presents Israel as adopting moral principles that are independent of circumstances or national interests.

This example, like the striking quotes from Generals Gantz and Eisenkot above, illustrates clearly how the Rawlsian conception has been embedded and turned into the moral-legal operating framework. This prism clarifies how morality and justice are perceived, and how the notion of a new human equality is imagined. According to this view, the way to create equality among humans is by completely detaching them from everything that makes them human. A person is severed from any given essence: they are neither male nor female, neither Christian nor Jew, neither Israeli nor French, neither young nor old, and so on. Through this series of negative descriptors, the person is emptied of any defining characteristics; and when a person strips away everything that makes them human and remains empty of all essence, then all humans are considered equal to one another.

The Philosophical Flaw of Rawls

First, Rawls' concept of the individual is flawed because it presents a person as a rational unit entirely detached from their social and cultural contexts. But what is a person without social, cultural, and linguistic ties? Individuals are not isolated entities; they are an integral part of the society in which they live, a society that shapes their identity and values. Without these connections, the individual becomes an empty concept, lacking substance. In this way, one achieves equality—but it is not equality among real human beings; it is equality among empty abstractions.

Morality arises from belonging to a collective project of a political community oriented toward achieving the common good

Second, Rawls' concept of society is flawed because it relies on methodological individualism. He constructs the idea of society based on a mistaken conception of the individual. First, he considers all people outside of their social context, and then he asks us to imagine society as a collection of individuals. But when society is imagined as merely a set of context-free individuals, the very meaning of society is lost. The only way to truly understand a person is through the context of their society—their language, culture, and values. The individual does not precede society chronologically or logically; on the contrary, society precedes the individual.

An attempt to understand the actions of a 7th-century BCE Indonesian girl in the same terms we use to interpret the behavior of a man in 21st-century New York would be mistaken and even absurd. The

Oedipus' complex may have accurately described the struggles of men in 19th-century Austrian society, but it would be ridiculous to explain the behavior of Julius Caesar using this Freudian model. Every human action we can imagine occurs within a concrete social context. A person is always born into a specific social framework—family, community, culture, place, time, language—over which they have no choice. Therefore, the collective context precedes the individual and shapes their identity.

The goals that a person sets for themselves throughout life are also derived from the social context in which they exist. More than that, a person's context is not a random collection of people and circumstances—these elements provide the individual with collective purposes and values to which they relate. An "I" detached from any identity loses its foundation for meaning. The person's unique identity, their authenticity, is lost. Without the guidance of the collective, the individual loses their moral orientation. They become an isolated, alienated entity. Human life reaches its highest expression when anchored in virtues, and virtues are not abstract systems of universal procedures—they emerge from the definition of the good within a specific community. The actions of the Rawlsian individual are meaningless, because they cannot be grounded in a value system. Without a sense of meaning, people fade into the pursuit of their own selfish needs.

Third, the political framework that Rawls develops is flawed because it serves the conception of the individual that he promotes. Rawls advances the notion of "distributive justice," claiming that in the past the distribution of resources was flawed and that we now discover that an original error occurred. Therefore, property and resources must be redistributed. Here, Rawls fails precisely in the type of argument he accuses utilitarians of: the individual is compelled to satisfy the needs of others. The individual becomes a means only, not an end. In a military context, this translates to a soldier who is forced to risk their life becoming merely a tool meant to satisfy a sense of justice and to absolve the conscience of those sending them into harm's way.

Rawls' political framework, based on the idea of "justice as fairness," undermines the possibility of a viable political community. This is because Rawls grounds his philosophy in methodological individualism, according to which principles of justice are chosen from behind a "veil of ignorance"—a perspective in which each individual is abstracted from their concrete identity (nationality, religion, culture, class, etc.). From this standpoint, a person selects principles that are not dependent on any particular worldview or conception of the good. The result is a neutral political community, in which the state cannot adopt or enforce any comprehensive conception of the good, so as not to infringe on the autonomy of the individual.

However, if a political community is based on neutral principles, the state lacks the ability to promote a moral way of life or shared values, and therefore cannot expect its members to sacrifice their lives in the military. Any particular conception of the good—such as religion, nationality, or cultural ideology—is viewed as an imposition of collective morality on the individual and is therefore rejected within this political framework. In this way, the state becomes a neutral arbiter, whose aim is not to strengthen a shared identity or communal bonds, but to ensure the protection of individual rights within fair institutions.

However, this approach contains an element that undermines the stability of the state itself. A political community, contrary to Rawls's idea, does not exist in a vacuum. It relies on a basic shared ethical agreement among its members, such as loyalty to the state, a common culture, or mutual commitment. When Rawls denies the existence of communal values as a foundation for a just regime, he weakens social cohesion, since a purely neutral state struggles to cultivate a sense of belonging and commitment among its citizens. Exclusive reliance on universal principles strips individuals of their concrete contexts and, at the same time, deprives the state of the ability to offer its members social or cultural meaning.

The political framework proposed by Rawls, based on absolute value neutrality and methodological individualism, undermines the stability of the state and its ability to exist as a cohesive political community. Because Rawls defines the individual as abstracted from his national, cultural, and social identity, he denies the state the ability to promote shared values or demand collective sacrifice. Such neutrality, grounded in the principle of universal equality of all human beings, creates a fundamental tension between the state's primary commitment to its citizens and its supposed obligations to the rest of humanity, including its enemies. For this reason, the traditional concept of military victory—which emphasizes national interest and community primacy—is inherently deemed immoral within the Rawlsian framework. In this way, Rawls's approach undermines the very existence of a sovereign state, as it strips the state of the ethical foundation necessary to ensure its security, survival, and capacity for self-defense.

An Alternative Philosophical Foundation and Updated Ethical Code

The classical ethical discourse, which has shaped Western thought from the time of Aristotle up to the communitarian current of today, rests on a different fundamental assumption. In the direct formulation of Rabbi Yosef in the Babylonian Talmud, Bava Metzia: "The poor of your city take precedence."[6] According to this teaching,

6 Babylonian Talmud, *Baba Metzia* 71a. [in Hebrew]

the order of precedence is: aid the poor before aiding the rich; aid a poor relative before aiding a poor non-relative; aid a poor person living in your city before aiding a poor person living in another city.

This ethical tradition stems from Rabbi Akiva's interpretation of the verse, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18). According to Rabbi Akiva, the meaning of the verse is not that a person should love others to the same degree that they love themselves, but rather that a person should love their neighbor in the same *manner* that they love themselves. In other words, one sublimates concern for others through oneself, using one's own feelings toward oneself as a guide for how to feel toward one's neighbor. It is understood that one will never love another to the exact same degree as oneself—and one is not expected to do so—but it is possible to learn to love others by channeling the love one preserves for oneself.[7]

It should be clarified that this tradition reflects a profound moral outlook that goes beyond charity and also concerns the preservation of life. In this context, the principle is established that "your life takes precedence over the life of your fellow." This principle is integrated with another moral rule derived from the verse: "You shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbor" (Leviticus 19:16). According to tradition, this means that a person is obligated to save their neighbor from danger. One has responsibility and mutual obligation toward others; if one's fellow is in distress, it is a moral duty to come to their aid.[8]

Exclusive reliance on universal principles strips individuals of their concrete contexts and, at the same time, deprives the state of the ability to offer its members social or cultural meaning

This obligation does not apply only to an individual in danger but extends to all of Israel who are at risk. This is the definition of a *milchemet mitzvah* (a commanded war), i.e., "coming to the aid of Israel against an enemy that comes upon them."[9] However, in the context of war, every individual must be prepared to risk much more than merely saving a single person. If saving one person does not justify entering a situation where the rescuer is likely to die, during war an individual must be prepared to place themselves in genuine danger and risk their life, because it concerns the entire community of Israel. From this, as ruled in Jewish law, the principle of *pikuach nefesh* (saving a life) does not apply in the same way during wartime. This rests on the following

7 Ze'ev Magen, "Imagine: On John Lennon and Love," *Techelet*, 8 (1999). [in Hebrew]

8 *Sanhedrin* 73a. See also the discussion by Eliezer Melamed in *The People and the Land, Mutual Responsibility*, Volume 1. [in Hebrew]

9 Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Laws of Kings*, Chapter 5, Halacha 1. [in Hebrew]

moral assumption: there is no freedom or life for individuals if there is no life and freedom for the collective. The life of the community takes precedence over the life of the individual, because individuals exist only as part of the collective.[10]

This Jewish tradition resonates closely with the republican moral tradition, whose roots go back to Aristotle. In Aristotle's terms, man is by nature a social being; that is, human existence is based on life within a community, not as an isolated individual. Aristotle's students and later thinkers developed the republican moral perspective, according to which morality arises from belonging to a collective project of a political community oriented toward achieving the common good.

This approach regards active citizenship and public engagement as central moral values, based on the understanding that true freedom exists only within a community where a balance is maintained between individual liberty and commitment to the collective. This moral framework emphasizes the importance of values such as responsibility, loyalty to the community, concern for social justice, and the struggle against tyranny and corruption. Civic virtues—courage, moderation, and justice—are given special emphasis, as they are seen as essential for preserving the community's freedom and ensuring its moral and political flourishing.

The esteemed historian Polybius[11] emphasized the importance of a state's laws and customs, which he believed reflect the moral character of the shared community. He praised those individuals who were willing to bear any burden for the sake of the common good, even at great personal cost. Polybius maintained that the exemplar of history is the person who prioritizes the welfare of the homeland over that of their relatives, as this loyalty preserves the moral and political strength of the state.

The great philosopher and statesman Marcus Tullius Cicero[12] developed these ideas further, arguing that morality cannot function as a matter of personal interest, for then a person would be inclined to disregard the law and tradition whenever it served their own benefit. Justice is not meant to serve individual gain, as such an approach would destroy it. He asserted that we are capable of distinguishing between good law and bad law through a combination of reason, experience, tradition, senses, emotion, and moral intuition, which together allow us to recognize what is honorable and what is shameful. This, he argued, is our unique human capacity as

10 Rabbi Kook, *Mishpat Kohen*, 145; *Tzitz Eliezer*, 13:100; *Peninei Halacha*, *HaAm VeHaAretz* (*The People and the Land*), Chapter 4, Halacha 1. [in Hebrew]

11 Polybius, *Histories*, Book 6, pp. 401, 436.

12 Cicero, *On the Laws*, Book 1, pp. 42–45.

social beings. Only within a moral and well-ordered community can human potential be fully realized.

Therefore, Cicero explains, moral behavior does not rely on pure abstract logic that operates uniformly in every situation, ignoring context. On the contrary, moral behavior emerges from the context of human life in its changing circumstances. "In all these duties that are imposed upon us, we must consider what is most necessary for each person…" Accordingly, a person should help their neighbor gather the harvest from the field before helping a distant relative. "However, if there is a legal matter, defend your close relative[13] and your friend before doing so for the sake of your neighbor…"

But, similar to the Jewish tradition, this did not prevent him from prioritizing the welfare of the collective over that of the individual. In his work *On Duties*, Cicero offers the following story as an example and model:

> Hannibal had in his hands eight thousand prisoners who had not been captured in their positions during battle or in attempts to escape death… The [Roman] Senate decided not to free them by paying ransom, even though it could have been done for a trivial sum of money, in order to instill in the minds of our soldiers that they must either be victorious or die. When Hannibal heard this… his spirit was broken, when he realized that the Senate and the Roman people, despite their great failure, possessed such steadfast spirit.[14]

New Principles – From the Classical Tradition to Modern Discourse

According to the alternative moral tradition proposed thus far, a moral action is a product of its context. In other words, **justice can only be realized through a link between virtuous qualities and a concrete situation**. In this sense, morality is subordinated to intention rather than outcome. The intention behind the action lies at the heart of moral conduct, because making a moral decision stems from personal commitment and responsibility toward human ties. The just action depends on the context in which the person finds themselves, as this context determines the degree of obligation and the particular virtue required.

Thus, for example, a young battalion commander called to an important meeting with the general while his wife is in labor would know that the moral action in this case is to stay by his wife's side. On the other hand, the same commander would not hesitate to leave his wife in the delivery

13 Cicero, *On Duties*, p. 62.

14 Ibid., p. 185

room when he must lead his troops into battle. As noted, the moral action arises from the context, the circle of obligations, and the virtue required.

Let us frame it this way: we replace Rawls' idea of "Justice as Fairness" with "Justice as Loyalty," and accordingly, instead of the "Veil of Ignorance," we turn to the "Lifting of the Veil."

In other words, while Rawls proposes the principle of the "Veil of Ignorance," whose purpose is to conceal social ties and contexts to ensure justice and fairness, classical ethics offers the opposite approach: to act morally, one must "lift the veil" and reveal social ties and contexts. Understanding these ties is what dictates our moral obligations. The role a person occupies within the different social circles directly shapes ethical action.

The principle of "Lifting the Veil" stands in direct opposition to Rawls' argument, as it asserts that moral decisions must be based on exposing and understanding social ties and contexts. Justice is not achieved by concealing these social connections but instead by revealing them. Only through understanding the contexts can one act in a morally wise and responsible manner.

The family provides an example of the application of the "Lifting the Veil" principle. A person who does not prioritize the lives of his own children over the lives of other children is acting immorally. Parents are required to "lift the veil" and recognize the mutual ties they have with their children. They must acknowledge their deep responsibility toward them and act on their behalf with love, sacrifice, and accountability. Here, the principle of "Justice as Loyalty" emerges—rooted in context and the revelation of virtue. An individual's obligations within different social circles depend on the context in which they find themselves. For example, parental obligations include caring for the welfare of the family and instilling virtuous traits, while the obligations of children differ and include respect for their parents, learning, and cooperation.

In each of the social circles—friends, work, and community—an individual must "lift the veil" and act according to the unique ties of that circle. In the circle of friends, justice is expressed through personal loyalty, trust, and mutual emotional support. In the work circle, loyalty is reflected in respect for the workplace, professional integrity, honoring agreements, and commitment to colleagues, managers, and shareholders. Within the community circle, the individual should act with solidarity, cooperation, and social responsibility, with behavioral norms tailored to the specific community context. In digital communities, transparency, privacy, and equitable access are the primary virtues. At the national level, collective patriotism, national responsibility, and the preservation of values and traditions are central.

The nation as a collective also "lifts the veil," acting to promote welfare and national

unity, while simultaneously striving for peace and fraternity on the international level. At the global level, global solidarity, universal respect, and global sustainability are key. Across all of creation, collective ecological responsibility, respect for all living beings, and ecological sustainability are the guiding virtues.

In all circles, the principle of "Justice as Loyalty" arises from context and the practical manifestation of virtue, though its content varies according to the nature of the ties and obligations involved. The goal of the principle within the different circles is to achieve the virtue that aligns with the context and unique connections of each circle.

Ethical dilemmas often arise from tensions between different circles of obligation. Between advancing a personal career and spending time with family—between loyalty to a friend and loyalty to the workplace, between loyalty to the state and loyalty to an international moral principle.

As noted, because the changing context also alters the morally required action, it is impossible to formulate a single, absolute rule that dictates how one should act in every place and situation. In cases of conflict between obligations to different circles, we introduce a consequentialist standard, which includes two guiding principles: first – commitment to a closer circle takes precedence over commitment to a more distant circle; second – priority should be given to lower-level needs over higher-level needs according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs. This prioritization may, in some cases, lead us to favor loyalty to a more distant circle over loyalty to a closer one. A crucial caveat: politics should never aim to create a society that itself embodies moral virtue, as such a society would be totalitarian; rather, it should only support social mechanisms and mediating agents that encourage community members to cultivate moral virtue.

The tension between spheres of loyalty can manifest as follows, for example: Rachel is a senior executive at a large technology company, leading an innovative project in the field of artificial intelligence. She is also a social activist advocating for human rights and fighting against the misuse of new technologies. Additionally, Rachel is a single mother to a teenage son named Yoav. One day, she faces three significant events simultaneously: her company is about to present the new project at an important international conference, and her presence at the conference is critical for the success of the project and for her career advancement; on the same day, Yoav is undergoing a complex surgery and needs her emotional support and presence at the hospital; and on that very day, a parliamentary debate takes place regarding new legislation on artificial intelligence, legislation she strongly opposes due to its ethical implications, and her presence at the debate could influence the decision-making outcome.

According to the principle of "Justice as Loyalty," Rachel must weigh her commitments as follows: her responsibility toward her son is considered a duty to the closest circle, her obligation to her workplace is a duty to a more distant circle, and her political commitment represents a duty to the most distant circle. To make a morally sound decision, Rachel must "lift the veil," expose the relational ties, and take into account the obligations arising from each context.

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, providing emotional support to her son—who requires a sense of security and belonging—is a more fundamental need than achieving success in the professional project or participating in the parliamentary debate related to self-actualization. Here, "Justice as Loyalty" is expressed through context and the practical demonstration of virtue. Accordingly, the morally correct decision is to be with her son in the hospital during the surgery, and only afterward attend to her other obligations.

However, if Rachel were the Prime Minister, her role would create a different set of obligations, and in the case of a security incident, her primary moral duty would be to attend the urgent security briefing rather than being present with her son during surgery. In this situation, "lifting the veil" reveals that the most significant tie and responsibility is toward the nation's security—a broader connection with far greater significance in this context.

This example illustrates how the principles of "Justice as Loyalty," guided by considerations of intention alongside moderate consequentialist factors, can be used to make a moral decision when there is tension between commitments to different circles. It also shows how one can act ethically in situations of conflicting obligations. "Lifting the veil" emphasizes the need to reveal the ties and contexts inherent in each commitment in order to make wise and balanced moral decisions.

Education and culture play a central role in instilling virtuous traits within each social circle. The family teaches values through personal example, the local community fosters solidarity and engagement through collective activities, and the state is responsible for civic education and reinforcing a sense of belonging and national identity. In this way, the ethical framework of "Justice as Loyalty" is established, in which each individual is aware of their social obligations and fulfills them within their unique context.

The standard for evaluating political, economic, and social policy is the moral character of the people it produces.[15] The state and its institutions are never neutral.

15 Irving Kristol, "Republican Virtue versus Servile Institutions", *The Neoconservative Persuasion: Selected Essays, 1942-2009*, ed. Gertrude Himmelfarb, New York: Basic Books, 2011, pp. 64, 75.

They are moral actors representing interests—at best, the general interest of the people. The role of the state is to serve the people by safeguarding their collective liberty, which allows national culture to flourish, and to serve individuals by providing the means for personal freedom to thrive. This is a moral premise that can hold under circumstances where the state acts vigilantly to promote national culture and instill educational and ethical values, without sliding into authoritarianism. The key to individual liberty lies in a lean, focused state that fosters a strong community and citizens with personal and moral responsibility.

From Theoretical Principles to the Code of Ethics

After identifying the logic underlying the moral framework of the IDF's Code of Ethics and formulating an alternative moral perspective capable of offering a different praxis for the use of force, I will now propose specific amendments to the current IDF Code of Ethics, based on the conclusions drawn from the discussion so far.

Proposed Text for the New Code[16]

Introduction

The Israel Defense Forces is the army of the State of Israel. The IDF is subordinate to the civilian leadership and is under the authority of the government.

The purpose of the IDF is to defend the State of Israel and the Jewish people. IDF soldiers are committed to fighting, dedicating all their strength, and even risking their lives for the defense of the State of Israel, the people of Israel, and all its citizens. IDF soldiers will act according to the values and orders of the IDF, while upholding the laws of the state and respecting the values of the State of Israel as a Jewish state with a democratic system of government.

"The Spirit of the IDF" – definition and origins

"The Spirit of the IDF" is the ethical identity of the IDF, which should serve as the foundation for the actions of every soldier, both in regular service and in reserve duty.

"The Spirit of the IDF" and the operational rules derived from it constitute the IDF's ethical code. It will guide the IDF, its soldiers, commanders, units, and corps in shaping their patterns of action. According to "The Spirit of the IDF," they will act, educate, and evaluate both themselves and others.

"The Spirit of the IDF" draws from three sources:

1. The centuries-old tradition of the Jewish people.
2. The tradition of the State of Israel, its institutions, and its laws.

16 The current Hebrew text can be found on the IDF website here: https://www.idf.il/media/4jrnaaug/%D7%A8%D7%95%D7%97-%D7%A6%D7%94-%D7%9C-10-%D7%99%D7%95%D7%9C%D7%99-2024-3-1.pdf

3. The tradition of the IDF and its combat heritage as the Israel Defense Forces.

Core values

1. **Defense of the Country, the People, and the Citizens:** The purpose of the IDF is to defend the State of Israel, the people of Israel, and all Israeli citizens.
2. **Love of the Homeland and Loyalty to the Country:** At the core of service in the IDF lie love of the homeland and commitment and devotion to the State of Israel.
3. **Striving for Victory:** The IDF acts to decisively defeat its enemies and achieve a clear and unequivocal victory in every campaign. Soldiers and commanders shall demonstrate courage, wisdom, and determination, employing all necessary tools and means to ensure the security of the State of Israel and the people of Israel.

The values

1. **Mission (*shlichut*) –** The soldier will regard their military service as a mission and a calling, being willing to contribute all in their power to defend the state, the people, and the citizens. This is while acting as a representative of the IDF, operating under the authority granted by military orders and within their framework.
2. **Comradeship –** The soldier will act with fraternity and dedication toward their fellow servicemembers, coming to their aid whenever they are in need or dependent on them, regardless of danger or difficulty, even to the point of risking their own life.
3. **Responsibility, reliability, and professionalism –** The soldier will consider themselves an active partner in protecting the security of the state, its citizens, and residents. They will carry out their mission with thoroughness and precision, acting with consistent engagement, initiative, and diligence, exercising judgment within the scope of their authority, and demonstrating readiness to bear responsibility for the outcomes of their actions. The soldier will strive to acquire the professional knowledge and skills required for their role and apply them while seeking continuous improvement of both personal and unit performance.
4. **Leading by example –** The soldier will act in accordance with the standards expected of them and uphold the standards they require of others, recognizing their ability and responsibility, both within the military and beyond, to serve as a worthy example.
5. **Respect for human dignity** – The IDF and its soldiers are committed to upholding human dignity. The soldier will represent their country with honor.
6. **Human life** – The soldier will act thoughtfully and safely in all actions, recognizing the supreme importance of human life, and will avoid endangering their own life or the lives of others in an unprofessional manner during operational activities.

7. **Discipline** – The soldier will act to the best of their ability to fully and successfully carry out what is required of them according to orders and in accordance with their spirit. The soldier will ensure that only lawful orders are given and will not obey orders that are manifestly unlawful.
8. **Moral use of force** – The soldier will use their weapon and force solely to accomplish the mission, only to the extent necessary, and will always preserve human dignity.

Seven Additional Code Values – supplement to the core values of the "Spirit of the IDF":

1. Defeating the enemy is a moral imperative.
2. Intentional harm to innocent people is strictly forbidden.
3. Looting is strictly illegal.
4. The soldier shall always preserve human dignity.
5. Do not attack those who have surrendered.
6. Soldiers must behave with respect and consideration toward uninvolved international forces.
7. Soldiers must behave with respect and consideration toward the civilian population of the enemy.

Regional Strategy: From a Bunker Mentality to a Regional Power

Chapter 9

Beyond Oslo: Israeli Policy in Judea and Samaria

Kobi Eliraz

Executive Summary

The Palestinian arena in Judea and Samaria is unstable, and the current situation poses a serious and continuous threat to the State of Israel. The Palestinian leadership does not accept Israel's very existence, indoctrinates the next generation with profound hatred toward Israel, and remains committed to the phased plan for establishing a Palestinian state from the river to the sea. Persistent terrorist threats exist, and the forces of the Palestinian Authority (PA) are either unable or unwilling to confront them, alongside the risk that these forces themselves could turn their guns against Israel. The PA leads international efforts to weaken Israel's international standing, is systematically taking over Area C, is unilaterally creating facts on the ground, and is harming natural resources and the environment. These threats have intensified since Oct. 7th, and the PA does not meaningfully distance itself from Hamas's aspirations. There is no realistic prospect that, under the current conditions, a Palestinian leadership genuinely seeking true peace with Israel will emerge. It is also clear to most Israelis that the establishment of a Palestinian state would mean the creation of a "Hamastan" in Judea and Samaria and constitute an existential threat to the State of Israel. Therefore, the illusion of separation inherent in the Oslo paradigm must be abandoned once and for all.

In light of these threats, Israel should adopt the long-term goal of a single sovereign state—Israel—while granting the Arab population the broadest possible scope for local self-governance, alongside the opening of pathways both for voluntary emigration and for a gradual process from residency to Israeli citizenship.

Defining the end-goal as a single sovereign state would be a strategic shift and requires careful planning in order to prevent, on the one hand, Israel from becoming a bi-national state, and on the other hand, the creation of a prolonged situation of unjustified discrimination that parts of the Israeli public would not accept and that would also generate significant international pressure. Nevertheless, this goal is feasible and, has more potential for success than the alternative establishing a Palestinian State to live in peace alongside Israel.

However, defining the end-goal as a single sovereign state does not necessarily require the immediate application of sovereignty over all areas of Judea and Samaria. Rather, this objective can be pursued gradually and flexibly, according to circumstances and emerging opportunities. Four parallel courses of action are proposed here to be implemented simultaneously based on the political feasibility and international circumstances.

First Axis: Gradual application of sovereignty and reform of land management policy – there are areas where the application of sovereignty can be done relatively easily, namely: the Jordan Valley and Greater Ma'ale Adumim. From there, the process can advance to the large settlement blocs and eventually to the entire territory. In parallel, the government should formalize all land claims by updating the official land registry (Tabu) with proper documentation. This would provide legal protection, prevent unlawful seizure, and enable a functioning, economically viable real estate market.

Second Axis: Taking responsibility for infrastructure and upgrading Israeli administrative offices – The State of Israel must assume responsibility for all civilian infrastructure in Judea and Samaria (hereinafter J&S), which is currently handled inadequately and partially. This includes overseeing transportation, electricity, water, gas, renewable energy, air quality, wastewater treatment, waste management, and key natural resources like the mountain aquifer. At the same time, the roles of the Civil Administration and COGAT should be redefined to operate proactively, efficiently, and with a clear focus on maintaining Israeli sovereignty.

Third Axis: Dissolution of the Palestinian Authority and transition to decentralized local governance, voluntary emigration or residency process – Decentralized local governance, like Arab municipalities within Israel, would have incentives to avoid funding terror and incitement against

the state. As part of the transition to local governance, a fundamental reform of educational content is required, removing all incitement and promoting recognition of Israel and its positive benefits. Israel should carefully dismantle security infrastructures that threaten its safety, including PA security forces, while considering incentives. Two pathways should be offered: (1) a voluntary emigration program with fair compensation and property, and (2) a residency and citizenship track conditional on renouncing terrorism and accepting civic obligations. This dual-pathway approach will help achieve sustainable demographic balance within the region.

Fourth Axis: Effective international advocacy – A well-structured public diplomacy program is required to explain the plan to other countries. While it is not necessary for all to be convinced, Israel must present its rationale and explain why this is a fair measure and the only approach capable of ensuring prosperity and security for all populations.

