

## CHAPTER 3

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### **Israel and the Actors in Syria: The Toolbox and the Rules of the Game**

Israel's policy of non-intervention in the civil war in Syria granted Israel a number of advantages and staved off possible dangers. The policy was driven by Israel's desire to avoid entanglement in the fighting and remain above the regional upheaval, compounded by skepticism as to the existence of trustworthy partners and the intrinsic difficulties of effectively influencing events by means of Syrian actors. On the other hand, standing idly by as other countries increased their intervention, and actors, most of whom were hostile to Israel, grew stronger while undermining the stability along the border in the Golan Heights, posed intensifying risks. In light of the circumstances on the Syrian side of the border since the second half of 2014, non-intervention has in practice come to mean abandoning the field to radical elements representing the Shiite axis led by Iran and Hezbollah and Salafi jihadist forces, and a decision to refrain from possibly strengthening "pragmatic" actors.

This chapter examines the significance of a change in Israeli policy, from non-intervention in the Syrian crisis to formal or covert forms of active involvement aimed at influencing processes on a number of levels: military, diplomatic, economic, and humanitarian, including the furthering of reciprocal relations with "positive" actors in the field.

The toolbox at the disposal of Israeli policymakers for working with the prominent non-state and other actors in Syria is derived from the interface between Israeli interests and the set of variables discussed above, including the actors' long term and short term goals regarding the future of Syria; their ideological worldviews; their military and political power; the extent to which they rely on internal Syrian forces; their internal legitimacy; and the

external support they enjoy. An analysis of these criteria allows the definition of the risks, limitations, and obstacles that Israel faces when considering the possibility of cooperation with actors in Syria for the sake of pursuing mutual goals and interests on the one hand, and weakening common enemies on the other hand. Accordingly, the opportunities these actors present Israel will be mapped, and possible rules of the game for Israel in the changing Syrian arena will be outlined, including use of leverage, influence, means of deterrence, and channels of communication.

### **Limitations and Risks**

In its conduct and policy vis-à-vis non-state actors in Syria, Israel must be mindful of the limitations and the obstacles presented by the complex Syrian arena. The new reality on the Syrian side of the border requires Israel to adapt to this dynamic arena, which continues to evolve according to different rules of the game than those that existed formerly, as well as to the new actors operating within it. The old mechanisms of deterrence employed vis-à-vis the Assad regime are not necessarily effective against the new actors, which include militias that are not responsible for a specific territory or population. Israeli efforts to contend with the array of new actors and identify their unique attributes have also presented difficulties as a result of the partial intelligence coverage regarding their interests, intentions, and worldviews.<sup>1</sup> Another obstacle is the fact the actors are characterized by rapid changes, join with and split off from other groups, with the term “loyalty” losing its meaning.

The professional literature proposes a number of relevant criteria for characterizing non-state players:

- a. *Autonomy*: the degree of freedom of action enjoyed by the actor in pursuing its goals.
- b. *Representation*: The population groups that the actor seeks to represent, and its ability to garner legitimacy as a reliable and hegemonic representative of their values and goals.
- c. *Influence*: The actor's ability to bring about change in realms related to its areas of activity.<sup>2</sup>
- d. *Material base*: Non-state actors' sources of economic funding and their relationship with their patrons.
- e. *Geographical framework*: Some non-state actors rely on the local population of a specific state or region, while others regard themselves

as the representative of populations located in more than one state that share common ideological, ethnic, religious, or sectarian attributes.

- f. *Political objective*: Some non-state actors are subversive in character and challenge the very idea of the state and the legitimacy of a specific regime, while others support preservation of the state status quo.
- g. *Modes of Activity*: Some subversive non-state actors adopt methods of armed violence, whereas others are hybrid actors, making use of non-violent activity in civil, political, social, and economic realms.<sup>3</sup>

Use of these criteria to examine the various Syrian actors highlights primarily the limitations in acting in coordination with them (table 1):

*Autonomy*: Many of the actors, including more pragmatic groups, are subject to the interests of patron states, which provide them with external aid in the form of funding and weapons supply, and consequently, serve as proxies not only of states but also of other non-state actors.

*Representation*: Although most of the actors belong to the Sunni majority, there is no one dominant group commanding broad recognition and legitimacy within the internal Syrian, regional, and international arenas. In parallel to their struggles against the regime, the different actors clash with one another over territory, assets, resources, population groups under their authority, and hegemony in determining Syria's political and religious ideological agenda, in the present and the future.

*Influence*: Some of the actors, especially the "positive" ones, represent small to medium size organizational initiatives with limited military strength. Whereas exiled groups have difficulty mobilizing military aid and other kinds of assistance, and local groups are preoccupied by mutual wrangling, the external jihadist groups that have penetrated Syria under cover of the civil war benefit from ideological, military, and economic resources and a flow of foreign volunteer fighters from outside of Syria, and therefore enjoy widespread influence.

*Material base*: "Positive" actors are extremely dependent on external aid and donations, whereas the Islamic State, the Nusra Front, and other Islamist jihadist actors on the whole benefit from a wide variety of funding sources, some of which are independent and autonomous.

*Geographical framework*: "Positive" actors direct their efforts throughout all of Syria or in specific regions of the country, whereas "negative" Islamist and jihadist actors regard Syria as one link in a much broader Islamic State, which, in their vision, is destined to be established in the future.

*Political objective:* While all the groups fighting against the Assad regime challenge the old state order, some seek to introduce political and social reforms within Syria, and others are in favor of eradicating the Syrian state, whether through partition or by means of its incorporation into some larger entity. Ultimately, although many actors seek to promote a civil agenda, the institutionalization of the potential “positive” actors in the field lags far behind that of the Islamic State, the Nusra Front, and Hezbollah.

In light of the parameters charted in table 1, the primary limitation encumbering the ability of Israel (and the entire international community, for that matter) to formulate an active and constructive policy vis-à-vis the new actors, and primarily the “positive” actors in southern Syria, stems from their being a mix of actors lacking a mature and institutionalized organizational state logic, and their tendency to join together and split apart with great frequency. The actors are characterized by deep ideological and political divisions and opposing interests, both among themselves and among the patrons supporting them. These structural and ideological attributes weaken the groups as individual and collective actors and continue to complicate the delineation of an integrated policy that can be generally endorsed and implemented. Moreover, the tendency of the Syrian population and the fighting groups to shift their allegiances in accordance with the situation on the ground and their immediate economic and military needs makes it difficult for Israel and the international community to identify a dominant, credible actor with overriding responsibility that can influence other actors. It is also difficult to assess prospects of success and the value of support for any of the actors with a reliable and long term sense of commitment.

