STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT
A Multidisciplinary Journal on National Security

Contents

A Note from the Editors

This issue of *Strategic Assessment* closes another year of the journal, dedicated to publishing insightful and innovative research. *Strategic Assessment,* among the list of refereed academic journals recognized by Israel's Council for Higher Education, has become an important resource for researchers in many fields from both Israel and abroad, enabling an in-depth and enriching debate of issues related to national security, in the Israeli and international contexts.

Strategic Assessment articles have garnered interest and attention among a wide audience, and consequently, we are eager to expand and diversify the types of articles in the publication. The previous issue, for example, included an article along the lines of "from the archive," based on an analysis of archival documents, so that researchers can draw from past occasions to illuminate issues and tackle dilemmas on today's public and research agendas.

In this issue, we expand the Professional Forum, featuring an article by INSS senior research fellow Ofer Shelah, a former MK who served for many years on the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee. His piece explores the challenges of parliamentary civilian oversight of the security establishment and the intelligence community. Similarly, we invite other professionals who have played prominent roles in political, security, and state systems to share their insights, based on their personal experience with issues related to national security. This allows for the presentation of a singular point of view that relies on a close familiarity with relevant systems and processes, and in turn enhances the existing knowledge infrastructure and serves as a basis for further research.

With excellent—if inadvertent—timing, two articles in this issue deal with notable events currently on the Israeli and regional agendas. Prof. Gerald Steinberg's article addresses issues related to European funding of Palestinian NGOs linked to terrorist organizations, and the article by Asher Lubotzky and Habtom Mahari deals with the expanding civil war in Ethiopia. Coincidentally, the book reviews in this issue all deal with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: they discuss three books written from three different angles, and offer new perspectives on a topic about which it would seem that everything has already been said.

We would like to welcome the new members of the journal's Editorial Advisory Board: Prof. Dima Adamsky, Prof. Abraham Ben-Zvi, Prof. Eviatar Matania, and Prof. Benny Miller. Their association with *Strategic Assessment* will strengthen the journal's professional base, expand accessibility to additional target audiences, and encourage more writers to submit manuscripts for publication in the journal. Dr. Ori Wertman also joins the *Strategic Assessment* team as the journal's coordinator, and as such assists in the entire production process, from receipt of the manuscripts to the publication of the online and print issues.

We invite readers to visit the journal's website, and find articles that are first published online before they are assigned to and published in a specific issue, as well as all past issues of the journal and related special publications.

Kobi Michael and Carmit Valensi
Editors, *Strategic Assessment*

The Beginning of the End of the Arab-Israeli Conflict?

Dan Schueftan

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In its familiar format, the Arab-Israeli conflict is fading away. The peace treaty with Egypt in 1979 marked the end of the beginning of the conflict, and we are now witnessing the beginning of the end. This is not the dream of peace that was promised by the Oslo process. The threats to Israel may have actually increased, because the Arab enemy of yesterday was far less dangerous than the Iranian enemy of today. Nor does it mean that the radical Arabs fighting Israel are any less determined or ruthless. It certainly does not signal the end of the conflict with the Palestinians. What is new is Israel's success in breaking the pan-Arab front against it, and in convincing most Arab countries that a strong Israel is not a threat, rather, an essential condition for their survival. While the region remains rife with violence and instability, the axis of struggle is not between Israel and "the Arabs"; it is between an Arab-Israeli coalition on the one hand, and Iran's Islamic Revolution and Erdogan's Turkey on the other.

Keywords: Arab-Israeli conflict, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Iran, Turkey, Palestinians, Egypt, Abraham Accords

Introduction

In its familiar format, the Arab-Israeli conflict is fading away. The peace treaty with Egypt in 1979 was the end of the beginning of the conflict, and we are now witnessing the beginning of the end. This is not the dream of peace (some would say the delusion of peace) that was promised by the Oslo process. It is possible that the threats to Israel have actually increased, because the Arab enemy of yesterday was far less imposing and dangerous than the Iranian enemy of today. Nor does it mean that the radical Arabs fighting Israel are less determined or ruthless. It certainly does not signal the end of the conflict with the Palestinians. The lives of Hamas supporters are shaped by their desire and at times their ability to inflict physical harm on Jews, even when this does not further their cause or actually detracts from their position. Those in the West Bank are intoxicated with their ability to gain the support of "progressive" groups in Europe and the United States against Israel, without this being of any particular use to their cause. Their national movement, in both the Gaza Strip and on the West Bank, is flawed in that it has no constructive goals that drive its national agenda.