While no perfect alternative exists, this single sovereign state model offers the best prospect for guaranteeing Israel's existence and security for future generations, whereas continuing the current situation carries much higher costs and risks.

How did we get here? The Oslo Paradigm and the Establishment of the Palestinian Authority

Until the signing of the Oslo Accords, Israel administered Judea, Samaria and Gaza under a military governance model, while granting relative freedom of movement and employment throughout Israel to all their residents. Against the backdrop of the Palestinian Arabs' rejection of partition proposals and various autonomy plans, and in response to the pressure created by the First Intifada, the Rabin government pushed for the Oslo agreements. The first agreement in the Oslo process was signed in 1993, transferring control of Gaza and Jericho to the Palestinian Authority (PA). In 1995, Oslo II was signed, expanding the scope of Palestinian autonomy to include areas of Judea and Samaria (the West Bank).[1] These agreements were also considered temporary arrangements, whereas any permanent settlement or final-status agreement was explicitly postponed to a later date that has still not arrived. In practice, the signed agreements created a partial administrative and security status quo but did not resolve the central issues of the conflict. To this day, there is no bilateral agreement that resolves the Palestinian demand for statehood or

Israel continues to act cautiously: on one hand, it opposes unilateral measures by the Palestinian Authority and international recognition of a Palestinian state, and on the other, it does not take action to establish its sovereignty over the long term

Israel's rights over the land, alongside its demand for security, and therefore legally and politically, the agreements remain non-final.

The Oslo agreements passed in the Knesset by an extremely narrow margin, highlighting the absence of broad national consensus for such dramatic measures. While part of the public viewed the agreements as a bold step toward peace, others saw them as a significant risk to Israel's security. Rabin himself did not support a fully sovereign Palestinian state but only administrative autonomy. In his final speech in the Knesset on October 5, 1995, considered his political testament, Rabin declared, "We aspire to a Palestinian entity that is less than a state."[2]

Since then, Israeli governments—left, center, and even right—have tried various policies including: attempting to reach

1 Yuval Blumberg, *The Oslo Trap* (Tel Aviv: Sela Meir, 2024) [in Hebrew]; Christopher Barder, *Oslo's Gift of "Peace": The Destruction of Israel's Security* (Jerusalem: ACPR, 2001). [in Hebrew]

2 Yitzhak Rabin, "Government Statement on the Approval of the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement," *Knesset Proceedings*, 13th Knesset, Special Session, 11 Tishrei 5756 (October 5, 1995), Plenary Protocol. Quotation: "We want this to be an entity that is less than a state and that will independently manage the lives of the Palestinians under its authority." [in Hebrew]

a comprehensive agreement to end the conflict, unilateral withdrawal, or simply managing the conflict with no clear future direction. The Palestinian side rejected any proposal that would declare the end of the conflict, even ones that would create an independent state, because its primary goal has always been and remains a single Arab state from the river to the sea. Today, there is a broad consensus in Israel that there is no partner for genuine peace in the foreseeable future. In practice, however, Israel continues to act cautiously: on one hand, it opposes unilateral measures by the Palestinian Authority and international recognition of a Palestinian state, and on the other, it does not take action to establish its sovereignty over the long term.

This dual approach stems, on one hand, from the recognition of the existential dangers that a Palestinian state would pose to Israel, and on the other hand, from a desire to keep this hypothetical possibility open for the distant future, mainly for international considerations. However, it involves ignoring the fact that the current situation is not static and itself poses serious threats to the State of Israel, while also ensuring that these dangers will only intensify over time.

The Illusion of a "Separate and Fenced Off" Palestinian State

The idea that has been raised occasionally—of creating a "separate and fenced-off" Palestinian state, disconnected from Israel—has no basis in reality and reflects strategic blindness. The disengagement from Gaza serves as a test case for this idea; the result was the establishment of a terror statelet on Israel's border, which exploited every fragment of freedom to develop an unprecedented security threat against Israel. Judea and Samaria in the hands of an independent Palestinian state, located close to Israel's population centers and controlling the mountainous terrain that dominates the coastal plain, would immediately become an existential danger. A Palestinian state, even if fenced off and disconnected, would always remain a hub of terrorism and instability directed against Israel. The illusion that it is possible to "get rid of the problem" is a sure recipe for another security catastrophe and for continued international pressure on Israel.[3]

The belief held by many Israelis that in the long term there is no alternative to a two-state "solution," however implausible, is in fact a short-sighted perspective that may buy temporary calm but carries

3 There is a thesis that claims the unilateral implementation of the Disengagement Plan is the reason for its failure. In practice, we transferred authority to the Palestinian Authority under relatively stable security conditions, with proven economic and agricultural potential, and upgraded infrastructure—the PA de facto took over the plan's implementation and signed arrangements regarding the crossings. Abu Mazen himself called the withdrawal "historic days of joy" and even ensured that it took place without incidents.

enormous strategic danger in the long term. Especially today, in light of the accumulated negative experience, Israel cannot allow any withdrawal to borders that are not defensible.[4]

Today it is clearer than ever to most of the Israeli public that the establishment of a Palestinian state would mean "Hamastan" or another form of a terrorist entity in Judea and Samaria, posing an existential threat to the State of Israel. What is less clear is that the current situation—under which Israel maintains freedom of military action throughout the territory while continuing to sustain the Palestinian Authority—also entails many costs and risks. In the next section we will examine the problems inherent in the status quo, and in the section following it we will propose courses of action for changing the long-term objective in a way that addresses these risks.

The Problems with the Status Quo

The PA's Struggle against Israel and Ongoing Incitement

The fundamental problem with the Oslo model is that the Palestinian side was never truly a partner in the vision of two states for two peoples, living side by side with dignity and prosperity. Public statements by Palestinian leaders, the continued incitement in schools and mosques promoting hatred of Jews, and the emphasis on a Palestinian narrative that demonizes Israel all indicate that they do not genuinely recognize Israel's right to exist in any borders.[5] The peace process, as perceived by Israel and the United States, was meant as a means to resolve the conflict through the establishment of two states. However, from the Palestinian perspective, it was merely as a stage on the way to realizing a vision of a single Palestinian state encompassing the entire territory of Israel.

4 Boaz Hezni, *Why Israel Cannot Exist Without Judea and Samaria*, Jerusalem: Author's Publishing, 2020. [in Hebrew]

5 Senior officials in the PLO and the Palestinian Authority continue to express positions that challenge the very existence of the State of Israel. For example, PA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas has repeatedly asserted Israel's illegitimacy in his speeches, stating that "the Palestinian people will never recognize a Jewish state" (Abbas speech in the Palestinian Parliament, 2011; Yosef Kuperwasser and Shalom Lipner, "The Problem Is Palestinian Rejectionism – Why the PA Must Recognize a Jewish State," *Foreign Affairs* 90 (2011), pp. 2–10). As well, systematic studies of Palestinian textbooks reveal a consistent pattern of incitement, demonization, and denial of Israel's legitimacy. Reports by IMPACT-SE and the Knesset Research and Information Center (2016–2024) show Israel being presented as an illegitimate foreign entity, the use of non-Jewish religious terms for sites in Israel (e.g., "Al-Buraq Wall" instead of the "Western Wall"), erasure of all references to the State of Israel in maps, and justification of violence as a legitimate means to liberate Palestine (see: Arnon Groiss, *Palestinian Textbooks: The Attitude to Jews, Israel and Peace*, IMPACT-SE Report, 2024; and Knesset Research and Information Center report on Palestinian textbooks, 2016). [in Hebrew]

The Palestinian leadership's refusal to accept Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people is manifested, among other things, in the continued demand for the right of return, which is not related to the "1967 occupation" but rather to the War of Independence.[6] Similarly, the 1974 decision of the Palestinian National Council regarding "national authority over any liberated area" is framed as a step toward "full liberation." This is a phased approach that allows partial achievements to serve as a springboard toward the ultimate goal.[7] It should be noted that in all PLO symbols, including those of its official bodies, the map of "Greater Palestine" is depicted, covering the entire area from the sea to the Jordan River, sometimes incorporating grenades and rifles.[8] Likewise, in the PA textbooks across all levels of education, including academic institutions, maps are consistently used that erase Israel entirely. There are documents signed by the Palestinian leadership recognizing Israel, but these are for external, symbolic, and public-relations purposes, allowing the Palestinian Authority tactical flexibility to present whatever message is most palatable to each audience.[9]

The leadership of the PA has indeed abandoned terrorism as its primary means of exerting pressure on Israel, but it continues its struggle to delegitimize Israel internationally and acts unilaterally to create facts on the ground through illegal construction. Although it does maintain security coordination with Israel against terrorist elements, in practice this primarily serves the PA against its own rivals, while Israel is the one that does the "dirty work" that actually prevents terrorism in practice.

The unwillingness of PA leaders to unequivocally condemn even the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023, further reflects their lack of recognition of Israel's right to exist. Here are several examples of statements made by the PA following the attack:

Jibril Rajoub, a Palestinian public figure and Fatah member, stated in an interview on November 22, 2023:

6 Adi Schwartz and Einat Wilf, *The War of the Right of Return*, Tel Aviv: Dvir, 2018; Joel Fishman and Yossi Kuperwasser, "Willful Blindness and the Mistake of Underestimation: The Oslo Gamble," *National Resilience, Politics and Society*, 2(1) (2020), pp. 9–50; Yosef Kuperwasser and Shalom Lipner, "The Problem Is Palestinian Rejectionism." [in Hebrew]

7 Palestinian National Council, "The Political Program" (Ten-Point Program), adopted at the 12th session of the Palestinian National Council, Cairo, June 8, 1974, PLO, https://web.archive.org/web/20070520034344/http://www.un.int/palestine/PLO/docone.html [in Hebrew]

8 "Official Palestinian Authority Office Erases Israel in Its Logo," *Palestinian Media Watch*, October 5, 2022, https://palwatch.org/page/32622 [in Hebrew]

9 Morris Hirsch, "The State of Palestine Is Only a Step Toward the Destruction of the State of Israel," *Mabat Latikshoret HaPalestinit*, September 11, 2022, https://palwatch.org/page/41375 [in Hebrew]

> What happened on October 7 did not come out of nowhere. The responsibility lies with the continuation of the crimes of the occupation, because what happened was part of a defensive war by the Palestinians... The explosion that occurred on October 7 is a natural response to this terror [by Israel], because those who control Israel are a model of the new Nazis.[10]

Mahmoud al-Habbash, the Supreme Sharia Judge and religious advisor to Mahmoud Abbas, said:

> First, let me say that we kiss every forehead, every hand, and even every foot that carries out ribat [a religious struggle to defend Islamic land and Palestine] at the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque and in Jerusalem... We are behind them, the leadership is with them. The President [Abbas] blessed them a few days ago, strengthened them, and asked them for even more ribat.[11]

Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), in his speech at the UN General Assembly, expressed a purported condemnation of the Hamas attack, but simultaneously presented a symmetrical stance and criticized Israel, claiming that "the Hamas attack provided Israel with additional excuses to act in Gaza."[12]

Popular Palestinian Support for Armed Struggle Against Israel

Surveys by the Palestinian polling institute indicate broad support for Hamas among the Palestinian population. Key findings from surveys conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR) show strong backing for Hamas following the events of October 2023. A survey conducted after October 7 found that 72% of Palestinians supported Hamas's decision to initiate the attack against Israel. Most respondents view Hamas as representing Palestinian interests more effectively than the PA. Between 46% and 63% of Palestinians believe that an armed struggle is the most effective way to achieve national goals, while support for diplomatic negotiations is significantly lower. 72% expressed support for the establishment of armed groups, such as the "Lion's Den," which operate independently of the Palestinian Authority.[13]

10 Friday Sermon, Official Palestinian Authority Television (PA TV), November 5, 2014; documented by *Palestinian Media Watch (Palwatch)*. [in Hebrew]

11 The Security Experts Team, "'A Commendable Attack': How the PA and Fatah Responded to the October 7 Events and Why They Cannot Govern in Gaza," *The Security Experts Website*, December 12, 2023. [in Hebrew]

12 Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), in his statement at the UN General Assembly, ostensibly condemned the Hamas attack but simultaneously presented a symmetrical stance, criticizing Israel by claiming that "Hamas' attack provided Israel with additional excuses to act in Gaza."

13 Khalil Shikaki (Ed.), "Quarterly Public Opinion Polls," *Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research* (PCPSR), May 6, 2025.

Additionally, terrorists are often referred to as "martyrs" and "heroes," and streets, schools, squares, and sporting events are named after them. Although there is a slight decrease in Palestinian support for the fight against Israel among Gazans, this is primarily due to the heavy price they are paying, rather than a genuine willingness to reach agreements or peace with Israel.

A Continuous Threat of Terrorist Attacks Against Israelis in Judea and Samaria and Within the Rest of Israel

In 2023 and 2024, the Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet) conducted extensive operations to thwart terrorist attacks against Israelis in Judea and Samaria, in Jerusalem, and within the Green Line. The following are key data points:

Thwarted attacks: In 2023, 1,032 actual terrorist attacks were thwarted. In 2024, 1,040 actual terrorist attacks were thwarted, including 689 shooting attacks, 326 bomb attacks, 13 stabbing attacks, 9 vehicular ramming attacks, 2 suicide attacks, and one attempted kidnapping. Within Israel proper, 20 terrorist cells composed of Arab citizens of Israel were exposed, five of which planned to carry out bombings or car-bomb attacks. Israeli casualties: In 2023, 43 Israelis were killed and 225 were wounded; in 2024, 46 were killed and 337 were wounded. In 2024, 3,682 terrorist operatives were arrested in Judea and Samaria and within the Green Line, compared to 5,100 arrests in 2023.[14]

For comparison, in the 15 years prior to the Oslo Accords (1978–1993), 270 Israelis—both civilians and soldiers—were killed in Judea and Samaria by Palestinian terrorist organizations. In the 15 years following the accords, between 1993 and 2008, 1,450 Israelis were killed by Palestinian terrorist organizations, i.e., five and a half times as many.[15] In the Gaza Strip, from 1967 until the Disengagement, 282 Israelis (including soldiers) were killed. In contrast, on October 7 alone, 1,163 Israelis[16] were killed, and from that date until August 2025, a total of 1,911 Israeli civilians and soldiers had been killed.[17]

The Palestinian Authority, in any of its possible configurations, does not want to—or is incapable of—confronting the existing terrorist organizations. In order to secure popular support, it prefers to adopt a policy of inaction or merely symbolic action.

14 Moran Ditch, Shaul Arieli, and Rivka Meller, "Summary of Terror Attacks in Israel and Judea and Samaria, 2023–2024," INSS website, February 2, 2025; Shin Bet, 2024 Annual Summary, The Shin Bet in a Multi-Front War, online. [in Hebrew]

15 Erez Tadmor, "The Blood Test of the Peace Formula – The Oslo Accords and the People of Tomorrow," *Mida*, September 29, 2014. [in Hebrew]

16 "October 7 – The Data That Tells It All," Government Press Office (GPO), 10.7.2024. [in Hebrew]

17 Monthly and annual terror reports on the Shin Bet website – https://www.shabak.gov.il/reports/; Ditsch, Arieli, and Melar, "Summary of Terror Attacks in Israel and the West Bank." [in Hebrew]

This situation creates fertile ground for the continued transformation of Judea and Samaria into strongholds of dangerous terrorist organizations. These organizations are gaining increasing confidence and influence, and in large areas—especially where there is no permanent Israeli presence—they dare to openly and brazenly display both weapons and power.

The Threat of a Mass Attack and Infiltration into Israeli Territory from Judea and Samaria

What surprised us in the Gaza envelope on October 7 could surprise us again in the heart of the country. It is true that the existence of Israeli settlements throughout Judea and Samaria, Israeli traffic on the roads, the presence of the IDF, and the daily work of the Shin Bet all work to reduce the element of surprise. Nevertheless, the scope of activity required from the IDF and the Shin Bet across Judea and Samaria as a whole testifies to a persistent desire to carry out attacks, which, even if usually thwarted at an early stage, has not disappeared. The illusion that this involves only a small group of extremist terrorists still misleads parts of the public, but the number of attempted attacks and the variety of places from which they originate point more than anything else to the backing and sympathy enjoyed by the attackers among the broader Arab-Palestinian public that supports the continuation of violent struggle.

Moreover, in many areas the lack of any permanent Israeli presence allows terrorism to flourish. Examples include the reality in northern Samaria, the entire area between Shechem, Jenin, and Tulkarm, as well as the Tubas area, the Arura bloc in Binyamin, the Dahrieh bloc in the Hebron Hills, refugee camps, and other locations where armed organizations operate openly. The IDF operates there from time to time with significant force, but Palestinian capabilities in such areas persist. A large-scale or even relatively limited attack, using tractors and various civilian means to breach the barrier, pickup trucks, and parachuting drones in order to seize and take control of vital terrain such as a community, a military base, or a central roadway, would be relatively simple to carry out. Arab attempts to massacre Jews have been occurring for a hundred years, and the ongoing effort by Arabs in Judea and Samaria to carry them out demonstrates that this intent has not disappeared and must not be ignored.

The Threat of a Reversal of the Security Forces of the Palestinian Authority

A reversal scenario in which the security forces of the Palestinian Authority direct the weapons they received from the State of Israel against it has already occurred in 2002 during the joint patrols,[18] in the midst of the Oslo terror wave known as the Second Intifada. Personnel from all Palestinian

18 Anthony H. Cordesman, *The Israeli-Palestinian War: Escalating to Nowhere*, Prager, 2005.

security apparatuses (the Preventive Security, the police, the National Security Forces, and the General Intelligence) took direct part in the fighting against IDF forces.

Even today, some of the central terror operatives are former employees of the Palestinian Authority security services, and some serve in both roles simultaneously. For example: the attack in the community of Eli (February 2024), in which a Palestinian police officer murdered two Israeli civilians; the incident in which IDF officer Major Bar Falah was killed in a clash with armed militants, among them members of the Palestinian Authority security forces; and the July 2025 attack in which the civilian Shilo Zvuluni was murdered at the commercial center at the Gush Etzion Junction by two terrorists who were active-duty officers in the Palestinian security mechanisms, among other cases. A report by the Regavim movement (2024) revealed that over the past three years, more than 80 officers and policemen from the Palestinian security services were involved in attacks against Israelis.[19] If the PA comes to believe that this reflects the will of the Palestinian street, there is a high likelihood that it would join the fighting in practice against the IDF, participate in an incursion into a single community or a group of communities, or even launch an attack on the "Judea and Samaria envelope" or inside the Green Line.

Over the past three years, more than 80 officers and policemen from the Palestinian security services were involved in attacks against Israelis

PA Financial Support for Terrorism

The PA's support for terrorism, particularly the financing of terrorists and their families, has been a consistent policy since its establishment. This support is economic, institutional, legal, and symbolic, benefiting terrorists who are imprisoned in Israel, those who have been killed (the "martyrs"), and their family members. The PA pays fixed monthly salaries to terrorists serving prison sentences in Israel, based on the severity of the attack or the length of the sentence—the longer the sentence, the higher the salary. These amounts can sometimes exceed 10,000 shekels per month. Some terrorists also receive promotions in rank, bonuses, and additional payments to their families.

For example, the terrorist Marwan Barghouti, serving five life sentences, receives the status of a "senior officer" in the Palestinian public service. Families of terrorists killed during attacks receive one-time grants of several thousand dollars, followed by monthly pensions as "compensation for the sacrifice of the son." These grants sometimes include assistance for education, housing, and healthcare, all

19 Yona Admoni, *Police by Day – Militants by Night: Involvement of Palestinian Security Forces in Terrorism*, Regev, March 2024.

anchored in formal institutional structures. In 2004, the PA enacted the "Prisoners' Rights Law," which effectively makes every imprisoned terrorist a "state employee." The law defines a terrorist as someone who "fulfilled his national duty" and grants them economic, medical, and pension rights. Responsibility for these payments is held by the PA's Commission for Prisoners and Released Prisoners, a well-funded official body. The budget amounts to hundreds of millions of shekels per year. According to Israeli Ministry of Defense data, in 2022 the PA invested approximately 512 million shekels in payments to terrorists and their families, and about 241 million shekels to families of "shaheeds" ("martyrs"). These sums account for roughly 7% of the PA's budget, sometimes exceeding the health or welfare budgets.

In 2018, the State of Israel enacted the "Law to Offset Palestinian Payments to Terrorists," which allows Israel to deduct the amounts paid to terrorists from the taxes it transfers to the PA. In February 2025, the PA chairman signed a presidential decree abolishing the previous payment mechanism, which had been anchored in law, and transferred the distribution of allowances to an independent institution that provides aid based on economic hardship, ostensibly without distinction between terrorist families and others. In practice, cuts were made, and automatic payments to roughly 1,600–1,700 prisoner families were halted. Nevertheless, most families continued to receive support through the new channel, sometimes via informal intermediaries,[20] and PA President Abu Mazen repeatedly stated, "We will not stop paying prisoners' salaries, even if we are left with only one shekel."[21]

Severe Anti-Israel and Antisemitic Incitement in the Education System and Mosques

The curricula of the Palestinian education system are full of antisemitic content, portraying Jews as an inferior race or not as human beings. Beyond the maps that completely erase the State of Israel, they glorify "shaheeds" and promote a narrative based on an ongoing struggle; and discuss the "right of return" to all parts of the homeland conquered, from Acre and Haifa through Jaffa, Ramla, and Lod to Kiryat Gat, Ashdod, and Ashkelon.[22] This education ensures that hatred of Israel is preserved and passed down from generation to generation. No sovereign state would allow such "freedom of opinion and religion," whose sole purpose is to deny the neighbor's right to exist and even to destroy it, despite having a peace agreement with that neighbor.

20 Maurice Hirsch, "How Will We Know the PA Has Ended the 'Pay-for-Slay' Policy?", *Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs*, May 27, 2025

21 WAFA, "President Abbas Meets Representatives of the Prisoners' Movement," July 22, 2018. [In Hebrew]

22 "Official Palestinian Education System: Glorification of Terrorists and Delegitimization of Israel," Ministry

Mosques serve as a central social and cultural hub for Palestinians in Judea and Samaria, and they are often used as a platform to spread incitement and encourage violence. During Friday sermons and other religious events, calls for terrorism and the promotion of hatred toward Israel are sometimes heard. Moreover, the loudspeaker systems in the mosques are occasionally used to broadcast extremist messages, which exacerbate regional tensions and fuel hostility toward Israel.

Incitement in mosques has a deep impact on the Palestinian public and intensifies hatred toward Israel. These messages, which are frequently heard and spread throughout communities, especially influence the younger generation and, in practice, lead to acts of violence and terrorism.

Unilateral Palestinian Land-Grabs

A significant portion of the land in Judea and Samaria is not registered in the land registry (Tabu). The land registration process, known as "first registration," requires a complex proof of ownership, leaving many areas legally ownerless. Within these lands, there is a category called "surveyed land." The legal status of surveyed lands has not yet been resolved, placing them at the highest risk of takeover and exploitation by Palestinians. The current situation, in which surveyed lands are neither declared state lands nor registered in the land registry, creates a strategic weakness, effectively results in the loss of large amounts of land, undermines Israel's ability to develop central and important areas, and carries security implications.

There is another type of land—declared state lands that are neither formalized nor registered in the land registry (Tabu), and are not cultivated. Even in this category, Palestinians exploit the situation: they begin cultivating the land, thereby acquiring legal possession as recognized under Ottoman law, which still applies in the area (Jews cannot do this due to a ruling by the Israeli Supreme Court requiring proof of connection documents).[23] Additionally, Palestinians carry out a unilateral land registration process in the Palestinian land registry, even in Area C, aiming to establish ownership and weaken Israeli ownership claims. Although this registration has no legal validity, it still constitutes a blatant violation of the Oslo Accords. Israel officially responded to this only recently through a significant cabinet decision in 2025. Israel must protest this

of Diaspora Affairs and the Fight Against Antisemitism, July 2024. [in Hebrew]

23 Supreme Court of Israel (HCJ) 5439/09 *Ahmad Abdelkader v. Military Appeals Committee* under the Order regarding Appeals Committees, Ofer Camp; and HCJ 5391/11 *Michael Lesans v. Head of the Civil Administration* (March 20, 2012), ruling by President D. Beinisch (with the agreement of Justices M. Naor and E. Arbel). In addition to the order, in the administrative sphere there is the Order regarding Lands (Interference with Private Lands) (Judea and Samaria) (No. 1586) [amended text], effective from 2010 onward. [in Hebrew]

to international bodies and demand that international institutions not recognize the unilateral Palestinian registration. But, at the same time, this requires Israel to take decisive steps in land registration and management.[24]

The PA is not interested in regulating construction, resulting in significant neglect in this area, allowing continued de facto takeover through Arab construction. Roughly speaking, while Jews build an average of 4 housing units per dunam (1000 square meters), Palestinians build 1 unit per 4 dunams. Palestinian construction in Areas A and B is neither planned nor restricted; it spreads over a large area and occurs mainly in rural areas. Expansion efforts are mostly directed toward Area C, aiming at gaining control over it.

In this context, it is worth mentioning the Palestinian flagship outpost "Khan al-Ahmar," which still has not been addressed; the village of "Dkeika," which was established illegally and was legalized by Defense Minister Gantz, demonstrating a complete lack of understanding of the Palestinian Authority's strategic takeover trend in the Judean Desert, which aims to create a continuous presence extending to the Bedouin areas near the city of Arad; and the attempts to establish a large construction project near the settlement of Amichai in the Shiloh Valley, among others.

Destruction of Natural Resources and Environmental Damage

The results of all open land that characterizes Palestinian behavior results in severe harm to natural resources and the environment throughout the region. Unregulated and unplanned stone quarries scar the landscape wherever there is a desire to exploit natural resources fully and immediately. Illegal water drilling reached such an extent that Israel decided to supply water to the Palestinians and built appropriate infrastructure solely to prevent the destruction of the mountain aquifer.

The Palestinians do not act to preserve the areas defined as nature reserves by the Oslo Accords but rather to take control of them. For example, under the Wye Agreements (1998), the PA was given responsibility for the "Judean Desert Reserve Areas" designated as nature reserves and green spaces, which are part of Area B. The result was total neglect, illegal construction, and frequent landscape violations, until in 2024, following political intervention by the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, the regional IDF commander signed demolition and enforcement orders for the agreed-upon reserve.[25]

24 "Israeli Security Cabinet Decision to Resume Land Registration in the West Bank Is Illegal," *Adalah*, June 2, 2025. [in Hebrew]

25 Elisha Ben-Kimon, "For the First Time: IDF Evacuates Illegal Palestinian Construction in the 'Designated Agreement Area,'" *Ynet*, December 12, 2024. [in Hebrew]

Similarly, the entire Judean Desert Plateau—the area above the cliffs on the slopes of the Hebron hills, a uniquely scenic landscape—has been severely damaged. Even areas that were previously designated as restricted "military live-fire training zones," which blocked access, have been breached. The Palestinians have paved roads, installed electricity infrastructure, and encouraged illegal construction on the scale of thousands of homes. Illegal waste disposal sites and pirate quarries have been established, causing severe landscape violations and extensive environmental destruction. Despite numerous appeals to the PA's agencies and legal battles, the takeover continues almost unchecked.