In addition, the international community itself, as well as the regional states, remains divided regarding the appropriate priorities for dealing with the crisis in Syria. Whereas Israel and Saudi Arabia tend to regard the takeover of Syria by the Iranian-led Shiite axis as the primary threat, other countries, most prominently Russia and the United States, regard stopping the Islamic State as its major concern.<sup>4</sup> For its part, Turkey is threatened by the establishment of an expanded autonomy for the Kurdish minority, and in June 2015 the Turkish president emphasized that his country would not allow the establishment of a Kurdish state in northern Syria.<sup>5</sup>

A major difficulty is Syria's transformation into a regional battleground for external forces and ideological and religious struggles. The primary battle in this arena is the battle between the two sectarian camps in the Muslim and

Table 1. Actors with Relevance to Israel (with an emphasis on southern Syria)

	Islamic State	Nusra Front	National Coalition	Free Syrian Army	Local Communities	Kurds	Druze
<b>Autonomy</b>	Full	Partial	Little	Partial	Partial	Partial	Little
<b>Representation</b>	All Sunni Salafi jihadist	Sunni Salafi jihadist in Syria	Syrian opposition in exile	Variety of Syrian militias	Local militias and civilian populations	Kurds in Syria	Druze in Syria
<b>Estimated influence on the future of Syria</b>	Substantial	Substantial	Little	Moderate	Moderate	Substantial	Little
<b>Material base</b>	Primarily independent	Independent and external	External	Primarily external	Partially independent	Partially independent	Partially independent
<b>Geographical framework</b>	Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere	Syria	International diplomatic arena	Syria	Southern Syria	Northern Syria	Primarily the Druze Mountain and southern Syria
<b>Objective</b>	Short term: establishment of control and governance. Long term: establishment of Islamic caliphate	Ousting of the Assad regime and imposition of Islamic law, beginning in Syria	Replacement of the Assad regime and establishment of a democratic regime	Replacement of the Assad regime and establishment of a democratic regime	Establishment of a stable and secure autonomy in southern Syria	Establishment of a recognized autonomy in Syrian Kurdistan	Protection of the Druze community and establishment of a religious and cultural autonomy on the Druze Mountain
<b>Modes of activity</b>	Hybrid	Primarily violent	Primarily diplomatic	Primarily violent	Hybrid	Hybrid	Hybrid

Arab world. On the one hand is the Shiite axis led by Iran, which will do all it can to prevent the conquest of Syria's essential territory – Damascus, the Damascus-Homs-Aleppo road, the strip bordering Lebanon, and the Syrian coastal area – by the rebel forces fighting the regime of President Assad and the Alawite minority. On the other hand is the Sunni camp, led by Saudi Arabia and Turkey, which seeks to topple the Assad regime and opposes Iranian Shiite dominance of any kind in Syria or Lebanon. In tandem, Syria has become a battleground in the struggle for hegemony within the Islamic Sunni camp, between Salafi jihadist Islam, political Islam, and moderate, reformist, and pragmatic streams. The regime vacuum in Syria was penetrated by the Islamic State, which seized control of large areas in eastern and northern Syria that have since been targeted by an American-led international coalition. The situation has been complicated even further by mounting US-Russian competition for influence in the region, which intensified following direct Russian involvement in the fighting against the Syrian opposition forces. In this context, any act of intervention in Syria is likely to generate a chain of unintended repercussions for the leading regional actors. This is the case not only for “negative” actors, such as Iran and Hezbollah, but also Israeli allies such as the United States and Jordan, potential partners such as Saudi Arabia, and countries that potentially pose challenges to Israel, such as Turkey and Russia.

In addition to the many difficulties impeding the ability of the international community to interact with non-state actors in Syria, Israel also faces ideological and cultural obstacles. Israel's image in Syrian public opinion is that of a threatening, occupying enemy; conventional belief was that it was neither appropriate nor recommended for Syria to have relations with it. These obstacles are aggravated by the lack of progress in the Israeli-Palestinian political process, and intensify with escalation in the Palestinian arena. Some opposition activists who responded to the INSS questionnaire maintained that jumpstarting and advancing the Israeli-Palestinian political process could be expected to remove these obstacles, encourage changes in the perception of Israel, and increase openness for ties with Israel. An Israeli-Palestinian political process would presumably help Israel coordinate and even build a mechanism for cooperation with the regional actors that are involved in Syria and enjoy influence in the country, particularly Saudi Arabia and Turkey. Nonetheless, one respondent to the questionnaire, who prior to the revolution was a member of the Baath Party, disagreed with



this assessment and asserted that contending with the opposition to peace with Israel would require an internal Syrian dialogue and formulation of a unified Syrian position on the matter.

Another obstacle to progress in Israeli relations with Syrian actors stems from their prevalent perception that Israel prefers the Assad regime – the “devil it knows” – which maintained calm and stability in the Golan Heights for 42 years. Although this obstacle may have been expected to erode following attacks attributed to Israel on Assad regime targets and violent clashes between Israel, Hezbollah, and Iran in the Golan Heights in January 2015, Syrian activists who responded to the INSS questionnaire maintained their perception of an alliance between Israel and the Assad regime. For example, E. A., a political activist in a liberal faction operating within the framework of the Free Syrian Army, claimed that from the onset of the civil war, Israel has favored the Assad regime in a manner that “widens the chasm between Syrians and the Israeli people.” M., a liberal Syrian activist, accused Israel of standing beside the tyrannical regime in opposition to the Syrian people’s demands for freedom, and asserted that most Syrians regard the Israeli lobby in Washington as responsible for Assad’s ability to remain in power and the absence of American support for the rebels. According to this critical and prevalent view, many Syrians believe in the conspiracy theories that Israel prefers dictatorial regimes in the region (Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan) and is taking its time – thanks to its reliance on these countries – in resolving the Palestinian problem, and, in this way, helps to strengthen religious and nationalist ideologies and intensify expressions of extremism in the region.

Another complication in this context for Israel is bureaucratic in nature. Israel classifies Syrian citizens as citizens of an enemy state and prohibits their entry into the country, regardless of their political and organizational affiliation. Official Syrian laws also prohibit all contact with the “Zionist entity,” and as a result, the years of conflict between the two countries have witnessed the development of entrenched norms with lasting cultural impact, even in the current reality in which the regime is unable to enforce them completely. This legal-cultural obstacle makes it extremely difficult to initiate and maintain interactions that build trust between Israel and more pragmatic Syrian actors. Such interactions could help break the ice between the sides, eradicate deeply entrenched stereotypes, promote common interests, exchange intelligence information and ideas, and solve some of the controversial issues

currently hampering relations. Yet as a result of this two-way bureaucratic obstacle, many of the initiatives for Syrian-Israeli dialogue proposed by prominent Syrian opposition activists have not advanced.