In its familiar format, the Arab-Israeli conflict is fading away. The peace treaty with Egypt in 1979 was the end of the beginning of the conflict, and we are now witnessing the beginning of the end.

What is new is Israel's success, aided by the Arabs' structural weaknesses, in breaking the pan-Arab front against it, and in convincing the majority of the Arab countries to effectively acknowledge in their policy that a strong Israel is an essential condition for their survival, not a threat to rally round. Violence and instability in the region remain as they were, but the axis of struggle is not between Israel and "the Arabs"; it is between an Arab-Israeli coalition on the one hand, and Iran's Islamic Revolution and Erdogan's Turkey (and the Salafi-jihadi threat) on the other. The former to a large extent overlaps with the de facto coalition of Israel and a majority of the Arab countries against the Muslim Brotherhood.

The prevailing idea in Europe and of former President Obama that "the Middle East conflict" revolves around the struggle between Israel and the Palestinians, supported by "the Arab world," was always misguided, simplistic, and ideologically (as opposed to analytically) driven, but it is now proven to be unfounded and untenable. The most recent conflict with the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip (Operation Guardian of the Walls in May 2021) confirmed this assessment. Following the operation, relations between Israel and the major Arab countries that are part of this coalition, primarily Egypt, became closer, and the overt and covert partnership between them deepened. These countries fear that a Hamas achievement is apt to encourage the Muslim Brotherhood in their territory and threaten their regimes.

Crystallizing the Pan-Arab Format

The Arab collective began to mobilize for the struggle against Israel late in the Mandate period, but the Arab-Israeli conflict in its quintessential form took shape when Nasser ruled Egypt. In the 1940s, Egypt made a final decision to assume the leadership of the Arab world and to displace the Hashemites in Iraq and Jordan from their principal position in the Arab east (Gershoni, 1980, 1981; Kedourie, 1970). With the end of the British Mandate, when the fate of Palestine hung in the balance and with Zionism threatening to institutionalize what the Arab narrative regarded as a continuation of foreign control at the expense of the rightful Arab owners of Palestine, anyone seeking regional leadership was forced to rally in "defense of the Palestinians." Even in the mid-1940s, the Egyptian leadership, with the exception of the Muslim Brotherhood movement, did not show much interest in the matter. Eliyahu Sasson of the Jewish Agency's political department met with Egyptian Prime Minister Ismail Sidky in September 1946, and reported, "It seemed to

me as if I was sitting with one of my friends from the department, and we were consulting" (Sasson, 1978). King Abdullah, ostensibly the leader of the Arab invasion designed to "save" Palestine from the Jews, was in effect in a strategic alliance with Israel against the Palestinian national movement and against Egypt. When he tried to make peace with Israel at the end of war, however, he discovered that the mood in the Arab world would not allow him and the Jordanian elite to deviate from the regional consensus (Schueftan, 1987).

During Nasser's presidency, the restriction on public and direct contacts with the "Zionist entity" was elevated to a supreme taboo, defining the degree of patriotic loyalty of all Arabs and tarring violators as traitors. The messianic movement of the Egyptian president succeeded in inflaming the elites and the political public "from the [Atlantic] Ocean to the [Arabian] Gulf," with its promise to restore the Arabs to their erstwhile greatness. Nasser regarded Egypt, located at the geopolitical junction of the Fertile Crescent, the Arabian Peninsula, and Northern Africa, as destined by its history, size, stability, culture, and leadership to lead Arabic speakers from Morocco on the Atlantic coast to Iraq and Saudi Arabia on the Gulf coast. The argument that won their hearts was ostensibly convincing, and initially proved valid: the Arabs were destined for greatness; they were weakened by internal division and struggles; this division resulted from a lack of leadership and weakness against their enemies. Nasser proved his ability to offer them unifying leadership, and in his successful conflicts with the West demonstrated his ability to ensure them a place of honor and reverence in the international theater (Kissinger, 1994). Underlying all of these impressive achievements was pan-Arab solidarity. Anyone dissenting from this solidarity betrayed the hopes of the Arabs for their future. The conflict with Israel was a critical tier of the Arabs' struggle to regain the Arab homeland in the Middle East, in which Western colonialism had planted a Jewish state. This state drove a wedge between the Arab east in the Fertile Crescent and the Arabian Peninsula (Mashreq) and the Arab west in North Africa (Maghreb).