The anarchy in all open areas allowed by the PA results in severe harm to natural resources and the environment

Archaeological sites are also targets for destruction and takeover. Valuable archaeological finds are often looted or used as building materials—thus lost forever—as part of an effort to undermine the Jewish connection to the land.

Burning garbage is the common method of waste disposal, and it harms the air, groundwater, and soil. Any attempt by Israel to address the issue or calls for cooperation to implement proper waste management have failed miserably. Sewage treatment facilities barely exist; Palestinians mostly rely on cesspits that pollute both groundwater and streams. Most sewage treatment plants operate only through Israeli initiatives and exclusively in Area C.

All of this demonstrates that the Palestinian Authority is completely incapable of managing the territory with an understanding of the necessary municipal needs and balances, including the preservation of natural resources and the landscape. Meanwhile, the damages continue to accumulate, and their effects are not confined to the territories but extend into the rest of Israel.

The Palestinian Authority Acts Against Israel Internationally on Diplomatic and Legal Fronts

For many years, the Palestinian Authority has been promoting a campaign of boycott, delegitimization, and criminalization of Israel on the international stage, using UN institutions, international courts, non-governmental organizations, and academic forums.[26] This activity aims to portray Israel as a violator of human rights, an occupying power, and an apartheid state, in order to generate political, economic, and legal

26 Liran Ofek, "The Palestinian Authority, the BDS Movement, and Delegitimization," *INSS Website*, February 20, 2017. [in Hebrew]

pressure against it. The following is a summary of the main activities:

Referral to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague: In 2015, after Israel blocked the Palestinians' request to become full UN members, the Palestinian Authority joined the Rome Statute and submitted an official request to the ICC. Since then, the Authority has been working to have the ICC investigate alleged "war crimes" by Israel in Judea and Samaria, Gaza, and Jerusalem. The cases raised include "settlement-related crimes," "illegal firing" in Gaza, house demolitions, administrative arrests, and more. In 2021, the previous prosecutor opened a preliminary investigation, and in 2024, a request was submitted to reopen it.[27]

Referral to the International Court of Justice (ICJ): In December 2022, the Palestinian Authority led a UN resolution to refer a question on the legality of the Israeli occupation to the ICJ. Although this is a request for an advisory opinion, it carries significant diplomatic weight. The opinion may address aspects such as the legality of the settlements, the status of Jerusalem, the separation barrier, the status of the Palestinian Authority, and international law.[28]

Integration with the BDS campaign: The Palestinian Authority does not directly initiate the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) campaign, but it coordinates with it in principle. Senior PA officials, including Saeb Erekat and Mahmoud Abbas, have praised the campaign and called on academics, cultural institutions, and consumers to refrain from purchasing Israeli products—especially those from the settlements. The PA has even established an internal Palestinian mechanism to "monitor the implementation of the boycott."[29]

Leading UN resolutions and agency initiatives: The Palestinian Authority promotes anti-Israel resolutions at the UN almost every month, including recognition of observer state status, condemnation of the settlements as "illegal," UNESCO resolutions against the Jewish connection to the Temple Mount and the Western Wall, condemnation of the Nation-State Law, investigations at the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), and more.[30]

27 "Statement of ICC Prosecutor on the Situation in the State of Palestine and Israel", **un.org**, October 30, 2023

28 United Nations General Assembly, Resolution A/RES/77/247, "Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem," December 12., 2022

29 Ali Sawafta, "Palestinians' Abbas Swings Behind Boycott Campaign", *Reuters*, 22.5.2010

30 Elior Levy, "Abu Mazen at the UN: Our capital is all of East Jerusalem—otherwise there will be no peace," Ynet, 27.9.2018; "President Abbas Draft Law to Boycott Settlement Products," english.wafa.ps, 31.12.2015; Ali Sawafta, "Palestinians' Abbas swings behind boycott campaign," Reuters, 22.5.2010; "UN chief: Palestine

Direct diplomatic action to boycott Israeli products: The Palestinian Authority has enacted local legislation prohibiting the sale of products from the settlements in Areas A and B. In 2010, a public campaign was even conducted to boycott Israeli goods. These Palestinian consumer campaigns are sometimes funded by foreign entities and operate in coordination with the Palestinian Ministry of Economy.[31] Additionally, all transfers of food and goods from the Israeli market to the Palestinian market pass through official channels that charge certain fees or fixed extortion payments.[32]

Mobilization of academic institutions and human rights organizations: The Palestinian Authority supports Palestinian and international organizations that run campaigns against Israel—such as Al-Haq, BADIL, DCI-P, and Adalah—which submit reports to the UN Human Rights Council and the UN. Some of these organizations have been designated as terrorist organizations in Israel due to their connections with the Popular Front.[33]

Attempts to block diplomatic relations between Israel and other countries: The Palestinian Authority operates with Arab, Muslim, and even African and Latin American countries to prevent normalization with Israel or to cancel cooperation agreements. Any political progress with an Arab country (for example, the Abraham Accords) is met with condemnation and Palestinian attempts to thwart it.[34]

The Palestinians have succeeded in spreading their false narrative worldwide, particularly on university campuses in Europe and even in the United States. Slogans like "From the river to the sea" have become a central tool in Palestinian

to join ICC on April 1," Al Jazeera, 7.1.2015. [in Hebrew]

31 Ali Sawafta, "Palestinians' Abbas Swings Behind Boycott Campaign," "Palestinians Ban Settlement Goods," Al Jazeera, 26.4.2010; Harriet Sherwood, "Palestinian Boycott of Israeli Settlement Goods Starts to Bite," The Guardian, 29.1.2010.

32 On the fees and rents collected by Palestinian authorities or security forces from traders in Judea and Samaria: *Unlocking the Trade Potential of the Palestinian Economy*, World Bank Group, shows that to release each shipment, the importer must pay a "service fee" to Palestinian government offices amounting to 5–10 percent of the cargo's value. *Doing Business 2020: Economy Profile of West Bank & Gaza*, World Bank Group, reports mandatory registration with the Palestinian chambers of commerce at a cost of 50 NIS as a registration fee plus 100 NIS annually as a condition for obtaining an unloading permit. *Ruling Palestine II: The West Bank Model*, Crisisgroup.org, documents local security officers imposing "service" levies on food trucks entering West Bank cities. Dore Gold & Yaacov Amidror (eds.), *Can the Palestinian Authority's Fatah Forces Retake Gaza? Obstacles and Opportunities*, Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, Policy Studies 105 (Jan. 2009), pp. 14, 65, note that NSF commander Abu Jaber in Nablus demands "protection money" from business owners as a condition for their security.

33 "Defense Minister Declares Six Popular Front Organizations as Terror Organizations," Ministry of Justice, 27.10.2021. [in Hebrew]

34 See, for example, Stephan Farrell, "Israel Hails UAE Deal but Palestinians Dismayed," Reuters, 8.14.2020.

propaganda, presenting their claims as demands for justice and the protection of human rights, and have garnered significant support.

A single sovereign state – Israel – is the only option capable of ensuring Israel's existence and security for generations to come

The Alternative: Establishing a Long-Term Goal of a Single Sovereign State and Gradually Progressing Toward its Realization

In light of the ongoing threats inherent in the current situation and the severity of the existential danger posed by a sovereign Palestinian state alongside Israel, the long-term objective should be redefined as a single sovereign state – Israel – while granting the Arab population the maximum degree of local self-governance and creating pathways both for voluntary emigration and for Israeli citizenship.

Adopting the goal of a single state indeed represents a strategic shift and requires careful planning to prevent Israel from becoming a bi-national state on the one hand, while ensuring that no long-term, unjustified discrimination arises that part of the Israeli public cannot accept, and that the international arena will oppose and create diplomatic obstacles. A Jewish state, ultimately, is a more stable and sustainable strategic objective than a Palestinian-Arab state living alongside Israel.

The necessary change for us is mental and psychological. If we were able to undergo such a shift during the signing of the withdrawal agreements, the Oslo Accords, and the Disengagement, we can achieve a similar transformation now. Is this a perfect alternative, free of challenges and costs? Certainly, not. Yet it is the only option capable of ensuring Israel's existence and security for generations to come, whereas continuing the current situation entails far higher costs and risks.

The practical expression of the strategic shift from two states to a single sovereign state does not have to involve the immediate application of sovereignty over all of Judea and Samaria. Sovereignty should be the final step in a gradual process of changing the reality on the ground. The goal can be clearly defined, and the intention to apply sovereignty can be publicly declared, as recently decided by the Knesset,[35] while advancing its implementation gradually and flexibly, according to circumstances and emerging opportunities. Four courses

35 Knesset Plenum, "The Knesset Voted in Favor of a Declaration Calling for the Application of Sovereignty in Judea, Samaria, and the Jordan Valley" (7.23.2025) [declarative decision, not legislation]; see also: Bills on the Application of Sovereignty in Judea and Samaria, P/5720/25; P/5760/25 (25th Knesset) – early discussion status. [in Hebrew]

of action are proposed here to be pursued simultaneously, in line with political possibilities and the international situation.

First Axis: Gradual Application of Sovereignty and Change in Land Management Policy

The Jordan Valley and the Settlement Blocs First

There are areas where the process of applying sovereignty can begin with relative ease: the Jordan Valley, the Greater Ma'ale Adumim area, and then the major settlement blocs.

The Jordan Valley serves as a natural security buffer against the vast Arab-Islamic region east of Israel. Its importance has been underscored recently by Iran's efforts to arm terrorist organizations through smuggling routes in the valley. It is a long and exposed border—especially in light of the fragile situation of the Hashemite regime in the Kingdom of Jordan and its relatively limited ability to act to thwart such activity. Therefore, applying sovereignty in the Jordan Valley would send a sharp and clear message, both to the Palestinians and to the international community, that Israel is determined to ensure its security and will not agree to compromises that could endanger its future. The Arab population in this area is relatively sparse, and therefore does not pose a great demographic challenge. The Jordan Valley is a topographical territorial unit whose entrances and exits can be controlled while requiring the creation of a physical barrier over relatively small sections. Application of sovereignty in the Jordan Valley includes the territory of the Megillot Regional Council, with a connection southward to the Tamar Regional Council, northward to the Ma'ayanot Valley Regional Council, and to Jerusalem via Highway No. 1. After sovereignty is applied there, infrastructure development should be advanced to connect the area to Highway 5—the Trans-Samaria Highway—in order to attract residents. The valley has unique characteristics of security importance and a sparse population, similar to the Golan Heights, in a way that allows for broad consensus among the Israeli public. The rights and obligations of the Arab-Palestinian population will be elaborated on later.

After applying sovereignty in the Jordan Valley, sovereignty should be applied to the Greater Ma'ale Adumim area, meaning from Qedar and Givat Adumim, through Mitzpe Yehuda toward the Mishor Adumim area and the communities of the Adumim bloc—Mitzpe Jericho, Kfar Adumim, Alon, and Nofei Prat—as well as the E1 area, up to the Az-Za'ayyem checkpoint. In this area also live Bedouins from the Jahalin tribe, who would be included at this stage of the application of sovereignty and presented with a pathway to residency and citizenship. This would sever their ties with the Palestinian Authority and allow flexibility regarding the solutions proposed for their relocation or consolidation. This area as well is one whose entrances and exits can be controlled, and parts of it already have

infrastructure in the form of the security fence, which can be completed relatively easily.

The next area would be complete settlement blocs, including the Shilo bloc and the western part of the Gush Etzion bloc, within which the status of the communities, outposts, and farms would also be regulated. Here too, it would be possible to include the Arab villages within the territorial unit and offer a graduated pathway to residency and citizenship.

By contrast, the blanket application of sovereignty over Area C is not recommended, because at present there is no geographic buffer between Area C and the rest of the territory, and therefore it would be impossible to control it as a separate area. This open situation would allow Arabs in the area and its surroundings to seek citizenship through family reunification, similar to the situation in East Jerusalem in Kafr Aqab and the Shuafat refugee camp. Subsequently, it would be possible to advance toward the application of Israeli sovereignty over additional distinct areas, and ultimately over the entire territory.

Reform in the Management of State Lands and Survey Lands

One of the central challenges in applying sovereignty and effective governance in Judea and Samaria is the management of state lands and lands that are in survey status, whose legal standing has not been normalized. Two-thirds of the lands in Judea and Samaria are not registered in the land registry, whereas one-third of the lands are.[36] Among the lands that are not registered, there are several types:

1. Declared state lands.
2. Privately cultivated lands.
3. Survey lands whose legal status has not been determined.

Among the lands that are registered and formalized in the land registry, there are two types:

1. State lands.
2. Private lands.

For lands that are not formalized in the land registry, the law in Judea and Samaria is based on Article 78 of the Ottoman Law, according to which *miri* or *muqafah* land that a person cultivates and holds for ten years without interruption is considered theirs by virtue of possession.[37] In other words, it is possible to acquire rights to land through cultivation over time. Therefore, even state lands that are not registered in the land registry and are uncultivated are vulnerable to appropriation, and the authorities must act to protect them. Likewise, survey lands

36 Haim Sandberg, *Public Law of Land in Israel and in the Judea and Samaria Areas*, Jerusalem: Israel Bar Association, 2022. [in Hebrew]

37 "Types of Land in Israel," Yanko & Co. – Law Offices, 8.21.2024. [in Hebrew]

require a legal determination to prevent the kind of illegal takeover described above.

To begin bringing order to the issue and prevent further appropriation, several immediate steps must be implemented:

Registration in the land registry: The process of registering lands in the Tabu must be renewed and applied to all lands in Judea and Samaria, a measure recently announced by the government.[38] As part of this, the currently confidential land registry should be opened to the public. This will allow transparency and help protect state lands. Land registration will provide full legal protection, prevent illegal appropriation, and enable a free and functional real estate market.

Mapping and regularization: A land survey must be conducted, and all lands that are not declared should be registered. Afterward, the registration of declared state lands must be ensured. In addition, the issue of the "blue lines" and the severe consequences resulting from the removal of houses from valid plans must be addressed, and the requirement for opinions in cases of communities established under seizure orders—where they now wish to continue building—should be canceled.[39]

Enforcement and supervision: Enforcement in the survey land areas must be strengthened to prevent illegal cultivation and appropriation. It is necessary to deploy dedicated monitoring teams and advanced technology for surveillance and enforcement technology, expand the Civil Administration's authority to oversee all lands in Area C, and provide rapid response to illegal takeovers.

38 Nir Hasson, "The Cabinet Ordered to Advance Land Registration," *Haaretz*, 5.12.2025. [in Hebrew]

39 In the 1980s and 1990s, a large portion of the settlements was built based on declarations and determinations of the "blue lines," which define the boundaries of state lands on which construction plans were advanced. Most of these declarations were made by Attorney Pleah Elbak from the State Attorney's Office. In the early 2000s, it was decided to refine these declarations because the plan lines had been roughly drawn without precise digitization. Although in some cases it appeared that plans had been approved even on lands that seemed cultivated, Elbak had conducted very meticulous work and, in some instances, determined that cultivated lands had been abandoned and thus could be used for Israeli construction plans. However, inexperienced and irresponsible junior officials challenged these determinations. As a result of this precision work, many existing houses were removed from approved plans, leaving their owners facing a problem that requires a long and burdensome legal process with the state. The Attorney General did rule that a solution could be applied (using Section 5 of Order 59 regarding government property) but placed the responsibility for implementing it on the affected citizens.
Additionally, settlements established in the 1970s were built under military seizure orders (prior to the period of state land declarations). These settlements did not necessarily utilize the entire area granted under the seizure order, and today, when they wish to make use of it, they must prove that the seizure order was indeed properly formalized. This is a long and arduous process, created by the Attorney General based on a strict interpretation of the law.

Legislation: Administrative orders must be approved to protect state lands and survey lands, and existing orders must be enforced, as they have so far been applied selectively—for example, the "Disturbing Use Order" (an order that allows the military commander to see changes in land cultivation and to instruct its cessation and remove the cultivator from the land), which until now has been applied only against Israelis.

Public diplomacy and international policy: Information should be presented on the international stage to clarify the strategic importance of state lands for Israel, and to highlight the Palestinians' actions regarding land registration as a unilateral process that undermines regional stability.

Normalization of Land Acquisition in Judea and Samaria

If an Arab wishes to sell land to a Jew today, the process is extremely cumbersome and carries a life-threatening risk for the seller. Approvals must be obtained from Muslim courts operating in the area—which are not under the authority of the State of Israel—for inheritance orders and other matters, and sometimes approval from the PA is also required. Even when the lands are registered, a lengthy process is needed to prove the inheritance orders of the original owners, some of whom reside in hostile countries, which further complicates and delays the transfer of ownership. An Arab who sells land to a Jew may face severe punishment or even a death threat from Palestinian society, where the act is considered a grave betrayal. Due to the fear of exposure, it is often necessary to use "intermediary Arabs," which complicates the transaction even further.

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After the land purchase, the real estate transaction must undergo numerous reviews in the Civil Administration, some of which are repetitive, and many approvals are required before the transaction can be registered in the name of the Israeli buyer. These checks and approvals take many years, making it difficult for the buyer to engage in transactions in Judea and Samaria and placing the investment at extremely high risk. The difficulty is compounded by the fact that the Civil Administration system is heavily burdened (partly due to cumbersome requirements), some of the employees handling these cases live in Areas A and B and are subject to pressure and threats, and some have even been prosecuted in the past for accepting bribes to advance or block registration.

To ensure a free, secure, and efficient land market in Judea and Samaria, dramatic steps must be taken to remove existing obstacles. The following are the key actions that could transform the reality on the ground:

Establishment of a Muslim Shari'a Court under Israeli authority: Currently, in any transaction in Judea and Samaria—even between Arabs—approvals from Shari'a courts under the PA are required to verify inheritance orders and ownership rights. An effective solution would be to establish a Muslim Shari'a court operating in Judea and Samaria under Israeli authority, similar to the Shari'a courts functioning in Israel. This court would be recognized by the Israeli authorities and would eliminate landowners' dependence on Shari'a courts under the PA.

Streamlining committee work and appointing additional professional staff: There is an urgent need to reinforce the professional staff within the committees and registration offices. Additional employees should be appointed, preferably Israelis fluent in Arabic, in a manner that matches the scope of the real estate and the volume of transactions, enabling efficient service and shortening the registration time for each transaction.

Land acquisition by the state: The state can serve as a central player in purchasing lands in Judea and Samaria, especially in strategic areas of national interest. It is appropriate for the state to re-enter the field, even through semi-state organizations such as the Jewish National Fund. Acquisition by the state would remove regulatory obstacles and allow for the enactment of orders that facilitate land registration. The state could also bypass the need to prove long-term ownership ties and carry out a faster process than private entities. Such procedures existed in the past, are legal, and can be reinstated, upgraded, and adapted.

Second axis: Assuming Responsibility for Infrastructure and Upgrading Israeli Administrative Offices

Integrating the Civil Infrastructure of Judea and Samaria into National Plans

Currently, in Israel's infrastructure development at the nationwide level, the Judea and Samaria region is treated as ex-territory. The fact that the State of Israel does not consider these areas as an inherent part of its territory for long-term planning hinders the development of the entire country, resulting in inefficiencies given Israel's geography. This approach must change in light of the shift toward a unified sovereign state. This applies to transportation, electricity, water, and other infrastructure frameworks.

This includes assuming responsibility for all civil infrastructure in the region, including the planning and oversight of roads and interchanges, electricity, water, gas, and renewable energy; preventing air pollution; planning and monitoring sewage treatment facilities; waste collection; and managing key natural resources such as the mountain aquifer, sand and stone quarries, and more.

In the energy sector, it is essential to secure the infrastructure for energy transmission and distribution, including gas pipelines, alongside the promotion and development of renewable energy sources such as solar power, wind turbines, and electricity-generating plants. This infrastructure is a vital component of the region's energy security and quality of life, and it carries long-term environmental and economic implications.

The shift in approach will lead to planning how to connect public transportation infrastructure in Judea and Samaria with the rest of the country, while upgrading existing road systems, Israel Railways infrastructure, and public transport networks, including the light rail systems in Jerusalem and the Gush Dan area. Such development could significantly reduce the existing congestion in central Israel. With the extension of Highway 5 to the Jordan Valley, residents of Gush Dan would be able to travel to the Sea of Galilee via Samaria and the Jordan Valley. Highway 60 could serve as a parallel route to Highway 6, linking Be'er Sheva with Haifa as a 4-lane highway with convenient interchanges and junctions. For electricity, this planning should ensure that the electrical grid and energy distribution networks in Judea and Samaria are fully integrated with the national system, supporting increased capacity for both residential and transport-related energy needs.

In addition, the establishment of an international airport under full Israeli control should be considered in a strategic location, such as the Allenby Crossing or the Horkania Valley, as has been examined in the past. This airport could serve as an alternative to Ben Gurion Airport and would be preferable even to proposals for airports at Ramat David or Nevatim. It would improve the quality of life for all residents, serve the Palestinian population comfortably, and facilitate those seeking to emigrate. This option could become even more feasible after sovereignty is applied in the Jordan Valley.

Reform of the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories and the Civil Administration

Since the Oslo Accords, the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) and the Civil Administration have been the two main bodies managing the Palestinian population and the area under Israeli control. These bodies reflect the paradigm that Israel's presence is temporary and will eventually transfer authority to the Palestinian Authority and withdraw. With the understanding that Israel will be the sovereign over the entire territory, their roles must be redefined to operate proactively, efficiently, and purposefully, with the aim of preserving Israeli sovereignty and ensuring stability on the ground.

COGAT will henceforth be called "The Office for the Coordination and Upgrading of Government Activities in the Judea and Samaria Region" (possibly abbreviated as *MALSHAB*), or simply "The Regional

Administration Office." At this stage, and until the application of full sovereignty, the office will continue to operate within the Ministry of Defense, under a designated minister—similar to the existing Settlement Administration currently within the Ministry of Defense.

The new office will focus on leading the overall strategic policy for managing the region and on creating an operational framework that strengthens Israeli interests while providing services to all populations. It will be headed by a civilian at the rank of Director-General of a government ministry, with appropriate experience. The new ministry will be responsible for planning and implementing a comprehensive policy for the overall management of the Judea and Samaria region, coordinating all government offices involved in this matter, including budget consolidation. The ministry will also manage all interfaces with the Palestinians. The policy will include setting a long-term strategy that integrates security, economic, legal, and social solutions, alongside the establishment of municipal authorities throughout the region. Management of all civil matters and the processes of voluntary migration, residency, and citizenship will likely be handled by separate offices in full coordination.

Oversight of the incentives: The ministry will design an incentive system aimed at encouraging cooperation from the Palestinian leadership and population. This system will focus on providing economic, educational, and social incentives to the population that acts in cooperation, while reducing support for those who do not cooperate. In addition, the ministry will supervise the flow of funds and international aid. Strict monitoring will be conducted to prevent the transfer of funds that finance hostile activities, support terrorism, or contribute to corruption more broadly.

International Cooperation: The ministry will serve as the focal point for foreign relations concerning the region and will lead public diplomacy efforts to strengthen the legitimacy of Israel's actions on this issue in the international arena. It will engage with international actors to clarify the need for Israeli administration of the territory and to promote international support for Israel's strategy.

The Civil Administration: Will henceforth be called the "Judea and Samaria District," similar to the existing districts in Israel that serve as the executive arms of Israeli government ministries. The Judea and Samaria District will function as the primary executive arm in civilian matters, operating through proactive and focused management that ensures full control of the territory as well as effective and efficient service to all residents under its responsibility within the framework of Israeli policy in Judea and Samaria. It will be headed by a civilian with the status of a district director within a government ministry and with appropriate experience. There may be an interim period

during which the office is led by someone responsible for the Israeli sphere, alongside a counterpart heading the Palestinian sphere.

It should be recalled that prior to the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, Israel managed the region more effectively in many respects. Even today, Israel administers Area C — in practice most of the territory (3.5 million dunams out of 5.7 million), where Palestinians also reside. The objective is to create municipal mechanisms and a civilian administrative framework similar to that used in Israel in its work with Palestinian local authorities — regional councils throughout the territory. This would include the services currently provided by the Civil Administration vis-à-vis Israeli local authorities — the existing councils in the region.

Land management and enforcement of land laws: The Judea and Samaria district will handle issues related to the land registration system, legal normalization and the status of survey and state lands, the "blue lines," seizure orders, and more (including opening the existing registry, computerizing systems, establishing appropriate judicial bodies, and simplifying the current mechanism). It will strictly oversee the prevention of illegal takeovers and work to preserve Israel's strategic areas, as well as manage the allocation of lands in coordination with the Palestinians according to clear and transparent criteria.

Management and oversight of civil infrastructure and citizen services: The Judea and Samaria district will manage the planning and construction of infrastructure, including roads, water, electricity, gas, wastewater treatment plants, waste disposal sites, emergency services, quarries, transportation, and healthcare services. The district will also establish efficient oversight and collection mechanisms, including payments for electricity, water, and municipal taxes (initially), general licensing, vehicle registration, issuing permits, approvals, fines and enforcement, payments, and budgeting. In addition, it will coordinate directly with government ministries and strengthen the connection to the region, including the rapid and efficient adaptation of legislation in these areas.

Harmonization of legislation, removal of barriers, and creation of solutions to advance infrastructure and construction: It is necessary to regulate contracts concerning the allocation of lands, payment for lands, and the continuation of actions taken so far in these matters, including the adoption of the late Judge Edmond Levy's report[40] and the outcomes

40 Levy Committee, *Report on the Examination of the Construction Situation in Judea and Samaria*, Jerusalem: Prime Minister's Office, 2012; Sandberg Committee, *Regularization of Construction in the West Bank – Final Report*, Jerusalem: Ministry of Justice, 2.15.2018. [in Hebrew]

of the Regularization Committee chaired by Judge Chaya Sandberg,[41] among others. In addition, it is necessary to harmonize legislation and relevant laws in numerous areas where gaps exist, and to reinstate the use of tools that were previously standard—such as "lands under management"—which have since fallen out of use.

Oversight of the education system and mosques: The Judea and Samaria district will supervise Palestinian educational content, with an emphasis on removing incitement from study materials. It will also monitor mosque activities, enforce transparency in religious messages, and prevent their use as platforms for political or hostile incitement.

Coordination of all government ministries with the Judea and Samaria district: The Judea and Samaria district will operate similarly to the existing regional government ministries in Israel. Ministry representatives will primarily report to their parent ministries while maintaining a connection to the regional ministry. With the expansion of sovereignty, the regional ministry will function exactly like a standard Israeli district. Additionally, the regional ministry will need to provide services to the Arab local authorities to ensure uniform policy planning and implementation, while preventing duplication and improving efficiency in both civil and security administration.

Institutionalizing a dedicated enforcement force: The Judea and Samaria district will operate a dedicated enforcement force, in addition to the Israel Police and similar to the national enforcement unit operating within Israel's borders, which will work closely with the security forces. This force will provide an immediate response to illegal takeovers of land and infrastructure, integrating high-quality personnel and advanced technology.

