



הערכה אסטרטגית לישראל
STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT for ISRAEL

INSS

2020

**A Look at the Coming Decade:
Summary and Insights
from the 13th Annual
International Conference**

From the Chairman of the INSS Board of Directors



Sir Frank Lowy

Ladies and Gentlemen,

One year ago, I stood here and spoke to you, half in English and half in Hebrew. I promised myself that next year, I would speak only in Hebrew. So now, let's begin.

2019 was a particularly challenging year for the State of Israel. We went through two elections and still have no government. This coming March we will again hold elections, and I hope that this time there will be a government. But if that doesn't happen this time as well, then we can hope that our politicians will be courageous and intelligent enough to do the right thing. A fourth round of elections will cause great damage to the state and the economy, and Israel's citizens will stop believing in our democracy. We expect our political leaders to put the good of the state before their own interests.

Our institute, the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), saw many achievements this year. We wrote many research papers, we held meetings with important organizations, including the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Defense, and the IDF, and we continue to collaborate with other institutions all over the world. We have excellent relations with Tel Aviv University, and we are working together on a number of important projects. I thank the new President of the University, Prof. Porat, and hope that we will continue to work together for many more years, to the benefit of our institute and Tel Aviv University.

Our work at INSS is primarily important research work that contributes to diplomatic relations between Israel and many countries around the world. INSS is led by a group of experts in the fields of national security and national strategy. It is headed by Amos Yadlin, a man with tremendous experience who has broad knowledge of security, strategic, and diplomatic issues. Amos has brought the Institute to many important achievements, and he leads a high-quality team that has formed a world-renowned institute.

I would like to conclude on a personal note. You may know that I am a Holocaust survivor, and I know what it means to feel danger and to live without security. I would like to tell you that all of the work that we do here promotes the security of the State of Israel, and that is the most important thing to me.

Sir Frank Lowy

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Strategic Assessment for Israel 2020

Conversation between Yoav Limor and Maj. Gen. (ret.) Amos Yadlin

The “deal of the century”

Given the past Palestinian rejection of Israeli offers more favorable to them than the Trump plan, the “deal of the century” is not expected to bring about an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement in the near future. Thus, it is important to consider Israel’s next steps. There are three possibilities: 1) shelving the plan; 2) unilateral annexation; and 3) steps toward improving the situation on the ground in coordination with the US and the Arab world, while preserving the possibility of the two-state solution. In accordance with the INSS Plan released in 2018, Gen. Yadlin recommends the latter.

Implications of the killing of Qasem Soleimani

The targeted killing of IRGC Quds Force Commander Gen. Qasem Soleimani dispelled the notion that while the US is willing to apply “maximum pressure” in the economic and diplomatic arenas, it is unwilling to use military force. That step, combined with subsequent events, including the deaths of 50 Iranians in the public mourning ceremonies for Soleimani and Iran’s accidental downing of the Ukrainian airliner, is likely causing Tehran to recalibrate its approach. The question whether these developments signal the reversal of deeper strategic trends regarding US isolationism and growing Iranian aggression in the region remains open.

The Iranian nuclear program: scenarios

Two optimistic scenarios (regime change or a US strike on Iran’s nuclear program) appear unlikely to come to fruition. Israel must now prepare, in coordination with the US, for more problematic eventualities, including the continued advance of Iran’s nuclear program or renewed negotiations.

Israel’s northern front: a new strategy to cope with the precision missile threat

In light of a new Iranian strategy to move the bulk of the “precision project” from Syria to Lebanon and Iraq, Israel’s “campaign between wars” has grown less effective. Israel must consider which strategy or combination of strategies to utilize against the precision threat from the following options: delay and disrupt acquisition, deter, defend, or launch a preemptive strike or preventive attack.



The Response to the Risk of Escalation in 2020

Conversation between Maj. Gen. (ret.) Amos Yadlin and Maj. Gen. Aharon Haliva, head of the IDF Operations Directorate

Maj. Gen. Haliva's remarks paint a highly positive and optimistic picture of the future operational response to the threats facing the State of Israel.

The current generation of new recruits

Maj. Gen. Haliva believes that those serving in the IDF understand that their military service reflects a mission that creates day-to-day meaning for them, and thus they are willing to set aside material compensation. The IDF should continue to develop its human capital, as "nothing is more important than people."

The integration of women in the IDF

According to Maj. Gen. Haliva, the IDF is constantly examining how to open up additional positions to women, as the contribution of women to the army is significant and essential for the IDF. "Eighty percent and more of those whom I work with at the ranks of major and lieutenant colonel are women, and they do their work as well as, if not better than, the men."

The campaign between wars

The IDF continues to exercise its power and its tools to prevent Iranian entrenchment in the region. A nation that wishes to survive and wants to avoid war must know how to use its power, and Maj. Gen. Haliva is convinced that the IDF is able and knows how to do so. In January 2020, two strategic turning points took place: the killing of Soleimani and the announcement of the "deal of the century." No matter what events follow each turning point, the IDF will know how to act.

The precision missile project

The IDF is working constantly on a strategic response that can provide Israel with security and the IDF with functional continuity. The response will be offensive and include preventing Iranian entrenchment in the campaign between wars by means of active defense, the Israeli Air Force, and extensive intelligence support. Thus, the campaign between the wars is far from over.

The ability of the ground forces to maneuver

The ground forces will be able to maneuver wherever necessary, defeat the enemy that it encounters, and provide the desired result for the State of Israel. The activation of IDF ground responses will be lethal, rapid, and precise. In offensive aspects, the previous multi-year plan, Gideon, significantly improved the ground forces. The current multi-year plan, Tnuva, will continue to improve the IDF's weapons capabilities and prepare the IDF for future wars.



From the Opening Event of the Conference

The Middle East after Soleimani: Possible Scenarios

Opening
Evening



Moderator: Amb. Martin Indyk, with Amb. Barbara Leaf, Gen. (ret.) Joseph Votel, Maj. Gen. (ret.) Amos Yadlin, Dr. Richard Haass, and Gen. (ret.) John Allen

The opening panel coincided with the presentation of the "deal of the century" by US President Donald Trump. Along with an analysis of the implications of the deal, the targeted killing of Qasem Soleimani was discussed, including doubts regarding the context and purpose of the attack, and what it indicates about US strategy toward Iran and the Middle East.

Likelihood of the implementation of the "deal of the century"

The release of the deal of the century in front of a partisan audience, with Netanyahu at Trump's side, made the plan look one-sided. The support of small Arab states but without the support of Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt shows a limited achievement, as Arab leaders will not want to be seen as harming the Palestinian interest.

Implications for Israel of the release of the "deal of the century"

The deal of the century includes all of the parameters that Israel seeks, and perhaps even more. However, it is still a division into two states. This is interesting because it upsets Netanyahu's right wing political bloc. At the same time, the Palestinians already rejected a plan like this a year and a half ago.

The targeted killing of Qasem Soleimani

The Middle East is a better place without Soleimani, and his departure creates the opportunity, if coupled with additional actions, of placing pressure on Iran. Soleimani's assassination changed Iran's victory image following the attack on the Saudi oil facilities.

The debate over the legitimacy of Soleimani's assassination

It is uncertain whether Soleimani's killing was legal according to international law, as it is not clear whether he can be defined as a terrorist. Soleimani acted under the auspices of a state and not a terrorist organization. While Iran uses terrorism as a tactic, Soleimani was a political-diplomatic figure within the Iranian leadership.

The US focus on Asia and the reduction of its forces in the Middle East

Trump decided over the course of his term to make a sharp turn and focus on Asia. The United States thus needs to maintain the ability to assist its allies in Europe and the Middle East, while simultaneously assisting its allies in Asia, and containing and deterring China. Soleimani's killing constitutes an opportunity for the United States to reduce its presence in the Middle East region.



Attorney General Dr. Avihai Mandelblit

The "deal of the century"

If a government decision on annexation is made, it will be examined. The role of the Attorney General is to implement the government's policy, and when there is a transition government, it is important to maintain restraint.

The indictment against the Prime Minister

Against the backdrop of the indictment filed that day, Mandelblit noted that from the moment immunity is removed, there is a legal obligation to file the indictment in court immediately.

The role of the Attorney General in the military context

Legal counsel must be provided to commanders in order to win wars, and not in order to restrict the army. The ones making operational decisions are the commanders, and legal counsel is given at their request.

The decision by the ICC in The Hague

Regarding the prosecutor's decision that there are grounds for opening an investigation into the commission of war crimes by Israel in the West Bank, Mandelblit said that "we will never investigate someone just in order to appease a foreign prosecutor in one country or another."

Not disqualifying MK Heba Yazbak

Mandelblit explained that someone who calls for harming IDF soldiers cannot be in the Knesset, but Yazbak for her part clarified that she does not support violence.



Maj. Gen. Tamir Hayman, Chief of IDF Military Intelligence

Israel's conflicts are shifting dramatically in a period of accelerated changes and shockwaves in the geopolitical, social, and technological environment

The Shiite system, which is divided into five sub-systems – Iran, Iraq and Yemen, Syria, Hezbollah, and the terrorist organizations – is marked by pressure on the regime in Tehran. In addition, Syria is in an ongoing process of change, and due to the many actors involved there, it is difficult to predict its future character. The Shiite axis has developed into an organization of armies that is difficult for Syria to tolerate.

Challenges for Israel vis-à-vis Hezbollah

Chief among these challenges is the precision missile project, which also includes Iranian assistance with efforts to construct missile and rocket conversion factories in Lebanon. In addition, Lebanon is beset by demonstrations and political instability, which grant Nasrallah a central leadership role, particularly after the killing of Soleimani.

The Palestinian system is characterized by three-pronged instability: societal, political, and leadership-related

The fundamental conditions in Gaza bespeak inherent instability, while in the West Bank, the instability is increasing given the activity related to the Palestinian elections and the issue of "the day after Abu Mazen."

Will We Long for the Outgoing Decade?

State Secretary at the Federal Foreign Office, Amb. Andreas Michaelis



In the current era, we cannot allow ourselves to be bogged down in sentimental nostalgia or to look at the past instead of the future. The most important actors in the new decade from the European perspective are Russia, Iran, Turkey, and North Korea.

The "new power triangles"

If in the past great powers were based on economic, military, and political power, in the future the balance will be different. Already Iran, Russia, and North Korea spend enormous budgets on security and the military while their economies face challenges and they are not able to form political alliances.

One sure guideline

Europe must avoid the path that Washington has taken in recent years. The US remains an economic and military center, but its standing in establishing alliances is declining, and accordingly its ability to shape regions politically is decreasing. The American vision of establishing a world order has not disappeared, but it is in decline. Europe remains the only actor whose power triangle is balanced enough to ensure an economic and military world order, but also cooperation mechanisms and even integration. Europe projects power on a series of issues, from the Ukraine to Iran and even Libya. The drawbacks of the European Union do not cancel out the potential of European foreign policy, which will be the "European project" of the next decade, including a strengthened European component of NATO and establishment of a European security council.

China and the West

Former US National Security Advisor H. R. McMaster



China constitutes a unique threat to the national security of the United States and to international security, as it challenges the liberal world order based on human rights and the free market. However, this is not a new Cold War.

The economic approach toward China

The approach was based on three assumptions that were proven false: China will adopt a liberal market economy; prosperity will lead to liberalization; and China will become a responsible actor in the world order. The US and the free countries cannot remain uninvolved, and they must return to the strategic competition from which they were absent.

Western policy toward China

The assumptions that should dictate Western policy toward China are: Beijing will not carry out economic or political liberalization; the Communist Party will work to change the international rules of the game; China will combine economic aggression with an industrial espionage campaign that aims at technological superiority; China's expansion aims to take over strategic regions and strategic networks, such as communications and logistics; and without more effective competition from democratic players, China will become more aggressive in pursuing its economic and governmental alternative.