Nasser used this taboo to close Arab ranks behind him and impose his authority over even his fiercest opponents. He adopted the radical goal of "liberating Palestine" without determining a binding time framework, and after the Sinai Campaign in 1956, realized that destroying Israel would require a vast increase in his military power. His objective, however, was not military, but political. The prerequisite for realizing the Arab hopes of liberating themselves from the foreign yoke and rebuilding their power and respect, becoming prosperous, and regaining the land taken by the Jews was unity under Nasser's messianic leadership. Anyone opposing unity for the sake of the common struggle and an absolute boycott against Israel was a heretic. Such a person would be punished by his own people, who would eliminate him, at least politically and probably also physically, for betraying the hopes and future of the nation. Nasser developed this argument in particular at the peak of the "Arab Cold War" in the 1960s:

> The campaign underway in every part of the Arab homeland is between two currents: the national current and the non-national current. The former includes all of the national and progressive forces, while the latter includes the enemies of nationalism and unity, including those who deny Arabism, reactionaries, ethnicists, imperialists, Israel, and capitalists linked to reactionism and imperialism. The campaign between these two currents is cruel and difficult, because it is a fateful struggle. (Radio Cairo, 1963)

The manifesto of the Federal Union between Egypt, Syria, and Iraq (April 1963) stated:

Unity is especially a revolution because it is profoundly connected with the Palestine cause and with the national duty to liberate that country. It was the disaster of Palestine that revealed the conspiracy of the reactionary classes and exposed the treacheries of the hired regional parties and their denial of the people's objectives and aspirations….It was the disaster of Palestine that clearly indicated the path of salvation, the path of unity, freedom, and socialism. (Laqueur & Schueftan, 2016, p. 92)

The delegitimization campaign against the "reactionary" monarchies was designed to put them on the defensive and force them to fall in line with Nasser's policy against their national needs, more than it was designed to eliminate their regimes (Kissinger, 1994). Under such circumstances, Jordan, for example, could not express its partnership of interests with Israel, and other Arab countries did not dare to ignore the struggle against Israel, even though they had no direct interest in it.

Radicalism at an Impasse: From the Six Day War to the Collapse of the Soviet Union

This system functioned well in Nasser's service until the early 1960s. Toward the middle of the decade, it turned against him, and eventually brought about the most painful defeat of his messianic movement. In a poetically just case of falling into one's own trap, an even more radical Arab actor, Syria, succeeded in using Nasser's own device to embarrass the Egyptian president and put him on the defensive on the issue of Palestine. During the bitter clash between Egypt and Syria over the blame for dismantling the United Arab Republic in 1961, the Syrians demanded that Nasser fulfill his commitment to go to war against Israel, fully aware of his determination not to do so at that time. In a 1962 speech before the Legislative

Council in the Gaza Strip, Nasser explained to the Palestinians, of all people, why the pan-Arab solidarity in whose name he was called "to liberate Palestine" conflicted with his responsibility as leader of the Arabs to avoid being dragged into a test of power with Israel at a time when the Arab armies were not ready for it. He reminded them of the defeat in 1948, when irresponsible leadership sent the Arab armies to war in Palestine without the preparations necessary for victory, and described the lessons to be gleaned:

And the leader who has no doubt of victory and strives to instill the thought of the impending victory—is a traitor to his country and his homeland…. When we undertake military actions, we must be ready to do so. If we are not ready, we are obligated to act in a calculated way until we are ready, so that what happened in 1948 does not happen again….I am also bound to refrain from gambling with the fate of my country, and avoid a second disaster like that of 1948…. War is defense, retreat, and attack, and a victorious commander knows when to attack and when to retreat. (Harkabi, 1972)

The Syrians themselves eventually began provoking Israel, and following Israel's responses, demanded that Egypt join and lead the struggle, as required by the core of the pan-Arab solidarity of the Nasserist messianic movement, including in the realm of the Arab-Israeli conflict. After years of provocation by Damascus, Nasser was no longer able to withstand the mechanism that he himself had created, and embarked on escalation that led to his defeat and destruction in the Six Day War. The same demand for boundless pan-Arab solidarity that was at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict in its most distinct format also dragged Jordan into a hopeless war that King Hussein

did not want, in which Jerusalem was lost, and Israel gained control over all of "Palestine" west of the Jordan River. On two occasions, King Hussein explained his considerations at the beginning and during the crisis:

> When Nasser moved his forces across the Suez Canal into Sinai, I knew that war was inevitable. I knew that we were going to lose. I knew that we in Jordan were threatened, threatened by two things: we either followed the course we did or alternately the country would tear itself apart if we stayed out and Israel would march into the West Bank and maybe even beyond….It wasn't a question of our thinking there was any chance of winning….We knew what the results would be. But it was the only way and we did our best and the results were the disaster we have lived with ever since. (Shlaim, 2007)

From a historical perspective, the complete and decisive fulfillment of pan-Arab solidarity in 1967 created the conditions that brought about its erosion, disintegration, and dissolution, followed by its complete collapse in the succeeding decades. It remained in force until Nasser's death in 1970; its swan song was in the Yom Kippur War and the oil embargo, but was irretrievably erased by the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty at the end of the decade. It was further damaged by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the 1991 Gulf War, and suffered protracted and tormented agony following the Arab Spring in the second decade of the 21st century. The Abraham Accords reflected the mortal state of pan-Arab solidarity and instilled it as a matter of widespread public knowledge. Each of these stages deserves a brief discussion.

The Erosion of Arab Solidarity

In its quintessential format at the peak of the messianic hopes of the 1950s and 1960s, pan-

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Arab solidarity reflected a sense of growing power among radical elements in the international and regional arenas. Egypt's astute positioning in the Cold War greatly increased Nasser's bargaining power with the superpowers. His international status thrilled his disciples in the Middle East, and forced his rivals to join his camp. After the Arab defeat in 1967, it was still widely hoped that a combination of Arab determination in the struggle and their position in the global theater would force Israel to relinquish the fruits of its military accomplishments with no political quid pro quo, as it had in 1957. Less than two years after the war, Nasser described his perception of the determining balance of power as follows:

> We lost a battle in June 1967, but the enemy did not win the war… because it was unable to impose terms corresponding to its assessment of this military victory. The main reason is that its military victory was unnatural, unreasonable, and opposed to any correct evaluation of the forces involved. The crux is that the enemy could not impose political terms, because our nation, its right, its endurance, and its resources— natural, political, psychological, and economic—are much greater than his. It was therefore capable of winning a battle, but not the war. We must redirect our resources and re- muster them in order to rectify what happened, and much more than that. (*Papers of Gamal Abdel Nasser*, pp. 49-52)

The Arabs' achievements in the Yom Kippur War and the dramatic global effect of their power and wealth during the energy crisis sustained their hope until the late 1970s of resurrecting their status and enforcing their will on Israel. In the first half of the decade, not only did a dramatic change for the better occur in the Arabs' bargaining position; their self-confidence and hopes for the future also soared. Nizar Qabbani, an acclaimed poet who published harsh criticism of the cultural characteristics that he held responsible for the Arabs' defeat in 1967 ("In the Margins of the Record of the Defeat"), wrote immediately after the Yom Kippur War about the difference in self-image between 1967 and what he felt following the achievements by the Arab soldiers in 1973. Before the war, he wrote, "My eyes were two caves in which bats and spiders are nesting…I bear on my forehead a deep scar named June 5"; after the war, he wrote, "I was born under the floating bridges and ladders" for crossing the Suez Canal and "I came out of…the womb of the armored personnel carriers and cannon barrels…I was one of those who came out of the womb of tragedy and rage…here I swim in the waters of the Suez Canal as a shark and tear the flesh of the Israeli soldiers in the Golan Heights with my teeth" (Sivan, 1974).

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Sadat's initiative and the separate peace treaty with Israel concluded by the largest and most important Arab country in 1979 damaged this hope irreversibly. It was not only the end of pan-Arab solidarity with the removal of its keystone; it also enabled Israel to divert resources from defense to internal affairs and thereby catapulted its development (Ben Zvi, 2002),[1] and widened the gap dramatically with the Arab parties still adhering to the struggle against it. The disintegration of Arab solidarity was reflected a few years later in the lack of response by Egypt and all other Arab countries to Israel's attack on the nuclear reactor in Baghdad in 1981 and Israel's occupation in 1982 of Beirut, the capital city of an Arab state. The impotence of the Arab countries deepened with the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of the decade (1989), not only because the Arab radicals lost the military and political support of a superpower, but also because all Arab states lost their strategic maneuverability and bargaining power lent by the competition between the superpowers during the Cold War. In the 1991 Gulf War, two years after the Soviet Union collapsed, the downfall of pan-Arab solidarity was highlighted when Hafez Assad, ruler of the country that had led the radical consensus, including in the struggle against Israel, joined the alliance created and led by the United States in its war against the radical regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq.