Strengthening technological capabilities: The use of artificial intelligence systems and advanced technological tools will enable high-quality and rapid service, as well as assist in identifying and monitoring threats, efficiently managing resources, and providing fast and effective responses.

Mechanism for handling residency and immigration processes: A dedicated mechanism should be established to oversee the residency and citizenship process, operating in coordination with all relevant ministries, including the various security agencies. Additionally, a dedicated office or department should be created to manage voluntary immigration.

41 Sandberg Committee, *Regularization of Construction in the West Bank – Final Report*. [in Hebrew]

Third axis: Dissolution of the Palestinian Authority and Transition to Decentralized Local Governance, Voluntary Migration, or a Naturalization Process

Replacing the Palestinian Authority with a Moderate Local Leadership

The transition from the centralized and corrupt rule of the Palestinian Authority to decentralized, local governance is a necessary condition for addressing all the failures outlined above. This means correcting one of the central mistakes of the Oslo model: the establishment of a centralized authority whose primary energy was devoted to harming the State of Israel in all areas, in addition to the mismanagement of municipal affairs. A local leadership would be required to recognize Israel as the sole sovereign in the territory and would be authorized only to manage civil-municipal affairs. It would operate as a municipal authority (eventually also elected) under the Judea and Samaria district, as detailed above, to ensure compliance with agreements and prevent incitement and support for terrorism. It would not be permitted to act in any way as a national or sovereign body.[42] This follows the principle consistently communicated across all systems: recognition of Israel leads to rights and responsibilities, enabling freedom of movement, employment in Israel, and more; whereas incitement and terrorism lead to the exact opposite.

This local leadership could emerge from the large clans that characterize Arab society. The local clan already plays a background role and, in practice, manages a significant portion of daily life. From now on, it would assume additional responsibilities, primarily municipal, which could also include rights such as managing lands within its area and collecting various taxes, all under the Judea and Samaria district as noted. Recently, the initiative of the Hebron sheikhs resurfaced, proposing the implementation of a decentralized local government bypassing the Palestinian Authority.[43] Another model to consider is regional councils, similar to the Israeli regional council system, where an elected leadership focuses solely on municipal affairs. It is also possible to consider a canton-style model, granting broader powers to local authorities, similar to arrangements in certain European countries.[44]

42 Raphael BenLevi, "Time to Abandon the Two State Paradigm and Move to Localized Self-Rule under Israeli Sovereignty," *Misgav Institute,* Sept. 2025.

43 Elliot Kaufman, "A New Palestinian Offer for Peace With Israel," *Wall Street Journal*, 7.5.2025 – This article reports on an initiative by five sheikhs in Hebron (led by Sheikh Wadi al-Jaabari) operating outside the Palestinian Authority, including a proposal to establish the "Emirate of Hebron" that would recognize the State of Israel and promote ties under the Abraham Accords.

44 Federal Constitution of the Swiss Confederation (18 April 1999), art. 3, *Constitute Project*; Constitution of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (1994), arts. 2–5, Venice Commission/Advokat Prnjavorac; EU

It is appropriate to examine any framework or formula that recognizes full Israeli sovereignty while providing locally supervised and budgeted municipal services, similar to the mechanisms currently in place throughout Israel. It is advisable to first implement the model in the easier areas, for example in the Ma'ale Adumim enclave, for the entire Bedouin community of the Jahalin tribe residing there, effectively severing their connection to the Palestinian Authority. A similar model could also be considered for the villages of Hizma-Giv'a, Muhmas, Deir Dibwan, the Hebron area, the Gush Etzion area, and others.

No sovereign state would permit such "freedom of opinion and religion" when its sole purpose is to deny the state's right to exist

The Palestinian Education System in light of Israeli Sovereignty

The Palestinian education system currently plays a central role in perpetuating hatred and hostility toward Israel, reinforcing the idea of the right of return, and educating the younger generation to continue the violent struggle. No sovereign state would permit such "freedom of opinion and religion" when its sole purpose is to deny the state's right to exist.

As part of the transition to local governance, a fundamental change must be advanced in the educational content of the Arab sector. Education should prepare a new generation that recognizes the reality in which the State of Israel is the sole sovereign in the territory. Inciting content will be removed and replaced with materials modeled on the United Arab Emirates' curriculum, which promotes religious tolerance within traditional Islam and recognition of the State of Israel's right to exist as the nation-state of the Jewish people. Any Arab village that adopts these new values would be able to enjoy improved civil conditions and the full accumulation of rights under Israeli sovereignty.

Reforming the Palestinian education system should be a central focus of Israel's strategy. Under Israeli supervision, a new generation will be cultivated that recognizes Israeli sovereignty, focuses on creating a future of cooperation, and avoids perpetuating hatred and violence. Education will no longer be an obstacle to peace but a tool for building regional stability and prosperity under full Israeli governance.

Committee of the Regions, "Division of Powers: Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina" (updated 2025), Portal CoR; Costa Rica, *Código Municipal*, Ley No. 7794 (1998, consolidated 2024), título I, arts. 3–12, PGR Web; Ecuador, *Código Orgánico de Organización Territorial, Autonomía y Descentralización* (COOTAD, 2008), arts. 2–61, Consejo de Participación Ciudadana; STATEC Luxembourg, "Statistics by Geographical Breakdown," 16.9.2024, Statistiques Luxembourg; El Salvador, *Código Municipal*, Decreto No. 274 (consolidated 2023), art. 2, Asamblea Legislativa; Guatemala, *Código Municipal*, Decreto No. 12-2002, art. 19, ACNUR.

Oversight of Mosques and Prevention of Incitement

Strengthening oversight of mosques and preventing incitement are essential steps for creating regional stability and reducing security threats. Thoughtful and balanced action in this area will not only decrease hostility and violence but also help build bridges of understanding and cooperation between different populations, especially in the context of monotheistic belief and mutual religious respect. Through a combination of enforcement, supervision, and collaboration with moderate actors, mosques can be transformed from centers of incitement into centers of connection and community life as a religious minority in a Western state. Successful examples of this approach exist both among Israel's Arab population and internationally.

Effective Oversight of International Aid

In light of the local governance model, Israel and the international community must work together to ensure that international aid continues to strengthen the region and is used to advance the population both at the civil and infrastructure levels—not to support terrorism or incite violence. The large existing gaps in infrastructure, environmental management, unemployment, and relative poverty require committed efforts to reduce disparities, maintain projects, and ensure long-term integration into the population.

Funding should be allocated to improve infrastructure and support various economic initiatives, especially to promote an economy integrated with the Israeli system. Strict oversight mechanisms must be established to ensure responsible use of funds and eliminate corruption or misuse. The Israeli economy should be central to regional economic development. Palestinians can prosper through integration into the Israeli market, rather than attempting to create an independent economy disconnected from Israel or investing in wasteful, showy projects like Rawabi. Palestinian economic prosperity depends on clear recognition of the State of Israel and the involvement of new Palestinian local leadership in initiatives linked to and integrated with the Israeli economy. If integration and support are managed correctly and fairly, the formula can succeed, enabling local leadership to thrive and significantly improve the current standard of living for Palestinians. Moreover, this represents an economic revival that must be implemented independently of international aid.

Strict Enforcement Against Terrorism and Its Supporters

Any attempt to harm the state's security must be met with a strong response. Effective deterrence involves the use of a wide range of measures, from economic sanctions and movement restrictions to military actions, such as deportation of terrorists, demolition of terrorists' homes, expropriation of property, and more. Family members of anyone involved in any form of terrorist activity would lose their rights, be denied freedom of movement and the

ability to work and earn a livelihood, and infrastructure that supports terrorism would be dismantled and confiscated immediately. At the next stage, the rights of those involved in terrorism or who support it would be completely revoked, and they would be required to emigrate from Israel within a defined period of time. This policy should be accompanied by a comprehensive public diplomacy effort vis-à-vis the international community, presenting evidence of hostile activity by Palestinians.

Dismantling the Security Infrastructure that Threatens Israel

Israel must address the dismantling of security infrastructures that endanger it and gradually transfer the authorities of the Palestinian Authority to the regional ministry (as an alternative to the Civil Administration) and to local municipal leaderships. Operation "Defensive Shield" in 2002 was a successful example of Israel's ability to operate on the ground and dismantle terrorist infrastructures that developed under the watch of the Palestinian Authority. The operation demonstrated that direct and effective control of the territory enables the eradication of terrorist elements and the restoration of security to Israeli citizens. The model presented in this operation proves the necessity of achieving full control over areas under Palestinian Authority control as a preliminary and unavoidable step toward ensuring long-term stability.

With regard to the Palestinian police and their armament, during an interim period the possibility should be examined of absorbing Palestinian operatives and police officers who wish to remain in police service under Israeli sovereignty, within and under the authority of the Israel Police, and granting them official recognition—according to clear admission criteria. Their salaries would be paid by Israel. In the second stage, weapons and ammunition would be collected and placed in storage. Such a move, if managed wisely, could succeed without provoking a hostile response. As the State of Israel expands its sovereignty, it will need to integrate more policing and supervisory forces and not rely on the IDF, whose expertise is primarily military and which is not trained to deal with civilian and criminal matters, whether involving Jews or Arabs.

Voluntary Migration

In light of President Trump's statement regarding his vision to allow Palestinians from Gaza to relocate to other countries,[45] a voluntary migration and incentive program should be developed for Palestinians in Judea and Samaria who wish to do so. This program would offer improved economic conditions and the option of receiving gradual or full citizenship in another country, in exchange for relinquishing existing rights in Israel and receiving fair compensation from Israel for their existing property. Unlike

45 Karen DeYoung and Cate Brown, "Gaza Postwar Plan Envisions 'Voluntary' Relocation of Entire Population,"

Gaza, Judea and Samaria include many Palestinians who own land that can be purchased, as has been happening for years in East Jerusalem—in Silwan/City of David, the Muslim Quarter, the Christian Quarter, and other areas. Jews live alongside Arabs there, and a significant number of Arabs choose to sell their property and emigrate.

This is a sensitive and complex issue that requires the development of creative, humane, and effective solutions, enabling individuals, families, and clans who wish to do so to leave voluntarily. It should be noted that most Palestinians migrated to the area over the course of centuries, and their connection to the specific land is not absolute. For many, the broader geographical space of the Middle East—or even other regions of the world—can be seen as a reasonable alternative, since, from a religious or cultural perspective, this particular parcel of land does not hold unique significance for them. This is especially relevant given that many are refugees, meaning they are not in their permanent place of residence. Many countries around the world are in urgent need of skilled labor, and Palestinians could fill this demand, creating opportunities for both themselves and the host nations.

It is worth remembering that between 1948 and 1950, hundreds of thousands of Jews from Arab countries—such as Iraq, Egypt, Yemen, Morocco, and others—migrated to Israel due to persecution, violence, and discriminatory laws. They did not claim, and do not intend to claim, a "right of return," nor are they commemorated indefinitely in refugee camps or displaced persons' camps. Highlighting this precedent alongside financial claims could encourage Arab states to reach a mutual agreement, whereby Palestinian refugees would be allowed to emigrate voluntarily in exchange for the withdrawal or settlement of reciprocal claims.

To implement the voluntary migration option, a dedicated office will be established to work in coordination with the Ministry of Finance, the Israel Land Authority, and other government ministries. This office will conduct appraisals of existing properties, propose fair compensation, coordinate the move to the receiving country, address all obstacles, oversee the process, and ensure that it is fast and straightforward.

Most Palestinians migrated to the area over the course of centuries, and their connection to the specific land is not absolute

Gradual Path to Residency and Integration

First, all management of civilian life will be transferred to the full authority of the Judea and Samaria District (the Civil Administration). Under it, municipal regional councils will operate to oversee

The Washington Post, 8.30.2025.

civilian life, similar to the existing Israeli model in Judea and Samaria and to the Arab municipal councils within Israel. All aspects of residents' daily lives will be managed in this manner.

Palestinians who accept the new reality and demonstrate understanding, loyalty, and refrain from any direct or indirect connection to terrorism will be given the opportunity to integrate into the Israeli labor market, initially as residents and eventually, potentially, as citizens.

This process will include several stages:

Stage One - Trial: After being offered a fair voluntary migration option, a Palestinian who instead wishes to upgrade their status to residency will submit a request, including a declaration recognizing the State of Israel as the sovereign authority. They will enter a probationary period of five to ten years, during which they must refrain from direct or indirect participation in terrorist or criminal activities. During this period, their request will be evaluated. A Palestinian who chooses not to participate will have their rights restricted, including no permits for work, free movement, travel abroad, healthcare services, and more (similar to the current situation).

Stage Two – Residency: A resident will be allowed freedom of movement and integration into the Israeli labor market. Residency will grant access to basic services, healthcare, welfare, and the ability to travel abroad. All rights come with obligations, including taxes, municipal fees, and national insurance. Continued compliance with security and civil criteria is required.

Stage Three – Citizenship: After the residency stage, there will be the option to apply for full citizenship. Citizenship will be conditioned on passing Hebrew language proficiency tests and committing to national service—civilian, military, or police. In accordance with Section 5 of the Israeli Citizenship Law, renunciation of previous citizenship will be required.

It is worth noting that in East Jerusalem, where the State of Israel has applied its sovereignty, approximately 400,000 Arabs hold permanent residency status. Of these, about 5% applied for and received full citizenship. Most Arabs with permanent residency do not vote in Knesset elections but participate in municipal elections. It is likely that implementation in Judea and Samaria would follow a similar pattern.

The very opening of the possibility for citizenship raises the long-term demographic question. This is a weighty issue, but ultimately, the trend favors the Jewish population. In recent decades, the average number of children per Palestinian woman has dropped from 6 to 3.7,[46] while among Jewish women it has increased

46 "Fertility Rate, Total for the Occupied Palestinian Territory", *fred.stlouisfed.org*, 4.16.2025

from 2.5 to 3.2.[47] This trend appears to be strengthening, so looking ahead, one can be cautiously optimistic.

There are currently an estimated 2.2 million Palestinian Arabs in the Judea and Samaria.[48] If Israel succeeds in encouraging voluntary Arab migration, it can maintain or even reduce the existing Palestinian population while the overall Israeli population grows and fertility rates continue their upward trend. This would allow for a reasonable demographic balance, and if all measures are implemented, Israel could gradually apply its sovereignty over the entire territory without significant long-term concerns, similar to the practical implementation in East Jerusalem.

Fourth axis: Effective Public Diplomacy on the International Stage

For all the actions outlined here, a well-structured public diplomacy program is required to explain the initiative to other countries around the world. It is not necessary to convince everyone, but it is crucial to present our reasoning and explain why, in our view, this is a fair course of action—one that is also the only approach capable of enabling prosperity and security for all populations in the country. Israel should operate under the assumption that various elements in the international community will find it difficult to accept this and may even express opposition for various reasons. Nevertheless, Israel must remain steadfast in communicating that the proposed plan is the best option, even for the Palestinian Arabs. This is also the truth that will ultimately prevail.

Israel as the bastion of the free world: In relation to countries that are also threatened by Islamism (the U.S., Europe, India, and many others), it should be emphasized that Jewish sovereignty serves as an anchor for stability and the prevention of terrorist chaos in the region, and that this is the only way to prevent the recurrence of events like October 7.

Effective Israeli public diplomacy should clarify that its struggle against Islamic terrorism is no different from the battles that Western countries are expected to face within their own borders. Nations that ignore the threat of radical Islam may find themselves confronting it on their own soil. Israel, positioned at the forefront of this fight, is not only defending itself but the entire free world.

47 Alex Weinreb, Dov Chernichovsky & Aviv Brill, "Israel's Unusual Fertility Patterns", *taubcenter.org.il*, 12.2018 [in Hebrew]

48 Bennett Zimmerman, Roberta Seid, and Michael L. Wise, "The Million Person Gap: The Arab Population in the West Bank and Gaza," *Mideast Security and Policy Studies* No. 65 (Ramat Gan: Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, Bar-Ilan University, February 2006). Available at: https://besacenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2006/02/MSPS65.pdf

The Abraham Accords, achieved despite the absence of a comprehensive resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, serve as an example that Israel can foster fruitful diplomatic relations with moderate Arab states without compromising its security and national principles. They highlight that the international community, including Sunni Arab countries, is capable of seeing Israel as a partner for regional stability. These accords gained even greater significance when, following the October 7th attack and Israel's response, no country withdrew from the agreements; on the contrary, many expressed disapproval of the brutal attack against Israel.

Jewish sovereignty serves as an anchor for stability and the prevention of terrorist chaos in the region, and that this is the only way to prevent the recurrence of events like October 7

Israel's successes in the Iron Swords War against the Iranian proxy network and against Iran itself have changed the regional and international playing field. They revealed the dependence of regional states on Israel's stability and security strength, making Israel the central anchor protecting against shared regional threats. Furthermore, although Saudi Arabia frames a Palestinian state as a condition for normalization, with careful diplomacy, it may accept the solutions proposed in this document as pathways to prosperity under Israeli central governance. Alternatively, its involvement in resolving the situation in Gaza could suffice to demonstrate its concern for the Palestinians. If the United States insists on upgrading relations with Saudi Arabia, Israel may prefer to accommodate that through alternative Arab governance in Gaza, but not in Judea and Samaria, where sovereignty will be implemented.

Emphasizing the historical and legal right: It must be clearly stated: the Jewish people are the indigenous people of this region, whose culture, tradition, language, and religion are directly rooted in this land. Judea and Samaria form the heart of the Jewish national story, and we hold both a legal and moral right to this territory.

Summary: A Realistic and Sober Alternative

The approach proposed here combines firm enforcement with pragmatic solutions that address both security needs and civilian challenges, while strengthening Israeli sovereignty and ensuring long-term stability.

The framework for managing the Palestinian population must shift from a reactive system to a clear and comprehensive strategy. Israel, as the sovereign in the area, needs to initiate a systematic change that links security, settlement, economy, infrastructure, and education. A gradual process of encouraging migration, applying sovereignty, and granting residency and citizenship is a central part of this, alongside setting clear

red lines while creating a positive horizon for those willing to live peacefully and loyally under Israeli sovereignty.

The proposed policy emphasizes that reality does not stand still, and numerous threats exist to the State of Israel due to the continued management of the conflict without a clear long-term goal. The current political and security reality is incapable of producing a new generation of Arabs who desire peace with us.

The history of the Oslo Accords, culminating in the events of October 7th, serves as unequivocal proof of the need for a fundamental change in Israeli policy in Judea and Samaria. This policy must be based on a clear principle: the State of Israel is the sole sovereign in the region, and the Palestinians can integrate into the model proposed here as a thriving, contributing, and prosperous minority that recognizes the legitimacy of the State of Israel.

Chapter 10

A Strategic Framework for Israel's Peace-Treaty States: Stability, Leverage, and Red Lines

Nitzan David Fuchs

Executive Summary

Israel faces two potentially extreme scenarios in Egypt and Jordan, requiring preparation:

1. **A Sunni Islamist Ring of Fire** – A takeover of one or both countries by Islamist movements. This would revive the threat of a hostile regular army on Israel's border and destabilize the entire architecture of peace agreements Israel has built since 1979.
2. **State Collapse** – The disintegration of governance in these countries, turning them into fertile ground for hostile terrorist activities against Israel.

These scenarios cannot be written off given the crises of internal legitimacy experienced by both regimes, signs of economic distress, and the growing strength of the Muslim Brotherhood.

The Palestinian issue serves as a powerful lever to undermine the stability of the peace agreement states. The Muslim Brotherhood effectively exploits the gap between the public stance of the regimes and their covert cooperation with Israel, portraying the regimes as "collaborators" with Israel against Palestinian interests. The issue also acts as an ideological bridge between various Islamist actors, strengthening Turkish influence in the region.

Israel's current policy toward the neighboring peace-agreement countries suffers from three main shortcomings:

1. A passive, reactive approach to emerging threats.
2. Acceptance of violations of peace agreements and hostile behavior by these countries in the diplomatic arena.
3. Underutilization of existing levers of influence and failure to develop new ones (e.g., aid through international economic institutions, technological cooperation, tourism collaboration).

This paper proposes an integrative strategy based on the DIME framework (Diplomatic, Intelligence, Military, Economic), focusing on three key ideas:

1. Integrating efforts to strengthen the existing moderate regimes with preparations for extreme scenarios.
2. Transitioning from a reactive policy to a proactive policy that shapes regional reality.
3. Creation of levers to advance and reinforce Israeli interests.

The proposed strategy operates across four dimensions:

Political: The strategy proposes coordinating activities in support of stability with the UAE and Saudi Arabia, conditioning U.S. aid to Egypt and Jordan, and assisting Jordan and Egypt regarding the Islamist threat.

Economic: The strategy leverages the asymmetric dependence of these countries to promote their stability, through incentives to improve relations (increasing water supply, upgrading energy infrastructure) while maintaining pressure levers against hostile actions.

Intelligence: It is necessary to develop an early warning and detection system for signs indicating extreme scenarios. Israel will cooperate with Jordan and Egypt against Islamist networks, primarily through shared assets.

Military: Comprehensive operational plans must be prepared for both extreme scenarios, with emphasis on ensuring control over strategic areas, defense systems for shared infrastructure, and effective enforcement of demilitarization measures.

This strategy will allow Israel to better address complex regional challenges, maintain the stability of the peace agreement countries, and build resilience mechanisms for extreme scenarios.

Possible Extreme Scenarios

The October 7th attack exposed the cost of ignoring extreme scenarios and demonstrated how a failure to prepare for events considered "unlikely" can lead to disaster. Since that date, public opinion and decision-makers have increasingly recognized the need to identify low-probability scenarios with potentially wide-ranging impact and to prepare for them.

Israel's security today relies, among other things, on the peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan. These agreements removed them from the cycle of armed conflict and allowed the IDF and the State of Israel to shift their strategic focus from the threat of a conventional army at the border to irregular threats (such as Palestinian terrorist organizations) and non-conventional threats (such as Iran's nuclear program). Any change in the status of these countries could rapidly and dramatically alter Israel's security situation—a scenario for which the IDF and the defense establishment are currently unprepared.

Scenario 1: The Sunni Islamist Ring of Fire

In this scenario, Islamist movements seize control of Egypt or Jordan, creating a hostile ring around Israel. Such a development would dismantle the security and political frameworks that Israel has built since the 1970s, leaving the country once again surrounded by adversarial forces on all sides. With potential military and economic support from Turkey, Israel could face a conventional threat even more intense than that posed by the Shiite Islamist axis.

The security implications could be far-reaching. Islamist regimes in Egypt and Jordan would likely allow the transfer of advanced weaponry to terrorist organizations—including long-range missiles and drones—grant freedom of operation to terrorist groups along Israel's borders, and even coordinate strategically with the Iranian axis. The increasingly capable Egyptian military, particularly in air and naval forces, could potentially ally with Turkey to challenge Israel's sovereignty over its exclusive economic waters.

Any change in the status of these countries could rapidly and dramatically alter Israel's security situation—a scenario for which the IDF and the defense establishment are currently unprepared

The strengthening of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan is one indicator of the prospect of the "Sunni Islamist Ring" scenario materializing. In the 2024 elections, the Muslim Brotherhood tripled its power in the Jordanian parliament, increasing from 10 to 31 seats, through a campaign focused on the Palestinian issue and criticism of the peace agreement

with Israel.[1] Since October 2023, the Brotherhood's leadership in Jordan has also led mass protests, whose central themes were the annulment of peace agreements with Israel and the severing of strategic relations with it. Simultaneously, in April 2025 Jordanian security forces uncovered an operational cell linked to the Muslim Brotherhood that had planned attacks against Israeli targets in Jordan. According to one report, the operatives met with individuals in Turkey and Saudi Arabia to coordinate and prepare these terrorist activities.

In Egypt, the risk of an immediate rise of an Islamist regime is relatively low, but internal dynamics indicate worrying trends. Despite the extensive repression of the Muslim Brotherhood under al-Sisi's rule since 2013, the organization maintains a broad infrastructure, particularly among the middle class and within universities. The severe economic crisis undermines the regime's legitimacy, and many in Egypt express dissatisfaction with its governance.

In addition to the presence of local Islamist elements, there is also Turkish involvement. Since the military coup in Egypt, Turkey has hosted many exiled members of the movement and provides a base for Hamas operatives. Turkey has become a key hub for the Muslim Brotherhood, enabling organization, training, and recruitment of activists on its territory. The rise of an Islamist regime in Egypt or Jordan would represent a strategic opportunity for Turkey to expand its influence in the Levant and North Africa, while encircling Israel.

Scenario 2: State Collapse

The second scenario entails the disintegration of central governance in Egypt or Jordan, similar in nature to the cases of Syria, Lebanon, or Libya. Its main characteristics are:

1. Loss of the state's monopoly on violence
2. Collapse of central authority and the rise of local forces (tribal, ethnic, or ideological)
3. Breakdown of basic service systems
4. Emergence of an informal economic system and the creation of "ungoverned spaces"

The implications of such a scenario constitute an immediate security threat to Israel's borders. Experience in the Sinai and along the Syrian border shows that ungoverned spaces can quickly become a base for terrorist activity and arms smuggling. A state collapse in Jordan would create a long strip of ungoverned territory

1 Camille Abescat, "Elections in Jordan: The Parties' Return to Parliament", *Orient XXI*, October 2, 2024, https://orientxxi.info/magazine/elections-in-jordan-the-parties-return-to-parliament,7659; Ronen Yitzhak and Elie Podeh, "Islam's Influence in Jordan Presenting Significant Challenges for the King", *The Jerusalem Post*, 23 September 2024, https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-821279.

along Israel's eastern border, posing an immediate threat to the Jordan Valley. Iran-backed forces could then move from Iraq, through Jordan, and reach Judea and Samaria, directly threatening central Israel. A collapse in Egypt would allow terrorist organizations to establish a presence in Sinai, turning it into a base against Israel.

Both Egypt and Jordan suffer from socio-economic crises that threaten their state stability. In Egypt, inflation averages over 20% annually, with an external debt of approximately $155 billion. Egypt's debt-to-GDP ratio stood at 90% in 2024. The country's dependence on food imports, coupled with a chronic trade deficit, exerts continuous pressure on the Egyptian pound. As part of a new agreement with the IMF, Egypt agreed to a sharp devaluation of the pound—about 43%—which caused a sharp rise in prices and severely affected households, especially the most vulnerable. Population growth is expected to turn Egypt into a net energy importer, further increasing pressure on the currency.

In Jordan, the water sector is in crisis, with per capita water availability expected to decline from 60 to 30 cubic meters in the coming years.[2] The combination of a high youth unemployment rate (39%, one of the highest in the region) and a young population (44% under the age of 20) creates a "demographic powder keg."[3] Jordan relies on external aid to fund government operations (about 14% of total government spending as of 2022).[4] Any reduction in international aid—particularly U.S. assistance—could further exacerbate an already dire economic situation.