In practice, as proven by the crisis in Syria, the most effective agent of cognitive change is reality itself. Conciliatory Syrian initiatives aimed at establishing ties with Israel have often been the outcome of internal Syrian actors' sense of despair with the international and regional systems, as well as extreme hardship, and have been advanced more in the spirit of "cast thy bread upon the waters" than as a choice based on a deep shift in perception. In addition, the situation in Syria has also provided extensive evidence of the ease with which local actors and the local population shift allegiances due to the situation on the ground and join actors that are strong and dominant. Therefore, actors change their mind, and they will continue to change their mind regarding the relations with Israel.

In addition to these limitations and obstacles, Israeli intervention in the Syrian crisis poses many risks. Public Israeli cooperation with non-state actors in Syria could cause more harm than good if used as ammunition by the Syrian regime to prove their "treachery" and tarnish their legitimacy in public opinion. Moreover, an active and open Israeli policy in Syria could serve to confirm Israel's prevalent image in many Syrian and Arab circles as a subversive entity and intensify the traditional animosity toward it.

Finally, taking clear sides in the civil war in Syria could somewhat diminish Israel's leverage based on the power of deterrence, which relies on its ability to threaten to intervene on behalf of one of the sides in Syria when it finds it prudent to do so – for example, if one of the sides targets Israel. The lack of clarity of Israel's policy regarding the crisis in Syria helps the information warfare it currently conducts against the actors in Syria and conveys a deterring message to all parties regarding the potential of its military intervention. In this context, Hezbollah's contained response to the killing of a senior official in Quneitra by Israeli forces appears in part to have stemmed from concern within the pro-Iranian axis of the possibility of significant Israeli intervention in the internal struggle in Syria.

## **Opportunities for Cooperation**

Despite the limitations and the obstacles discussed above, the reality that has taken shape in Syria since 2011 has presented and continues to present Israel with unique opportunities to initiate dialogues, relations, and cooperative



efforts with more “positive” actors with overlapping interests. The National Coalition, the Free Syrian Army, and most actors linked to local populations, specific minority groups, and independent influential actors are associated with states of the Sunni Arab camp, which pinned its hopes on Washington but was ultimately disappointed. Many also share common enemies with Israel, namely Iran, Hezbollah, the Assad regime, and the Islamic State, and therefore tend to support a pragmatic policy. Relations with these actors could serve Israel as a platform for ad hoc cooperation in pursuing immediate and focused tactical goals such as creating a stabilizing influence in the Golan Heights for the purposes of calm and security, intelligence cooperation, and the provision of civilian-humanitarian aid. Moreover, relations established on the ground could prepare for future relations between Israel and the entities that will reach a position of influence once the civil war comes to an end. In addition, the establishment of relations with non-state and other actors in Syria could also provide Israel with a unique opportunity to secure symbolic returns in terms of normalization.

Examining actors’ candidacy for cooperation with Israel requires adjusted calculation of their willingness to establish ties with Israel and the potential benefit offered by such ties. Willingness to cooperate with Israel in principle, and in some cases to do so in practice, crystallized and significantly intensified during 2014, primarily among groups associated with the Free Syrian Army, local fighting groups and communities in southern Syria, and independent activists in exile who possess political, public, and media influence. A number of factors contributed to the evolution of this conciliatory approach toward Israel among the actors in question:

- a. Close relations with Arab and Western countries sharing Israel’s strategic interest in curbing the expansion of Shiite-Iranian influence in the region.
- b. The experience of the war in southern Syria and an understanding of the benefits of access to humanitarian and other kinds of aid at the Israeli border, in light of the unique needs stemming from the day-to-day realities on the ground.
- c. Liberal pro-Western ideology, which regards the establishment of peace and normalization with Israel as an opportunity and an important condition for securing the support of the international community, led by the United States, in the struggle to topple the Assad regime and rebuild Syria as a democratic, advanced, and secure country.

- d. A particularistic approach that prioritizes singular group interests as a chief consideration in determining the immediate political agenda of actors, taking priority over pan-Arab and pan-Islamic considerations pertaining to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The willingness of actors in Syria to cooperate with Israel is neither automatic nor interminable and may change in accordance with changing circumstances, the needs of the actors in question, and Israel's reactions to their initiatives. Furthermore, radical actors harboring religious-ideological hostility toward Israel, such as the Nusra Front, have refrained from taking action to challenge Israel and have been willing to establish rules of the game based on an indirect mechanism of coordination.

Although the interest of Syrian actors in establishing tactical and/or strategic ties with Israel is a necessary precondition for their development, it is not, in itself, a sufficient criterion to determine the existence of a distinct Israeli interest in investing the resources and taking the risks necessary to do so. The Israeli response must therefore be based on a careful calculation of the potential for cooperation with the actors in question and the extent of their centrality in the present and future Syrian reality. Assessment of the potential for cooperation between Israel and these actors must take into consideration the following four variables:

- a. The actors' ability to contribute to the preservation of routine security and calm along the Israeli-Syrian border.
- b. Their capacity to represent broad, deeply rooted coalitions (regional, sectarian, ethnic, and political) that can be expected to play a role in shaping the future political map of Syria (or at least part of Syria) at the end state of the civil war.
- c. Their legitimacy in internal Syrian public opinion and in the regional and international arena.
- d. Their ability to influence other actors that in terms of ideology are far removed from Israel, including radical Salafi jihadist groups.

Actors with the ability to enhance routine security in the border region and represent broad-based, deeply rooted groups that enjoy popular legitimacy and are likely to play a role in Syria immediately following the war are by nature extremely attractive candidates for cooperation as far as Israel is concerned. For example, local communities in southern Syria, local units associated with the Free Syrian Army, and the Kurdish and Druze minorities are actors with strong representation and with well-established

geographical, ethnic, and sectarian interests that are not expected to vanish from the political map. In contrast, other actors, such as veteran exiles who are foreign to the Syrian experience and small transitory groups lacking tradition and duty are less attractive candidates for cooperation, primarily due to aspects of representation, influence, and concern regarding their potential disappearance the day after.

Between these two extremes are actors that enjoy broad support today but whose role after the civil war is currently difficult to determine (for example, the Nusra Front), or, alternatively, actors possessing less influence on the current reality in Syria but that may play a key role in the future. Examples include the National Coalition, which represents a broad common denominator among the Syrian people and enjoys international legitimacy but currently lacks a substantial military force; humanitarian organizations; and prominent independent activists. In addition, actors that appear weak today if they are united with a more powerful force may subsequently gain popular support, influence, and legitimacy and become more attractive candidates for cooperation, following the adoption of an active Israeli and international policy that could strengthen them militarily, economically, and in the humanitarian realm.