Western policy: strengthen elements that China sees as weaknesses

The West should pursue four concrete steps: increase civil involvement in democratic states; investigate subversive Chinese activity under the auspices of the Party; support and strengthen independent journalism and NGOs; and further investment norms such as transparency and quality standardization - all while continuing cooperation between the countries in a variety of areas.

Great Power Competition

Moderator: Amb. Dr. Oded Eran, with Dr. Michael Doran, Prof. Irina Zvyagelskaya, Dr. Stanley Fischer, and Amb. Andreas Michaelis

The Nature of the Competition

In the international system there is competition between authoritarian capitalism and democratic capitalism: China vs. the United States. In the Middle East, the question is whether the United States will see the region as an important area for this competition. A possible US withdrawal should worry Israel, which could end up alone against a nuclear Iran, and it must identify the limits of US power and act on its own, in part with American backing, in the form of economic warfare and military deterrence.

The International System

The American hegemon that ruled from 1945 to 2016 no longer exists, and the Franco-German alliance is not as powerful as the Germany-UK-France triangle that existed before Brexit, which in turn significantly undermines Europe.

The United States in the Middle East

Washington should be concerned about the Russian-Chinese-Iranian attempt to push it out of the Gulf, specifically by preventing Iran from becoming a tool in the hands of China, but at the moment the US does not have a strategy in the face of this threat, and it must maintain economic pressure, backed up with a credible military threat.

Russia in the Middle East

Russia is exploiting the vacuum left by the United States, but without spreading its forces too thin.

Challenges to the global economy

Slowing growth in China might be compensated by accelerated growth in India, and aside from "black swans" like the coronavirus, it seems that the global economy is stable. However, economic crises "percolate" for a long time but erupt all at once.

The nuclear threat

The collapse of the arms control regime is the main threat to the world, evidenced by tensions between nuclear powers (India-Pakistan, North Korea).



Fake News in a Post-Truth Era

Moderator: Inbal Orpaz, with Brig. Gen. (ret.) Itai Brun, Dr. Liraz Margalit, and Dr. Tehilla Shwartz-Altshuler

We are now at the outset of an era in which it is harder and harder to distinguish between truth and lies, to the point that it is difficult to know if a picture is real, while lies and falsehoods are disseminated virally. The traditional disruptions and problems in the ability to analyze reality are coupled in the information revolution with the disappearance of the enemy, thus leading to a disparity in which we know a lot, but we seemingly understand less.

Psychology and lies

Our perception is composed primarily of emotions and automatic decisions. These are the easiest, quickest, and most efficient mechanisms for making decisions. Rational examination and careful fact-checking require much more cognitive effort, so this mechanism does not operate most of the time. Today, people judge the credibility of information according to the number of likes on Facebook and tweets. What is threatening is the process of habituation that we are going through vis-à-vis lies and liars, and the global indifference of the public to the phenomenon of fake news.

National security rooms and professional analysis

National security rooms are not immune to lies. There are multiple truths without the ability to decide among them, and liberal democracy's free market of ideas is now a platform that has been penetrated. We face a new era in which professional, fact-based analysis makes way for beliefs, opinions, and emotions in the public discourse, as well as in national security rooms.

Distancing from reality and a dynamic of escalation

The real threat is that decision making mechanisms adopt alternative truth instead of the absolute truth, and distance themselves from reality and fact-based dialogue. This could create a dynamic of escalation that is based on mistaken assessments.

Technological capitalism and regulation

Enormous companies have become digital dictators, and the dissemination of lies has become expedient and profitable for them. The technological capitalism that we have enabled created this situation, which leads to an "infocalypse." The concern is that in the future, the point of interface between the information revolution and the artificial intelligence revolution will enable control and surveillance to the point of policing the secrets of our personality, and human rights will become a thing of the past. Regulatory intervention is the solution that we must turn to.

Directions for solutions

There are four directions: digital literacy, methodologies, regulation, and technology. While technology did not create the problem, it accelerated it by making many individuals into creators and easy and viral distributors of content. There is a public interest in stopping the growing trend of fake news and deep fake, yet there are too few start-ups on this issue, due to a market failure in this field.



Innovative Technologies and National Security

Moderator: Yonatan Adiri



The impact of technological growth on national security / Dr. Nadia Schadlow, former Deputy US National Security Advisor

Leading the field of artificial intelligence is the key to the question of who will rule the world, when picture processing systems become more accessible and create a "battle for the truth." The speed of technology requires that governments adapt to this quickly, and decision makers fully understand the technology they are trying to regulate. The main influencing factor to realize the advantages inherent in artificial intelligence is technological superiority in access to information (big data). To this end, a joint effort by companies and governments, based on trust, is needed in order to cope with this national challenge.



Israel and the technology revolution / Brig. Gen. (ret.) Nadav Zafrir

From an Israeli perspective, information, cybernetics, machine learning, and artificial intelligence are technologies in which Israel has an advantage based on its situation in a "tough neighborhood." Mandatory military service enables Israel to harness inexperienced but highly motivated young people toward the technological challenge, and this is one of the foundations of the creation and strength of the "start-up nation."



The drone threat / Dr. Liran Antebi

The growing drone market was presented as a revolution that contains a large degree of potential and challenges, as drones constitute a combined threat – tactical, cognitive, and strategic. A decline in the price of drones is a significant factor in enlarging the market, with the aircraft used by terrorist organizations such as ISIS and Hezbollah. There are solutions to drones being used by terrorist organizations, but they are not airtight.



DNA and synthetic technology / Dr. Ido Bazelet

Nanotechnology enables the manipulation of DNA, in which it is possible to train molecules in a way identical to artificial intelligence, for missions such as identifying and destroying tumors. Another futuristic idea is embodied in digital distribution that exploits the DNA sequence, making it possible to send it by email or print a medication for personal use.



Climate and technology / Prof. Uri Shani

The Middle East region suffers from severe drought and a warming climate. There are two solutions for this. The focus is on irrigation, which uses some 70 percent of the world's water: one is Israeli drip irrigation technology, which can replace flood irrigation systems. The second is water reclamation, which is more common in Israel than in most countries.

The Coming
Decade
in the
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How the World Went from Flat to Fast to Smart to Deep

Thomas Friedman, *The New York Times*

We are in a stage of exponential global acceleration: the temperature of the earth, the population of the world, the scope of economic globalization, and more. The world is becoming more connected than in the past, and the collapse of adversaries is more dangerous than their rise.

The political parties in the industrialized world are collapsing because they were established during the previous revolution, the industrial one, as part of a binary political paradigm that separated between an economic and social right and left. Accordingly, a political system that wants to survive needs to stop thinking in terms of political axes and replace them with the terms of an ecosystem: it must ensure its own survival and sustainability. There are several strategies for maintaining an ecological system in nature: pluralism of life forms, entrepreneurship, adaptation and adjustment, and "bankruptcy laws" whereby a model that fails is eliminated. On the geopolitical level, the future belongs to those that cling to the laws of nature: nature does not recognize the differences between Areas A, B, and C, the Iran-Iraq border, or the third elections in Israel.

Nation-states are under increasing pressure: the world powers do not want to invest in them, the climate and the population are changing rapidly, China is undercutting blue-collar industries, and smartphones make it possible for all people to compare their lives to the lives of others. These challenges are intensified in nation-states whose borders do not match the demographic, ethnic, or religious distribution (states that surround Israel). Accordingly, Israel's main challenge is not "managing strengths" but "managing weaknesses," and the main threat to it is invasion by an "army" of refugees.



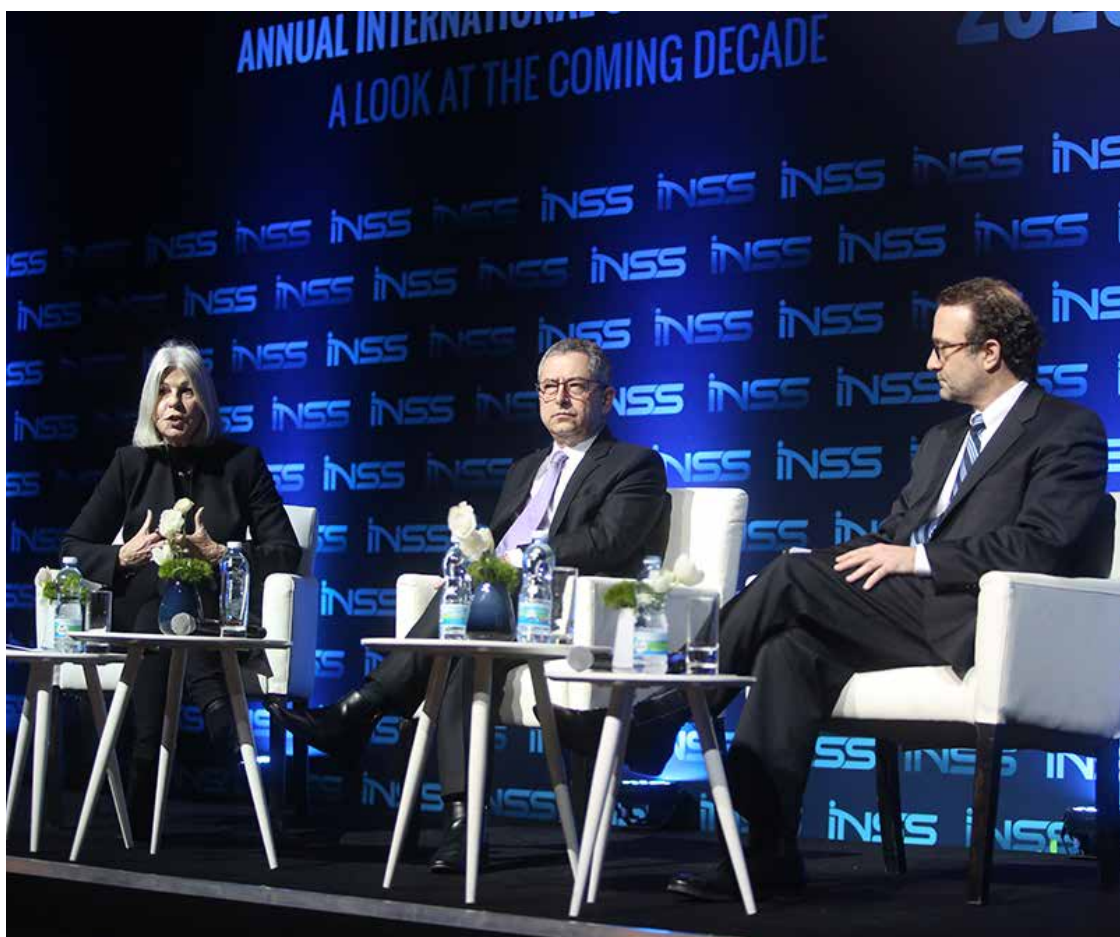
Air Power Next: The Future of Combat Air

Erin Moseley, VP Business Development & Strategy, Lockheed Martin Aeronautics



The main reason for the need for air power is deterrence, and in order to achieve it, simultaneous and multidimensional action is needed. In the current era, the boundaries between missions and platforms are blurred, and there is an operational demand for a protected, internally operated, networked, synchronized, and multidisciplinary system that addresses challenges.

The fifth and newest generation of airplanes enables a higher level of connectivity in network-based operations, and increases the potential inherent in the system in the future aerial battle arena. The new airplanes communicate with one another, and thus each airplane is simultaneously a system and a platform. In operations with these aircraft, pilots serve as data nodes that manage the battle arena together.



Perspectives from Washington and Jerusalem

Moderator: Dr. Anat Kurz, with Zohar Palti, head of the Political-Military Bureau at the Ministry of Defense, and David Schenker, Assistant Secretary of Near Eastern Affairs in the State Department

One of the recurring ideas regarding hopes for the region in the next five years, with the aim of making the region more stable and more prosperous, is the need for ongoing, close coordination between the US and Israel. The value of this relationship cannot be overstated. The containment of Iran is a major shared goal, and there is a need to curb aggressive behavior from China and Russia. Mr. Schenker emphasized that the United States is not leaving the Middle East – on the contrary, the US is in the region to stay, and better coalitions will allow for better handling of the multiple threats. Therefore, Washington will continue to reach out and work with coalition partners. One possible arena in which US and Israeli interests may diverge regards China, and it is important to resolve this. For Israel, stated Mr. Palti, it is of the utmost importance and urgency to maintain and enhance relations with Egypt and Jordan, while simultaneously working to undermine the Shiite threat. This latter goal is predicated on maintaining strong security institutions and capabilities in Israel.