Current Policy: "Quiet for the sake of quiet"

In light of the extreme scenarios described above, Israel's current policy toward the peace treaty countries reveals significant weaknesses. This policy can be characterized as "quiet for the sake of quiet"—a passive approach that ignores early warning signs and does not actively prepare to prevent these scenarios. Understanding the shortcomings of the current policy is essential for formulating an effective strategy against emerging threats.

Two main strategic reasons for signing the peace agreements can be identified:

1. Reducing Israel's security burden by ending hostilities with countries with which Israel shares a land border; this is especially true for Egypt, whose peace agreement significantly eased Israel's security challenges.

2 Nada Maher Abdrabbo, "The Ministry of Water Expects the Per Capita Share of Water to Decrease to Less than 30 Cubic Meters," *Arabia Weather*, 19 December 2024. [in Arabic]

3 World Bank data.

4 Yehezkel Dror, *Israeli Statecraft: National Security Challenges and Responses* (Routledge, 2011), chap. 13, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203814321. [in Hebrew]

2. Improving Israel's strategic standing through normalization of its existence. A peace agreement recognizes Israel as a legitimate and permanent entity.

In the face of hostile actions against Israel on the part of Cairo and Amman in the international arena, Israeli policy treats them as necessary pressure valve relief, while ignoring the harm to Israel's diplomatic standing

With the signing of the agreements, the first consideration shifted to a new priority—the importance of the stability of the peace agreement countries. This stems from the understanding that the populations in these states are hostile to Israel, and the collapse of their regimes could lead to the end of peace.

Maintaining stability has become the guiding principle of Israel's entire strategy toward the two peace agreement countries, Egypt and Jordan. This comes at the expense of the second consideration—the normalization of Israel in the Arab world. In the face of hostile actions against Israel on the part of Cairo and Amman in the international arena, Israeli policy treats them as necessary pressure valve relief, while ignoring the harm to Israel's diplomatic standing. Not only does this contradict the rationale of the peace agreements, it also reflects passive, reactive thinking in Israel, without active strategic planning.

In this section, we will briefly examine the key characteristics of Israel's relations with the peace agreement countries and highlight the fundamental problems within these relationships.

Israel-Egypt Relations: Diplomatic Cold and Increasing Violations

Israel-Egypt relations are characterized by a "cold peace," combining institutional stability with a gradual erosion in the substance of the relationship.[5] Since al-Sisi's rise to power in 2013, the relationship has been marked by the tension between shared security and economic interests on the one hand, and deep public opposition in Egypt to normal relations with Israel on the other. Despite the strategic potential inherent in these ties, the trend since 2020 has been one of cooling relations and escalating anti-Israel rhetoric, particularly following the outbreak of the Iron Swords War.

The official diplomatic channel between the two countries operates at a minimal level, consisting primarily of focused visits on security and economic issues. High-level diplomatic exchanges are limited, with the last meeting between the heads of state taking place in 2021 between Prime Minister Bennett and President al-Sisi. At

5 Haim Koren, "Israel and Egypt: Strategic Partnership, Civil Remoteness?" *Mitvim*, March 2019. [in Hebrew]

the same time, Egypt leads or participates in diplomatic initiatives hostile to Israel:

1. In September 2024, Egypt was one of the initiators of UN General Assembly Resolution L.31, calling for Israel's full withdrawal "from the Palestinian territories" within 12 months and imposing a weapons embargo on Israel.
2. In March 2025, Egypt presented a proposal to the UN Security Council to deploy an international force in Gaza and the "West Bank."
3. Egypt joined a lawsuit against Israel at the ICJ, accusing Israel of committing "war crimes" against Palestinians in Gaza.

And these are just a few examples from the Iron Swords War. Despite this, Israel did not see fit to respond to these actions, beyond minimal protests behind closed doors.

Security cooperation in Sinai and along the Gaza border is perhaps the cornerstone of relations between Israel and Egypt, yet it is characterized by fluctuations and limitations. The security coordination focuses primarily on preventing arms smuggling into Gaza and coordinating operations against terrorist organizations in northern Sinai. Israel has assisted the Egyptian army and participated in the campaign against ISIS-Sinai. Both countries also share an interest in securing tourist sites on the peninsula, which are frequented by many Israeli visitors.

Considering this cooperation, the discovery of numerous smuggling tunnels along the Egypt-Gaza border is striking. Israel had assessed that Egypt was acting decisively against smuggling into the Strip and the Egyptians themselves repeatedly claimed they were working to prevent any tunnel-based smuggling. However, with the capture of Rafah, numerous tunnels were exposed, indicating that Egypt, at the very least, ignored arms smuggling to Hamas in the Strip.

The Egyptian failure is not due to a lack of military presence in the Sinai Peninsula. On the contrary, Egypt maintains large forces there, rehabilitating or building new military infrastructure. These actions constitute violations of the military annex to the peace agreement. Some of these violations were carried out with Israel's approval, but one should question whether it remains prudent for Israel to continue approving them.

The increased Egyptian military presence in Sinai has been justified in the name of "counterterrorism." Yet some of the activities are difficult to explain solely as measures against irregular forces. For example, despite a decline in terrorist incidents, Egypt maintains roughly 88,000 troops in the peninsula; Al-Maliz airport has been upgraded, including reinforced hangars; and Egypt has constructed several large fuel depots, some concealed.[6] This military

6 Yagil Henkin, "The Buildup of the Egyptian Army," *Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security*, 2018. [in Hebrew]

buildup raises concern that, if a political change occurs in Egypt—such as a scenario of Muslim Brotherhood ascendancy or a shift in the military government's stance toward Israel—Sinai could become a forward base for military operations against Israel.

Economic cooperation between the countries focuses mainly on energy trade and QIZ (Qualified Industrial Zones, meaning special industrial zones allowing preferential exports to the U.S. provided they include Israeli components), yet it falls far short of its potential. Israel supplies natural gas valued at $1.5–2 billion annually. The importance of Israeli supply has increased since the global energy crisis of 2022. Simultaneously, the Egyptian QIZ industry exports goods worth $1.2 billion per year, or about 2% of Egypt's total exports.

Israel–Jordan Relations: Asymmetric Dependence and Hostility

Israel–Jordan relations since the 1994 peace agreement are characterized by pronounced asymmetry: Jordan's growing dependence on Israel stands in stark contrast with a public rhetoric of hostility. The relationship has significantly deteriorated in recent years, particularly since November 2023, when the Hashemite Kingdom took unprecedented steps such as recalling its ambassador and threatening the peace agreement. Despite the mutual security interests and strategic importance of the two countries, the peace agreement has effectively been reduced to a formal framework, lacking genuine normalization and straying far from the "warm peace" vision of the 1990s.

The asymmetry in the relationship is evident in Jordan's deep dependence on Israel in three core areas: water, energy, and U.S. aid. In the water sector, Jordan receives 100 million cubic meters of water annually from Israel (up from 50 million in 2021), a critical addition for a country facing severe water scarcity (61 cubic meters per capita per year). In energy, Israel supplies approximately 3 billion cubic meters of natural gas, which powers roughly 90% of Jordan's electricity generation. The peace agreement with Israel has also increased U.S. aid to Jordan; as Jordan's stability is considered an Israeli strategic interest, American support for the kingdom's stability has been maintained.

Security cooperation between the two countries is a vital pillar of Jordan's stability but remains under continuous tension. The coordination primarily focuses on securing the shared border, preventing terrorism, and blocking the infiltration of hostile elements. Israel provides significant, albeit covert, security support to defend the kingdom against regional threats, including pro-Iranian militias in Syria and Iraq.

Despite Jordan's clear dependence on Israel, it conducts itself internationally as an adversary of Jerusalem. Since October 2023, Jordanian diplomatic rhetoric against Israel has reached unprecedented hostility. King Abdullah II has taken a hardline stance, including threats against the peace

agreement, equating Israel's actions in Gaza to "war crimes," and recalling his ambassador. In international fora, Jordan has led anti-Israel initiatives, including active support for the International Criminal Court's investigation against Israel. Israel has chosen not to respond decisively to this escalation, limiting itself to minor diplomatic protests and refraining from leveraging Jordan's dependence to restrain the kingdom.

The Palestinian Issue as a Destabilizer of the Peace Agreement States

The Palestinian issue serves as a powerful lever for the Islamist opposition in Egypt and Jordan to destabilize the regimes. The Muslim Brotherhood in both countries systematically exploits the Palestinian issue to portray the regimes as "traitors to the Arab interest" and as "collaborators with Israel" against their Palestinian brethren. In the 2024 elections in Jordan, the Muslim Brotherhood's campaign focused on the Palestinian issue and criticized Jordan–Israel relations.

The regimes in Egypt and Jordan face a constant dilemma in handling the Palestinian issue, balancing domestic political needs against strategic interests. On one hand, they must adopt strong pro-Palestinian rhetoric to maintain internal legitimacy and respond to domestic criticism; on the other hand, their strategic interests require continued cooperation with Israel in security, energy, and economic matters. This gap between public stance and actual policy creates a structural vulnerability for the regimes.

In Jordan's case, beyond the use of the Palestinian issue by Islamist opposition forces, there is also concern that the establishment of a Palestinian state in Judea and Samaria could destabilize the kingdom. Such a state might seek to expand its influence in Jordan by mobilizing the local Palestinian population against the Hashemite monarchy. In this scenario, a large Palestinian state stretching from Iraq to Kfar Saba would serve as an ideal operational base for Iranian, Turkish, and terrorist forces.

Failures of Current Israeli Policy

Israel's policy toward the peace-treaty states is characterized by pronounced strategic passivity, reflected in a reactive rather than proactive approach. This policy stems from a mistaken assumption that the existing situation is the most stable arrangement possible, while disregarding warning signs that point to growing risks and the erosion of the peace agreements.

The absence of a comprehensive strategy prevents Israel from strengthening its relationships and from preparing for extreme scenarios.

Moreover, Israel does not demand that the peace-treaty states refrain from hostile

diplomatic activity internationally (as distinct from domestic-facing actions, such as speeches directed at internal audiences), despite the underlying rationale of the peace agreements. On the contrary, it justifies such diplomatic conduct as a form of pressure relief intended to preserve regime stability by portraying these governments as acting against Israel in the international arena—and absorbs the cost.

The lack of readiness for a sudden strategic change in Jordan or Egypt must be addressed

Yet if the peace-treaty states act to undermine Israel's legitimacy, what is the purpose of the peace agreements? This question is all the more acute in the case of a country such as Jordan, with which friendly relations existed even prior to the signing of a formal peace treaty.

The justification for this conduct lies in the strong security relations between the countries. However, this rationale overlooks two key considerations.

The first is the importance of international legitimacy for Israel's long-term prosperity. When Jerusalem is branded a pariah in the international arena, it deters potential partners with whom Israel could otherwise pursue economic, diplomatic, and even security cooperation. Japan is an excellent example of a regional power whose relations with Israel remain limited due to Arab–Muslim criticism concerning Jerusalem.

Thus, while hostile diplomatic activity against Israel may not exact an immediate or measurable price, it certainly carries an opportunity cost.

Second, just as Israel has an interest in preserving the stability of the regimes in the peace-treaty states, those regimes themselves have a clear interest in maintaining their own stability. If they allow terrorist activity to operate from their territory, or fail to secure their borders with Israel, they will attract actors who threaten them as well, foremost among them Islamist terrorist organizations seeking to entrench themselves on their soil.

Egypt and Jordan do not engage in security cooperation with Israel out of goodwill, but out of a clear national interest. Jerusalem must make it clear that it will not be prepared to sacrifice one interest—counterterrorism activity—for the sake of another—its diplomatic standing.

Given the dynamics described above, Israel struggles to define and enforce red lines. The erosion of demilitarization in the Sinai Peninsula, Egypt's economic difficulties, and Islamist opposition represent a strategic risk that could lead to a scenario in which a hostile Egyptian army once again positions itself along Israel's border.

Conversations with senior officials indicate that Israel is not prepared for extreme

scenarios, relying instead on improvisation and flexibility to deal with problems on a "here and now" basis. The lack of readiness for a sudden strategic change in Jordan or Egypt must be addressed.

The Proposed Strategy: A Proactive Policy

A Strategic Vision

The proposed strategy is based on a shift from a reactive approach to a proactive approach. The guiding vision is to create a relationship with the peace-treaty states composed of three components:

1. **Political stability** – Stable regimes in Egypt and Jordan that are committed to the peace treaties and are proactively acting against destabilizing actors (the Muslim Brotherhood and its affiliates).
2. **Upholding** the **terms of peace treaties** – Full compliance with the formal obligations of the peace agreements (such as the demilitarization of Sinai) and avoidance of actions that undermine the spirit of the agreements (including hostile diplomatic activity).
3. **Mutual interdependence** – A relationship based on shared interests and mutual dependence, leveraging Israel's comparative advantages in water, energy, security, and technology.

The objectives will be achieved through action on three levels:

1. Clear definition of red lines and the consequences for crossing them.
2. Building a system of incentives and penalties to steer relations toward a positive equilibrium for both sides.
3. Preparation for extreme scenarios.

The Political Component

To stabilize Egypt and Jordan, Israel will seek to coordinate efforts with the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia. The aim of this coordination is to strengthen the regional legitimacy of the regimes in Egypt and Jordan and to provide them with a political and economic "safety net."

Israel will strive to conduct a strategic dialogue and establish working groups on issues of Islamist terrorism, incitement to violence, and the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood. Israel and the peace-treaty states will seek to present a unified diplomatic front—one in which Egypt and Jordan do not act against Israel—and to weaken Islamist opposition movements in those countries. To this end, Israel will be prepared to share intelligence assets (see below).

At the same time, Israel will clearly define red lines in its relations with the peace-treaty states and a graduated set of responses to their violation. These definitions will be conveyed through discreet channels in order to create clear expectations and enhance Israeli deterrence. Responses will range from diplomatic protests, through the reduction

of cooperation in non-critical areas, to significant restrictions on economic and energy cooperation in extreme cases. While such measures could undermine regime stability, the peace-treaty states must be made to understand that Israel will not acquiesce to actions taken against it.

The Red Lines

It is recommended that the red lines include, at a minimum:

Full demilitarization of the Sinai Peninsula – Any violation of the demilitarization regime must be temporary, subject to Israel's prior approval, and must not include any strategic components such as air-defense missiles, base upgrades, airfields, logistics facilities, or similar assets.

Prevention of terrorism on their territory – If the states fail to act against terrorist activity on their soil directed at Israel, Israel must make clear that it will not only consider itself free to act against those terrorist networks, but also against any local actor—civilian or official—that Israel determines to be involved in such activity.

Prevention of foreign forces – Preventing the entry or deployment on their territory of foreign forces hostile to Israel or liable to disrupt the regional balance of power (Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia).

Strategic Coordination with The U.S.

Strategic coordination with the U.S. will be a key component of the diplomatic strategy. An important element of this coordination will be to condition security and economic aid to both countries in Congress, so that aid is provided only if they refrain from hostile actions against Israel and actions contrary to the spirit of the peace agreements. At the same time, Israel will assist the peace-agreement countries in engaging with Washington and other countries to attract investments and economic or other aid.

The Role of Egypt in the Future of Gaza

Israel will act to prevent Egyptian involvement in the future of Gaza, whether as a single governing authority or as part of a governing framework in the Strip. Israeli security control over Gaza is essential to protect the settlements of the Negev and the southern coastal plain. Any Egyptian presence would constitute a strategic risk that Israel must avoid.

The Intelligence Component

Enhancing intelligence-gathering efforts regarding the peace agreement countries is a necessary step to address strategic challenges. Israel will expand its intelligence activities, with an emphasis on open-source information, and strengthen its socio-economic analysis apparatus. The IDF must be capable of assessing the capabilities of the Egyptian and Jordanian militaries and provide early warning in the event of a threat to Israel's qualitative edge.

The intelligence component can also include assistance to the peace agreement countries against Islamist networks. This assistance may involve exposing and blocking funding channels of the Muslim Brotherhood, disrupting propaganda operations in the digital sphere, and interfering with the international activities of Islamist actors. It should be emphasized that the assistance will be based on Israel responding to requests from Egypt and Jordan according to its own prioritization. It should be noted that intelligence cooperation—such as sharing intelligence assets—can also serve as an effective lever in relations with the peace agreement countries.

The Military Component – Preparation for Extreme Scenarios

Preparing comprehensive operational plans for each extreme scenario is the core of the military component. For the "ring of fire" scenario, plans will be developed to ensure control of strategic areas such as the Jordan Valley and the Philadelphi Corridor, to prepare for defense against a renewed conventional threat, and to address the possibility of extensive Turkish assistance to the armament of Arab armies. For the "state collapse" scenario, plans will include stabilizing border areas, protecting shared infrastructure, and establishing a forward intelligence array to identify threats in zones of non-governance.

Enforcing the demilitarization of Sinai is a unique challenge that requires a sensitive yet resolute approach. Israel will be required to operate an effective enforcement system that monitors the Egyptian force posture in the peninsula, military infrastructure and dual-use infrastructure, and analyzes related activity. The purpose of this system will not only be to document and track individual units, but also to create an integrated situational picture that will enable the General Staff to assess the potential military threat emanating from the peninsula. Israel will operate through various channels to ensure that Egypt adheres to the demilitarization of the Sinai Peninsula.

Protecting shared strategic infrastructure is another vital component. Israel will work with the peace agreement states to develop defensive responses for water-supply facilities and pipelines, natural gas installations, border facilities and trade terminals, and major transportation arteries. These infrastructures constitute potential chokepoints in any extreme scenario, and damage to them could affect not only bilateral relations but also regional stability as a whole.

Finally, all three countries share an interest in securing the Red Sea and its maritime routes. Cooperation among the three—especially between Egypt and Israel—could serve as a new component of security cooperation that would directly benefit both states. Egypt possesses naval forces capable of securing at least parts of the Red Sea, while Israel has air and intelligence capabilities for target detection and strike.

The countries will work to coordinate their security activities in the region and act jointly against shared threats.

The Economic Component

The economic component is essential for creating leverage with the peace agreement countries and strengthening them. Israel, as one of the region's strongest economies, can offer access to its large consumer market, as well as cooperation in technology, education, industry, and tourism. Israel will aim to expand trade relations in particular and economic relations in general with both countries, to contribute to the stability of the regimes, to strengthen the Israeli economy, and to create strong leverage.

For example, Israel can leverage Jordan's deep dependence on Israeli water and energy supplies. Israel could link a measured increase in water provision to Jordan with corresponding diplomatic and security behavior. Similarly, conditions for supplying natural gas can serve as leverage. In the long term, Israel will develop projects to address Jordan's water crisis, conditional on improving the bilateral relationship, and will work to integrate Jordan into the IMEC project as an anchor for economic stability.

Leveraging Egypt's dependence on Israeli gas and the QIZ (Qualified Industrial Zones) framework will allow Israel to exert effective pressure if needed. Israel will link the conditions of gas supply to Egypt with corresponding diplomatic behavior. A plan will also be developed to expand the QIZ and increase technological and industrial cooperation between the two countries. In the longer term, Israel will work to create a joint framework for developing new gas fields and to transform the "Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum" into a strategic-economic platform.

With both countries, Israel will work to strengthen the tourism sector as a source of foreign currency. One way to achieve this is through "peace packages": regional tourism routes that combine visits to Israel, Egypt, and Jordan under a unified marketing framework, similar to "Classic Europe" packages in the global tourism market. Such packages will attract tourists from outside the region, strengthen the tourism sectors in the involved countries, and reinforce Egypt's and Jordan's economic interests in maintaining relations with Israel.

Israel can also offer to remove barriers to imports from Egypt and Jordan, foster technological cooperation in agriculture, energy, and water sectors, and develop joint infrastructure projects. Shared industrial zones in the Jordan Valley or the western Negev can help strengthen peripheral regions and provide new sources of revenue for the peace agreement countries.

Scale of Pressure on the Peace Agreement Countries

To illustrate the strategy, a theoretical scale of pressure on the peace agreement countries is presented here. The scale is designed to

allow Israel to respond gradually to actions by these countries, with a stepwise increase in pressure. The underlying logic is that the threat of escalation to a higher level will motivate the country to cease its adverse activities.

Level 1	
Event	**Israeli Leverage**
Anti-Israeli rhetoric in international forums	An official and public diplomatic protest
Votes in favor of non-binding anti-Israeli resolutions	Delay in approving visits by senior officials and official delegations
Statements by senior officials against Israel in the international media	Reduction of cooperation in non-essential regional forums

Level 2	
Event	**Israeli Leverage**
Initiating or leading anti-Israel resolutions in international forums	Approaching the U.S. Congress accompanied by detailed reports on antisemitic content and anti-Israel bias in education and state media
Active efforts to promote sanctions or an embargo on Israel	Delays in joint regional projects (energy, water, tourism), attempts to hinder or prevent international aid to the target country, and suspension of intelligence-sharing assets
Limited violations of peace agreements (such as minor breaches of demilitarization without authorization)	"Malfunctions" and safety inspections for the natural gas and water infrastructure
Incitement of anti-Israel demonstrations or boycotts of Israeli products	Exposing intelligence on governmental corruption and the use of U.S. aid funds, and submitting it to Congress

Level 3	
Event	**Israeli Leverage**
Clear violation of peace agreements (introducing significant military forces into Sinai, deploying hostile foreign troops)	Reduction of natural gas supply and restriction of water transfers to Jordan
Failure to prevent terrorist or sabotage activities against Israel from their territory	Israeli strikes on terror infrastructure, exposure of terrorist organization presence, official public condemnation

Chapter 11

Israel's Iran Strategy: Undermining the Regime and Restoring Deterrence

Shai Bantski

Executive Summary

Over the past two decades, Iran has been the primary existential threat to Israel. The Iranian leadership openly declares its intention to destroy Israel and has pursued this goal on multiple fronts: developing nuclear capabilities; building a large arsenal of surface-to-surface missiles (SSMs), unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), and cruise missiles; deploying proxies including Hezbollah, the Houthis, and Iraqi militias and assisting Hamas; carrying out terrorist activities in Israel and abroad. In addition, Iran transfers weapons and funding to terrorist organizations in Judea and Samaria and seeks to destabilize moderate regimes in the region.

At the same time, currently Iran is experiencing a severe internal crisis—its economy is collapsing, there are shortages of water and energy, public unrest is rising, and it is exposed to Israeli-American strikes. This point of weakness presents a window of opportunity for Israel in 2025–2026 to leverage its strategic advantage over Tehran.

In recent years, Israel has operated mainly within the framework of the "campaign between wars" (CBW)—targeted killings, strikes in Syria and Iraq, and attacks on senior Iranian figures. In the large-scale Operation Rising Lion in June 2025, nuclear sites, missile launchers, air defense batteries, and some regime symbols in Iran were attacked. Nevertheless, Iran continued missile and UAV fire toward Israel directly and through its proxies, especially the Houthis. The naval blockade in the Red Sea, which caused economic and psychological damage to Israel, and the continued

surface-to-surface missile fire toward Israel, illustrated that airstrikes alone do not provide deterrence.

This chapter proposes that Israel's policy should be based on two complementary principles:

1. **Undermining the stability of the Iranian regime** – The fall of the current regime must be the long-term strategic objective, since as long as it exists, it will continue to seek Israel's destruction. This can be advanced through heavy economic sanctions, kinetic operations inside Iran, strikes on energy infrastructure, cyber activity, mobilizing and supporting internal opposition and minorities, and conducting an influence campaign aimed at removing the "barrier of fear" among the Iranian public.

2. **Imposing direct responsibility on Iran** – It should be established that any hostile action by its proxies (UAVs, missiles, or terrorism) will lead to a direct response against Iranian targets. This step would make clear to Tehran that it cannot hide behind proxies and would compel it to restrain them.

To enable this, Israel needs a diverse firepower array that complements the Air Force, including surface-to-surface missiles and large quantities of low-cost UAVs, enabling rapid, sustained responses at varying levels of intensity—up to creating a dilemma for Iran whereby continuing proxy attacks it risks sliding into a broader direct confrontation.

Regarding the Houthis and the Iraqi militias, the article proposes additional strike options: eliminating senior leaders (such as Abdul-Malik al-Houthi), targeting regime and economic infrastructure, and applying international pressure. In Iraq, it argues that pressure should also be directed at regime power centers themselves in order to compel the government to restrain the militias.

In conclusion, Israel faces a historic strategic opportunity to exploit Iran's weakness. A shift is required from a policy of limited responses against proxies to a comprehensive offensive policy—applying maximum pressure to undermine the regime while establishing a clear deterrence equation: for every attack on Israel, Iran will pay a direct price.

The Iranian Threat in Its Various Dimensions

Over the past two decades, Iran has been the principal existential state-level threat to Israel. The Iranian leadership has repeatedly declared its desire and intention to destroy the State of Israel and has called for the elimination of the "Zionist cancer." Beyond rhetoric, Iran is working to realize this objective through several strategic and operational efforts:

Development of nuclear capability – The primary existential threat to the State of Israel. Despite Israeli and American strikes on Iranian nuclear scientists and on nuclear facilities in Fordow, Natanz, and Isfahan, the current status of Iran's nuclear program remains unclear. It is not fully known what has happened to the uranium enriched to 60%, nor what the Iranians intend to do next, including in the context of a possible nuclear agreement with the United States.

Surface-to-surface missiles – The threat of ballistic missiles being launched at Israel directly from Iran continues to constitute a strategic threat independent of the nuclear capabilities. Large numbers of missiles launched simultaneously cannot be fully defended against, as seen during Operation Rising Lion. As well, Iran's various proxies, including the Houthis and Hezbollah, despite the heavy blows they have suffered from Israel, still retain significant missile capabilities. This threat has accompanied Israel throughout the Iron Swords War and is expected to continue in the future. It is estimated that all elements of the "axis of resistance" together possess thousands of missiles. Such quantities pose major destructive potential for Israel and would strain Israel's air defense systems, especially due to the large number of interceptors required for protection.

UAVs and cruise missiles – The launch of suicide UAVs and cruise missiles from Iran and by its proxies toward Israel. Although the destructive capacity of cruise missiles and UAVs is lower than that of surface-to-surface missiles, and certainly lower than that of nuclear weapons, they can still strike strategic sites in Israel, cause significant casualties, disrupt civilian life, and harm the economy. This threat has accompanied Israel throughout the Iron Swords War and is expected to continue in the future.

Invasion of and attacks on Israel through various proxies – Iran trains its proxies, builds up their capabilities, funds and directs them, and provides them with intelligence in order to create a "ring of fire" around Israel and prepare forces for attack. These forces are intended to strike strategic targets inside Israel, wear it down, and potentially carry out ground incursions. It is true that two of Iran's principal proxies, Hezbollah and Hamas, were severely degraded in the Iron Swords War, and Hezbollah is under heavy pressure within Lebanon to disarm and avoid renewed war with Israel. However, Iran will try to rebuild these organizations' capabilities as quickly as possible in order

to restore the threat to Israel. Iran is not expected to forgo rebuilding and reinforcing these groups despite the blows they suffered in the war.