### **Tactical Partnerships versus Strategic Partnerships**

Discussion of the establishment of ties between Israel and non-state actors in Syria should distinguish between short term tactical partnerships and long term strategic partnerships. Short term partnerships that focus on the security-military realm, characterized by tactical attributes and focused objectives, are more available to Israel than broader and more ambitious strategic alliances. The conditions necessary for such cooperation are common enemies; overlapping interests; at times, the ability to maintain secrecy; and the existence of an agreed upon “negative” vision (for example, an anti-Iranian vision or an anti-jihadist vision) with a limited “positive” horizon. Such tactical relationships require both Israel and Syrian actors to invest relatively limited input at a specific point in time, without an excessive need for ideological, emotional, or ethical conditions, and can usually be advanced bilaterally, without the intensive involvement of a third regional or international party. Ad hoc actions meant to address specific security, civilian, or humanitarian needs directly on the ground may be undertaken by Israel in conjunction with any of the actors operating in southern Syria, from the

Free Syrian Army and local forces in the Syrian Golan Heights to violent jihadist groups that do not regard Israel as an immediate enemy. Some of the actors operating in southern Syria regard these common interests as a basis for initial tactical cooperation with Israel that has the potential to expand and to intensify in the future. In his response to the INSS questionnaire, Y. S., a senior figure in the Sayf ash-Sham Brigades in Quneitra, identified “preventing Iran, Hezbollah, and the extremists” from seizing control over southern Syria as a supreme Israeli interest, and called on Israel to provide assistance to the local groups on the ground in promoting it.

In contrast, long term strategic cooperation between Israel and non-state actors in Syria in the diplomatic, military, economic, and ethical realms requires a well formulated positive vision based on broad interests, clear goals, and developed worldviews, backed up by a reliable capacity for execution and recognition of the limitations of the actors in question. Israeli-Syrian partnership in a political platform of this sort – which goes beyond the overcoming of common enemies and requires the establishment of new ruling frameworks in Syria, the demarcation of territorial borders, and the reconstruction of national narratives – is a complex undertaking necessitating a supportive local, regional, and international atmosphere. Such initiatives, both those pursued covertly and those pursued in an open manner by regime opponents in southern Syria and abroad, are consistent with the Israeli interest of translating the overlapping interests between the sides into policy aimed at strengthening more pragmatic forces and curbing radical Islam. These initiatives are also consistent with the international interest of encouraging the evolution of an authentic local vision for Syria in aiding the construction of an operational ideological alternative to the competing vision for Syria and the region offered by the Islamic State.

Israel will only be able to consider such initiatives seriously if they enjoy the support of a significant, representative, and known force backed by broad public legitimacy within Syria. In addition, they must earn the broad backing of major actors in the regional and international arena, as part of an organized, comprehensive campaign to strengthen the moderate Syrian camp and fight Salafi jihadist forces and the pro-Iranian axis. In the splintered Syrian reality of 2011-2016, there appeared to be little likelihood of broad internal and international mobilization for the implementation of such a strategic master plan. Still, successful tactical cooperative efforts, which are initially easier to implement and less risky for those involved, can

serve as a platform for building trust, shaping a new reality in the country, and, when the time comes, perhaps also preparing the ground for strategic partnerships, including pursuit of the array of conditions required for their consolidation.

The opportunities for cooperation presented to Israel by the crisis in Syria, however, are not limited to non-state actors but also extend to the patron states backing them. Indeed, the key to a settlement in Syria may actually rest not with the non-state actors but with the states of the region, due to their influence on some of the actors operating in the Syrian arena – with the ability to damage and undermine a future settlement in Syria – and the ability of the international arena to place trust in and rely on them to guarantee their commitments. The common denominators between these states and Israel regarding the Syrian issue could open the door to the establishment and strengthening of existing low profile cooperative relationships, as in the case of Jordan and Saudi Arabia, or to the building, improvement, and expansion of problematic or inadequate relations, as in the case of Turkey and Qatar. Israel might also make its support of the Syrian actors who oppose the regime conditional on a broad package deal between it and the Arab Sunni states, including elements that extend beyond the Syrian arena itself. Weakening the Shiite-Iranian axis in Syria is a Saudi and Jordanian interest no less than an Israeli interest. For this reason, in exchange for taking a decisive stand in favor of one of the sides in Syria, which would involve risks, Israel can ask for recompense with regard to issues it views as of the utmost importance and that currently top its security and political agenda. Some possible examples include regional or international recognition of its right to defend its vital security interests in the Golan Heights; promotion of normalization; amendments to the Arab Peace Initiative; exertion of pressure on the Palestinian Authority to cease its efforts to delegitimize Israel and return to the negotiating table; and efforts to deal with the Iranian nuclear program.

### **Military Modes of Action**

An analysis of the interests of the actors in Syria points to the effectiveness of the military levers of deterrence possessed by Israel vis-à-vis violent groups under the existing circumstances. Also evident is the limited power of “soft power” that can influence and be used to strengthen more “positive” actors, as well as change the balance of power in Syria and the reality on the



ground. Israel's toolbox contains a number of military modes of action for deterring violent non-state actors, most prominently Salafi jihadist forces and Hezbollah, including:

- a. Direct military strikes against military targets associated with these actors, such as commanders, military bases, fighting units, and ammunition repositories, with the aim of reducing their ability to inflict damage on Israel and to fight moderate rivals within Syria.
- b. Direct military strikes against infrastructure and sources of economic income associated with these actors, with the aim of damaging their ability to mobilize the financial resources required to consolidate their control and provide for the local population so as to boost their legitimacy as preferred regime alternatives.
- c. Strikes against the channels of aid and support supplied by patron states to radical actors operating in Syria, which may ultimately turn their capabilities against Israel.
- d. Strikes against Syrian army strategic weapons repositories, should it become increasingly likely that these weapons will reach the hands of radical elements within the Salafi Sunni camp or the Shiite camp.
- e. Tipping the balance of power in the internal Syrian arena of fighting in favor of the rivals of those that are hostile to Israel, through the provision of arms, equipment, information, and resources (as strengthening one side is likely to weaken the opposing side, according to the zero-sum equation that is characteristic of the struggles of the civil war in Syria).
- f. Establishment and enforcement of a no-fly zone in the Syrian Golan Heights and southern Syria, and warnings that aircraft that violate it on behalf of the Assad regime will be intercepted. Such a zone could be enforced through cooperation with Jordan, similar to the influence zone of Turkey along the northern border of Turkey and Syria, an area of Russian influence in the west and the sector of the Syrian coast, and the US area of influence in eastern Syria.
- g. Cooperation with Jordan in marking a special security zone in southern Syria and the Golan Heights to deny entry of Salafi jihadist forces and pro-Iranian forces, and the willingness to use military air and special ground abilities (without remaining in the field) to enforce this restriction and deter regime forces and "negative" actors from violating it.
- h. Reformulation of Israel's red lines and creation of a direct threat against Assad's continued rule in Syria in the event of attempts by the Iranian and



Hezbollah-led Shiite axis to establish a presence of forces in the Golan Heights or activate terrorist infrastructures against Israel.

i. Cooperation in cyber warfare against the radical axis and its allies.