From Washington's perspective, in order to increase stability and bring about greater prosperity in the Middle East, it is necessary to roll back Iran's malign behavior in the region and prevent Russia and China from gaining a greater foothold. From Jerusalem's vantage point, maintaining the special relationship with the United States will remain of paramount importance. Israel must preserve and enhance its relationships with Jordan and Egypt, respectively. Preventing Iran from becoming a nuclear power remains a top priority for Israel. Likewise, reducing Iran's footprint in countries such as Lebanon and Syria is crucial. US engagement in the region is set to continue, as Washington maintains essential interests in the Middle East.

War Game: The Northern Front

Moderator: Brig. Gen. (ret.) Itai Brun, with Gen. (ret.) Joseph Votel, Gen. (ret.) John Allen, Lt. Col. (ret.) Orna Mizrahi, Dr. Igor Yurgens, Maj. Gen. (res.) Nitzan Alon, and Shimrit Meir

The war game dealt with the implications of recent geostrategic developments for the battlefield: the war in Syria, the presence of the United States and Russia in the region, Iran's entrenchment, Hezbollah's buildup, and the killing of Soleimani. The scenario described an escalation dynamic between Israel and Iran and its proxies, in which an Israeli attack in Syria led to a series of additional attacks, including casualties for the sides involved.

The stances of the players

Iran: The main question was where to respond from. Iran is not interested in escalation, and even sought to distance the event from Iran and not to endanger the Assad regime in Syria; thus it preferred a Hezbollah response from Lebanon. Another guiding principle was to keep Nasrallah close to Iran, and to keep the United States out of the conflict. In the end, Iran preferred to limit the war to Lebanon and perhaps Syria, via proxies. The Iranians feared deterioration in Iraq and the loss of their assets there.

Hezbollah: As Israel had the last shot, Hezbollah is in a dilemma: should it stop, and how? It is under a series of constraints: demonstrations in Lebanon, domestic hostility toward it, economic distress, and the complicated situation of the Iranian patron. Hezbollah carried out a measured response toward military targets only, so that it could claim that it had the last word, but without causing the situation to deteriorate into war.

Syria: Assad has a strategy of avoiding outright conflict with Israel. He is concerned with strengthening his domestic sovereignty, and thus he turned to diplomatic steps with Russian assistance, and even demanded that Iran restrain the Quds Force and prevent Hezbollah from operating out of Syria.

Israel identified strategic conditions for action: full US backing for its actions and American-Iranian friction in Iraq; the economic and military pressure on Iran, which leads to a high degree of deterrence toward it; the crisis in Lebanon and Hezbollah's sensitivity to Lebanese public opinion; and Assad's desire to avoid war. In the end, Israel did not see room for large-scale action to remove Iran from Syria or to change the situation in Lebanon radically.

Russia: Russia has invested considerably in Syria, and therefore has much to lose. Consequently, it has an interest in avoiding escalation. It utilized its relations with all of the players in the region, including with Israel, with whom its relations are better than ever, in order to rein in the situation. Its actions were backed up by a UN Security Council decision, as well as activity with China to exert economic pressure on Iran.

The United States was driven by three principles: response in Iraq to the attack on its forces, which would increase the pressure on the Iraqi government to protect the US and coalition forces; support for Israel; and obstruction of Iran, while employing mechanisms to convey messages to Tehran that the US is interested in avoiding large-scale escalation or American-Iranian escalation, and expects Iran to restrain its proxies in the region.



Commanders Debriefing

Moderator: Brig. Gen. (res.) Udi Dekel, with Lt. Gen. (ret.) Gadi Eisenkot and Gen. (ret.) David Petraeus

David Petraeus

Why weren't any of the players in the scenario eager to fight?

The killing of Soleimani, an unprecedented measure, indicates an American desire to restore its deterrence capability vis-à-vis Iran, and this shapes the context of the war game. In such a situation, it is undesirable that the United States take an aggressive or hasty approach. Hezbollah acted correctly in the game in not wanting to start a large-scale war with Israel, unless it faces an existential threat. Israel must also be wise and not push Hezbollah into a position in which it will have to respond to the point of large-scale escalation. Assad, similar to Hezbollah, is in need of Iranian assistance but is not interested in large-scale war with Israel. Iran controls the shaping of policy in the Shiite sphere, while Syria is not part of this.

Would the United States fight for Israel in the Middle East?

In an Israeli-Iranian war, US involvement is unavoidable. But the scenario is unlikely, as Iran knows that it would endanger the survival of its regime in such a war.

Is it possible to topple the Assad regime, the weak link in the Shiite axis, in order to shape a better reality in the region?

Syria is not a state with centralized rule, and Assad does not manage Syria in practice. A simplistic analysis should be avoided, e.g., if Assad is removed and another ruler comes to power, Syria would stabilize in a way that helps undermine the Shiite axis. Syria is doomed to years of chaos, and in this context, the United States should demonstrate a desire and an ability to support Israel.

Gadi Eisenkot

When will Israel decide to fight against Iran and not its proxies?

Iran is much stronger than Hezbollah or the militias, but its ability to harm Israel with missiles is significantly lower than that of Hezbollah. Israel has worked to prevent the Iranian entrenchment in Syria and the precision missile project in Lebanon, neutralized the tunnel threat, and helped thwart the Islamic State, while conducting a daily struggle against terrorism. Israel must continue this policy until an existential or severe strategic threat emerges. This is also how the players in the scenario acted.

Had the scenario seen deterioration into a broader war, how is such a war ended, and what would be a satisfactory result for Israel?

It is possible to get caught in an escalation to the point of war, due to a mistaken assessment or a proactive action that goes wrong, and then it is clear that Iran is the target. The Iranian objectives are: ensuring the survival of the regime; achieving regional hegemony in the Middle East; and achieving nuclear capability or nuclear threshold capability. Any Israeli action should strive to harm these objectives. The event can be ended once Israel has a clearly advantageous position – removing Iranian forces from Syria, limiting Hezbollah's power, and increasing the monitoring of the land crossing between Iran and Iraq.



The Coming
Decade
in the
Regional
System



Speaking of Syria

Conversation between former Amb. Prof. Itamar Rabinovich and Prof. François Heisbourg

Multi-level chain of Middle East conflicts that are expected to deepen

Libya is becoming the "new Syria" in every sense: the level of violence, the variety of international forces active there, and the fact that there are pro-Turkish Syrian mercenaries inside Libyan territory. In addition, there are crises in the region surrounding the issue of natural gas and the Aegean Sea. This arouses conflict between Turkey, Greece, and Egypt regarding maritime and air control of the territory between the Eastern Mediterranean and Libya. These conflicts will get worse.

Great power involvement

Russia is one of the big winners in the war in Syria. It placed itself in a key role as mediator between the fighting forces on the ground, between Arabs and non-Arabs and between Sunnis and Shiites.

Europe as hostage of Turkey and Greece

Turkey is complicating the situation for NATO, both due to fears of the flow of Syrian refugees from Turkey into Europe and in the context of control in the area. Greece is also holding NATO hostage in its own way. Turkey and Greece have opposing interests regarding territories, energy resources, and the players in the war in Libya: Greece is working with Israel and Egypt, while Turkey is working with Qatar and the Libyan government. All of these make it very difficult for NATO to create a unified policy.

Trump as a leader without a clear policy compass

There is continuity between Obama's approach and that of Trump regarding withdrawal from the Middle East, despite Trump's desire to differentiate himself from his predecessor. Trump's vision of refraining from involvement in unnecessary wars brings him into new conflicts, which causes him to act like Obama. However, Trump has different and even contradictory motivations in shaping his policy. His actions in the Syrian arena have not been driven by real American needs (such as Syrian oil) but rather by whims.

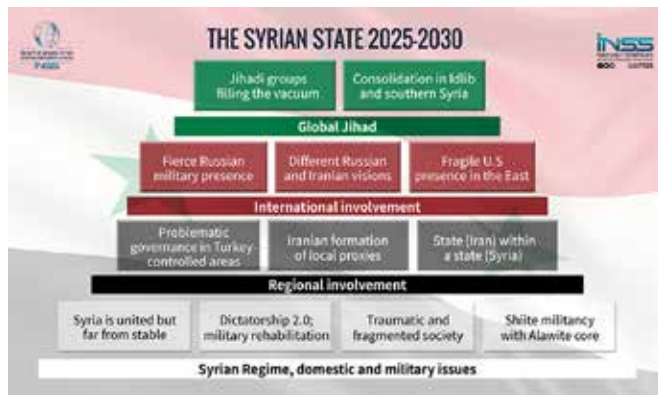
Continued Iranian involvement in the region, despite domestic difficulties

Iran is over-extended in the Middle East, to the dismay of the Iranian people. Hezbollah is an important interest for Iran, and it expected to remain such. Hezbollah and Syria have brought Iran from the periphery of the Middle East to the heart of the Levant and the Israeli border. The Iranians will do everything they can to continue to maintain their relative victory in Syria, and will remain there.

Syria: Back to the Future?

Moderator: Dr. Vera Michlin-Shapir, with Dr. Carmit Valensi, Dr. Can Kasapoglu, Dr. Jonathan Spyer, and Jennifer Cafarella

The discussion revolved around what is expected in Syria in the coming decade, and thus addressed the nature of the Syrian arena and the Syrian state. In the coming decade, Syria will enter a different war, which can be understood in several dimensions.



The internal Syrian arena

In the coming decade, Syria is expected to be territorially unified but without real governability, and Assad, hard-pressed to restore sovereignty, will thus intensify the nature of his dictatorial and violent regime. The population of Syria is expected to grow to 25 million people, but will suffer from rifts and divisions, and the majority of the refugees will not return to Syria. The economic situation will continue to decline,

in terms of inflation, destroyed infrastructure, and poverty. Estimates indicate that it will take 50 years and \$300 billion for state reconstruction.

Russian-Iranian competition over control in Syria

The competition and the conflict between Moscow and Tehran over influence in Syria will deepen once the fighting subsides. Russia is interested in stabilizing Syria and making it a Russian pawn, including rebuilding the Syrian army and integrating the rebels within it. Iran seeks to make Syria its proxy through in-depth, ambitious, multi-faceted penetration: influence over infrastructure, the presence of pro-Iranian militias, involvement in building up the army, and ideological and demographic change in Syria.

A multitude of actors in the arena

The jihadist organizations are restoring territorial control in parts of Syria; countries such as Turkey operate alongside them. The struggle between the various parties prolongs the conflict, and the governmental vacuum in Syria will increase the involvement of these actors. The United States will need to intervene in Syria if one of the hostile actors fills in the void that has been created. Russia has limitations on its ability to help stabilize the regime, from a military and civilian perspective.

The impact of the future Syrian state on Israel's security

Israel will have to continue to operate in a realm of great uncertainty in Syria in the upcoming decade. Iran and Hezbollah continue to entrench themselves in southwestern Syria by recruiting local forces (most of them Sunni) and through military integration in the area, at the expense of the weakness of the Syrian state. Disarming Syria of its chemical weapons and weapons of mass destruction is the highest priority for Israeli national security, as President Obama failed in fully eliminating these.



The View from US CENTCOM

**Former US CENTCOM Commander
General (ret.) Joseph Votel**

Former US CENTCOM Commander General (ret.) Joseph Votel spoke of the national interests driving US engagement in the region. These include preventing any territory from becoming a platform for terrorist or other activity against the US and its allies; preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; maintaining access to major waterways and resources; minimizing the spillover of instability into the US or its allies; and maintaining a positive balance of power to prevent the rise of regional hegemons. While these issues may be less urgent than in the past, they all remain relevant.