Terrorist activity against Israeli and Jewish targets abroad – Iran continues to attempt to carry out and facilitate attacks overseas against Israeli and Jewish targets and is expected to persist in doing so in the coming years. To execute these attacks, Iran uses various proxy actors, including criminal elements, thereby broadening the threat to Israeli and Jewish targets and making prevention more difficult.

Terrorist activity against senior figures inside the State of Israel – Following the targeted killings of various Iranian figures, Iran has intensified its efforts to assassinate senior Israeli officials, including through the recruitment of Jewish and Arab agents inside Israel. Reported targets have included a former prime minister, defense ministers and other ministers, a former chief of staff, additional senior security officials, and scientists.

Support for Palestinian terrorist organizations in Judea and Samaria – Iran smuggles high-quality weapons into Judea and Samaria, mainly through Jordan. In addition, Iran provides funding and direction to these terrorist organizations so they will carry out attacks both in Judea and Samaria and within the "Green Line," as part of the concept of unified arenas and in order to wear Israel down.

Subversion and destabilization of regimes near Israel's border or those maintaining relations with it – Iran will continue trying to undermine stability in various states, especially those that have ties with Israel, particularly Jordan and Bahrain, and possibly Egypt as well. The goal is that moderate regimes will be replaced by radical Islamist elements hostile, among others, to Israel, which could allow Iran to operate near Israel's borders and promote regional hegemony.

Israel has not stood still in its actions against Iran over the past decade, especially within the framework of the campaign between wars (CBW). Beyond striking various proxies during the Iron Swords War, Israel targeted senior Quds Force officials operating in Syria, assassinated Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh during his visit to Tehran (31 July 2024), and struck inside Iran (on October 26, 2024) strategic air defense targets, surface-to-surface missile production sites, and a nuclear-related site in Parchin in response to Iran's attack on Israel (October 1, 2024), leaving Iran exposed to potential Israeli and American airstrikes. Indeed, on 13 June 2025, Israel launched a surprise attack on Iran, focusing on nuclear facilities, missile sites and launchers, and numerous air defense batteries, and eliminated most of Iran's senior military leadership as well as Iranian nuclear scientists. In addition, regime symbols and regime-stability targets were attacked, including Iranian state television, Evin Prison, and Basij facilities. Iran then launched about 500

ballistic missiles and roughly 1,000 UAVs at military and civilian targets in Israel. The attacks killed about 30 Israeli civilians, wounded hundreds, and caused extensive property damage.

Iran today is at a peak of weakness as a state and as a society. It is facing one of its most severe economic crises, acute energy and water shortages, and in many places lacks electricity and running water; the Trump administration has increased pressure through economic sanctions. The combination of these crises could potentially drive the public into the streets and threaten the regime.

The period spanning 2025 into 2026 is shaping up to be a critical period in Israel's confrontation with Iran. Israel currently holds a significant strategic and military advantage over Iran, and it has a duty to continue leveraging this window of opportunity.

Israel's Current Policy

At the time of writing, Israel faces a Middle East dramatically different from the one it confronted at the end of October 7, 2023. To date, Israel has been proactive in its actions against Hamas and Hezbollah, and unlike in the past, it does not allow them to rebuild their capabilities or establish themselves along Israel's border. Instead, Israel strikes immediately upon detecting any terrorist activity and works to destroy infrastructure that is being rebuilt, particularly in Lebanon. Likewise, in Syria, whenever Israel identifies a threat—whether from Palestinian armed factions, the al-Assad regime, or Iranian proxies—it responds immediately and aggressively to neutralize the danger.

Iraqi militias launched numerous cruise missiles and UAVs toward Israel over the course of about a year. Israel did not respond directly but relied, without effect, on American pressure on the Iraqi regime to prevent further attacks from the territory. Although these militias have ceased attacking Israel since the Israel–Lebanon/Hezbollah ceasefire agreement in November 2024, they continue to rearm and could pose a future threat to Israel.

Iran today is at a peak of weakness as a state and as a society. It is facing one of its most severe economic crises

On the Houthi front, Israel has carried out several large-scale strikes against seaports, Sana'a airport, electricity facilities, oil refining and storage infrastructure, and a cement factory, and even destroyed several civilian aircraft parked on the ground in Sana'a. However, the Houthi naval blockade in the Red Sea continues, forcing Israeli-linked shipping to reroute around the African continent on routes between the Far East and Israel and vice versa. Missile and UAV launches toward Israel have also continued. Israel has suffered significant

reputational, economic, and psychological damage, beyond the serious risk to human life; meanwhile, the status of the Houthis and the personal standing of their leader, Abdul-Malik al-Houthi, have strengthened in the eyes of many in the Arab and Muslim worlds. Israel finds it difficult to sustain a continuous airstrike capability over time against the Houthis and to generate real-time targets beyond fixed infrastructure due to the great distance from Yemen. It does not appear that periodic airstrikes alone will cause the Houthis to stop launching missiles and UAVs toward Israel. Israel may therefore face a prolonged problem with the Houthis, since its leverage is limited and the Houthis will likely feel comfortable acting against it whenever Israel uses force on any front.

Until the election of President Trump, Israel acted to thwart the Iranian nuclear program through several channels: advancing an international diplomatic campaign, conducting covert operations, and in parallel building a military option for striking Iran's nuclear program—an option that was ultimately employed in June 2025. However, even after this blow, Tehran is unlikely to abandon its intentions to destroy the State of Israel or to seek revenge against it.

Regarding Iranian activity against Israeli and Jewish targets abroad, it appears that Israel is coping with it successfully, as open-source reporting indicates that many networks are being exposed and foiled, and Iranian agents are being uncovered and arrested, some with the assistance of foreign countries.

With respect to Iranian efforts to smuggle high-quality weapons into Judea and Samaria, the IDF is operating inside Palestinian refugee camps, evacuating residents and conducting house-to-house searches in order to dismantle terror infrastructure and seize weapons. It is also maintaining forces within the refugee camps so as to preserve operational control on the ground and the ability to prevent terrorist activity. In addition, there is an intention to establish a serious and effective security barrier along the Jordanian border similar to the one on the Egyptian border, which would help prevent weapons smuggling, as well as to establish a new division that would be responsible for the Jordanian border and be able to deal much more effectively with potential threats from that direction, including infiltration and the smuggling of weapons and drugs.

Against the regime itself, until Operation Rising Lion, activity consisted mainly of influence and messaging efforts, including video appeals by the prime minister to the Iranian public, along with occasional harassment-type operations inside Iran attributed by the media to Israel. During the operation itself, several actions were carried out aimed at undermining regime stability and encouraging the Iranian public to take to the streets, but in practice these moves did not lead to widespread protests.

The Proposed Policy: Maximum Pressure on the Regime, Including Efforts to Undermine its Stability, and Direct Retaliation for Attacks Carried Out by its Proxies

Activity Aimed at Undermining Regime Stability

As long as the current regime continues to rule Iran, it will continue to work toward the destruction of the State of Israel in various ways: rebuilding the ground forces of its different proxies surrounding Israel, producing a missile arsenal, and developing weapons of mass destruction. Therefore, in the long term, Israel must set for itself the objective of toppling the Iranian regime.

Against the backdrop of the deep economic crisis facing Iran, the regime is highly fearful of widespread protests and responds harshly to any sign of criticism directed against it. Until now, the regime has managed to cope with the waves of unrest in 2009, 2017, 2019, and 2022; however, the current situation is different. In those earlier periods, the regime was able to suppress the protests because it was dealing with a single major crisis at a time, whereas now it is confronting several large-scale crises simultaneously, along with pressures and forces it has not previously faced. This comes at what is arguably the weakest strategic point for the regime in the 46 years since the revolution.

To undermine the stability of the regime, Israel can act according to several principles:

1. Creating external and internal pressure on the regime. An example of external pressure is persuading many countries to designate the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist organization. This could harm Iran's relations with those countries and encourage public opposition inside Iran against the regime. Additional possible steps include: encouraging large-scale protests against the Iranian regime abroad; organizing demonstrations in front of Iranian embassies overseas; activity in various parliaments and at the UN against Iran and its regime with an emphasis on human rights violations; organizing a body composed of different opposition elements to operate with regard to internal Iranian affairs; establishing a team to apply international pressure regarding detainees inside Iran through human rights organizations, governments, the UN, and mobilization of global public opinion.
2. The activity should be designed so that Iranian citizens support it rather than oppose it or fear it.
3. Removing the barrier of fear among the Iranian public toward Iranian security forces by harming them and their image.
4. Creating an alternative to the current leadership. This step could encourage the Iranian public to understand that overthrowing the regime would not lead to chaos or worsen the situation in Iran.

5. Support and assistance to various groups and minorities operating against the regime inside Iran through funding, weapons, communications tools, and technology.
6. Enlisting global and regional powers for action against the regime in diplomatic, economic, and legal spheres.

Israel should declare that from this point forward, any launch of UAVs, ballistic missiles, or cruise missiles toward Israel by the Houthis or by Iraqi militias will be treated as an attack for which Iran bears direct responsibility

Beyond the above principles, Israel could act concretely along several lines in order to encourage the Iranian public to take action and weaken regime stability:

1. Supplying weapons to various opposition groups in Iran. These actors would occupy the security forces in the internal arena. It should be emphasized that the Iranian security forces are relatively strong and exercise effective control over events inside Iran and over public sentiment. Removing fear, together with the understanding that security forces can be targeted on a daily basis, could give a large segment of the population the courage to rebel against the government and attempt to replace it. In this context, it would be preferable for such opposition elements to target judges who hand down death sentences to opposition activists and prison wardens who carry them out, in order to create deterrence among judges and wardens on the one hand and encourage the public to take action on the other.
2. Kinetic activity against various regime targets that would damage the regime's economic capabilities and weaken it, such as harming oil exports and energy infrastructure. There is already significant criticism of the regime due to long daily electricity outages. Factories are closing and schools are not operating. During the winter, many homes lacked heating and residents suffered severe cold in various regions of Iran, while in the summer, they suffer from heavy heat. Activity of this kind would serve Israeli interests and also help generate protests against the regime.
3. Recruiting operational agents — Israel could recruit agents in Iran broadly and assign them operational missions that would force the security services to allocate extensive resources to locating and thwarting them. This step could exhaust Iran's internal security countermeasures apparatus. In this context, one could learn from Iran's extensive efforts to recruit agents in Israel. Even if some agents are caught during or after their activities, it would still be possible to amplify and publicize the weakness of the security services and portray it as problematic.

4. Imposing economic sanctions — If a nuclear agreement with Iran is not signed, heavy economic sanctions would be highly important in encouraging the public to take to the streets. Accordingly, close cooperation with the United States to halt Iranian oil exports (a key source of regime revenue) would be essential. Steps should be taken that would lead to further depreciation of the rial against the dollar, up to the point of economic collapse and extreme inflation.
5. Cyber activity — Against various infrastructure targets in Iran, such as communications, transportation, energy, and the economy. Such activity could also present the regime as vulnerable and incapable of defense and response, potentially encouraging public anger toward it.
6. Influence operations — The campaign should also include influence, reputational, and psychological efforts directed at the Iranian public, including direct appeals over the heads of the regime by the Israeli government; cooperation with leading social media influencers abroad who would deliver daily messages and highlight problems inside Iran; various active measures inside Iran that would damage the regime's image and resilience and encourage the public to take to the streets; and identifying an Iranian security or military figure who opposes the regime and would declare this publicly.

Placing Direct Responsibility on Iran for Attacks Carried Out by its Proxies

Israel should declare that from this point forward, any launch of UAVs, ballistic missiles, or cruise missiles toward Israel by the Houthis or by Iraqi militias will be treated as an attack for which Iran bears direct responsibility. In the event of such an attack, Israel should exact a price first and foremost from Iran itself — through strikes on Iranian targets or on Iran proper — and only afterward, or in parallel, strike Iran's proxies.

Israel does need to not limit itself to a strictly proportional response. It could escalate the response somewhat beyond the scale of the original attack. Thus, an attack on an Israeli port, airport, or energy infrastructure would trigger an immediate strike on parallel targets in Iran, plus an additional target, so that Tehran understands that the price it pays for proxy activity will exceed the damage inflicted on Israel. Such a policy would create situational surprise for the Iranian leadership. Israel would be conveying that it is not prepared to chase every Iraqi militia operative or every Houthi fighter in a cave, but will instead place full responsibility for hostile proxy activity on Iran itself. In every case of an attack on Israeli targets, Iran would be the party that suffers the consequences — and it is better that Tehran understand this now, while it is concerned about a renewal of fighting after Operation Rising Lion. As a result, Tehran may instruct its proxies to refrain from attacking Israel,

especially if it concludes that the Israeli threat is credible.

Developing Appropriate Force Capabilities in the Long Term

To enable the consistent implementation of this policy, it is necessary to establish as quickly as possible a diverse strike capability that includes loitering munitions (suicide UAVs), ballistic missiles, and cruise missiles as a complementary response to air force aircraft. This capability — especially in the areas of ballistic missiles and UAVs — needs to be low-cost. For example, Iran produces Shahed-136–type loitering munitions at about $30,000 per unit and advanced ballistic missiles at roughly $1 million per unit. This makes it possible to manufacture large quantities of weapons, sustain operational continuity and endurance over time, and maintain the ability to strike numerous targets, even if some UAVs or missiles are intercepted or fail en route to their targets.

Israel's strike force should have rapid activation capability and cover long ranges. Its advantage lies in operational flexibility — it would enable an immediate response mechanism against Iran and its proxies — and would ease political decision-making regarding the execution of strikes. This is because there would be no need to risk pilots or conduct manned flights over sovereign countries. In addition, these would be autonomous Israeli capabilities that do not depend on the United States, and they could also serve as an initial substitute if air force bases were significantly damaged in a way that limits the ability to operate aircraft.

Such a diversified force would allow responses across different levels of intensity, so that below the high threshold of fighter aircraft would be ballistic missiles, and below that, loitering munitions. A particularly low-intensity strike could place Iran in a dilemma due to escalation concerns. Israel could also use "proxies" to launch UAVs against Iranian targets. The need for prior coordination with the United States would be reduced. In a situation where Israel fears broad escalation with Iran, this capability could enable responses below the escalation threshold.

The Proposed Policy toward the Houthis and the pro-Iranian Iraqi Militias

In parallel with strikes on Iranian targets in response to Houthi fire, several response alternatives should be considered:

1. Target top Houthi leader directly, Abdul-Malik al-Houthi, along with other senior leadership. Abdul-Malik currently sees himself as a central figure, similar to Nasrallah in Hezbollah, and therefore taking him out could have organizational and governance effects.
2. Consider broad measures aimed at degrading the Houthis' governing and revenue-generating capabilities, including restrictions and enforcement actions affecting key logistical and commercial gateways under their control.

3. Maintain sustained economic pressure on regime-linked resource sectors in order to constrain revenue flows and increase internal accountability pressures.
4. Include actions directed at regime symbols and legitimacy assets as part of a wider deterrence and signaling campaign.
5. Promote expanded international sanctions — led by the United States and partners — against companies, vessels, and other entities that maintain ties with the Houthi regime, which is designated as a terrorist organization by Israel and the United States.
6. Employ cyber, financial, and regulatory measures against critical regime-supporting systems, subject to legal and coalition frameworks.
7. Over the long term, weakening the Houthi regime could strengthen rival Yemeni actors and create conditions for political change with regional and international backing.

With respect to the pro-Iranian Iraqi militias, Israel should adopt a policy that addresses both the militias themselves, and the Iraqi state framework connected to them. The rationale is that the Iraqi government holds influence and leverage over these militias, since many of them are incorporated into the Popular Mobilization Forces structure, subordinate to the Iraqi state, and receive budgets and equipment through official government channels.

Chapter 12

Rebalancing Israel's Global Posture in a Multi-Polar World

Nitzan David Fuchs

Executive Summary

The weakening of American hegemony, the rise of China, Russia's threat to Europe, and ideological opposition to Israel require Israel to reassess and update its relations at the global level. Israel's current posture in the global environment has achieved significant successes but suffers from three main shortcomings: excessive dependence on the U.S., an inability to project sustained power, and a lack of investment in soft power. In the near future, Israel could find itself in a crisis without sufficient U.S. support, exposed to maritime threats from regional states and terrorist organizations, and isolated amid anti-Israel trends.

The proposed strategy rests on four dimensions: ideological, political, economic-technological, and military. In the political dimension, Israel's relationship with the U.S. should shift from dependence to partnership, based on local production, regional integration, and joint technological projects. In parallel, Israel should invest in its relationships while differentiating between three circles: The circle of ideological allies that share similar values and can form a new political-values bloc; The Western circle, including threatened democracies such as Taiwan and South Korea, as well as Germany and Japan; The circle of additional non-Western states.

In the economic dimension, Israel should leverage its advantages as a geo-strategic hub and become a regional infrastructure center for goods, energy, and data. Key steps include investing in fiber-optic infrastructure and data centers, offering incentives to attract foreign investment, and

implementing regulatory reforms to facilitate business. This approach can create international dependence on Israel, reduce domestic costs, and strengthen its economic power base.

In the military dimension, the strategy proposes moving from point-counter capabilities to sustained power projection. Emphasis is placed on developing an advanced naval arm, including unmanned vessels as a cost-effective and flexible solution to protect trade routes and deter distant adversaries. At the same time, independence in armaments should be ensured through local production, inventory management, and international collaboration.

In conclusion, this chapter presents a vision of Israel as a state capable of self-defense, projecting power regionally and beyond, positioning itself as a regional economic hub and diversifying its alliances in the international system.

Current Policy and the Need for Update and Renewal

The Importance of Relations with the U.S. as a Cornerstone of Israel's National Strategy

The alliance with the United States is a cornerstone of Israel's national strategy. There is a widely accepted—and justified—consensus among Israeli decision-makers that the U.S. has no substitute, and that American military support, economic relations, and the diplomatic umbrella it provides are essential to Israel's prosperity. At the same time, decision-makers understand that the very importance of the alliance does not guarantee its stability over time.

Increasing Israel's strategic value as a way to maintain the alliance over time

From this understanding emerged the notion that Israel must continuously strengthen its strategic value in the eyes of Washington—that is, increase the added strategic value Israel brings to the table relative to American interests. Israeli decision-makers aim to create a situation in which the alliance is as resilient as possible to political fluctuations and changes of government in the U.S. The thinking is that if Israel is sufficiently "valuable," even a future administration less sympathetic to Israel will not be able to ignore its importance to American national security.

Israel's strategic value is expressed in several key areas:

1. **Intelligence:** Collecting and sharing intelligence on terrorist activity and regional developments.
2. **Technology:** Joint research for weapons development and positioning Israel's high-tech industry as a leading target for U.S. investment.
3. **Regional stability:** Supporting American allies such as the Gulf states and Jordan.

Israeli decision-makers aim to create a situation in which the alliance is as resilient as possible to political fluctuations and changes of government in the U.S.

Military Force Buildup Focused on Countering Discrete Threats, Without Sustained Power Projection

In the military domain, Israel has focused on developing capabilities to counter threats, particularly in the third circle (Iran). The military buildup emphasizes:

1. **Countering high-trajectory fire threats** through investment in active defense systems such as Iron Dome and Arrow.
2. **Preventing the advancement of Iran's nuclear program.**
3. **Developing precision strike capabilities** to hit high-value targets, primarily through the air force.

These systems indeed provide Israel with impressive capabilities to detect and neutralize discrete threats, but they do

not support sustained power projection in areas of interest. Power projection is defined as a state's ability to employ some or all components of its power—military, political, economic, or informational—to deter or stabilize areas of strategic interest over time.

Foreign Relations Lacking Soft Power

Israel excels in security cooperation, but it struggles in activities related to soft power channels. For example, Israeli public diplomacy, which has seen technical development in recent years, lacks the initiative and confidence of states with significant soft power (the United States, Japan, and to some extent Germany). Israel has developed innovative tools such as digital diplomacy frameworks, yet it remains passive in its implementation. The emphasis is placed on countering delegitimization threats and presenting Israel's security-historical narrative—as a safe haven for the Jewish people, justifying the existence of the state. However, the relevance of this narrative to Western audiences is diminishing.

The Weakening of American Hegemony as a Potential Threat to Israel

The meteoric rise of China as a major economic and military power is one of the most dramatic developments on the international stage in recent decades. The vast resources that accompanied its economic growth have allowed Beijing to steadily increase its defense budget, which now exceeds $230 billion per year. These resources have also enabled China to pursue ambitious economic policy initiatives, such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

China's rise has a direct impact on the gradual erosion of American hegemony. The need to devote significant resources to the military threat posed by China forces the United States to rebalance its global commitments, which imposes constraints on its attention, willingness, and military resources across different theaters worldwide. Examples of this can be seen in American handling of challenges such as Houthi attacks on maritime traffic in the Red Sea, Iran's nuclear program, or Russia's aggressive actions. China is also expanding its influence in international and regional organizations, such as the United Nations.[1] The United States struggles to garner international support for various initiatives and sometimes encounters opposition even from its own allies.

The dangerous scenario: parallel crises in the Middle East and East Asia, and the absence of American military assistance

The threat of a military crisis in East Asia has a direct impact on Israel's national security. In the past, Israel could rely on

1 Ted Piccone, *China's Long Game on Human Rights at the United Nations*, Brookings Institution, September 2018.

comprehensive American assistance during wartime, as in the Yom Kippur War or the Iron Swords War. However, a scenario involving a U.S.–China conflict in East Asia, occurring simultaneously with military tensions or war in our region, could lead to a dramatic reduction in U.S. military reserves available to Israel.[2] In such a case, even if the administration in Washington were highly sympathetic to Israel, the country could find itself without American backing and lacking critical weaponry, despite all of its "assets."

A scenario involving a U.S.–China conflict in East Asia, occurring simultaneously with military tensions or war in our region, could lead to a dramatic reduction in U.S. military reserves available to Israel

New Threats in the Maritime Domain Require a Reassessment Of Force Build-up

The effects of the weakening of American hegemony are also felt in the maritime domain, where Israel is exposed to new threats to its vital trade routes—both from state actors and sub-state actors—and these threats are expected to intensify with the diffusion of technologically advanced weapons into the hands of sub-state actors, such as terrorist organizations. Examples include advanced cruise missiles, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), and unmanned surface vessels (USVs).

Even today, Israel struggles to ensure freedom of navigation through strategic chokepoints such as the Suez Canal, the Bab al-Mandab Strait, and the Red Sea. Compared to regional countries such as Egypt or Turkey, the Israeli navy is relatively small and lacks a permanent capability to deploy forces to distant regions, such as the Persian Gulf or the Horn of Africa. These installations/limitations become a major strategic problem when there is no hegemon to guarantee freedom of navigation, as illustrated by the Houthi threat.

The threat is expected to worsen given the troubling trend in Israel–Turkey relations, which has even led to an economic boycott imposed by Ankara. The deterioration of relations on one hand, and the strengthening of the Turkish navy on the other, create a dangerous scenario of a Turkish maritime blockade of Israel—or at least disruption of Israeli trade routes. It should be noted that Ankara's naval presence is not limited to its own waters, given its intention to deploy naval forces in Somalia (near Bab al-Mandab) and Turkey's desire to establish

2 Seth G. Jones, "Empty Bins in a Wartime Environment: The Challenge to the U.S. Defense Industrial Base", *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 23.1.2023), https://www.csis.org/analysis/empty-bins-wartime-environment-challenge-us-defense-industrial-base.

a port in Sudan.[3] If relations with Egypt also deteriorate, Israel could face two large and hostile navies capable of cutting it off from global maritime trade.

The threat from sub-state actors is also worrisome. The Houthis' ability to operate advanced weaponry, including UAVs, explosive boats, and cruise missiles, poses a first-order threat to Israeli maritime trade. Similarly, cruise missiles in the hands of Hezbollah and Iraqi militias present significant risks. With the declining cost of computing power and the integration of artificial intelligence, these capabilities are likely to become more sophisticated and lethal in the near future, posing a serious danger to Israel's merchant fleet and offshore gas platforms.

The sea is a vital domain for Israel. Most Israeli trade is conducted via maritime routes. As of 2021, approximately 40% of Israeli exports and 66% of Israeli imports (by value)[4] were carried by sea. All of Israel's energy resources are also located offshore. The inability to ensure the exploration and extraction of oil and gas fields, as well as the free movement of trade to and from Israel, poses a direct threat to the country's national security and requires an appropriate response.

The rise of transnational and anti-Western forces has undermined established norms regarding Israel's right to exist as the nation-state of the Jewish people

Soft Power as an Essential Necessity in the Face of Delegitimization Campaigns

Beyond gaps in operational capabilities, Israel faces a deeper challenge—the erosion of its legitimacy on the international stage. The rise of transnational and anti-Western forces has undermined established norms regarding Israel's right to exist as the nation-state of the Jewish people.[5] Actors such as the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement challenge the foundations of Zionism and work to isolate Israel in international institutions, impose sanctions, and even bring about military action against it.[6] From the perspective

3 Spyros A. Sofos, *Navigating the Horn: Turkey's Forays in East Africa*, Global Transitions Series (South Bridge, Edinburgh: The Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform, 2022), http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/119753/1/Navigating_the_Horn.pdf.

4 Central Bureau of Statistics, "Exports and Imports of Goods by Mode of Transport 2021", 1.6.2022, https://www.cbs.gov.il/he/mediarelease/DocLib/2022/174/16_22_174e.pdf.

5 Yoram Hazony, "Israel Through European Eyes", *Jerusalem Letters* (blog), 14.7. 2010, https://jerusalemletters.com/israel-through-european-eyes/; "WCAR NGO FORUM DECLARATION", 1.9.2001, https://www.adalah.org/uploads/oldfiles/eng/intladvocacy/ngoforumdecl.htm.

6 Francesca Albanese, 'Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Occupied since 1967' (United Nations, 21 September 2022), https://www.un.org/unispal/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/A.77.356_210922.pdf.

of Israel's opponents, the very existence of Israel as the Jewish nation-state is a crime and a factor contributing to Islamic hostility toward the West. In their view, Israel would contribute more to Western security if it disappeared from the map, rather than waging what they see as a colonial war in the heart of the Middle East.

This position must not be dismissed as marginal or extreme. It penetrates international institutions, civil society organizations, and even legal frameworks, in a way that, over time, **erodes Israel's legitimacy** and prepares public opinion among Western elites for boycotts, sanctions, and even military pressure. Even if not every aspect of this threat materializes, it is clear that Israel would struggle to thrive under a regime of Western sanctions. It would be better—and easier—to undermine this approach at its ideological roots and prevent its further spread.

Moreover, Israel faces hostility that does not stem from "material interests," but from ideas—whether religious, cultural, or otherwise. A clear example is the Islamic Republic of Iran, which seeks to destroy Israel for ideological reasons. Virulent antisemitism prevalent in the Arab world—even in "peace-circle" countries such as Egypt and Jordan—is another example of hatred driven by ideological motives. Israel is aware of this situation, yet it does nothing to change it.

Furthermore, Israel seeks to stabilize authoritarian regimes that disseminate, or allow the dissemination of, virulent antisemitic material—for example, in Egypt.[7] This threatens the future of peace agreements with these countries and Israel's strategic stability in the region, due to the persistence of deeply rooted antisemitic attitudes within the population. Peace cannot endure when the population views the other state as a foreign menace and a threat to world peace.