The Palestinian Dimension

In the 1990s, the change in the global balance of power aroused groundless hope in Jerusalem that Israel's willingness to dramatically change its policy on the Palestinian question would facilitate a historic compromise with the Palestinian national movement. This hope was based on the assumption that Arafat and his partners in the Palestinian leadership realized that in the American era, their struggle to achieve all of their national goals had no chance of success. The inevitable failure of the Oslo process was due to a basic misunderstanding by its architects of the essence of the Palestinian national movement under the leadership of Mufti of Jerusalem Haj Amin al-Husseini, Arafat, and their successors. From the outset, this movement rejected any historic compromise (Porat, 1971, 1978; Schueftan, 1987),[2] even when in the late 1940s its leaders were fully aware of the catastrophic alternative to such a compromise in the form of an Israeli-Jordanian

partnership at the expense of Palestinian national independence. The attitude prevailed after Sadat's initiative, when Arafat himself understood that Begin's autonomy proposals would lead to a Palestinian state (Levy, 1998).[3] Arafat and his successor continued to reject any historic compromise, even after the Oslo process collapsed in the second intifada, during the terms of Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert (MEMRI, 2020).[4]

The suicidal radicalism from the Mufti until the present is anchored in the Palestinian assumption that the pan-Arab format of the conflict with Israel will prevail, as will denial of the structural features of the cumulative change in this format since the 1970s described here. In the 1990s, the Palestinians assumed that in the future they would also receive massive support from the Arab world for their struggle, just as solidarity with the Palestinian cause had pulled the Arab countries into war in 1948, dragged Egypt and Jordan into war in 1967, prevented separate settlements until 1977, and isolated Egypt outside this ring of solidarity for another decade and a half following the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty. In the early 1990s, Arafat realized that the Israeli government was eager to believe in the chances of peace, and was willing to allow him and his partners to take control in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. He helped this government deceive itself, until his radical strategy started to emerge, revealing as early as 1995 (Galili, 1995; Bron, 1995)[5] that this foothold was designed to escalate and strengthen the struggle against Israel, not to end it with a compromise.

In retrospect, notwithstanding the heavy damage inflicted on Israel, the Oslo process also helped to continue the erosion of pan-Arab support for the Palestinians. Jordan identified in the process an excuse to justify peace with Israel in 1994, arguing that the PLO was working in the same direction. Countries in Asia and Africa forged ties with Israel, or renewed them after breaking off relations in the 1970s. Even the use of brute force to end the second intifada early

in the 21st century had no significant negative impact on the erosion of solidarity with the Palestinians.

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The Collapse of Arab Solidarity Following the Arab Spring

After the Six Day War, the most dramatic blow to the essential component of the Arab-Israeli conflict in its familiar format, namely, pan-Arab solidarity on the Palestinian issue, occurred in the second decade of the 21st century, during the Arab Spring and what emerged in its wake. This solidarity had been forged under the momentum of Nasser's achievements and his messianic movement at the peak of Arab self-esteem and power. The lessons of the Arab Spring drawn by the Arabs themselves, their enemies, and experienced observers of the region undercut the Arabs' self-image and outsiders' judgment concerning the Arabs' standing and their future hopes.

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fundamental change in the tribal social and political order—without willingness to upset patriarchal foundations, develop civil society, and adopt a pluralistic approach to society and politics. Without such infrastructure, even free elections can only replace one destructive tyranny with another oppressive regime.

Today, after a decade of Arab-style "spring," the tyranny, anarchy, civil wars, misfortune, and despair prevailing in the Middle East are more severe than what preceded it. The situation is worse, both because millions of people have undergone great and unnecessary suffering and because the hopes of improvement have been dashed. Even in Tunisia, where a positive change appeared initially, its fulfillment depended on the good will of the Muslim Brotherhood, which is adept at offering assistance to the oppressed and extending its grip on society in preparation for the imposition of its authoritarian governance. This was precisely Erdogan's policy in the first decade of his rule, before the oppressive nature of his version of the Muslim Brotherhood's crafty strategy was revealed.