Most important, the US must maintain a competitive advantage over Russia and China in the region. Iran remains the most urgent issue on the US regional agenda, and although the regime in Tehran may actually be subject to more pressure, its proxies are not likely to de-escalate anytime soon. Jihadi terrorism may become more local, and the region will likely see an attempted resurgence of the Islamic State. Overall, it is a strategic imperative that the US continue to compete in this dynamic, unpredictable region, while working to wind down military conflicts and move them into the political realm, maintaining a sustainable military presence, and reviewing security cooperation with coalition partners. This strategic imperative does not eclipse other US interests, and must be integrated with them.



Views from the Arab World

Moderator: Dr. Sarah Feuer, with former Amb. Barbara A. Leaf and former Amb. Dana Shell Smith

The Arab world has been undergoing many changes and transformations in recent years. These stem from technological, generational, and economic changes, as well as changes to the threats on states and their priorities, including in relation to Israel.

The reactions to Trump's "deal of the century"

The Arab regimes, especially in the states that are central from the perspective of Israel and the United States, have not taken a clear stance toward the plan. However, their commitment to a resolution of the conflict still exists, as evidenced by the fact that there has not yet been opposition to the plan or reactions to its content, and, unlike in the past, the masses have not been sent out to protest against it and to let off steam.

The attitude toward Israel in the Arab world

Thanks to the internet, there is more openness in the Arab world toward Israel and toward its technological progress and innovation, especially in the wealthy Gulf states, but the attitude is not uniform. For example, in Saudi Arabia, there are groups in favor of the Palestinians and other groups that express a positive attitude toward Israel. In the states that are poorer and more distant from Israel such as Iraq and Algeria, Israel is generally not on the agenda. As a rule, the Arab world is a large area and there are great differences in the attitudes of the states and the masses toward Israel.

Qatar's situation

Qatari support for political Islam stems from fears that these organizations will become a threat to it. In practice, the main threat to Qatar is the blockade led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The blockade gives Iran leverage over it, as it Iranian airspace is the only access route for Qatar.

The troubles of the Arab world

The day-to-day troubles besetting populations in the Arab world are mainly economic issues and frustration at the ineffectiveness of public systems and government services. These have prompted the waves of protest in the various states in the region.

Policy recommendations for the US president elected in 2020, in the context of improving relations between Israel and the Arab states:

- Provide a central role for key states in the Arab world in negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians
- Accelerate the establishment of a channel of communication between Israel and the Palestinians, even if it is covert
- Understand that progress in relations can only be reached through negotiations
- Be clear regarding the United States role and its interests in the region.





Voices from the Arab World: Trends and Trajectories

Conversation between Dr. Sarah Feuer and Khader Sawaed

Over the past year, INSS began to distribute its publications to the public in the Arab world through INSS social media accounts on Facebook and Twitter. Posts by INSS in Arabic were viewed by over a million users in countries in the region (including Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon), and received thousands of comments and shares. We were exposed to opinions and voices that are not heard in the institutional media, and we discovered masses who want to know more and to understand what is happening in the region, not troubled that we are an Israeli research institute. In advance of the conference, we distributed a questionnaire on social media to learn what the masses in the Arab region around Israel think, what concerns them, what their opinions are on issues connected to the national security of their countries and regional security, and how they see relations between Israel and the Palestinians.

The questionnaire focused on three main issues:

An arrangement between Israel and Hamas in Gaza

Most of the respondents voted in favor of a settlement (53 percent in favor, 26 percent against, and 21 percent undecided). Users indicated that the most important element of an arrangement is the provision of work permits and freedom of movement within Israel. Among Palestinians respondents, 66 percent saw work permits in Israel as the most important element of an arrangement.

What do you think is the most important element of an arrangement between Israel and Hamas in Gaza?



66%

Work visas in Israel and freedom of movement



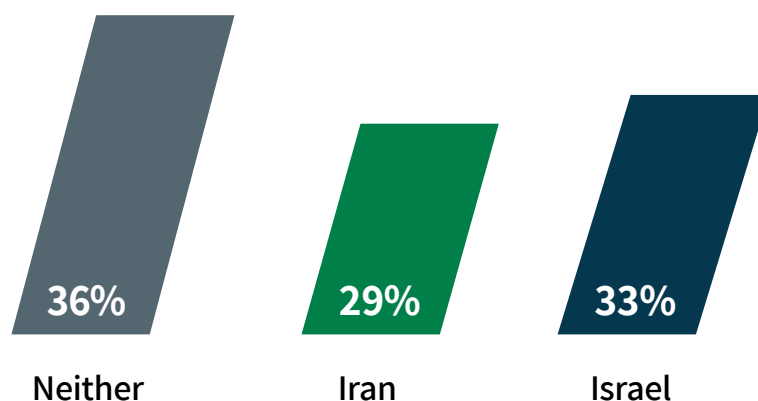
34%

Supply of electricity, water, and medicine

The conflict between Israel and Iran

Iran's image in the Arab world is negative, and it has worsened steadily and significantly over the past decade. Iran is seen as the actor with the most negative influence on the region, twice as much as Israel. In the case of escalation and the outbreak of a war between Israel and Iran, the level of support for Iran would be lower than the level of support for Israel.

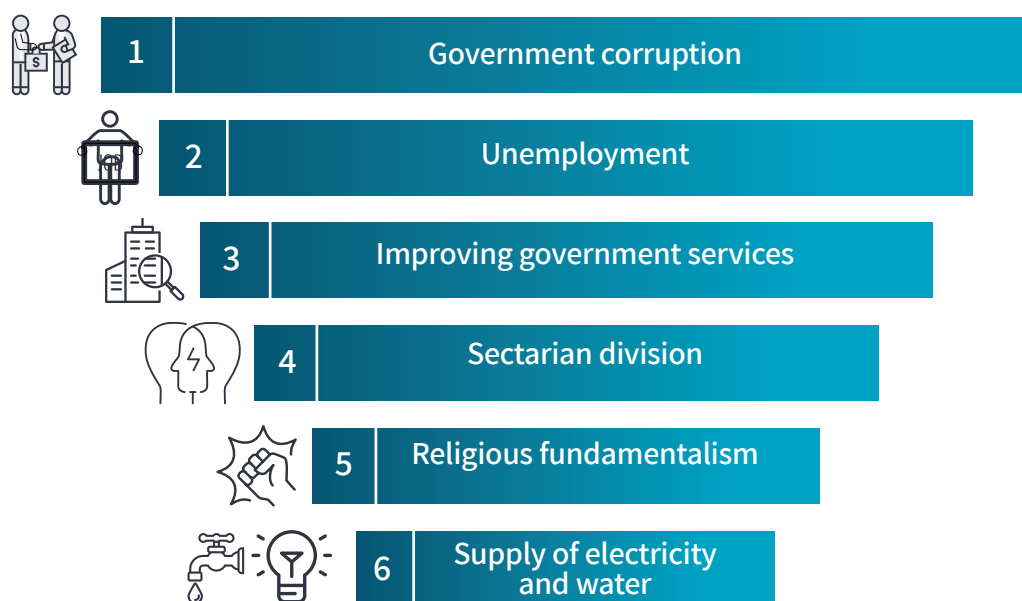
In the event of a military confrontation between Israel and Iran, which side would you support?



The concerns and issues important to citizens of Arab states

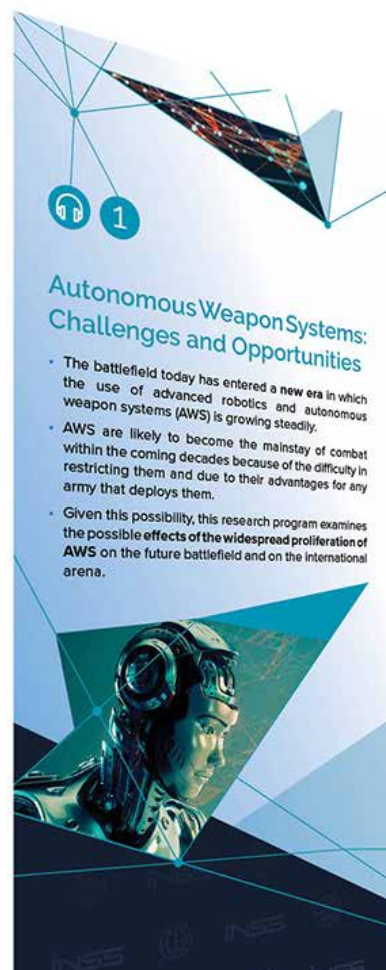
At the center of the public's concern in the Arab world are issues of daily life, first and foremost, government corruption, as well as unemployment and the level of government services. Issues of identity, some of which were very prominent during the past decade (such as ethnic divisions and religious radicalism), were ranked relatively low.

What issue worries you the most?



Research Gallery

During the conference, four interactive graphic exhibits were on display in the lobby of the Smolarz Auditorium at Tel Aviv University, where the conference was held. The exhibits featured four leading research projects at INSS.



EXISTENTIAL THREATS TO ISRAEL



The Objective

Analyzing potential existential threats that might endanger the physical existence of the State of Israel, the performance of its essential systems, and its identity as a Jewish and democratic state.

Israel's Security Pillars

These pillars represent a range of advanced "hard" and "soft" power capabilities against both internal and external threats and risks.

Military
Power



Technological
Superiority



International
Standing



National
Resilience



ADVANCED TECHNOLOGIES AND NATIONAL SECURITY PROGRAM



Artificial Intelligence and National Security

- Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a growing technological field that has a **revolutionary impact** on almost all aspects of life. It is no longer a futuristic technology, but a basic requirement.
- AI holds many **opportunities** and benefits for the future, but many **challenges** as well. Therefore decision-makers should pay attention to the changes in the world of AI and prepare accordingly.



As part of this research program, a memorandum will be published during 2020 on the impact of AI on national security.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: AREAS OF USE

APPLICATION \ CAPABILITIES	Database Analysis	Video Processing	Natural Language Processing	Autonomous Capabilities	Computer Vision and Image Processing	Personalization of Services
National Security	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cyber	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Banks and Finance	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Transportation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Education	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Communication	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Labor and Manufacturing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Healthcare	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Disruptive Innovation and the Boomerang Effect

- Scientific and technological advances have made various applications **affordable, available, and easy to operate** – including in the security realm.



- The INSS research program examined this development as it relates to the **modus operandi** of Hamas and its threat to Israel.
- While advanced off-the-shelf products such as drones are highly accessible, Hamas tends to prefer more primitive means of attack for various reasons, including deterrent and psychological factors, political restraint, and the power of inferior means over technological superiority.

Extreme Military Threats

03 Regional Armies Unite against Israel

This scenario is not likely under current circumstances, but a change in regional power dynamics and a volatile event could lead to broad regional mobilization against Israel.

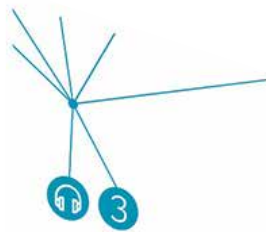
04 Nuclear Proliferation in the Middle East

Multipolar nuclearization in the Middle East could occur if Iran accelerates its military nuclear program. This could lead to a domino effect, with other countries striving to develop nuclear capabilities.

05 Massive Missile Attack and the Collapse of Israel's Defense Systems

A precise and intensive aerial attack on Israel with a variety of weapons from various fronts simultaneously could overwhelm Israel's defense systems and damage the performance of its operational systems, national infrastructure, and essential infrastructure.





Threats and Dilemmas



Dilemmas for Israel

- What scenarios can lead to escalation?
- What developments will require a preemptive strike?
- Will Israel target Lebanese infrastructure, or only Hezbollah?
- What are the implications of a multi-front war?
- Should Israel attack Iran, or only its proxies?
- Ground maneuver vs. air and stand-off attacks?
- What is the exit strategy?