Israel must act against these antisemitic forces. It must also encourage voices in the Arab sphere that seek to free the peoples of the region from hatred of Israel—support them and assume responsibility for their situation. The day when Arab societies internalize that neither Israel nor the West is responsible for their backwardness—but rather they themselves are—will be the day that an era of genuine prosperity and true peace in the Middle East begins.

Managing Adversarial Relationships in a World of Increasing Competition

Apart from the growing challenges with the West, Israel must also formulate a strategy toward the non-Western powers,

7 Rivka Yadlin, "Arab Antisemitism in Peacetime: The Egyptian Case", In Michael Curtis, *Antisemitism in the Contemporary World*, 1st ed, New York: Routledge, 2021, pp. 86–96, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429035845-9.

primarily China and Russia. There is no doubt that, for the foreseeable future, Israel belongs in the Western camp—whether due to shared values with its members, extensive economic ties and economic strength, or because the West (still) poses less hostility toward Israel than the Global South. However, the Western camp is not the only bloc with which Israel needs or wishes to engage. Israel has much to gain from relations with non-Western powers and may at times be compelled to reach understandings with them. Furthermore, many Western countries maintain close relations with these powers—for example, France, Italy, or Japan. Israel must know how to strengthen its position within the Western camp while simultaneously maintaining practical relations with Beijing and Moscow, avoiding direct confrontation.

The change of administration in Washington creates a unique opportunity to reshape the relationship between Israel and the United States, from one of dependence to one of partnership

The New Policy: Rebalancing Israel's Priorities

The new policy rests on four pillars: ideological, diplomatic, economic-technological, and military. It seeks to update Israel's relationships across the globe to reflect new realities and adds recognition of the importance of ideas in shaping and successfully implementing policy.

Changing the Nature of the Relationship with the United States, with the Aim of Consolidating the Alliance over the Long Term

The change of administration in Washington creates a unique opportunity to reshape the relationship between Israel and the United States, from one of dependence to one of partnership. Israel will increase its independence vis-à-vis the U.S., and in doing so, will actually ensure the stability of the alliance over time. This is because greater Israeli independence will reduce the temptation to use the relationship as a leverage point. Independence will also lower the demand for American resources, aligning with the long-term American trend which seeks to reduce U.S. military commitments in the Middle East.

Fundamental Principles

The proposed change is based on three fundamental principles:

1. **Operational independence:** Transition from reliance on external supply to local capabilities. The Israeli defense industry already produces 85% of the IDF's ground forces equipment. By 2038, Israel must aim to achieve operational independence through domestic solutions for essential munitions categories such as artillery shells, tank rounds, and aircraft bombs. This shift will reduce demands on U.S. stockpiles and ensure Israel can conduct high-intensity operations even without U.S. ammunition supplies.

2. **Regional integration:** Replacing American mediation with direct ties between Israel and Middle Eastern countries. The Abraham Accords demonstrated the potential for normalized relations between Israel and Arab states, enabling flourishing economic, diplomatic, and security ties. Expanding such agreements in the region will allow Israel to advance regional interests without constant U.S. mediation and free American attention for other areas.
3. **Economic partnership:** Turning dependence on aid into mutual benefit through joint projects, especially in critical technology sectors. Israel's advanced tech sector offers essential capabilities for modernizing the U.S. defense system while securing critical supply chains against Chinese influence.

Implementation Strategy: 2025–2029

Immediate goals (2025): The first year will focus on creating the basic conditions for success. Three critical objectives require immediate action:

1. Remove all barriers to military aid to Israel to ensure its ability to prevail in current conflicts. This includes expedited supply of precision-guided munitions, air defense systems, and critical spare parts. Beyond immediate operational needs, this step will demonstrate renewed American commitment to regional allies while creating leverage to end conflicts.
2. Activate the snapback mechanism of the nuclear agreement through Washington's European allies. Activation of the mechanism will address both Iran's nuclear ambitions and its provision of military equipment to Russia. Iran's violations of the 2015 nuclear agreement, combined with its role as Russia's military supplier, provide strong justification for sanction enforcement.
3. Achieve normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia, likely contingent on stabilizing the situation in Gaza, which would alter the regional dynamic.

Medium-term goals (2025–2027): The next three years will focus on institutional transformation and regional integration:

1. Reform international organizations: Establish mechanisms to address anti-Israel and anti-American bias, set a threshold for human rights protection for UN Human Rights Council members, and transfer UNRWA responsibilities to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. These changes require leveraging American UN contributions to achieve meaningful reform.
2. Advance Palestinian conflict resolution: Replace the Palestinian Authority with an efficient civil administration, update Palestinian Authority educational materials, and ensure that any bodies for Palestinian self-rule constitutionally recognize Jewish national rights in the Land of Israel.

3. Strengthen Israel's international standing through observer status in AUKUS technology partnerships and the G20 forum.
4. Establish a joint innovation fund focusing on energy storage, artificial intelligence, and quantum computing.

Long-term vision (2028–2029): The final phase of the framework establishes permanent structures for strategic partnership:

1. New ten-year security assistance memorandum (2029–2039) signaling full independence, explicitly noting this will be the last grant-based aid agreement. The aid amount in the new memorandum will be half of the previous one, totaling $19 billion.[8] The memorandum will include: joint weapons development projects beyond 2039; upgrading ground forces capabilities according to the Nagel Committee recommendations; and expanding naval capabilities to secure shipping lanes in the Red Sea and Eastern Mediterranean.
2. Deepen economic integration through two parallel initiatives: integrate Israeli companies into critical U.S. supply chains while reducing dependency on potentially hostile actors; and establish the India–Middle East–Europe Corridor (IMEC) consortium led by the U.S.
3. Establish a space partnership between the two countries, aiming to remove regulatory barriers to cooperation in the space industry and invest in R&D for technologies in space launch, zero-gravity manufacturing, and long-duration space missions.

The Diplomatic Circle: The Three Rings

In parallel to the reduced dependence on the United States, the current reality requires renewed thinking about Israel's network of alliances and international relationships. Deep shifts in the international system—including the rise of China, tensions between the West and Russia, and changes in the Middle East—require Israel to develop a multidimensional diplomatic strategy.

The proposed strategic model divides Israel's foreign relations into three distinct yet complementary circles. The first circle focuses on value-based and ideological partnerships with democracies that share a similar worldview. The second ring concerns cooperation with Western and democratic states that face challenges similar to those confronting Israel. The difference between the first and second circles is the distinction between internal and external foundations: the first circle includes countries whose ideological outlook shares core components with

8 For further reading, see: Raphael BenLevi, "The Future of U.S. Military Aid to Israel," *Misgav Institute*, September 19, 2024. [in Hebrew]

Israel's; the second includes countries that share a similar pattern of external threats. The third circle focuses on building ties with non-Western countries, with the aim of creating strategic redundancy.

This division is not hierarchical—each circle serves a different and complementary strategic purpose. The first circle strengthens Israel's value-based and ideological foundation; the second provides practical partners for addressing shared challenges; and the third expands Israel's strategic options beyond the traditional Western framework. The third circle also provides Israel with strategic redundancy, thereby increasing its value and freedom of action in the other two circles. A given country may belong to two or more circles—for example, India (the first and third rings).

The United States is not included in this model due to its unique importance and power. Any multilateral framework established by Israel that includes the United States would effectively become an American framework by virtue of Washington's weight.

The First Circle: Ideological Allies

Israel should seek to deepen its relations with countries with which it shares common values. These relationships, which will of course also include an element of overlapping interests, can serve as the foundation for a new bloc in the international arena—one that supports Israel and increases its diplomatic influence, economic strength, and even military power. An ideological ally would be a state that shares Israel's values of nationalism and freedom.

Membership in this ring would be granted to states that have demonstrated, over time and through their actions, support for the values of nationalism and freedom—both at the governmental level and within civil society. Such actions may include voting patterns in international institutions, the character and objectives of foreign aid, public discourse, the state of relations with Israel, statements by senior officials, legislation, and more.

A country would become a substantive ally by signing a series of agreements constituting a standard package for this status. It is not necessary for Israel and the allied state to sign all agreements simultaneously. On the contrary, a gradual process of developing and upgrading relations over time may be the most effective path toward a stable and durable partnership. The agreements would promote cooperation in three areas: ideological-value based, political-security, and economic-commercial.

The agreements could include:

1. Academic cooperation, including exchanges of students and faculty.
2. Civil cooperation through meetings between research institutes, civil society organizations, joint workshops, and more.

3. A memorandum of understanding on developing a diplomat training program for the implementation and advancement of a foreign policy grounded in the values of nationalism and freedom.
4. The establishment of a strategic dialogue forum led by the foreign and defense ministers—an annual ministerial meeting and working groups addressing shared issues (for example, counter-terror financing, cybersecurity, and diplomatic coordination in international institutions). The forum would be joint for Israel and all signatory allies, and each additional ally would join it.
5. An intelligence-sharing agreement regulating the transfer of sensitive intelligence and the use of the ally's collection assets.
6. The establishment of an economic forum led by the finance and economy ministers, with the participation of central bank governors.

These states would aim to form a distinct political, security, and economic bloc characterized by coordinated diplomatic action, a business-friendly environment, strong infrastructure, and the free movement of capital, goods, and knowledge. The agreements would create ties not only between the political and security leaderships of the states, but also between their civil society institutions. In this way, even if political leadership changes, the relationship between the countries would continue at the sub-state level.

The Second Circle: The Western Camp

The second circle in Israel's diplomatic strategy focuses on cooperation with threatened Western and democratic states. Its main purpose is to advance shared security, political, and economic interests with countries facing similar challenges. In an era of growing great-power competition and hybrid threats, the importance of this circle is increasing. The circle is divided into two groups: threatened democracies, and leading G7 states — Japan and Germany.

Threatened democracies

The term "threatened democracies" refers to democratic states that face major threats to their national security or vital interests. They are required to maintain a democratic system of governance under severe, and sometimes existential, threat, which creates internal tension between security constraints and democratic governance. Their democratic character also creates affinity — and at times partnership — within the Western camp. Because Israel shares with them dilemmas, camp alignment, and interests, threatened democracies can be important partners for Israel, especially in force buildup and capability development.

Today these states include Ukraine, Poland and the Baltic states, which must address Russian threats; Taiwan, facing threats from China; and South Korea, which confronts the North Korean threat. In all cases, these countries are engaged in significant force-

buildup processes or are preparing for such processes.

Cooperation with threatened democracies is vital for Israel for three reasons:

1. These states continuously develop new technologies and tactics to address advanced threats, and Israel can learn from them and benefit accordingly.[9]
2. Cooperation with these states allows Israel to broaden its circle of international support and strengthen its standing in the international arena.
3. The combined economic mass of these countries can ease each one's security burden through pooled resources.

In light of the strategic importance of such cooperation, it is proposed to establish three central mechanisms of action:

1. An intelligence forum that will serve as a platform for sharing intelligence information and insights among the partner countries' intelligence services. The forum will convene semi-annually with the participation of the relevant agency heads. Its importance derives from the growing need for intelligence sharing in an era of cross-border threats and hybrid warfare.
2. A technological center of excellence that will serve as a framework for joint research and technological development among the partner countries. The center will bring together researchers, private-sector technology developers, and relevant security bodies to advance technological solutions to shared challenges. Primary fields will include autonomous platforms and munitions, cyber technologies, secure communications systems, and critical-infrastructure protection.
3. A defense production directorate that will work to maximize the partners' independent defense-production capabilities. It will coordinate procurement and force-buildup authorities and promote governmental and commercial cooperation in the defense industries. Its work will include coordinating joint investments, joint procurement of weapons systems and materiel, and developing resilient supply chains.

G7 leadership – Germany

In addition to the threatened democracies, Israel should strengthen and deepen its ties with two key states: Germany and Japan.

Within the Western camp, Germany is a central partner for Israel due to its

9 Dominika Kunertova, "The Ukraine Drone Effect on European Militaries", application/pdf, *CSS Policy Perspectives* 10(15) (December 2022), https://doi.org/10.3929/ethz-b-000584078; Laurent Borzillo, "The Proliferation of Militarized Civilian Drones in Ukraine: A Lesson from the War for Western Military Staffs", *Network for Strategic Analysis (NSA)* (blog), 1.5.2023, https://ras-nsa.ca/the-proliferation-of-militarized-civilian-drones-in-ukraine-a-lesson-from-the-war-for-western-military-staffs/.

economic weight, its membership in leading international forums such as the G7 and G20, and its traditional sympathy toward Israel. Its importance is reinforced by its leading status in the European Union and its influence on EU policy toward Israel and the Middle East.

Germany today faces a very different strategic environment from that which existed immediately after the Cold War. The American commitment to the defense of Europe is no longer taken for granted, and Germany is again required to invest in developing its military power. Russia is no longer a partner but a strategic threat, requiring Germany to develop not only military capabilities but also strategic-security thinking. The need to secure alternative energy sources to Russia is pushing Germany toward Africa and the Middle East in search of oil and natural gas. Israel can contribute to Germany in shaping regional strategies and in supporting its defense industry.

Several practical steps are recommended to strengthen and deepen ties with Germany:

1. A working group to address the Iranian threat, focusing on two central aspects: the nuclear program, which concerns both countries, and Iranian assistance to Russia, which concerns Germany. Cooperation will include intelligence collection and analysis, sanctions coordination, and development of joint diplomatic initiatives.
2. A defense-industrial cooperation working group to identify and implement joint projects between the two countries' defense industries. Special emphasis will be placed on responses to shared threats such as ballistic missiles, UAVs and drones, and cyber threats. Cooperation may include joint defense-system development, technology sharing, and establishment of production facilities.
3. An industry and innovation forum to assist Germany in addressing its innovation challenges while leveraging Israeli experience. The forum will promote exchange of innovation insights, regulatory knowledge-sharing, academia-industry ties, and joint project funding, with emphasis on cyber defense, green and renewable energy, and robotics.
4. A scientific-technological steering committee focused on cooperation in future fields such as quantum computing, advanced biotechnology, and artificial intelligence. The committee will promote researcher exchanges, joint research, and co-funded projects, with special priority given to projects with industrial and security applications.

G7 leadership – Japan

Another country of interest is Japan. Japan is an important potential partner for Israel for reasons similar to Germany: it is a central Western-camp country, a member of the G7 and G20, and a major economic power. Like Germany, Japan is in the midst of military capability development and is pursuing a more independent and proactive

foreign policy. Japan and Israel also share similar threats — especially ballistic-missile threats — and can contribute to one another in security, technology, and possibly energy, including through Israeli gas exports.

The Israeli government should define Japan as a strategically important country and track progress in relations at the cabinet level

However, in its relations with Israel, Japan is sensitive to Arab and Muslim public opinion, primarily because of its dependence on energy imports from the Persian Gulf. Relations with Japan are less developed than with Germany, and a gradual approach is required to realize their potential.

The proposal is to begin with small steps that will help deepen relations over time. Israel should support Japan's efforts to transition to green and renewable energy sources (nuclear, hydrogen, wind) and to develop new fossil-fuel sources in order to reduce dependence on Persian Gulf imports. This would enable Tokyo to be less constrained by Arab-Muslim public opinion and to deepen ties with Israel. For its part, Israel will need to establish institutional capacity to monitor and cultivate the relationship, recognizing that in the short to medium term it may not yield tangible returns. The Israeli government should define Japan as a strategically important country and track progress in relations at the cabinet level.

Several practical steps are recommended to advance the relationship:

1. A scientific-technological committee focused on applied research in strategic fields such as hydrogen technology, energy storage, and cyber defense. Including defense-establishment representatives would allow an indirect security dialogue channel while preserving a civilian cooperation profile. Presenting research outputs at business conferences would help attract investment and expand bilateral commercial cooperation.
2. An energy dialogue forum, involving the foreign ministers and the economy/industry ministers, focused on cooperation in energy and energy security. Special attention would be given to joint development of energy sources, including Israel's natural-gas fields. Japanese experience in the LNG industry could assist Israel's development of this sector and attract Japanese investment.
3. An Israel–Japan business forum, led by the economic attaché in Japan, to deepen commercial ties. The forum would organize annual conferences and exhibitions alternating between Israel and Japan to generate business opportunities and promote mutual investment, with special emphasis on connecting technology and innovation companies from both countries.

As trust develops between the countries, cooperation can gradually expand into additional areas, including security domains,

while maintaining discretion and sensitivity to Japanese regional interests.

The Third Circle: Beyond the West

The third ring in Israel's foreign policy strategy focuses on creating connections beyond the Western world. Its purpose is to generate independent channels for Israel's essential needs and to build strategic redundancy. It also aims to weaken hostility from the Arab-Muslim camp, thereby reducing Israel's diplomatic isolation. The countries in this circle can be divided into three groups: Arab or Muslim countries, friendly non-Western countries, and anti-Western powers.

Weakening hostility of the Arab-Muslim camp through the Abraham Accords and peace agreements as a strategic goal

The hostility of the Arab-Muslim world toward Israel is a major international challenge. This hostility manifests not only in direct relations with Israel but also in applying pressure on countries that wish to deepen their relations with Israel (such as Japan). This situation contributes to Israel's international isolation and increases the cost of its diplomatic relations with other states.

To address this challenge, Israel should adopt a strategy with two vectors. The first is the normalization vector – Israel should deepen relations with countries with which it has already normalized relations and expand the circle through additional normalization agreements. Relations should be deepened not only in trade and military cooperation but also in scientific and technological collaboration, culture, and diplomatic coordination.

The second vector is the national honor vector. Israel must hold peace agreement and normalization countries accountable for hostile actions in international forums. The price may be diplomatic, economic, or even security-related—for example, suspending the sharing of critical intelligence or mobilizing Israeli lobbying in Congress against that country. Israel will no longer accept a situation in which countries with peace agreements initiate hostile steps against it in international bodies, and will pressure peace and normalization countries not to support such initiatives in Arab-Muslim organizations, such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. The National Security Council (NSC) will be responsible for formulating incentive programs for each country, presenting a list of action options to the cabinet.

Currently, Israel refrains from such actions out of concern that it may harm diplomatic relations or even lead to the collapse of a peace agreement state if excessive pressure is applied (especially Jordan). Two responses justify this approach: First, Israel's pursuit of peace and normalization with its neighbors is intended to secure its position in the region and ensure long-term prosperity. If these countries, with which Israel has peace agreements, undermine

Israel's legitimacy, then the agreements lose their meaning. For avoiding war, a ceasefire agreement is sufficient.

Second, actions by these countries against Israel in the international arena strengthen extremist groups at home. When a peace agreement state acts against Israel internationally, one likely motivation is to appease the anti-Israel opposition at home, such as the Muslim Brotherhood. The opposition perceives it has power and influence, gaining encouragement and strength. Instead of confronting these extremist groups directly to weaken them, the governments of peace agreement countries inadvertently empower them through their actions.

Friendly non-Western countries

Friendly non-Western countries are states with which Israel has positive relations or potential for positive relations. These countries are important to Israel because they provide redundancy: relations with them can fulfill Israel's essential needs even in times of international crisis. For this redundancy to be effective, these countries must have a history of refusing to comply with Western bloc dictates.

India and Azerbaijan are good examples. These are non-Western countries with enough influence to enjoy strategic autonomy vis-à-vis the West. India has a large export market and can supply Israel's food needs. Azerbaijan already supplies a significant portion of Israel's oil needs. Israel should advance emergency supply agreements with both countries. These agreements will ensure stable access to oil, grain, and steel even in times of international crisis. Israel will establish companies in advance to secure the supply of these and other products through these countries, shielding these channels from external pressure.

Regarding Azerbaijan, transit through Turkey could be complex if Jerusalem-Ankara relations continue to deteriorate. Israel may seek an additional non-Western country willing and trustworthy to supply oil during crises. Potential candidates include Angola, Gabon, and Brazil.

Ideological activity in the Global South, including non-state channels

Beyond bilateral relations, Israel should work to expand its influence in the Global South through subnational networks, foreign aid programs, and ideological work. This approach should be accompanied by a clear policy: all cooperation will be conditional on refraining from actions against Israel in the international arena. While this may deter some countries, it will allow Israel to identify genuine partners and invest in them. The goal is to make political action against Israel too costly to continue.

Anti-Western powers: Russia and China – protecting interests while avoiding conflict

In relations with China and Russia, Israel should adopt a balanced approach. On one

hand, it is important to keep open dialogue channels with these powers. This can be done through annual meetings of foreign and defense ministers and maintaining communication channels between military chiefs (in the case of Russia). Israel will be ready to cooperate in clearly civilian areas to realize the economic potential of these relationships (especially relevant in the case of China).

On the other hand, Israel must maintain freedom of action to protect its national interests and values. Support from these countries for hostile actors against Israel must be met with a clear response, ranging from diplomatic protest to active measures against their interests. Israel will not accept harm to its interests and will act to balance these countries.

The cases of Taiwan and Ukraine are good examples of this approach. Regarding Ukraine, Russia's war is an imperialist act contrary to Israel's values and deserves condemnation. Israel should condemn this action regardless of its working relations with Moscow.

Furthermore, cooperation with Ukraine can serve Israel's interests in areas such as the technological development of autonomous systems[10] and the fight against Iran (a common adversary of Jerusalem and Kyiv). There is no strategic justification for allowing Israel's relations with another sovereign country to be limited by Moscow, except in very specific matters.

Relations with Taiwan can also greatly benefit Israel in various fields—cybersecurity, chip development, and understanding Chinese weaponry reaching adversaries (Iran). Recognizing China's economic importance, Israel will maintain relations with Taiwan at the level of work meetings in civilian forums, while not avoiding them, to express principled support for a defending democracy or for the benefits that can be gained.

Building Israel's economic power by transforming it into a central infrastructure hub

Today, Israel enjoys three key strategic assets: a high-tech industry, natural gas reserves, and a location at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa. Each of these assets creates an opportunity to deepen Israel's influence—whether by creating technological dependence of other countries on Israeli products, by positioning Israel as a regional energy player, or by establishing it as a critical hub for the flow of goods and information between continents.

Israel is already working to leverage its advantages in the gas sector and to

10 Dominika Kunertova, "The War in Ukraine Shows the Game-Changing Effect of Drones Depends on the Game", *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 79(2) (4.3.2023), pp. 95–102, https://doi.org/10.1080/00963402.2023.2178180; Phillips P. O'Brien, "AI Is Starting to Rule the Battlefield", Substack newsletter, *Phillips's Newsletter* (blog), 22.1.2024, https://phillipspobrien.substack.com/p/ai-is-starting-to-rule-the-battlefield.

strengthen its high-tech industry. It is also striving to become a central hub for goods and energy. What is still lacking is a plan to also transform Israel into a central data hub, and to leverage its position as a hub for goods and energy to bolster Israeli industry and ease the cost-of-living burden on its citizens.

Israel as a Regional Data Hub

To transform Israel into a regional data hub, two components need to be developed: a fiber-optic network and data centers. In the fiber-optic domain, a high-capacity infrastructure is required to connect Israel to Europe via the Mediterranean Sea and to the Persian Gulf and East Africa via the Red Sea. Regarding data centers, Israel should aim to attract them through regulatory measures and proactive policies.

Israel's relative advantage in the data center sector relies on three factors: first, the ability to provide cheap and stable electricity, based on its natural gas reserves; second, its geographic location, which enables low-latency connectivity to both Europe and Asia; third, advanced human capital and technological capabilities. The combination of these factors creates an opportunity to attract multinational companies.

To realize this potential, several steps are proposed:

1. **Promotion of international data transfer agreements:** These agreements will provide a legal and operational framework for data transfers between Israel, Europe, Africa, and the Persian Gulf. This will attract multinational companies seeking to operate in emerging markets while benefiting from the stability and security of a Western-aligned economy. Companies could locate their server farms in Israel while remotely supporting their operations in developing markets.
2. **Incentive programs to attract investment:** Incentives could include reduced electricity pricing for data centers, grants for establishment, fast-track regulatory approvals, and tax benefits.
3. **Investment in supporting infrastructure:** Development of electricity, communication, and transportation infrastructure in data center zones. Investment in supporting infrastructure—especially reliable power supply and high-speed communication networks—is critical to attract investment.
4. **Workforce training:** Specialized training programs in data center operations, cybersecurity, and cloud infrastructure. Availability of skilled personnel is a key consideration in determining the location of data centers.

Maximizing Israel's Economic Potential as an Infrastructure Hub through Structural Reforms

Turning Israel into a central hub for goods, energy, and data will bring new inputs to Israel at a low cost. For Israel to efficiently absorb these inputs and leverage them to create secondary value, reforms are required

in Israel's regulatory and bureaucratic system. Beyond targeted infrastructure measures, it is recommended to implement a broad regulatory reform to improve the business environment in Israel. Such a reform will allow Israel to realize the potential of being a central hub in the Eastern Mediterranean by harnessing market mechanisms.

Turning Israel into a central hub for goods, energy, and data will bring new inputs to Israel at a low cost

It is recommended to establish an inter-ministerial working group led by the Ministry of Finance to ease regulation across the economy in terms of business establishment and operation. Improving the business environment will also support the specific goal of turning Israel into a regional infrastructure hub. Foreign companies considering setting up data centers or communication infrastructure in Israel take into account not only the specific incentives offered to them but also the overall business environment in the country.

Building military power to project force

The U.S. focus on competition with China compels Israel to develop independent capabilities to deal with distant threats. This is especially evident in light of the disruption of maritime trade routes by the Houthis in the Red Sea—an event that demonstrates how non-state actors can harm Israel's vital interests while the U.S. shows limited willingness or ability to intervene effectively.

The required strategic response is based on two complementary pillars:

1. Developing force-projection capabilities, including a significant strengthening of the navy.
2. Developing independence in armaments through domestic production, effective stockpile management, and international cooperation, including long-term supply contracts and joint weapons production.

The pillar of independence in defense production is already being addressed in the existing plans of the defense establishment. Israel's defense industries are expanding their independent production capabilities for advanced weapons systems, with an emphasis on flexible supply chains and rapid production capacity in emergencies. In contrast, the issue of force projection—particularly the ability to operate in distant maritime theaters—has not yet received an adequate response. Therefore, this section will focus on developing a new concept for Israeli force projection.

Force Projection as a Vital Necessity

Power projection is one of the central capabilities that distinguishes regional powers from ordinary states. It is the ability to apply power (economic, military, or political) far beyond a country's borders, influence adversaries' behavior, and

defend national interests. In the military dimension, this capability is achieved through a combination of naval, air, and special forces, enabling a state to operate in distant theaters over time.

Today, Israel is Limited in its Power-Projection Capability to Pinpoint and Short-Range Operations

Israel's current power-projection capability is based primarily on air-power focused on neutralizing specific threats. Although this capability has proven itself in many cases, it is limited in its ability to sustain a long-term campaign far from Israel's borders. Several reasons can be noted:

1. Air power cannot remain in the theater for an extended period for purposes of deterrence and defense.
2. It depends on bases in Israel for its operations and resupply.
3. Its employment becomes increasingly complex the farther the target is, due to the need to include—beyond strike aircraft—also refueling aircraft, interceptor aircraft, electronic warfare platforms, and at times rescue helicopters. Air power also often must cross the sovereign airspace of other countries, which creates diplomatic friction.