In the other loci of the Arab Spring—Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and countries that weathered fear but evaded seminal upsurge—old hardships and failure have prevailed, or even worsened. In the most important Arab country, when the president (Mubarak) was ousted from office, the elections replaced a dysfunctional but stable and moderate regime with a dangerously militant and oppressive alternative of the Muslim Brotherhood, which eliminated any chance of pluralism and democracy. This regime was replaced in turn, with broad public support, by a military dictatorship. Where the effort to overthrow the ruler failed, the president (Bashar Assad) conducted a large-scale massacre of civilians and survived thanks to merciless cruelty. Where the ruler (Qaddafi) was murdered, the only alternative that Libyan society could offer was a state of tribal chaos that was even worse than

the rule of the oppressive and mentally unstable former president. In Yemen, two armed gangs slaughtering each other guarantee suffering and distress for the population. Even if Lebanon, against all odds, initially somehow managed to escape collapse, the decay and structural corruption are wreaking devastating havoc on the country. Defying the national interest, Hezbollah puts the country at risk of a disastrous war, and Iran's involvement exacerbates the situation. The impressive prosperity in parts of the Gulf rests to a large extent on a precarious pyramid, with a decisive majority of foreign workers and a small privileged minority. Where the Palestinians have established their own regime—the Gaza Strip and Area A in the West Bank—oppression and structural corruption prevail.

"Poetry, it has been said, was to Arabs what philosophy was to the Greeks, law to the Romans, and art to the Persians: the repository and purest expression of their distinctive spirit" (Ajami, 1998, p. 80). One of the most important Arab poets of the last generation, if not the most preeminent, has eloquently shared his despair and sense of stagnation. Ali Ahmad Esber, known as Adonis, born in 1930, is an Alawite from the Latakia district in Syria who migrated to France decades ago. In his "Medarat" (Scopes) column in *al-Hayat*, an important newspaper published in London, Adonis wrote:

> The long play now staged on the Arab land/ does not deal with the discovery of new light/ but its opposite: Is the course of events enough to say/ that thanks to the "Arab Spring"/ a person on Arab soil has no/ outlet of hope?... In an Arab-like voice, history said: I died today, and tomorrow I will send in a different Arab-like body/ tribes and ethnic groups torn and devouring one another./ I have learned nothing other than expertise in killing and its arts. (Adonis, 2016)

In a column on June 29, 2017 entitled "Arabism Conversing with Itself," he wrote:

> I, Arabism, am isolated, ill/ which is only an expression./ They make declarations about me daily.
> I am Arabism—My books are rising up against me,/ casting off from their shoulders enormous loads of hallucination and nausea.
> Every word declares the overall grief of its history,/ on its present and its future.
> On its history—because it migrated or was forced to migrate/ to a place to which it refuses to return.
> Its present—because it is an inevitable collapse/ on its future—because it is an opening to deficiency and deletion.
> Yes…from now on, the future will be behind you./ Oh, my Arabic language. (Adonis, 2017)

Hazem Saghieh, editor of the political supplement of *al-Hayat* and one of the most astute and esteemed political commentators in the Arab world, described the desperate state of society a decade after the outset of the seminal events in an article entitled "Arab Spring: The Ten Bitter Years" (Saghieh, 2020). He describes the Arab Spring as the most significant revolution in modern political history, which should have been the foundation for the Arab future. The revolution was supposed to liberate the Arabs from adherence to emotional goals beyond the needs of peoples and nations: from the need to strive for an Islamic solution, for Arab unity, for a struggle against strategic alliances or to liberate Palestine. Thus, the various peoples who revolted had a common universal interest in "freedom, bread, and human dignity." They wanted to return the power to the people peacefully, to replace the effort to achieve eternal goals with relative achievements, and to connect to the scientific, technological, and information revolutions that were unavailable to them.