Despite powerful deterrence created by military levers vis-à-vis violent actors, their effectiveness in strengthening positive non-state actors and advancing their agendas will remain marginal as long as they are not accompanied by a broad, supportive international framework. There is little likelihood of Israel agreeing to enforce a no-fly zone in southern Syria on its own, as such a formative step – which, in the eyes of its Syrian proponents, would constitute a tie-breaker in the civil war and a possible first step in the reconstruction of Syria and the establishment of a new governing framework – can succeed only under conditions of broad internal Syrian, regional, and international cooperation backed up by manpower, resources, planning, and executive capacity.

An independent Israeli military initiative undertaken outside the framework of an international effort, on the other hand – from the establishment of a no-fly zone in the Syrian Golan Heights to the direct or indirect provision of Israeli military aid (e.g., providing arms or information, or training moderate opposition forces in southern Syria) – would involve significant risks. If such aid were to become public knowledge, it would reflect blatant deviation from Israeli neutrality in the Syrian civil war and could draw Israel into the heart of the fighting, against its own will. At the same time, the manifest provision (direct or indirect) of Israeli military aid to Syrian actors can be expected to have a detrimental impact on the reputation and legitimacy of those involved and to be used against them. Perhaps for this reason, many actors have refrained from pursuing such a course and have stressed their desire to avoid repeating the Lebanese model of cooperation between the IDF and the South Lebanese Army (SLA). Moreover, the experience of the war in Syria has demonstrated that military aid to Syrian non-state actors who are perceived to be more moderate and pro-Western has, on more than one occasion, strayed from their intended beneficiaries and ended up in the wrong hands.

It is recommended that Israel plan an American-backed joint strategy with Jordan to establish a cooperative regional influence in southern Syria and strive for coordination with “positive” (or “less negative”) actors such as Free Syrian Army forces, local communities, pragmatic Islamist groups, and minorities, especially the Druze. Israel and Jordan possess air and

advanced standoff capabilities with which they could establish a no-fly zone in defined areas and, at the same, provide a defensive standoff backup to actors that cooperate with it, without the use of ground forces. Such actions would strengthen the strategic alliance between Jordan and Israel, curb the expanding influence of Iran and Hezbollah on the one hand, and the Nusra Front and Salafi jihadist elements on the other hand, and prevent the creation of a vacuum that the Islamic State will try to fill. It is important to ensure that the Druze, both on the Druze Mountain and in the Syrian Golan Heights, are part of the array of actors identified as potential partners of Israel and Jordan. Throughout, Israel and Jordan can demarcate a protected area for Druze refugees, provide them with humanitarian aid, or alternatively, assist Druze forces in protecting the Druze Mountain region and al-Suwayda.<sup>6</sup>

The proposed strategy must take into consideration the tensions and distrust existing between the different Syrian actors, particularly between the Druze and the Sunnis, and the influence of interaction between Israel and the actors in Syria on relations with the Druze in Israel. Delay in implementing this strategy could ultimately present Israel and its partners with an arena of operation that is much more complex than the current reality in southern Syria where, as of mid 2016, no one “negative” actor, such as the Islamic State or Hezbollah, has thus far achieved dominance, due to its need to divide its resources among other arenas of combat.

### **Diplomatic Modes of Action**

Along with “hard” military power, Israel may take action to shape the processes in Syria and promote its own interests vis-à-vis the new actors in the country using elements of soft power. To this end, it can make use of political, diplomatic, media, economic, legal, and humanitarian tools.<sup>7</sup> In this context, an important place is reserved for tools of public diplomacy (as opposed to traditional diplomacy between state actors), which is conducted in part by means of both traditional and new media and recognizes the role of unofficial position holders in shaping reality. The large diplomatic toolbox at Israel’s disposal provides it with diverse possible means of action, albeit limited in scope, vis-à-vis the actors in Syria, that can likely serve three different goals.

The first goal is the restraint of “negative” actors. Although Israel possesses no direct diplomatic levers of influence vis-à-vis most of the violent and hostile non-state actors operating in Syria, deterrence and establishment

of red lines can be effected by means of third parties such as patron states and “positive” actors in the arena. In this way, through the United States, Israel can take advantage of Washington’s close relations with Riyadh and Doha to advance regional cooperation in Syria to curb actors belonging to the pro-Shiite axis and, at the same time, keep Salafi jihadist actors away from the Israeli border. Qatar and Turkey, for example, can be mobilized to use concerted efforts to restrain groups under their patronage, such as the Nusra Front and Ahrar ash-Sham. “Positive” non-state actors engaged in cooperation with jihadist actors in defined arenas of operation may also be able to serve Israel as a diplomatic channel for the conveyance of warnings and threats. For example, the Free Syrian Army and local actors in southern Syria could serve as mediating, regulating, and buffering forces between Israel and the Salafi jihadist forces.

The second goal is the strengthening of “positive” actors. The levers of diplomatic influence that Israel possesses vis-à-vis moderate Syrian actors are not well cultivated considering the faint relations currently existing between the sides. Still, the public statements of these actors and the responses to INSS questionnaires reflect repeatedly that in order to further ties with more moderate actors, Israel needs to endorse the demand of the Syrian rebels that Assad be replaced. Opponents of the regime – both those that support peace and cooperation with Israel and those skeptical of this possibility – have explained that Israel’s public support of the rebels’ resolute claim that Assad will not remain in power would be considered a confidence-building measure that would make it easier for them to be convinced, and for them to convince others, of the need to adopt a conciliatory approach toward Israel. For example, B. H., a liberal activist and member of the Revolutionary Union for the Future of Syria, explained that because of the prevalent perception of Israel throughout the Syrian public, its failure to adopt a position is interpreted as support for the Assad regime. Although this impression is already difficult to rectify, such a declaration – made at the appropriate time – is still welcome and would be viewed as coming better late than never.

Although an Israeli statement would constitute a formal embrace of one of the parties in the civil war in Syria (from which Israel has thus far abstained), it would not be considered a deviation from the international consensus as long as it is justified based on the defense of human rights and the advancement of freedom and democratization. Therefore, even if such a

declaration does not result in an immediate reversal in Syrian public opinion toward Israel, its benefit is likely to be greater than its expected damage to Israel's non-intervention policy. This will certainly prove true as long as such a declaration remains in the symbolic and moral diplomatic realms and does not find manifest operative military expression on the ground.

The third goal is action that benefits more moderate Syrian actors in the international arena. Although Israel does not enjoy the magical influence on global and regional politics that some Syrian actors believe it does, it would not be inappropriate for Israel to make use of the actual diplomatic connections at its disposal to help advance an international settlement that suits its needs. Such a settlement would enable the "positive" actors and the religious and ethnic minorities in southern Syria to play a central role in Syria after the revolution. Israeli diplomacy could encourage Western parties to provide "positive" actors with financial and humanitarian support. Such measures could help shape the future reality in Syria according to Israeli interests, and would strengthen the cooperation between Israel and the relevant actors. For example, T. M. N., a Syrian civil activist, urged Israel to help bring an end to the bloodbath in Syria by asking its allies around the world to support democratic Syrian elements calling for intellectual openness that are interested in a life of peace and welfare. S. Y., a Syrian Kurdish activist with close ties to the Yekiti party, recommended that Israel put greater effort into helping moderate Syrian actors in order to prevent the consolidation of extremist forces among them in the arena.