The Suitability of Naval Power for Power Projection

Israel requires a naval force capable of operating far from its borders and providing the desired power projection — specifically a naval force for three central strategic reasons. First, Israel is critically dependent on maritime trade routes, especially in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. Growing threats to these routes, as recently demonstrated by Houthi activity, require an immediate response capability and effective deterrence. Only a permanent naval presence can provide both of these components.

Second, naval capability provides Israel with essential redundancy. Unlike air power, which is limited by the availability of airfields and their vulnerability during wartime, naval forces can continue operating even when Israel is under broad attack. This independence from infrastructure located within Israeli territory makes naval power an important asset that significantly reduces Israel's vulnerability in emergency situations.

Third, naval power offers unique operational flexibility. It enables operations across a much larger area than the air force can continuously cover and provides extended on-station endurance without reliance on aerial refueling. Naval platforms can carry a wide range of capabilities — from intelligence collection systems, through electronic warfare tools, to precision munitions — and can rapidly adapt to immediate operational needs.

However, the traditional model of a large battle fleet is not suited to Israel's budgetary

and operational reality. Instead, Israel should develop a naval force that is, on the one hand, powerful in both firepower and operational range, and on the other hand, economical in cost and manpower.

Unmanned Vessels as a Strategic Necessity

The solution to the challenge lies in the development of advanced unmanned surface vessels (USVs). These platforms, combining advanced autonomy with significant combat capabilities, can provide the required capabilities at a reasonable cost. A modular platform capable of performing multiple roles — intelligence collection, electronic warfare, air defense, anti-ship warfare, anti-submarine warfare, and land-attack missions — would enable Israel to counter maritime threats, strike distant targets, and protect critical sea lanes.

Such platforms can also serve as a dramatic force multiplier for the navy's manned ships, support Israel's land-based air defense array, and even assist air force operations. For example, a USV carrying loitering munitions that neutralizes air-defense targets before the arrival of air force aircraft would allow the attacking force to focus on high-value targets such as bunkers and command-and-control facilities that the USV itself cannot strike. USVs could also intercept threats before they reach Israel, easing the burden on Israel's air-defense systems and enabling more flexible deployment patterns that complicate enemy launch and attack planning.

Tzaltsal Directorate

The Ministry of Defense and MAFAT are already aware today of the importance of robotics in the maritime domain. However, the Ministry of Defense's current plan is to establish a single directorate that will deal simultaneously with ground robotics, maritime robotics, and artificial intelligence. These fields do overlap to a certain extent, but a single directorate handling such a wide range of subjects may struggle to deliver the required outputs on the necessary timeline.

Israel requires a naval force capable of operating far from its borders and providing the desired power projection

The reason lies in the unique nature of the maritime challenge. Developing unmanned vessels requires addressing technological challenges unique to the naval arena, such as long-range communications in a maritime environment, autonomous navigation at sea, and system maintenance and reliability under harsh sea conditions. In addition, a deep understanding of naval warfare doctrine is required, and of how unmanned vessels can be integrated into it effectively.

Accordingly, it is recommended to establish a dedicated directorate focused on the development of unmanned vessels — the Tzaltsal Directorate — operating according to clear milestones. This directorate would

integrate experts in shipping and naval warfare, robotics, and artificial intelligence, but would focus exclusively on the unmanned vessel development challenge. It is especially important that the directorate operate in close cooperation with the Navy to ensure that technological development meets operational needs.

The directorate's initial goals should focus on developing an unmanned vessel costing about $50 million per unit, capable of operating far from Israel and modular enough to be adapted to different missions — from patrol and intelligence collection to strike missions. Strikes against deep inland targets should preferably be carried out using loitering munitions rather than missiles, due to the lower cost of the former. Development at this price point would enable procurement of many platforms and compete with the Air Force's strike costs.

The main development milestones should include:

1. Development of survivability and sea-endurance capabilities — including advanced autonomous navigation and operation in harsh sea conditions.
2. Development of a resilient communications and control system enabling operation even under jamming or denial conditions.
3. Development of the ability to carry diverse payloads, including missiles and electronic warfare systems.
4. Development of artificial intelligence capabilities enabling a high level of autonomy across missions.

Alongside the technological development, thorough staff work is required to develop an appropriate operational doctrine. This doctrine will define how the unmanned vessels integrate into the Navy's existing force structure and how they contribute to Israel's power-projection capability. It is particularly important to define the interaction between unmanned vessels, crewed ships, and air assets.

Chapter 13

"My Heart is in the West, and I am in the Middle East": New Diplomatic Priorities for Israel

Raphael BenLevi[1]

Executive Summary

Israel's foreign policy has traditionally focused on the West, primarily the United States, while neglecting the potential of the Middle East and Africa regions. This trend, shaped by hostile relations with the Arab world and a sense of cultural affinity with the West, nevertheless leads to missed economic, diplomatic, and security opportunities.

The Abraham Accords demonstrated the region's potential for openness, yet the "villa in the jungle" mindset still dictates priorities in practice. The current approach reflects a detachment from the regional geopolitical environment and prevents Israel from realizing its influence as a regional power, while also blinding it to emerging changes and threats. Israel must internalize its natural belonging to the Middle East and act from a position of self-confidence and assertiveness, with an integrative view of regional interests.

An integrative approach requires a deep familiarity with the relationships among Arab states themselves and an understanding of their interests. The more we grasp the dynamics of regional politics, the more we can initiate solutions, solve problems independently, and avoid constantly running to Washington for mediation. This approach means that major

1 The article was written on the basis of consultations with former senior officials in the security establishment. I credit them with many of the ideas that were developed by me into this article. Responsibility for the content is mine alone.

initiatives—such as an agreement with Saudi Arabia or the IMEC trade corridor—should proceed in a way that benefits all neighboring states. By contrast, when Israel cooperates with hostile actors such as Qatar, which is viewed negatively by other Gulf states, it becomes an object of contempt in the eyes of the Emiratis and Saudis.

To instill this shift in mindset within the diplomatic system, organizational steps are also required, including: transferring responsibility for managing relations with states that do not have diplomatic ties with Israel from the Mossad to the National Security Council; creating two new ministerial-level positions within the Foreign Ministry—a minister for Middle Eastern and Arab affairs and a minister for African affairs; and upgrading the status of ambassadors to regional countries. In addition, Israel should insist on reciprocal official visits and institutionalize international conferences of regional states in Israel—for example, an Africa conference in Israel every five years and a Middle-East states conference every two years.

It should be emphasized that Israel's ability to position itself as a diplomatic leader as described in this chapter depends on a decisive and unequivocal defeat of Hamas in Gaza and on fully bringing the Nukhba terrorists to justice. These two steps would demonstrate that Sunni Islamism is in the losing camp and that Israel is determined to stand firm against its enemies. Anything less would give tailwind to Sunni Islamism throughout the region and challenge regimes willing to cooperate with Israel.

The Cognitive Disconnect: Where Do We Live?

The Abraham Accords, signed in 2020 between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco, and Sudan, are a historic breakthrough for Israel's diplomatic integration in the region. They stemmed first and foremost from the fact that in recent decades Israel has become a regional power in security, economic, and technological terms, and that regional states have recognized that it is in their interest to strengthen diplomatic ties with Israel. The fact that none of them severed relations with Israel throughout the Iron Swords War attests to the strength of these interests.

Most of Israeli society, including the public elites responsible for managing foreign policy, lives with the consciousness that we reside in the United States or Western Europe

Despite this breakthrough, it seems that the State of Israel has not yet internalized the meaning of being a native member of the Middle East. It is often disconnected from the important political and geopolitical currents in the region, which pass "over its head." One might say that it is not only indifferent to the winds filling the regional sails, but not even aware that such winds exist. Most of Israeli society, including the public elites responsible for managing foreign policy, lives with the consciousness that we reside in the United States or Western Europe. The mental map in the collective consciousness gives broad space to the West and very little to our own neighborhood, while Africa remains off in the periphery of the collective imagination.

There are good reasons for this state of affairs: the hostile relations of Arab states toward us throughout most of Israel's history; the sense of cultural affinity with the free and modern countries of the West; the distance from the political culture of most regional peoples living under monarchical and authoritarian regimes; and many economic considerations that reinforce the importance of ties with countries that have strong economies and standards of living far closer to Israel's than those of many regional states, some of which lag decades behind Western and Israeli averages.

However, the continued mindset of a "Western villa in the Middle Eastern jungle" no longer reflects Israel's political, economic, and security interests looking ahead to the coming decade. If we continue to ignore the neighborhood in which we live, we will miss critical opportunities to influence the region and to achieve economic growth, and we will be blind to crises and security threats that may emerge. We may even worsen these crises through a lack of understanding of the secondary effects of our actions.

To remove any doubt, the regional integrative approach presented in this article is not one in which Israel comes from a submissive, inferior position seeking acceptance in the neighborhood in exchange for strategic and

political concessions. On the contrary, the success of the Abraham Accords stems from Israel being a strong regional power that acts assertively to advance its interests—interests that a growing circle of countries recognizes as shared.

To act from the position of a regional power befitting Israel's present and future status requires a shift in mindset. First, we must recognize the geographic fact that we are in the Middle East and adjacent to the African continent. Our national interests are bound up with regional interests whether we like it or not. We are influenced by regional geopolitical, commercial, and even ideological developments by virtue of geographic proximity—and we can influence them in return.

Moreover, we must internalize that the Jewish people are indigenous to the Middle East—our language is a Middle Eastern language within a mosaic of regional languages—and we should feel at home here without apology and without relinquishing the fact that we represent a model of a free and technologically advanced state. The more we internalize and project the naturalness of our presence here outwardly and unapologetically, the greater the chance that other peoples of the region will eventually relate to us accordingly.

We must also update our perception of the Arab societies around us. The image of a society with low socio-economic status, a failed political culture, and one steeped in hatred of Israel, applies to many of our neighbors, but not all, and not to the Arab world as a whole.

The result of the cognitive disconnect described above is missed diplomatic and economic opportunities and neglect of emerging security threats. The path to correction requires changes at the level of mindset, organizational changes in the foreign and defense establishments, and initiatives toward civil society. Only such changes in Israel's diplomatic agenda will allow it to realize its full potential as a prosperous and leading regional power. Without this internalization, Israel may pay a heavy price.

The Problem: Lack of Influence Over What is Happening Around Us, Missed Opportunities, and Blindness to Emerging Threats

The Road to Arab Capitals Should Not Have to Pass Through Washington

Currently, Israel relies to a large extent on American mediation in its relations with Arab states, instead of operating through direct and independent channels. Washington is an important hub for Middle East policy and its influence should not be underestimated, but there is another hub as well — the Arab states themselves. The tendency to run to Washington to mediate our relationships with Arab countries is mistaken and unnecessary. The better we understand

the relationships among the Arab states themselves, the more we will be able to initiate, solve problems on our own, and avoid the need for American mediation. On the contrary, the more we understand the interests of the pro-Western Arab states, the more we can assist them in Washington in ways that will earn us credit in our bilateral relations with them.

For example, Israeli policy toward Egypt is to support the el-Sisi regime because it is preferable to the alternatives. But we assume Washington will ensure the regime's stability for us, and therefore we give no real attention to scenarios of its collapse. We need to understand what Egypt needs now, identify opportunities to help it, and thereby create Egyptian commitment toward us that will assist in other contexts. When the Ukraine war broke out, a crisis emerged in Egypt's wheat supply. Had this crisis continued, it could have undermined regime stability. Israel should examine how it can help address such issues.

Since a stable wheat supply is a vital Egyptian interest, Israel can offer technological support in Egyptian agriculture, bring scientists, and provide the knowledge the Egyptians need. In addition, the continued development and expansion of the QIZ (Qualified Industrial Zones) framework with Egypt does not receive the attention it deserves. This agreement creates incentives for business cooperation between Israeli and Egyptian companies by granting free-trade conditions — exemptions from customs duties on final products exported to the American market. However, the great potential embodied in this agreement is not being realized because it is not treated as a priority.

Another example is the "Prosperity Green" and "Prosperity Blue" projects — regional cooperation initiatives among Israel, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates. Under "Prosperity Green," Jordan will produce solar energy to be supplied to Israel, and under "Prosperity Blue," Israel will supply desalinated water to Jordan. These projects have significant potential, yet their advancement has progressed far more slowly than required, partly because we did not prioritize them and instead relied on Washington to move things forward.

If We Recognize the Interests of our Neighbors, we will be Able to Accumulate Diplomatic Credit with Many countries, which will serve Israeli Interests

During the negotiations on the normalization agreement with Morocco, there was a debate within the Israeli system about whether to recognize Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara. Some voices in Israel opposed taking a stance on this internationally disputed issue, while others argued that since this recognition was important to Morocco, it would be a significant gesture and would create a commitment from Morocco to us that

would be difficult to quantify in advance.[2] Ultimately, Israel recognized Western Sahara as Moroccan territory in July 2023. In response, Morocco immediately invited the Israeli Prime Minister for an official visit.[3] Additionally, after the outbreak of the Iron Swords War, Morocco maintained ties with Israel, and later that year even signed a deal to purchase two satellites from Israel.[4] Had even one Arab country cut ties with Israel, it would have created political pressure on the others not to appear too "Zionist," and we could have seen a wave of severed relations. Since none of them cut ties, the others maintained their stance—largely thanks to Israel's gesture of recognizing Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara.

One unimplemented opportunity involves the semiconductor industry. Israel made an effort to join an agreement related to the semiconductor industry with the United States. Within this framework, Israel could have proposed connecting the United Arab Emirates to agreement, since it was also in their shared interest, but this was not done.

Africa also remains outside the focus of Israeli attention, even though it is a region close to us with many of our interests and strategic importance, given its growing population and abundant natural resources. Additional countries in central Africa are interested in establishing ties with Israel, but Israel has neglected them. Many Christian communities in Africa support Israel out of religious affinity and a desire for cooperation. Africa also faces negative developments that require Israeli attention: Iran has been attempting to increase its influence on the continent, and strengthening Israel's ties with African countries helps to curb Iranian influence. Geopolitical competition in Africa is also growing, including from China and Turkey, and Israel must establish its presence on the continent in light of this. Africa represents a huge potential market for Israeli technologies in agriculture, water, renewable energy, and health, and Israel has much to offer in these areas, as well as in security and the economy. Despite all this, Africa receives only a fraction of the attention it deserves.

Normalization with Saudi Arabia the Right Way: An Integrative Approach Without Gestures to the Palestinians

Normalization Which Benefits Everyone

Institutionalizing relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia is a historic opportunity,

2 Ariel Kahane, "The Early Promise, the Diplomatic Incident, and the Final Recognition – How Israeli Recognition of Western Sahara Came About," *Israel Hayom*, 7.18.2023. [in Hebrew]

3 Itamar Eichner, "After Israeli Recognition of Western Sahara: King of Morocco Invited Netanyahu for a Visit," *YNET*, 7.19.2023. [in Hebrew]

4 Yuval Azulai, "From Diplomatic Minutes: Morocco Purchases an Intelligence Satellite from the Aerospace Industry for About One Billion Dollars," *Calcalist*, July 9, 2024.

but it must be managed carefully. To ensure an agreement benefits all neighboring parties, Israel must prevent the creation of fractures elsewhere. The agreement with Saudi Arabia should be approached from a broad perspective, taking into account its network of relations with other countries in the region, so as to strengthen rather than undermine ties with countries like Bahrain, Morocco, or Egypt, but rather to strengthen them through various elements incorporated into the agreement, so that all parties benefit. This approach will ensure the agreement's success and build diplomatic credit for Israel with other nations.

For example, the Saudis' central position in the Muslim world rest on their role as guardians of Islam's two holy sites, Mecca and Medina. This interest conflicts the Palestinian glorification of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.

Without Concessions to the Palestinians

A peace agreement with Israel would offer Saudi Arabia significant strategic and economic benefits. Therefore, we must not pay for relations with Saudi Arabia with concessions to the Palestinians, nor is there any need for any process involving the Palestinians. If we insist on including Palestinian issues, the Saudis will likely accept it eventually. In talks conducted during the Biden administration, Washington inserted the issue of progress toward a Palestinian state—a matter of little concern to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman or to the Saudi public. If Saudi Arabia continues to demand it, Israel must maintain that it seeks peace without requiring Palestinian concessions. Israel must not present itself as desperate for normalization.

Prioritizing Palestinian demands weakens the Arab world. Focusing on the Palestinians diverts attention from other issues because Palestinian misinformation undermines regional stability.

Despite sympathetic rhetoric toward Ramallah and genuine sensitivity to the public crisis in Gaza, Arab states understand that empowering the Palestinians will not solve their internal problems and may even exacerbate them. Conversely, they also understand that Israel effectively advances many shared interests with them. For example, Jordan struggles with domestic pressures from Islamists emboldened by Assad's overthrow, faces a severe economic crisis, and depends on Israel for energy and water. Syria is fundamentally broken, divided along ethnic and religious lines, and its Islamist leadership is willing to act moderately to try to stabilize the government. Notably, all new opportunities for rebuilding ties from Israel's operations against Hezbollah and Iran. For the first time in decades, Lebanon has a government that is interested in reducing Hezbollah's dominance and recognizes that

Israeli actions have weakened the Shiite organization and opened an opportunity to restore national sovereignty.

Additionally, the Gulf states that signed peace agreements with Israel maintain ties despite critical diplomatic rhetoric because they know their economies remain unidimensional and reliant on energy exports, making cooperation with innovative partners such as Israel essential.

Saudi Arabia is at a decisive crossroads: approximately half of its GDP still depends on energy exports, despite the kingdom's wealth.[5] The implementation of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salaman's Vision 2030 faces many challenges and relies heavily on importing innovation from abroad to make Saudi Arabia relevant in an era of artificial intelligence. At the same time, the kingdom faces threats to the Crown Prince's life from domestic Islamists. Moreover, like many countries in the region, Saudi Arabia seeks to reduce Iranian influence, an objective aligned with Israel's recent military operations.

In this context, conditioning normalization on establishing a Palestinian state is unjustifiable. It will not help Arab states address their challenges; on the contrary, it could destabilize the limited stability they currently enjoy. Therefore, there is no room for Israeli concessions.

The Role of Faith-Based Dialogue

We must recognize that religious belief is central to the region's identity, and therefore, we should not shy away from faith-based dialogue with the Saudis. For example, the Saudis' central position in the Muslim world rest on their role as guardians of Islam's two holy sites, Mecca and Medina. This interest conflicts the Palestinian glorification of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. One might ask: What would Muhammad have thought of the Palestinians, and what would he have made of Palestinian governance, given its record of corruption? There are pathways within Islamic tradition through which the Saudis could lead change and legitimize Israeli sovereignty according to Islamic jurisprudence. Israel should emphasize its historic and religious connections to the land.

Unlike agreements with Egypt and Jordan, a warm peace with Saudi Arabia could develop over time, as a growing middle class opens to the world. However, widespread ignorance about Israel and prevailing negative opinions resulting from decades of anti-Israel education pose significant obstacles. Changing public opinion will require time, and Israel must encourage educational reforms in Saudi Arabia to present balanced Israeli-Saudi relations. The hope lies in the tendency of populations in monarchies to align with the guidance of their rulers.

5 Luke Aplin, "Saudi Arabia Hits Milestone in Shift Away from Oil Economy", *Global Finance*, 4.2.2024.

Similarly, when advancing the India-Middle East-Europe (IMEC) trade corridor initiative, it must be done with integrative regional thinking. The corridor's success will benefit the Gulf states, Jordan, and Israel, but could negatively impact the Egyptian economy by competing with transit through the Suez Canal. This reality must be addressed by developing a model that ensures Egypt benefits from the corridor or is compensated for any negative impact.

Cutting off the Hamas-Supporting Camp as a Shared Regional Interest

One of the central challenges in the region is how to relate to Qatar. The media network it operates, Al Jazeera, generates and sustains a large share of the region's problems, especially Palestinian misinformation. We must recognize that Qatar is an enemy state of Israel and a supporter of terrorism, and begin treating it accordingly. Moreover, Qatar is already considered a negative actor by other Gulf states, as it finances terrorism, corrupts academic institutions in Europe and the United States, and serves as a base for harmful Muslim Brotherhood propaganda. Thus, when Israel cooperated with Qatar on the Gaza issue, it drew contempt from the Emiratis and Saudis, who did not understand how we are willing to do this. We should halt all negotiations with Qatar, stop engaging with its government, declare it an enemy state, and eliminate the remaining Hamas elements on its territory. As part of an agreement with Saudi Arabia, Israel could propose relocating the American base from Qatar to Saudi Arabia — a move that would strengthen regional ties and weaken Qatar's influence.

Turkey is more a rival than a friend, but there is still room for further deterioration. A cautious balance should be maintained due to shared energy and geopolitical interests. Erdoğan is on the wrong side regionally, but we do not want to intensify the rivalry with Turkey, especially given the potential hostility in the Mediterranean arena. For example, the oil Israel purchases from Azerbaijan passes through Turkey, and Turkey does not halt this flow in order to avoid harming Azerbaijan and its own reputation as a reliable country that honors major trade agreements.

In response to Turkey's hostile rhetoric toward Israel during the war, Israel rightly adopted a cautious diplomatic approach — making clear that aggression on Turkey's part would be a mistake, while avoiding escalation and keeping communication channels open in an effort to prevent further deterioration in relations. It should be understood that there has been deep hostility between Egypt and Turkey due to Turkish support for the Morsi government and Islamist ideologies in general, and this should be leveraged in our work with Egypt.

Algeria is also an important regional player due to its gas wealth and its influence over Europe. However, its hostile positions

toward Israel pose a diplomatic challenge. Algeria is hostile to Israel, supports Hamas and the Palestinian Authority, but is also hostile to Morocco — which creates a shared interest between Jerusalem and Rabat.

Mossad is not designed to serve as a political-diplomatic body but rather as an intelligence organization focused on human intelligence collection and covert missions to thwart and eliminate security threats to Israel from its enemies

Organizational Changes Required

The Mossad is not a Diplomatic Apparatus but an Intelligence and Covert Operations Agency

Currently, the head of the Mossad manages most of Israel's foreign relations in the Middle East and Africa. This is an abnormal situation, since the Mossad is not designed to serve as a political-diplomatic body but rather as an intelligence organization focused on human intelligence collection and covert missions to thwart and eliminate security threats to Israel from its enemies, viewing the world through a narrow operational prism suited to those purposes. Therefore, managing relations with countries that do not have diplomatic ties with Israel should be the responsibility of the National Security Council, under the leadership of the Prime Minister, while the Mossad should focus on countering hostile actors. Implementing this change is critical ahead of expanding the Abraham Accords to additional countries such as Indonesia, Oman, and others.

Appointment of Ministers for Middle Eastern and African Affairs in the Foreign Ministry

The knowledge required about the network of relationships among regional countries and their various interests exists within the Israeli intelligence community. There is expertise within the system and integration specialists, but there is no entity at the political level that is willing and available to utilize this information, convene the experts, ask the right questions, and request the mapping of information for practical use. To remedy this, it is proposed to appoint two ministers within the Foreign Ministry – a Minister for Middle Eastern and Arab Affairs and a Minister for African Affairs. These ministers would have the organizational interest and political authority to identify opportunities and advance them at the national level. Appointing a senior official with the authority and responsibility to make things happen will lead to a transformation of the knowledge system, with people organizing around them. There is no need for thousands of staff positions like in a large government ministry—fewer than one hundred officials would suffice.

Upgrading the Status of Ambassadors to Regional Countries

The lack of awareness regarding the importance of diplomatic ties in the

region is also reflected in the appointment of ambassadors to these arenas, who are often individuals with bureaucratic backgrounds. Everyone knows the identity of the ambassador to Washington or the UN, for example, but not to the United Arab Emirates or Morocco. A reflection of a shift in perception and recognition of the importance of relations with these countries would be the appointment of ambassadors with a higher status. There is no need necessarily for a senior political level, but what is required are individuals with public standing who possess vision and initiative.

Visits, International Conferences in Israel, and Civil Society

Another expression of this new mindset, which carries both symbolic and practical importance, is hosting senior officials in Israel. An Israel that sees itself as a natural part of the neighborhood should invite high-ranking officials from regional countries for official visits. It should insist that these visits be regular and reciprocal. Such visits, both to Israel and by Israelis to countries in the region, will require regional leaders to acknowledge Israel as part of the neighborhood and to reinforce this message to their populations.

Beyond leadership visits, Israel should initiate international conferences of regional countries in Israel. For example, an Africa conference in Israel every five years, and a Middle East countries conference every two years. The Negev Forum initiative is an example of this type of thinking, but it should be expanded, and the invitation of the Palestinian Authority should be avoided, as it is not a state and is an adversarial entity that would only sour the atmosphere and undermine the conference's positive potential. Efforts should be made to anchor the existence of such a conference in a future agreement with Saudi Arabia. Hosting an Arab League conference in Israel might also be considered.

At the public level, programs should be encouraged that foster interaction between populations in ways that benefit both sides. For example, student exchange programs in Abu Dhabi. Learning Arabic is important, but it should happen naturally from the bottom up, through incentive and enrichment programs, rather than as a mandated requirement by the Ministry of Education, so that Arabic learning develops as organically as possible. Opening relations will also allow for the development of the business and tourism sectors.

Deepening security integration through CENTCOM

The transfer of the American command responsible for military cooperation with Israel from European Command (EUCOM) to the command in charge of the Middle East (CENTCOM) is a huge diplomatic achievement, whose significance is not fully understood by the public. It reflects the correct perspective of viewing Israel as an integral part of the region—one that should be embraced and deepened.

Summary

Israel stands before a historic opportunity to establish its position as an influential and thriving regional power, but achieving this requires a shift in its foreign policy priorities. Israel's status as a technological, economic, and security power enables it to lead diplomatic processes, strengthen ties with regional countries, and influence the surrounding geopolitical landscape. However, continued reliance solely on Western mediation channels and neglect of direct relations with Arab countries and Africa misses the potential to create strategic partnerships, economic strengthening, and the containment of security threats.

This repositioning, however, depends on a decisive achievement against Hamas in Gaza. Halting the fighting before achieving all war objectives and failing to bring the Nukhba operatives to justice would constitute a victory for Hamas—an outcome that would eliminate any incentive for Arab states to advance relations with Israel. They will not extend a hand to a weak partner incapable of defeating its enemies. The only way to advance in reshaping the regional landscape is to achieve a clear victory in Gaza. Afterward, Israel can resume discussions on normalization with Saudi Arabia and other countries from a position of strength.

To secure its future and status in the region, Israel must internalize its natural place in the Middle East, act boldly with a regional vision, and project self-confidence derived from understanding its power and unique position. The required change is not only at the diplomatic level but also in public consciousness and the organizational structures of the foreign and defense systems. This approach will allow Israel to realize its full potential as a stable, proactive, and leading force in the Middle East.