Saghieh describes the process in which after two years these trends were eliminated by the military regimes and the radical Islamists through violence, cruelty, and civil wars. They also revived the discourse based on the failure to reach out to the achievements of the modern world and on the distortion of human isolation. According to him, this defeat was rooted in the weaknesses of Arab society: the weakness of the bourgeois, the fragility of urban society, and the eruption of repressed rural tribalism. A decade later, the counterrevolution was completed with the restoration of military regimes or the rifts in societies along religious, sectoral, and ethnic lines—a kind of sub-patriotism in place of the promised combination of patriotism and universalism. Broad segments of society are paying the price of freedom's defeat with expulsion and exile. "As for the revolutionary forces," Saghieh laments, "they are in a state of rot that makes a swift revival unlikely—not only that of the revolutions but also of the countries themselves."

In his youth, Hisham Melhem, a leading Lebanese-American journalist who for many years has been the Washington bureau chief of the al-Arabiya News Channel and a correspondent for the *an-Nahar* newspaper, was active in reformist groups in the Arab world. In June 2017, on the 50th anniversary of the Six Day War, he sorrowfully described the destruction of the Arab political order, the "primitive and backward" religious structures, and the sinking of Arab society into an abyss. He mourns the destruction of the bustling cosmopolitan cities he knew in his youth: Damascus, Aleppo, Baghdad, Mosul, Cairo, and Alexandria. He describes the destruction and exile of shocking proportions that the Arabs brought on themselves in the wake of the horrors of the Arab Spring (contending that while Arabs constitute 5 percent of the world's population, they account for 50 percent of its

refugees). Melhem notes the rise of the non-Arab powers in the region—Iran, Turkey, and Israel—caused by the Arabs' weakness and the disintegration of Iraq and Syria, which he doubts can ever be reunited. He especially laments that Egypt has been shunted to the sidelines, depends on handouts from the Gulf states for its survival, and in its struggle against strongholds of the Islamic State in Sinai needs the assistance of the same Israeli air force that destroyed the Egyptian air force in 1967. Although Melhem tries to take comfort in the struggle by young Arabs from business, higher education, and the arts, who have not abandoned their hope of a better future, he concludes on a note of despair: "They constitute thousands of points of light, but in reality, these flickering embers of enlightenment will continue for years to come to be engulfed in darkness, thick darkness" (Melhem, 2017).

The three writers quoted above—Adonis, Saghieh, and Melhem—live in Paris, London, and Washington, respectively, in exile from the Arab world, but their assessments on the state of the Arabs resonate widely and deeply in their cultural community. The fact that in their native countries they are unable to tell the bitter truth about the cultural depth of the Arab failure is one of the structural weaknesses of this culture.

Perhaps the two most influential critics who wrote with painful empathy about their society's impasse were Syrian philosopher Sadiq Jalal al-Azm and Lebanese born Shiite scholar Fouad Ajami. They too lived in the West, in Berlin and Washington, respectively. Both died in the middle of the preceding decade, and did not experience the full destruction that the Arabs brought upon themselves in the Arab Spring (early in the decade, Ajami still believed in the project's success, and wrote an optimistic book about the events in Syria). Both identified the profound structural crisis years before it surfaced (Ajami, 1998; al-Azm, 2004).

Following their perpetual failure in hundreds of years of friction with the West and decades of Western colonial rule in their countries, the Arabs are especially sensitive to their image in Europe and the United States. They are inclined to be easily offended by critical assessments of their culture and often ascribe unflattering Western views to racism or Islamophobia. Their sensitivity and Western political and cultural intellectual fashions have inhibited severe criticism of Third World elements at almost any cost, especially in academic circles and the media, even when objectively justified. Noteworthy, therefore, is an example of the deep disappointment in liberal circles at the Arab Spring's failure that was published before the full horror in Syria and other places was widely reported. An article in July 2014 in the balanced and critically acclaimed *Economist* stated:

> A thousand years ago, the great cities of Baghdad, Damascus and Cairo took turns to race ahead of the Western world. Islam and innovation were twins. The various Arab caliphates were dynamic superpowers—beacons of learning, tolerance and trade. Yet today, the Arabs are in a wretched state. Even as Asia, Latin America and Africa advance, the Middle East is held back by despotism and convulsed by war.
> Hopes soared three years ago, when a wave of unrest across the region led to the overthrow of four dictators—in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen—and to a clamor for change elsewhere, notably in Syria. But the Arab spring's fruit has rotted into renewed autocracy and war. Both engender misery and fanaticism that today threaten the wider world. Why Arab countries have so miserably failed to create democracy, happiness or (aside from the windfall of oil) wealth for their 350 million people is one of the great questions of our time. What makes

Arab society susceptible to vile regimes and fanatics bent on destroying them (and their perceived allies in the West)? No one suggests that the Arabs as a people lack talent or suffer from some pathological antipathy to democracy. But for the Arabs to wake from their nightmare, and for the world to feel safe, a great deal needs to change. ("Tragedy of the Arabs," 2014)

The article affirms that only the Arabs can reverse their civilizational decline, yet at that time, there was little hope of that happening. It insists that what is needed—pluralism, education, and free markets—were characteristic of the Arabs in the distant past, but there is little likelihood of the Arabs adopting them anew in the foreseeable future.