### **The Economic Toolbox**

Some of the most important levers of influence in the civil war in Syria have been economic. The dissolution of the Syrian economy in the course of the war resulted in material hardship and severe living conditions throughout Syria, with two thirds of the country's pre-war population in need of humanitarian aid. Consequently, economic considerations have become a supreme criterion in determining allegiances and organizational affiliations, alignment with certain actors and subsequent divergence from them, and transitions from one group to another. Over the course of the war, external political actors have played a central role in diverting funds to their proxies in Syria. The plummeting price of oil has made it difficult for Russia to provide economic support to the Assad regime, while the Gulf states have enjoyed deeper currency reserves. This situation has made it

difficult for the Syrian regime to retain its loyal population bases through economic benefits such as diversion of funds to compensate the families of those killed, import gasoline, and perform maintenance on the electricity infrastructure. In turn, this has had a detrimental impact on the political and social backing previously enjoyed by the regime among the local populations under its protection.<sup>8</sup>

The economic hardship has given rise to both a decline of the Syrian regime's material resilience and a vacuum that has been filled by the Salafi jihadist forces, which are financially dependent on external aid from the Gulf states and Turkey, as well as on the sale of oil, the sale of antiquities, tax revenues, and the collection of protection money.<sup>9</sup> For example, the Islamic State provides its population with food and water, clothing, fuel, electricity, and medical and sanitation services as part of its efforts to consolidate its rule.<sup>10</sup> Moderate pro-Western actors have thus far had difficulty offering the local population an attractive material alternative. The international community, including Israel, has an interest in working to turn the tide and help strengthen more moderate rebel groups economically, to enable them – rather than extremist groups such as the Islamic State – to fulfill the material functions of the state vis-à-vis the local population. Israel should also weigh favorably the initiatives of local communities in southern and northern Syria to establish safe zones that would enjoy international protection and a support umbrella in which it would be possible to rebuild Syria's infrastructure and economic and social services and establish an attractive moderate governing alternative. Such areas could serve as a safe haven for refugees and the displaced, prevent the continued growth of popular support for radical Islamic groups, and constitute a constructive positive model that would later be adopted elsewhere in Syria. At the same time, the international community must keep increasing its economic pressure on the Islamic State through damage to oil sales, which supply it with ready capital to fund its activities.

The international community must also adhere to its sanctions on the Syrian regime and its economic patrons. The goal of this measure is to take advantage of the regime's economic weakness as an additional lever for reaching an agreed upon political settlement that would bring an end to the bloodbath in Syria and enable political reforms, including substantial concessions by the regime. The sanctions on Iran lifted in accordance with the nuclear agreement will make it easier for Iran to allocate increased



funding to the Assad regime and Hezbollah for the purpose of strengthening its allies in Syria and reestablishing its regional influence. Such a scenario could affect the balance of power in the civil war in Syria and present the Western powers and the international community with the need to find new solutions for curbing Tehran's negative activities regarding regional issues not directly linked to the nuclear realm.

For its part, Israel would be wise to take action in the international community to advance a comprehensive plan to strengthen more moderate Syrian groups and set up security zones for them. It could contribute directly to such a plan in the short term through the provision of material aid on a larger scale to the point of creating a border economy, including supply routes from Israel to southern Syria.<sup>11</sup> Within such a framework, Israel could take advantage of border crossings to facilitate trade with the local Syrian civilian population, including the import and export of merchandise, consumer goods, agricultural produce, and services, as well as the entry to Israel of a Syrian workforce. This would help improve the economic and humanitarian situation in the Golan Heights and in southern Syria in general and expand the spectrum of mutual interests shared by Israel and local Syrian actors on the ground. In addition, in the long term Israel could benefit from a border economy – in the event that conditions conducive to such a development indeed emerge – through cooperative efforts with Syrian parties in fields such as infrastructure, economics, trade, agriculture, and technology.

## **Humanitarian Activities**

Against the background of Israel's current policy of non-intervention vis-à-vis the civil war in Syria, the provision of humanitarian aid has served as a notably effective tool giving Israel significant yield in exchange for controlled risks that can be taken without leaving its sovereign borders or explicitly siding with one of the warring parties. The civil war in Syria has created an ongoing humanitarian crisis that thus far has forced some 13 million people, representing approximately two-thirds of the population, into conditions of poverty both in Syria and abroad.<sup>12</sup> Humanitarian aid activities have had to address a variety of challenges, including the dangers facing civilians in the areas of fighting, severe living conditions, the collapse of the health systems, and the paralysis of the education systems. Harsh weather conditions in the winter; difficulties involved in conveying humanitarian aid to the combat areas; impartial distribution in accordance with humanitarian criteria, without



strengthening negative forces; the cynical, corrupt exploitation of humanitarian aid for financial gain by military militias; the insufficient cooperation of Syria's neighbors in transporting this aid; and shortages in the amount of aid available have all aggravated the crisis.<sup>13</sup> Significant humanitarian difficulties have also been faced by Syrian refugees in nations outside of Syria (most Syrian refugees are currently concentrated in Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon), including a shortage of resources, the heavy burden on infrastructure-based services and social, medical, occupational, and educational services, lack of knowledge of the local language, bureaucratic obstacles in securing refugee status and work permits, and the failure to mobilize the international aid required to address all the needs of the refugees.

The humanitarian aid required by the population in Syria and the refugees residing outside its borders includes: suitable shelter for changing weather conditions; water supply; proper sanitation and hygiene, and electricity. Among the medical services needed are a skilled workforce of physicians, surgeons, and pharmacists; buildings; delivery rooms and clinics for the performance of abortions of pregnancies resulting from rape; medical equipment; medicines and milk substitutes for infants; ambulances and fire trucks; a blood bank; sterile conditions; and means to prevent illnesses and epidemics through proper heating, cleanliness, sanitation, and suitable housing. There must be adequate physical protection of vulnerable populations in refugee and displaced persons camps in a manner that provides them with security, particularly in the case of women and children, and there must be adequate provision and distribution of food.

The refugees' extended stay in host countries means that they are also in need of legal aid, including the normalization of their legal status and their entitlement to shelter, basic services, free movement, and work permits; psychological support in contending with the crisis and the trauma of war; the integration of children into local education systems; the creation of places of employment for men and women; and the concurrent guarantee of suitable employment conditions and the prevention of poverty and unemployment among citizens of the host countries.