THE NORTHERN WAR



IDF Readiness for the Northern War



Components of the Israeli Strategy

- Deterrence; "campaign between wars"
- Defense; especially of the civilian home front
- Surprise the enemy; preemptive attack
- Intelligence and technological superiority
- Targeting - precision and capacity
- Ground maneuver - maximum power in minimum time
- Clear victory and continued freedom of operation



Foreign Interference in Elections as a Threat to Democracy

The Russian Interference in the 2016 U.S. elections



Deepening polarization and encouraging communities to boycott the elections.

Reducing public support for Hillary Clinton and supporting Trump's election.

Threats to Israeli Democracy?



Nadav Argaman, Head of the ISA (Shin Bet)
"A foreign country has the intention of interfering in the Israeli elections..."
January 8, 2019

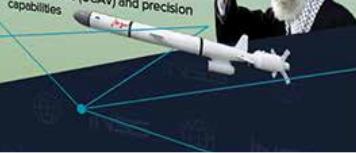
Iran & Proxies

Iran strives for regional hegemony, while working to form a Shiite crescent around Israel and strengthen its proxies



Iran's "War Machine"

Increasing arsenal of ballistic missiles, cruise missiles, unmanned combat aerial vehicles (UCAV) and precision capabilities



NATIONAL SECURITY, FAKE NEWS, AND INFLUENCE EFFORTS IN THE DIGITAL AGE



Growing Difficulty to Understand Reality

We live in an era of growing difficulty in understanding reality, and consequently, in making correct decisions in the field of national security. The Lipkin-Shahak program studies the causes of this situation and looks for directions toward a solution.



Deepfake - Don't Trust Your Eyes

Deepfake demonstrates how manipulating becomes easier and the level of trust decreases.



High-quality Deepfake videos created by machine and distributed online in the last two years



Can you tell true from fake? Try yourself!



fakenews.inss.org.il

Cognitive Warfare in Israel

The Threats



Nasrallah
"Israel, which owns nuclear weapons and has the strongest air force in the region, is weaker than a spider's web..." May 27, 2000

Yahya Simwar

"The balloons...are just a message...that the Israelis are incomparably stronger, but will never win." May 10, 2018



The Response



The IDF Spokesperson's Unit
Campaign against the Iranian presence in Syria



The Ministry of Strategic Affairs
Campaign highlighting the training of children in terrorist-led summer camps



The Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Campaign "In honor" of President Rouhani's birthday



Minister of Defense Naftali Bennett

The “deal of the century,” according to DM Bennett, is an opportunity to determine the scope of Israel’s territory and delineate the Jordan Valley as its border: “History has knocked on our door and provided us with a one-time opportunity to apply Israeli law to all of the settlements.”

Applying Israeli law is a simple process – there is no need to delay it or complicate it. “Like the Nike commercial says: Just do it.” Levi Eshkol applied sovereignty in 1967 because he understood the significance of the occasion, as did Menachem Begin, who passed the three readings of the law in a single day.

Three principles for implementing Trump’s “opportunity of the century” are: applying sovereignty now; applying sovereignty to all of the territory to which the President has agreed – 30 percent of the territory, whereas no settlement or Israeli should remain on the outside; and avoiding recognition of a Palestinian state by the Israeli government.

Interview with Minister of Energy Dr. Yuval Steinitz by Amb. Dr. Oded Eran

Israel before the discovery of natural gas fields

In the past, the economic and environmental costs of importing energy were very high, and importing energy from abroad caused a decline in the national product. On the environmental level, the energy industry in Israel was very polluting, due to the necessity of using coal, oil, diesel, and mazut.

Economic consequences of the discovery

The discovery of natural gas fields brings economic growth. Natural gas has already led to a reduction in costs, for example a reduction in electricity prices; state revenues will increase thanks to the royalties, corporate tax, and tax on profits from national resources; and the national product will increase, thanks to the export of surplus gas to Egypt and Jordan.

Environmental consequences of the discovery

Natural gas enables a reduction in air pollution to a minimal level, and a dramatic improvement in the environment and public health. Within a decade (2015-2025), there will be a 95 percent decrease in air pollution from the energy industry in Israel. This means healthier lives for all citizens, thus reducing the burden on the health systems and social welfare systems.

Geopolitical consequences of the discovery

The sale of surplus gas to Egypt and Jordan strengthens the axis of peace between Israel and its neighbors. Due to the discovery of natural gas fields, Israel has established a regional organization that promotes economic cooperation between the states of the Eastern Mediterranean and Europe, as well as agreements between Israel and Europe.

What does the future hold?

There is a forecast of economic growth that will lead to a growth in the state's revenues, a reduction in costs that will lead to lower electricity prices, and in the future also investment in education, health, social welfare, and infrastructure.





US Government Sanctions in 2020: Priorities and Strategies

Conversation between Dr. Raz Zimmt and David Peyman, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Counter Threat Finance and Sanctions

The discussion revolved around the level of success of the sanctions imposed on Iran by the Trump administration, and the sanctions that are expected to be imposed in the coming year. Mr. Peyman made clear that the aim of the sanctions is to achieve the political objectives of the State Department, i.e., to deny the regime income that Iran invests in aggressive activities in the region, as well as activities against Iranian citizens. Furthermore, the sanctions aim to bring Iran back to the negotiating table and accept the 12 points of Secretary of State Pompeo.

Mr. Peyman noted that in relation to the short period in which Iran has been subject to sanctions, there is considerable evidence of this strategy's success: Iran has significantly reduced the amount of money invested in terrorist organizations, Shiite militias, and the Revolutionary Guards; it is more isolated in the international system; and a "conflict resolution mechanism" has been activated by European countries. Furthermore, cracks are evident between the Iranian regime and its citizens, as well as cracks within the regime itself. Looking ahead, Mr. Peyman said that he believes that additional sanctions will be imposed on Iran in additional industries. He emphasized that the United States will not lift the sanctions until Iran behaves like the rest of the countries in the international system.



Iran vs. the US: Escalation or Negotiation?

Moderator: Sima Shine, with Holly Dagres, Amb. Eric Danon, Dr. Michael Doran, and Maj. Gen. (ret.) Giora Eiland

The background: the high level of tension between Iran and the United States after a series of violations of the nuclear deal by Iran, following the Trump administration's withdrawal from the agreement. The climax of the crisis: the killing of Quds Force commander Qasem Soleimani following the killing of an American civilian and the attempt by an Iraqi pro-Iranian militia to take over the US embassy in Baghdad.

"Maximum pressure"

Panelists disagreed in their assessment of the level of success of the US "maximum pressure" strategy. Ms. Dagres contended that the strategy has failed miserably, Maj. Gen. (ret.) Eiland argued that the strategy pushes Iran toward nuclear capability, and Amb. Danon said that the American strategy has not reduced the aggressive nature of Iran's actions but rather intensified it, although it is still too early to determine whether the strategy will achieve its objectives. However, Dr. Doran suggested that despite the flaws in the strategy, it has succeeded in harming the Iranian economy and also, indirectly, in strengthening the protests in Iran.

Will we see a new agreement?

The possibility of renewing negotiations between the sides continues to be on the agenda as the alternative preferred by President Trump, who has reiterated that he does not intend to start new wars. However, the Iranian leadership insists that it will not return to negotiations without the compensation that it was entitled to by virtue of the agreement, and even then would do so only in the multilateral framework of the P5+1. Panelists agreed that the US is interested in a new agreement, but it is unlikely Iran will engage in negotiations before the US presidential elections.

Would a new agreement include issues beyond the nuclear issue?

Ms. Dagres claimed that President Trump is interested in signing an agreement if only to strengthen his image; therefore, the next agreement will not be very different from the current agreement, while Iran will wait until it accumulates leverage that will help it negotiate from a position of strength. Amb. Danon estimated that it will not be possible to reach a broad agreement that includes the regional issues, only an agreement on the nuclear issue. According to Dr. Doran, if Trump has an opportunity to sign an agreement, whether in its narrow form or in a broader form, he will sign it.



Antisemitism: A Global Problem

Moderator: Adi Kantor, with Prof. Yehuda Bauer and Dr. Sharon Nazarian

With the steady weakening of traditional mainstream parties and the formation of an ongoing political and social vacuum, new actors are entering the political arena, spouting radical, racist, and anti-liberal discourse directed also toward Jews. Although historic antisemitism is still highly pervasive within modern society, new characteristics have emerged in recent years that encourage an increase in antisemitism: historical revisionism and distortions with regard to Holocaust memory and World War II among political leaders; the rise of immigration from Africa and the Middle East to Europe, which has a low birthrate, fueling a nationalist backlash familiar from the past, in which Jews are a prime target; technology and social media spreading hate and violence; antisemitic ideology “camouflaged” as anti-Israel positions – all of which encourage the pernicious trend. This alarming phenomenon has direct influence on the State of Israel and its national security, as well as on Jewish communities throughout the world.

Antisemitism in the center of social-political discourse

Antisemitism is no longer a “marginal” issue, having entered the mainstream political discourse over the past years. The growing political polarization within democratic societies has created a vacuum for extremists both on the right and on the left. Hence, the phenomenon must be seen in the wider context of the current struggle between liberals and anti-liberals. Countries are downplaying their roles as complicit perpetrators during the Holocaust. State leaders and politicians tend to rewrite, distort, and minimize facts concerning the active collaboration and participation of parts of their population in the murder of Jews. This tendency is part of Holocaust denial and contributes to the rise of contemporary antisemitism.

A change for the worse in the US

Antisemites feel more emboldened today to express their extreme and racial views in the public and cause high-profile violent attacks. This leads to a decline in the sense of security among many American Jews.

Antisemitism afflicts also non-Jews

Antisemitism is an infectious social disease that ruins nations and societies from inside. This is a threat to liberal democratic societies. Jews as well as non-Jews are victims, and leaders of nations must fight against it, to protect the future and survival of their nations.

From defense to offense

A new approach is needed: defensive measures such as increased security are only supplementary to a broader offensive campaign, targeting antisemites on their turf (social media, internet, press, etc). Israel must abstain from any collaboration with false and distorted national narratives propounded by some political leaders today, be more proactive in strengthening its relations with Jewish communities throughout the world, defend victims of antisemitism, and preserve the memory of the Holocaust and historical truth.



Three Takes on the "Deal of the Century"

Conversation between Adv. Gilead Sher, Brig. Gen. (res.) Assaf Orion, and Maj. Gen. (ret.) Amos Yadlin

Amos Yadlin

Given the Palestinians' past rejection of Israeli offers more favorable to them than the Trump plan, the "deal of the century" will likely not bring about an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement in the near future. Thus, it is important to consider Israel's next steps. There are three possibilities: shelving the plan; unilateral annexation; and steps toward improving the situation on the ground in coordination with the US and the Arab world while preserving the two-state option, in accordance with the INSS Plan released in 2018. The latter alternative is recommended.

Assaf Orion

The plan undermines the Palestinian positions, but as the conflict is not a zero-sum game, the plan is not necessarily in Israel's favor. The important question is: what is the purpose of the plan? The Trump plan may provide Israel with a better position for opening negotiations, but presuming that those negotiations do not lead anywhere due to Palestinian rejectionism it may not change much. The Israeli security establishment was likely surprised by the plan's release and will need some time to prepare for possible scenarios that may result. In addition, the plan's inclusion of an area of Palestinian sovereign territory along the Israeli-Sinai border poses significant security challenges.

Gilead Sher

There is some similarity between the Trump plan and previous proposals, and the plan can be considered as "Oslo III." It is unclear if the parameters presented by President Trump would be adopted by future US presidents seeking to mediate in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but Israel should try to use the plan as leverage in order to negotiate under more favorable conditions. The reaction from the Arab world indicates that a key source of Ramallah's leverage, support for the Palestinian cause from Arab states throughout the region, has eroded significantly. A decision on annexation means deciding between separation from the Palestinians to preserve Israel's Jewish and democratic nature, as recommended by the INSS Plan, or erasing potential borders that could separate Israel from a future Palestinian state – which would lead to the end of the Zionist project.



The Keys to the Palestinian Arena

Moderator: Brig. Gen. (res.) Udi Dekel, with Dr. Kobi Michael, Dr. Ronit Marzan, Amb. Daniel B. Shapiro, and Maj. Gen. (ret.) Gershon Hacohen

Against the backdrop of the release of the Trump plan and its rejection by the Palestinians, the panel discussed the expected situation in the Palestinian arena over the next five years.

The Palestinian Authority is at a critical juncture

The Palestinians are in a crisis of confidence in face of the incompetence of the PA as well as Hamas's rule in Gaza, which has not succeeded in bringing about an improvement in the living conditions of the local population either by resistance or through political leadership. Israel and the states in the region do not pursue initiatives that would strengthen the PA and enable it to regain control in the Gaza Strip.

The one-state vision is gaining momentum on the Palestinian street

The younger generation has lost faith in the two-state solution, the Palestinian leadership, and the path that it has tried to chart. Understanding that the international discourse places human rights as the highest priority, it has changed its national demand. Many Palestinians see the economic benefits and advantages of relations with Israel and believe that the preferred option for them is to merge and integrate.

The US responses to the "deal of the century" reflect the polarization regarding Israel

The Democrats severely criticized the plan and the way it was presented, and the fact that it contradicts the principles of US policy. A future Democratic-progressive administration might be more attentive to the Palestinians and try to impose a new plan, and if Israel annexes extensive territories in the West Bank, it might force Israel to grant rights to the Palestinian population.

Security coordination as a Palestinian interest

A situation might emerge in which the security coordination ceases despite this being a Palestinian interest, if the PA encounters a domestic uprising that it cannot handle. Unrestrained behavior by Israel could also accelerate existing processes in the Palestinian arena that disrupt the coordination and increase violence and terrorism.

Unilateral annexation: a horizon, with dangers of escalation

Gradual annexation that includes territorial concessions, that is, transferring territories from Israeli control to the PA, could soften the negative consequences. Unilateral annexation without dialogue and without consideration of the Palestinian public would be seen as humiliation and elicit feelings of anger and retaliation with the danger of escalation.



Solutions for Gaza: Interview with Nickolay Mladenov

Conversation between Brig. Gen. (res.) Udi Dekel and Nickolay Mladenov,
UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process

The Trump plan as a different paradigm for resolving the conflict

The chance that the plan will serve as a basis for future negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians is slim, because the Palestinian public and leadership rejected the principles of the plan outright. Even if the plan is not implemented, changing the paradigm can influence the current reality, which is still based on the paradigm of the Oslo Accords and direct negotiations between the sides toward a two-state solution.

Unilateral annexation would shut the door on the possibility of negotiations

If Israel decides to act independently and annex territories, it would deny the possibility that the Palestinians would agree to return to the negotiating table, as well as the possibility that Israel might normalize relations with the Arab world.

The solution in Gaza: restoring PA control

Only reconciliation that succeeds in subordinating Hamas to the PA and disarming it can be sustained over time. Until then, the UN is working to advance understandings between Israel and Hamas to reduce the military tension, but at the same time is trying to promote reconciliation with the aim of creating a single Palestinian entity under the PA.

The next round in Gaza

The results of another operation will be more severe than those of Operation Protective Edge and could leave Gaza in a state of destruction, governance vacuum, and humanitarian crisis knocking on Israel's door.

UN involvement in advancing an arrangement

The UN is working to help Israel and the Palestinians reach common ground, but it cannot do so without the good will of both sides. Finding a resolution to the conflict depends on the willingness of the leaderships to sit down together and discuss in depth the details of a plan for sustainable separation based on mutual respect and recognition of the historic right of the other side.

ALTERNATIVES FOR THE GAZA STRIP

MANAGING THE CONFLICT The current situation

Alternatives:

Military campaign to
dismantle Hamas's
military capabilities

Completely severing
the Gaza Strip from
Israel

Long-term ceasefire
agreement in return
for eased restrictions
and reconstruction
projects

Ramification:

Israel is "sucked"
back into Gaza

Hamas military
buildup

Weakening the
Palestinian
Authority

Improving the
sense of security

Objective:

**The Palestinian Authority
regains control of the Gaza Strip**



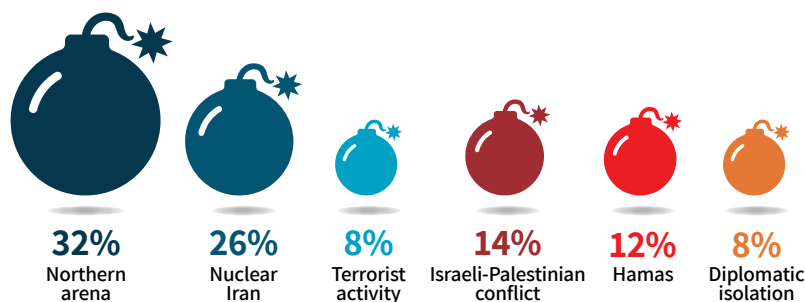
National Security Index: Public Opinion Survey

Dr. Zippi Israeli

Threats and challenges

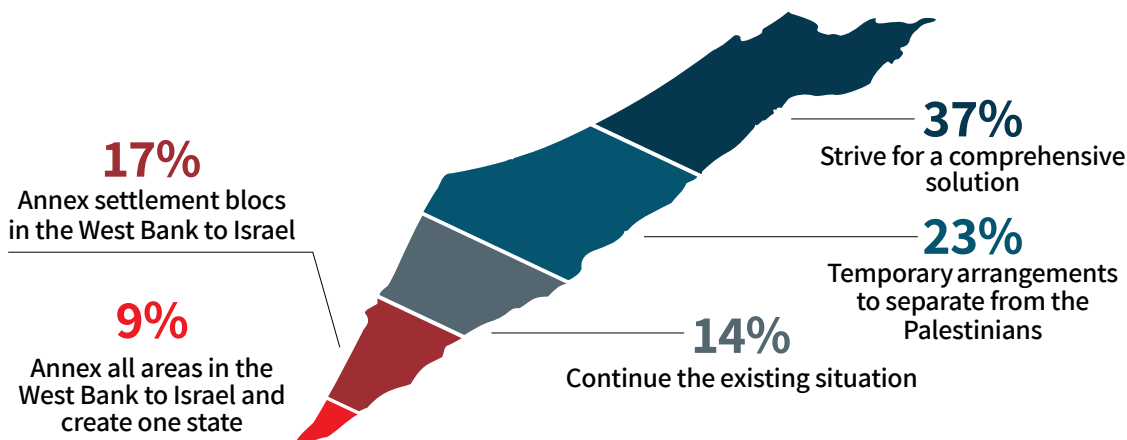
The Israeli public has adopted the approach of the security establishment and points to the northern arena as the most significant external threat to the

State of Israel; second is the Iranian nuclear threat, which rose compared to previous years. In contrast, there has been a decline in the perception of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a significant threat. In addition, this year, as in the past, the public believes that the State of Israel will be able to cope very successfully with all of the challenges that it faces. The challenges that the public is most concerned with are the ability to cope with international isolation of Israel and a reduction in US support for Israel. In contrast, the majority of the public believes that Israel can cope very successfully with external military threats, including: a simultaneous escalation in the northern arena (Lebanon, Syria, Iran, and Iraq) and the West Bank and Gaza, and with severe and ongoing terrorist attacks. Specific questions also consistently indicate that the vast majority of the public believes that the IDF is ready for the next military conflict, and supports the military being proactive and taking initiative. For example, there is broad public support (70 percent) for proactive IDF activity in Syria to prevent Iran's entrenchment, even at the cost of war.



The Israeli-Palestinian conflict

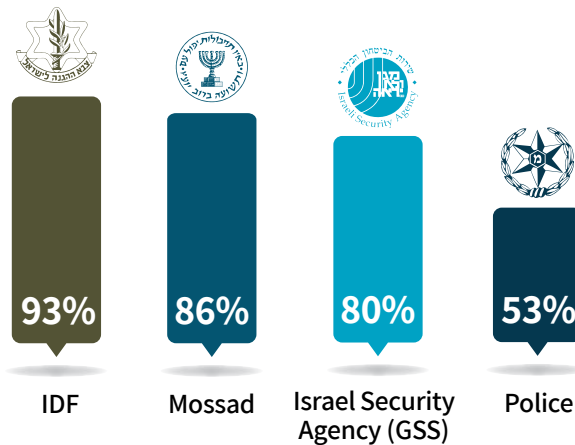
The public is interested in a settlement and in separation from the Palestinians: 55 percent of the Jewish public support a two-state solution, along with 89 percent of the Arab public in Israel. The answers to a more complex question show that the majority of the Jewish public (60 percent) are interested in a settlement (striving for a comprehensive settlement or transitional settlements); 26 percent are interested in annexation (of all of the territory of the West Bank to Israel and creation of a single state, or annexation of the settlement blocs), and only 14 percent are interested in the continuation of the current situation. Furthermore, most of the public believes that continuing the current situation without a political settlement works against Israel, and there is even an increase in this stance from year to year. As a rule, the public is pessimistic – the majority believes that "there is no partner for peace," but another question shows that a large portion believes the two-state solution is achievable, though not in the foreseeable future.



The security establishment

The level of confidence in the security forces in Israel is high. The IDF was ranked with the highest level of confidence (93 percent), which is an increase over the previous year. The Mossad received an 86 percent confidence rate, the Shin Bet received 80 percent, and the police received the lowest confidence rate (53 percent). The study shows that the majority of the public is interested in keeping the IDF outside of controversies, supports the mandatory draft, and believes that the IDF is the people's army. Overall, the public's level of confidence in the IDF's professional-operational level is high. In contrast, the attitude toward social-ideological-political issues that relate to the IDF is more complicated.

Confidence in the security establishment

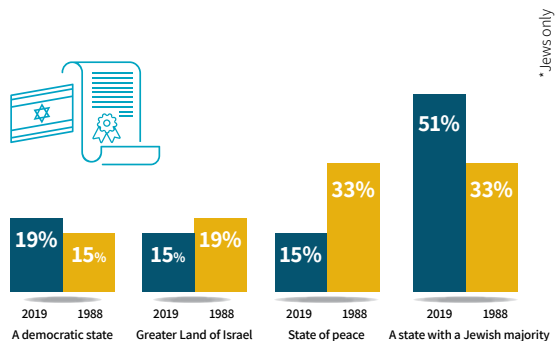


Worldviews and values

On the one hand, the majority of the public believes that "the State of Israel is a villa in the jungle" (66 percent). On the other hand, the majority supports the survivalist-existential narrative – "we will forever live by the sword" (64 percent), and this perspective has become even more prevalent. Another challenge to the sense of security can be seen in the decline in support for "Israel's strategic situation has never been better." This year, 44 percent supported this statement, in contrast with 52 percent last year. Another significant increase concerns "Israeli democracy is in danger": last year, 40 percent supported this statement, while this year 55 percent supported it.

In conclusion, the most important value in the eyes of most of the public is "a state with a Jewish majority (51 percent)," surpassing the values "the entire land of Israel," "a democratic state," and "a situation of peace." There has been a clear increase over the years in support for the value "a state with a Jewish majority," while there has been a decline in the value "a situation of peace" over the years (1988 – 34 percent, in contrast with 12 percent in 2018). It seems that the national element has strengthened – the importance in 2020 of demarcating boundaries in Israel is clear, and is expressed within the national framework of a Jewish nation-state.

What is the value that is most important to you?



Israel's Arab Community: Integration vs. Particularism

Moderator: Brig. Gen. (ret.) Dr. Meir Elran, with Prof. Mohammad Essawi, Ola Najmi Yousef, and Dr. Muhammad al-Nabari

In recent years, a growing trend is evident among Arab citizens toward integration within Israeli society, but many challenges and barriers stand in the way of fulfilling this trend in practice.