In light of the ongoing Syrian crisis, the majority of the burden of funding the humanitarian work has been borne by the United States, the European Union, relevant UN agencies, and international NGOs. Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, and Iraq have thus far agreed to absorb most of the waves of Syrian refugees, despite the immense economic and social difficulties involved.

The burden on Israel has been immeasurably less than that borne by Syria's other neighbors, but Israeli officials and civilian parties have also lent a hand to the overall humanitarian effort since the early stages of the war, although only a small amount of the work done in this area has actually been made public. The justifications for the provision of Israeli aid have been moral, Jewish, humanitarian, and historical in nature. They have also been utilitarian, based on the hope that humanitarian aid would usher in a change, from the negative views of Israel prevalent in Syrian public opinion to the cultivation of neighborly relations and the transformation of Syrian beneficiaries into potential future "ambassadors" of Israel.

Israel's official provision of humanitarian aid began only in 2012 as a local initiative of an IDF officer who picked up a wounded Syrian from the border and continued with the establishment of a field hospital in the Golan Heights. Over time, this initiative has been institutionalized, with the admission of more than 2,000 wounded Syrians (including fighters, civilians, and children, some of whom had lost limbs) for medical treatment in Israeli hospitals; the provision of humanitarian aid to villages in the Syrian Golan Heights, including baby food, medicines, and blankets; and cooperation with Israeli civilian organizations. According to informal conversations with Arab aid workers, Israel has maintained a humanitarian channel of communication with groups operating in the villages near the border in the Golan Heights but has refrained from direct contact with most parties in southern Syria, such as the Free Syrian Army's Southern Front. Some of these parties are also interested in establishing direct contact with Israel regarding humanitarian issues, but not all of them were able to do so. In addition, with the support of the State of Israel but without its official participation, thousands of tons of humanitarian aid have been provided by means of independent civilian Israeli and Jewish non-government organizations, most of which have operated covertly in Jordan, Turkey, and even Syria itself.

What follows is a list of some of the prominent civilian initiatives connected with Israel (some of which involved the cooperative effort of multiple organizations):

- a. A humanitarian organization that provides lifesaving humanitarian aid to people in need (the full name of this organization and those behind it are on file with INSS): This organization extends lifesaving humanitarian aid in disaster and conflict-ridden areas where the entry of humanitarian organizations is prohibited. It also operates in countries that have no

diplomatic relations with Israel without seeking the authorization of the central government. The group began operating in Syria in April 2011, at first secretly and later in cooperation with local Syrian groups. It is responsible for humanitarian initiatives that to date have touched the lives of hundreds of thousands of Syrian displaced persons (as opposed to refugees, whose situation is severe, but who enjoy the protection of host countries and organized international aid). The aid products provided by the organization are visually branded in a manner that will enable Syrians to identify them in the future, when the source of the humanitarian initiatives is made public, and to understand the connection between the aid and Israeli civil society. The group provides aid in Syria in a variety of areas: the construction of hospitals, clinics, and day care facilities for children, as a substitute for schools; the conveyance and distribution of dry food convoys; the provision of medical equipment, including operating room tents, protective kits, and three-dimensional printers for the printing of prostheses; means of protection against chemical weapons for medical teams treating the injured; the training of firefighting units and the provision of equipment; the training of units to engage in rescue, clearing of debris, and location of individuals trapped in wreckage; and the transfer of injured parties to central Israel via Ben Gurion airport for lifesaving operations, with the authorization of the relevant government ministries. In Operation Human Warmth, which included participation by the organization in November 2013, youth movements in Israel collected coats and sleeping bags for displaced Syrians. The group also helped Syrian refugees in Jordan and cooperated with Jordanian Prince Zeid bin-Ra'ad, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.<sup>14</sup>

- b. Tevel (or Tevel b'Tzedek): an Israeli NGO that aims to promote social and environmental justice based on the desire to create a community of Israelis and Jews to address world hunger, social disparities, and environmental destruction. The organization implemented a project for helping Syrian refugees in Jordan, led by Dr. Rony Berger, director of the Rehabilitation and Development Unit of Brit Olam.
- c. Save A Child's Heart (SACH): Headed by Simon Fischer, this project provides assistance to children from developing countries with heart problems by bringing them to the Wolfson Medical Center in Holon to undergo lifesaving operations, and by training medical teams in developing countries. During the civil war in Syria, the organization undertook to

provide assistance for heart surgeries, including assistance in surgeries for a number of Syrian children.

- d. IsraAID – the Israel Forum for International Humanitarian Aid: This Israeli NGO, founded and directed by Shachar Zahavi, is an umbrella framework for Israeli humanitarian aid organizations. IsraAID undertakes projects that provide aid to Syrian refugees in Jordan, sometimes by means of Christian and Muslim organizations.
- e. Special Tasks Department of the Kibbutz Movement: In March 2012, under the leadership of Yoel Marshak, the Kibbutz Movement's Special Tasks Department collected blankets, food, and financial donations for the Syrian refugees in Jordan. Marshak explained the gesture as stemming from the lessons of the Holocaust, which precluded Israel from remaining an uninvolved bystander, even at the risk of "heating up" the Golan Heights.<sup>15</sup>
- f. Joint Distribution Committee: Beginning in July 2013, this American Jewish charitable organization brought together 14 Jewish organizations in the United States under its auspices to implement aid projects among refugees in Jordan, in coordination and cooperation with the Jordanian government and with international aid organizations operating on the ground.<sup>16</sup>
- g. Jewish-Arab Committee for Humanitarian Aid to the Syrian People: This committee, established in October 2014, collected donations in cooperation with Save the Children, an international organization that works to protect the rights of children in developing countries. Members of this public committee that took part in the initiative included Uri Avnery, Sami Michael, Prof. Yossi Yonah, Prof. Ron Barkai, Shlomzion Kenan, Mossi Raz, Liora Rivlin, Prof. Yehuda Bauer, MK Issawi Frej, Prof. Esther Herzog, and Prof. Arik Shapiro. The founding document of the committee states: "The indifference of the West thus far, and the inaction with regard to the war crimes of the regime, has resulted in the weakening of the secular opposition and the rise of extremist jihadist elements. This fact neither exonerates the regime for its crimes nor overshadows the fate of the refugees who have found themselves in this tragic situation. The Syrian people are entitled to freedom, democracy, and social justice, like all other peoples."<sup>17</sup>

- h. Hand in Hand with the Syrian Refugees: This Israeli initiative to provide assistance to the Syrian people sent clothing and sanitation accessories from Israel to Jordan in 2013 and conducted a campaign on Facebook.<sup>18</sup>
- i. Syrian Aid Committee: This initiative by Jewish and Arab Israeli activists took shape in early 2014 with the aim of collecting donations for children in the Syrian refugee camps administered and funded by Save the Children. The organization solicits donations via a designated website and the social networks.<sup>19</sup>
- j. Local initiatives: On a number of specific occasions, Israeli civilians and institutions have organized themselves to help wounded Syrians hospitalized in Israel through visits and the collection of items such as games, computers, and clothing.