The state of the integration and its challenges

The integration of Arab citizens within Israeli society continues in a positive trend, as a result of changes among part of the Arab leadership, especially in local government and civil society, and thanks to partnerships between civil society organizations that have entered the space left behind by the traditional leadership and the government. An important change is also evident in the government's policy, especially when it comes to the field of economic integration, thanks to the five-year plan. The expectation is that at the end of the five-year plan there will be a follow-up plan, based on the lessons learned from the first plan.

What must the Israeli government do to continue and accelerate the integration?

The government must take responsibility, first for improving the situation of Arab citizens, based on the idea of civil equality as the basis for integration in all fields, and the understanding that this will produce positive results for Israeli society as a whole. There is a need for governmental initiatives in various areas of life that will benefit the Arab community and the state. These should be manifested in the stage following the five-year plan.

What must the Arab leadership do to continue and accelerate the integration?

The Arab leadership should focus on advancing integration and place it as the foremost goal on its agenda, alongside training future local leadership. In addition, it must take more responsibility for its situation, work proactively and in cooperation with the government and with civil society organizations, and plan and execute strategic processes to advance integration.

The Bedouins in the Negev

The Bedouins in the Negev are in the most difficult situation in all areas of life among all of the populations in Israel, as a result of many years of neglect by the government, whose ministries do not excel at systemic innovation and risk-taking, and by the local leadership, which has not ensured that it is part of the change in Israeli society. Successful change requires planning based on strategic, process-oriented thinking, and a vision of the Bedouin community as the strategic depth of the Negev.

The fight against violence and crime in the Arab community

This issue must become a top national priority. Otherwise, the violence might develop and increase, cause severe damage to the Arab community and to the state, and even spill over into the Jewish community. Governmental responsibility and a proactive police force are needed, as well Arab leadership responsibility. A nationally-funded program should be put together for this critical issue, preferably as part of the second five-year plan.



The Struggle over Israel's Zionist Image

Moderator: Col. (ret.) Adv. Pnina Sharvit Baruch, with Dr. Lior Alperovich, Adv. Talia Sasson, Lt. Col. (ret.) Avital Leibovich, and Dr. Assaf Malach

The session dealt with the tensions related to the Jewish and democratic character of the State of Israel, and in particular the tension between maintaining Jewish identity and promoting liberal values, as well as the implications of the attitude toward minorities in Israel and the attitude toward the Palestinians on the democratic character of the state.

From the perspective of religious Zionism, Dr. Malach made clear that the formative ethos of Zionism is the existence of a sovereign Jewish state. Therefore, extreme liberalism should be avoided, as it exalts individual freedoms but is alienated from Jewish values, and could erode solidarity. Israel should not become a state run by Jewish law (halacha), but should preserve the desire of Jews to fulfill their Judaism in Israel.

From the perspective of the secular-liberal public, Adv. Sasson noted that even though the nations of the world distinguish between religion and state, Judaism is also a nationality, in addition to being a religion, and the state was established on this basis. Maintaining Israel's democratic identity is essential for maintaining its existence as a Jewish state. Maintaining Jewish identity will be ensured in practice as long as there is a Jewish majority in the state.

From the standpoint of the haredi (ultra-Orthodox) public, Dr. Alperovich clarified that the haredi community is still becoming accustomed to the very existence of a sovereign Jewish state. From the perspective of this community, halacha is what should regulate life in the Jewish state, which otherwise will lose the justification for its existence and become an empty shell. Determining who is a Jew must rest on the halachic definition, which represents a mechanism that has been preserved over thousands of years in order to prevent assimilation. Utilitarian considerations such as the demographic aspect cannot influence this definition.

From the standpoint of Diaspora Jewry, Lt. Col. (ret.) Leibovich clarified that the majority of US Jewry (85 percent) is not Orthodox and belongs to streams that are not recognized by Israel's religious establishment, and thus do not meet the religious definition of the question of who is a Jew. A survey of Jews in the US and France found that the majority see Judaism as a culture and not a religion. Therefore, the state should display flexibility and avoid completely excluding a large portion of the Jewish people.

The attitude toward minorities and the Palestinians, and the state's democratic character

Relating to the Israeli control over the West Bank, Adv. Sasson said that controlling another nation harms Israel and undermines democracy and the Jewish majority in Israel. With regard to minorities that are citizens of the state, we must ensure complete equality of rights while maintaining the Law of Return, which enables citizenship for any Jew. Dr. Malach agreed that equality for minorities is a fundamental value in Israeli society. However, the minorities cannot come at the expense of the Jews. Religious Zionism will not accept the evacuation of the settlements by force, and it will be necessary to display creativity toward the question of Jewish settlement and the scope of rights for the Palestinians.



Lt. Gen. (ret.) Benny Gantz

President Trump's peace plan

The plan is a historic opportunity to shape the State of Israel's borders and future as a secure Jewish, democratic state. The "deal of the century" enables a resolution of the conflict instead of continued conflict management, and secure separation from the Palestinians is an important strategic objective toward which we should strive.

The sides in the peace plan

The peace plan demands broad, integrated, and wise action, both military and political. Hasty and irresponsible steps that are not coordinated with the moderate Arab states endanger the ability to implement the plan. The Palestinian leadership must accept the plan, be part of the negotiations over the terms of the plan, and not miss an opportunity for peace.

Stasis and even regression in Israel's strategic standing

Hezbollah has armed itself and gained strength; Israel has lost pieces of land due to a lack of policy toward Jordan; over 1,300 rockets have been fired on the southern population; the Foreign Ministry has been dismantled and undermined; and Iran is closer than ever to nuclear weapons, while thousands of fighters are deployed on Israel's northern borders.

Necessary policy measures

In the military-strategic arena: increase the deterrence vis-à-vis Iran and distance it from the borders; in the political arena: enlist the world powers in increasing the pressure on Iran; and in the southern arena: restore the deterrence vis-à-vis Hamas by defeating it or reaching an arrangement, including bringing the prisoners and soldiers' bodies home, even if this involves employing unprecedented force.

Ongoing erosion of internal national resilience

This is expressed in declining enlistment rates; a budget deficit and economic instability, which do not enable the development of a multi-year plan in the security systems; significant gaps between students in the education system; stagnation in the health system; internal political division that leads to external weakness; and the loss of public confidence in the institutions of government.



Interviews with Politicians: Initial Responses to the "Deal of the Century"

Tal Shalev, political correspondent



MK Avigdor Liberman, head of the Yisrael Beiteinu Party

"This is the first time that there is a vision, but we are not under the illusion that tomorrow we will sign a peace agreement. The Palestinians are not so important, because it does not matter what they are offered – they will not be offered more than what Olmert offered at Annapolis; he offered everything and Abu Mazen didn't sign. The same thing with Arafat at Camp David. Our real partner for such a settlement is the moderate Arab states."



MK Yair Lapid, head of the Yesh Atid Party

"The 'plan of the century' is an excellent plan for Israel, includes all of our security demands, and creates the possibility of addressing the conflict differently. The fact that we have also restored to the political arena the possibility of two states, a basis for negotiations and, with time, hope for the Palestinians – these are good things."



MK Nitzan Horowitz, head of the Meretz Party

"I don't see how an agreement or some kind of peace will come out of this. Even Trump says that we need to find common ground – there are things in this agreement that no Palestinian will accept. We must refrain from any unilateral annexation now; Meretz will oppose this with all its power. Those promoting annexation have no intention of promoting a settlement. If we want a Jewish and democratic state, we cannot annex all of the Palestinians. We will create a kind of apartheid here."



Minister of Aliyah and Absorption Yoav Galant

"Policy decisions are not made leisurely and not through international consensus. There are moments of opportunity that will never return in the life of a nation in which leadership and decisiveness are necessary. In this respect, I have no doubt that at issue is not only an ancestral right, but also strategic depth for Israel against existential threats."

A New Decade, with Regional Challenges Testing Israel's Strength

Summary



Main Insights from the INSS 13th Annual International Conference

Brig. Gen. (res.) Udi Dekel, Managing Director of INSS

General overview

The risks Israel faces are growing, given a weakened and fragile surrounding Middle East where combat arenas and interconnected zones of instability abound. It is particularly difficult to assess the unintended consequences of military and political action, and there is an ongoing process of learning and improvement underway among Israel's adversaries, who take advantage of advanced technologies that are cheap and readily available. There is increased difficulty in attaining a proper grasp on reality in a world of clashing narratives and questioned truth, which compromises decision making.

Several meta-shapers can generate significant pivots. Maj. Gen. Tamir Hayman, chief of IDF Military Intelligence, presented three: 1. Iran's amassment of nuclear capabilities; 2. fissures within the Shiite axis after the targeted killing of Quds Force Commander

Qasem Soleimani, given that he "has a successor, but it is doubtful he can be replaced." Soleimani transformed the Shiite axis from a network of organizations into a network of armies that requires a command and control mechanism and a management infrastructure. His successor will find it hard to maintain and advance this complex initiative; 3. US President Donald Trump's "deal of the century" for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has the potential to shake current balances within the Israeli-Palestinian arena and upset Israel's relations with countries with which it has signed peace treaties (Jordan and Egypt), mainly if Israel sees in the Trump plan legitimacy for a unilateral application of law (annexation) over settlement areas in the West Bank and the Jordan Valley.

The balance of power among the superpowers

A contest for global hegemony: Former US National Security Advisor Gen. (ret.) H. R. McMaster assessed that China will continue combining economic belligerence with international espionage, mainly technological, in order to achieve dominance over the international economy. Within this framework, it will try to take over strategic assets, for example, ports in Israel. In the absence of counter-competition by the United States and Europe, China will grow more aggressive. As action the West should take given this threat, McMaster said, "What the Chinese Communist Party perceives as our weaknesses [should be turned] into strengths: democracy, rule of law, the free press, and international investment standards." If the United States does not confront China on a range of issues, nothing will curb a broadening of its global activities and influence.

The United States remains the dominant economic and military power, but President Trump's "America First" approach distances the US from international coalitions and cooperation arrangements. According to former Bank of Israel Governor Stanley Fischer, this approach also weakens the global trade structure and raises a risk of global recession in the coming decade. In addition, the end of the US hegemonic role could lead to a loss of oversight mechanisms against the proliferation of nuclear weapons.

US interests in the Middle East are changing. According to Gen. (ret.) Joseph Votel, former commander of the US CENTCOM, the United States is less dependent on the region's resources than in the past. That said, US involvement in the Middle East is still necessary, given the contest with Russia and China for regional influence and the challenge posed by Salafi-jihadists seeking local opportunities to emerge anew. In the wake of the Soleimani killing there has been a rise in US motivation to continue economic and military pressure against the Iranian regime.

It is difficult to forge a Middle East coalition against the Shiite axis, and Washington sees few regional partners that can be trusted. Israel remains the only ally that can be relied upon, such that heavy responsibility will shift to Israel if and when the administration decides to withdraw US forces from Syria and Iraq – at which point Israel is likely to be fighting for American interests, as well as its own.

"The deal of the century"

After the Trump plan on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was made public (which coincided with the opening of the conference), three main scenarios were analyzed:

1. Review and suspension: Given Palestinian rejection of the plan, Israel accepts it in principle but decides not to take dramatic steps until the Knesset election (March 2020), and announces that it will invite the Palestinian Authority to discuss implementation of the outlined steps after the election.
2. Initial gradual implementation, leaving an opening for negotiations: Israel accepts the plan, seeing an opportunity to craft an improved strategy. With that, it expresses interest in cooperation with the Palestinian Authority, which it tries to enlist toward an arrangement. If the PA refuses, Israel does not wait, and embarks on steps for implementing the plan, while still leaving a door open for the Palestinians to join in the future. The first steps could be applying the law over settlements in the West Bank, but without changing the routine situation on the ground.
3. Unilateral annexation: Israel accepts the plan, and uses the rejection by the Palestinians to shape the area on its terms. Within this framework, Israeli jurisdiction is applied to the Jordan Valley and the settlements (as outlined by the plan) with a willingness to contend with the move's negative impact on the Palestinian arena and its relations with the Palestinians, as well as on its relations in the regional arena - specifically, the northern front - and in the international arena.

As part of the conference, the implications of the "deal of the century" were analyzed and several insights emerged:

1. In the view of the experts who took part in the conference, and regarding the three scenarios above, in the next five years no sovereign Palestinian state will be established – in other words, there will be no real prospect of creating two states for two peoples. Furthermore, in the absence of Palestinian unity and the given the currents of internal erosion within Palestinian society, it is possible that the Palestinian Authority will collapse after Chairman Mahmoud Abbas departs the political scene. The speakers were hard-put to see a possibility of internal Palestinian reconciliation and unity, even in response to a phased implementation of the Trump plan by Israel.
2. The plan does not allow for the creation of a viable Palestinian state, and in actuality it would divide up a Palestinian entity, surrounded and imprisoned in Israeli territory, into six separate cantons, with Israel controlling the entry points, exit points, traffic routes, and border crossings of the Palestinian entity. Accordingly, there is concern that unilateral annexation moves by Israel on a large scale (Jordan Valley and all settlements) would accelerate the disintegration of the Palestinian Authority and prompt it to "return the keys" to Israel. In that case, it would fall to Israel to control the territory, and in so doing, attend to the welfare and socio-economic needs of some 2.5 million Palestinians, without external economic aid. A one-state reality is liable to result, which actually reflects the goal of a significant segment of the young generation of Palestinians, who believe that the time for armed struggle toward Palestinian independence alongside the State of Israel has passed, and that the goal should be one state with equal rights for all its citizens.
3. Inability to implement the plan consensually and unilateral Israel steps that would foil any two-state solution would alienate the US administration - Republican or Democratic alike - as well as the rest of the international community striving to advance a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, leaving Israel to deal with the Palestinian problem alone. Pursuant to this scenario, it was assessed that a Democratic administration might well try to compel Israel to grant full rights to everyone residing between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. That would spell the end of the Zionist dream of a Jewish state.
4. For those who champion annexation moves, a reality of de facto rather than de jure annexation is preferable. However, announcement of the plan shifts the momentum from a quiet, incremental annexation to a trumpeted and active annexation, which is likely to inject new energy into the conflict theater. Before a decision is made, it must be understood that annexation of territory incurs annexation of feelings of hatred, anger, and revenge. Annexation without consent is doomed to lead to violence and protracted instability.
5. While Jordan does indeed prefer an Israeli military presence in the Jordan Valley as part of security arrangements within the framework of an Israeli-Palestinian accord, it rejects political annexation of the Valley, which from its perspective would exacerbate the view that the kingdom is the alternative Palestinian homeland, and undermine its foundations. In other words, this could effectively end the option of an independent Palestinian state.
6. It is crucial to preserve the two-state option by any means: as an aspirational horizon for the Palestinians, should they be persuaded, in the future, to adopt principles within the Trump plan as a basis for an arrangement with Israel; as an asset for legitimizing, vis-à-vis the international and regional spheres, the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state; as a value that would secure Israel's relations with the United States, including when a Democrat returns to the White House; and as a shield in the face of any attempt to impose a one-state solution on Israel or of a one-state reality emerging on the ground. The two-state reality is supported by a majority of the Jewish public in Israel – 55 percent, with close to 70 percent in favor of separation from the Palestinians.

The northern front

A war game was held as part of the conference, simulating escalation on the northern front. As it unfolded, what became clear is that all actors were interested in avoiding war. The scenarios emerged from an Israeli operation within the framework of the “campaign between wars” against Iranian military entrenchment in Syria and against the precision-guided missile project, in parallel with a strike against US forces in Iraq by local militias serving as Iran's proxies. It was further demonstrated that due to restraining forces - the aversion to war evinced by all actors was joined by the influential presence of Russia and the United States in the region - a window of opportunity was left for the campaign between wars, with the goal of arresting and preventing the construction of the Iranian war machine.

1. Iran aspires to keep the risk of war far from its border, preferring that the payment for its aggression will be damage to non-Iranian Shiite proxy forces and not its own forces. From its standpoint, the preferred arena for an escalation with Israel is Syria, where there is no strong public opinion against it, and where expected losses would be tolerable, with an attack on weapons and proxies. Iran would do everything possible not to become embroiled in a war with the United States, while activating its proxies in Iraq to strike US forces in order to stimulate President Trump's intended evacuation of US military forces from Iraq and Syria.
2. Israel sees Syria as the weakest and most vulnerable link in the Shiite axis. However, the main threat to Israel emanates from Lebanon: Hezbollah's military capabilities (many thousands of missiles including precision-guided, rockets, UAVs, and commando forces capable of penetrating the border). Lebanon is thus the front presenting the main threat to Israel, which can be expected to use any escalation to deliver a heavy blow to Hezbollah – the organization's military capabilities and combat support infrastructures. The preference for action on the Lebanese front stems from both Hezbollah being Iran's main proxy and Lebanon being the country most under Iran's influence. Striking at Syria per se might well generate an exit strategy for a confrontation on the northern front, because Russia would then likely intervene in order to bring about a quick end to the fighting so as to preserve the Assad regime and minimize the damage to Syria.
3. Hezbollah has no interest in war at this time. The organization's patron Iran is also interested in continuing to preserve the organization's capabilities for the critical day when there is a showdown over its nuclear capabilities. Thus Iran could be expected to orchestrate a scenario of measured escalation that would conclude with a bolstered deterrent image for Hezbollah and perception of Hassan Nasrallah as a Soleimani successor. Hezbollah would opt for an action that Israel could contain - an attack on military targets only within Israeli territory - and try to have the last word: a message that any Israeli operation will meet with a response.
4. The United States does not want war, but neither is it fleeing war. Thus it could be expected to respond harshly against the Iraqi militias for the strike on its soldiers and to extend absolute support to Israel – albeit while restricting the IDF from taking action within the Iraqi theater. Similarly, the United States could be expected to do its best to leave Iran out of the war, both because it is not interested in direct military confrontation with Iran and due to concern about the confrontation's ramifications for its friends in the Gulf.
5. Russia would exact maximum profit from a controlled escalation, due to its role as mediator among the warring sides. At the same time, Russia stands to lose much from a war within Syria, mainly due to the ensuing imminent threat to the Assad regime.

The situation in Syria

Contrary to common perceptions, the war has not ended. The weakening of the Syrian state continues, and there is no central power element capable of imposing law and order, internal security, and stability. The Assad regime has apparently restored its control over some 70 percent of Syrian territory, but throughout the country basic services like electricity and gas are lacking. The national economy has collapsed and there is no reconstruction agent. The rebels' agreement of surrender and the arrangement drafted by Russia have been wiped out, and jihadist elements are regrouping and resuming terrorist attacks. Russia aspires to institute a central governance model, while by contrast, Iran is building and operating regional and local militias that are stronger and enjoy better conditions than the Syrian military.

Iran will pursue an aggressive policy in order to preserve the regional influence that it achieved, mainly over the last five years, and in response to the "maximum pressure" applied by the United States, which is perceived in Tehran as designed to topple the regime. The Soleimani killing left Iran with a score to settle with the United States, and retaliation can be expected to focus on an effort to make life difficult for US forces stationed in Iraq and bring about their withdrawal - which, as it happens, has at this stage prompted President Trump to postpone their departure.

The question of the sanctions mechanism as an effective strategic tool

When the "maximum pressure" doctrine on Iran is reviewed, specifically the efficacy of US sanctions against Iran in staving off its attainment of nuclear weapons, it appears that the opposite is happening. The sanctions indeed generate an economic crisis and public despair in Iran, but these are not enough to compel it to act like a "normal country." David Peyman, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Counter Threat Finance and Sanctions, made clear that the US is now conducting a maximum pressure campaign against Iran, and in 2020 will shift to "super-maximum pressure." He stated, "Our sanctions are intended to deprive this regime of revenue it uses to engage in malign activities across the region." The pressure is intended to present Iran's leaders with a choice: either cease the belligerent actions or watch its economy collapse. Peyman added that the sanctions are very effective: Iran is isolated and its economy has shrunk by more than 9 percent. Consequently, the budget for Shiite militias in Iraq has been cut, there has been a significant decline in the cash flow to terrorist groups all over the world, and groups like Hezbollah are forced to seek other sources of income. As for the future, Peyman said the United States will not yield on the sanctions until Iran behaves like a normal country within the international system.

The discourse in the Arab world

The conference presented the ongoing discourse that INSS holds with Arabs in the region through the publication of research studies over social media. These are viewed by around a million people and prompt hundreds of thousands of responses. These figures point to the Arab public in the region being open to information and findings, eager to hear opinions from Israel and to be exposed to different viewpoints. Young people in the Arab world are especially keen on alternative information to what regime media in their countries provide. Among findings of an opinion poll of the Arab world that INSS conducted using social media is that in the eyes of the Arab public, the most negative force in the Middle East is Iran – double the negative view of Israel. Most respondents see a low probability of war between Israel and Iran, but in the event such were to erupt, a third of respondents said they would side with Israel, and less than a third said they would side with Iran. The primary issues that preoccupy the public in the Arab world are corruption, unemployment, and lack of governance.

Conclusion

Israel's strategic position has improved, and stands in marked comparison to the weakness and fragility prevalent in the regional environment. Israel's adversaries, chiefly Iran and its proxies, are not interested in a confrontation that would bring about a war with Israel, and they fear United States intervention in fighting alongside Israel. The operational zone for Israel in waging the campaign between wars – below the war threshold - is not closed. Thus, it would be right for Israel to keep up its efforts to delay and disrupt the consolidation and the buildup of Iranian war machine in the northern arena. At the same time, Israel must take into account its adversaries' weakness and avoid exploiting operational opportunities without weighing the strategic consequences. From a political standpoint, exploiting what looks like an opportunity to reap immediate gains, specifically by annexing territory in the West Bank, would make it difficult in the future to achieve a political, demographic, and geographic separation from the Palestinians, and this would also open a door for Palestinian and regional weakness to seep into Israel, thereby undermining Israel's strength.



Participants in the war game at the conference

The INSS media room directed dissemination of the contents to the various platforms. The conference earned widespread coverage in the local and international media.

[See Translation](#)



A group of people are working at a long table in what appears to be a newsroom or media production environment. In the foreground, a woman with dark hair and glasses is looking at a tablet. Behind her, another person is partially visible. Further back, a man in a dark cap and a woman with curly hair are looking at a laptop. To the right, a woman with long brown hair is also working on a laptop. The table is cluttered with various electronic devices, including laptops, tablets, and a power strip. A monitor in the background displays a blue screen with the word 'PRESS' and a logo. The overall atmosphere is one of busy, collaborative work.

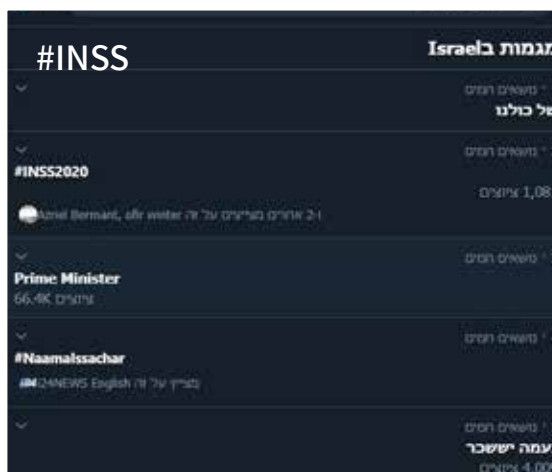




An Instagram page was launched, and during the conference we posted ongoing updates – from on stage and backstage.



The INSS Facebook page prepared special live content in English and Hebrew, which reached hundreds of thousands.



The conference also had wide coverage on Twitter, and was a central focus of on-line discussions.

The
Conference
in Pictures





The Conference in Pictures



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