Some of the non-state actors in Syria have regarded the Israeli and Jewish government and civilian humanitarian gestures – from the admission of wounded Syrians to Israel for treatment in Israeli hospitals, to the provision of medical equipment and food to Syrian refugees and displaced persons, to the solidarity protests held in Israel following the massacres in Syria – as actions that contribute to the reconstruction of the traditional attitude toward Israel and the shaping of a peace-seeking approach. Whereas the National Coalition has not viewed the humanitarian aid as a reason to change its official position toward Israel and has publicly characterized it as a cynical exploitation of the Syrian plight and a useless attempt to improve its image,<sup>20</sup> other actors have interpreted it as a formative political measure that goes beyond the humanitarian. The aid has significantly strengthened the belief – among the militias operating in southern Syria, Syrian civilian humanitarian organizations, and exiles operating independently – in the potential of cooperation between the Israeli and Syrian peoples in the present and the establishment of coexistence and peace in the future. The humanitarian measures have likewise served to develop unofficial channels and generate “humanitarian diplomacy,” which has helped break the ice between Israel and military and civilian Syrian actors inside Syria and abroad, most of whom are affiliated with the opposition. Israeli humanitarian aid has constituted a confidence-building measure with the ability to construct a civilian network of relationships for the day after the revolution.

A number of Syrian activists have expressed their admiration, both openly and in private conversations, at the decisiveness, consistency, and reliability of Israel’s provision of humanitarian aid. This aid has stood out in their



eyes as the antithesis of the acts of killing, destruction, and rape that are attributed to the Syrian regime. For example, during his visit to Ziv Medical Center in Safed, Kamal al-Labwani was impressed by the Israeli doctors' dedicated treatment of the Syrian wounded, and regarded the humanitarian gestures as evidence that non-government initiatives from both sides have the potential to advance an official policy and pave the way for a reality of social and economic peace that will impose itself on the leaderships. "The weapon of physicians" is Israel's most effective weapon, al-Labwani told Israeli security officials.<sup>21</sup>

From the perspective of a number of Syrian activists, the Israeli government's policy of humanitarian aid – manifested in the entry permits issued to wounded Syrians and further corroborated by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's February 2014 visit to a base where wounded Syrians were treated – has strengthened the integrative perception of Israel and Jewish Israelis as desired allies. For example, Abu 'Umar al-Hourani, the Free Syrian Army spokesman in Daraa, characterized Israel as a "friendly country" as a result of the successful medical treatment received by two members of his unit in Israel.<sup>22</sup> Other opposition members drew positive attention to Netanyahu's publicized visit of wounded Syrians as a gesture unmatched by the actions of Arab leaders. According to one opposition member, the Israeli humanitarian aid has enabled the Syrian people to refine its political consciousness formed by the hardships of oppression and pain, and learn which peoples and governments of the world stand by their side in times of hardship and which oppose them.<sup>23</sup> A Syrian activist in a humanitarian aid network who visited the Institute for National Security Studies characterized the Israeli aid as a first step in the long journey of bridging the mistrust between the sides, overcoming the gap between the traditional ingrained perceptions of Israel and the reality on the ground, and changing Israel's negative image in Syrian public opinion. According to the head of an Israeli humanitarian organization who requested anonymity, the humanitarian channel has enabled Syrians and Israelis "to discover one another," to overcome the stereotypes, and to find mutual humanity and a chance for partnership.<sup>24</sup>

Nonetheless, the impact of the Israeli measures on easing the deep humanitarian crisis in Syria remains minor, and its role in changing the Syrian public's attitude toward Israel has been limited. Evidence lies in the number of responses to the INSS questionnaire that reflect only superficial



knowledge of the Israeli aid and assign it no importance in the overall picture. The difficulty of taking full advantage of the benefits of the Israeli humanitarian measures in the informational realm stems in part from the contradiction between the need to convey the aid to beneficiaries in a discrete manner on the one hand, and the desire for substantial reverberations in the media that will give Israel credit and make it easier for Israeli organizations to mobilize significant resources for their future work, on the other. One possible escape from this dilemma lies in the visual branding of aid in a manner that would be ingrained in the consciousness of the beneficiary, to be revealed in the future, as well as use of unique channels of Israeli aid operating directly vis-à-vis beneficiaries in Syria that refrain from being assimilated into international channels of aid that are not associated with Israel.

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### *Notes to Chapter 3, Israel and the Actors in Syria: The Toolbox and the Rules of the Game*

- 1 Dekel and Einav, "Formulating an Updated Strategy in the Face of Regional Upheavals," p. 46.
- 2 Geeraerts, "Analyzing Non-State Actors in World Politics."
- 3 Rajab, "The New Actors: The Types and Roles of non-State Actors in the Stages of Transition"; Iman Rajab, "The New Actors: The Types and Roles of non-State Actors in the Arab Revolutions," *a-Siyassa al-Dawliya*, July 2011 (Arabic).
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- 5 "Erdoğan says Turkey Not to Allow Kurdish State in Northern Syria," *Today's Zaman*, June 27, 2015, [www.todayszaman.com/anasayfa\\_erdogan-says-turkey-not-to-allow-kurdishstate-in-northern-syria\\_392105.html](http://www.todayszaman.com/anasayfa_erdogan-says-turkey-not-to-allow-kurdishstate-in-northern-syria_392105.html).
- 6 Udi Dekel and Omer Einav, "The Problematic Scenarios in Syria: The Choices Facing Israel," *INSS Insight* No. 714, June 28, 2015, <http://www.inss.org.il/index.aspx?id=4538&articleid=9946>.
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- 18 See [www.facebook.com/pages/Hand-in-Hand-with-the-Syrian-refugees/136844413170394?fref=photo](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Hand-in-Hand-with-the-Syrian-refugees/136844413170394?fref=photo).
- 19 See <http://mustiben.wix.com/syria-aid-committee>; and [www.facebook.com/SyriaAidCommittee/timeline](http://www.facebook.com/SyriaAidCommittee/timeline).
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- 22 Miller, "Jihadists Capturing Southern Syria, Local Fighter Warns."
- 23 Private letter from a Syrian opposition activist to one of the authors of this memorandum; Nir Boms, "Summary of the Jordan Meetings," June 15-17, 2014.
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### *Notes to Appendix, Syrian Activists on Israel's Role in the Crisis in Syria*

- 1 This is apparently a reference to the meeting discussed in the following link, which makes reference to statements ostensibly made in a similar spirit during a conversation between the Russian ambassador in Tel Aviv and an Israeli colleague: "The Russian Ambassador in Tel Aviv in a Conversation Leaked on YouTube," *al-Mandasa al-Suriya*, February 28, 2012, <http://the-syrian.com/archives/69361> (Arabic).