There is no need for rhetoric from poets, scholars, Arab journalists in exile, or British weeklies to attest to the prevailing recognition among the Arabs of their weakness vis-à-vis Israel, beyond the social and cultural roots of this weakness. The president of the largest and most important Arab country admitted as much at a ceremony marking the only war against Israel perceived as an Arab victory. At a meeting of military figures on the 45th anniversary of the Yom Kippur War, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi praised the heroism of Egyptian soldiers for their willingness to fight against the superior power of the IDF: "The major gap did not deter Egypt or its army. It's like one was driving a Seat and the other a Mercedes. The truth is that it was obvious the Mercedes would win. Who would even imagine competing against a Mercedes with a Seat, except true men?" El-Sisi added that "the results of the war were a miracle…the Egyptian army could do that in the past, it could do it every time" ("El-Sisi on the October War," 2018). The message was clear: Israel's superiority is structural.

Suffering weakness, lack of self-confidence, and well-grounded fear, the Arabs can no longer afford solidarity of the kind that will weaken each one of them. They need other partnerships that conflict with this solidarity in order to cope with new dangers, including threats of existential proportions. What was exposed in the Arab Spring has deeply affected Arab bargaining power and Arab-Israeli relations. Given the special importance of this latest chapter in the history of the region and its political and cognitive complexity, a slightly more detailed discussion of this phenomenon is called for.

For generations, especially since the Arab countries were founded and gained independence in the mid-20th century, observers from both the West and the region attributed the Arabs' failure to cope with the challenges of the modern world to the tyranny and corruption of the local rulers. This trend became stronger in the era of political correctness—and with the formative influence of Edward Said on Western academics. In this era, discussion of the endogenous failings of non-Western societies was banned in broad circles, especially regarding non-white societies that were subject to colonial rule. Discussion of such failings that did not focus on the lingering damage caused by foreign rule led to the speaker being condemned as a racist, to the detriment of his professional and public status.

Following its publication in 1978, Said's book *Orientalism* had a seminal effect on the process of delegitimization of the objective discussion on Western campuses of post-colonial societies, hinging the debate on a presumption of Western responsibility for Arab failures. To Said, the original sin was "orientalism" that distorted the region's image, and repentance for this sin requires reversing the unacceptable prevailing pattern of Western academic discussion, which tends to belittle and defame the people of the region in order to serve the West's appetite for control. The contribution of Said's book to an understanding of the region was negligible, but his influence in suppressing free thought and dictating the scholarly perspective in Western academic institutions was revolutionary (Said, 1978; Kramer, 2001).[6]

In contrast, in a lecture at Oxford, then-Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh of the Congress Party presented a fair and thorough discussion of the complex reciprocal relations between the colonial power and the society shaped under the influence of the British Empire during and after foreign rule. Alongside criticism of colonial rule, Singh expressed gratitude for the contribution of the British tradition to constitutional government, the rule of law, free media, professional public service, and academic education and research (Ministry of External Affairs, 2005).

According to the dictates of political correctness, the local population can be held responsible only if the focus is on corrupt tyrants imposed on their country by the colonialists and their Western successors by either force or manipulation. When the history of the rise of these leaders makes such an accusation difficult, it is customary to claim that colonial heritage or Western policy and intervention aroused a response of this kind (Levi & Young, 2011). The hopes that accompanied this distorted description (and to a great extent engendered it) centered on a broad popular uprising, while ousting these rulers and replacing them with popularly elected rulers who faithfully reflect the local society.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, a simplistic and populist argument has been added to this hope, accompanied by an unsustainable conclusion: the democracies triumphed because they brought freedom, democracy, peace, and human rights; this quality of life arouses jealousy and is familiar in the world thanks to television and the social networks; everyone wants such a life, and understands that it can be obtained only through democracy, regional cooperation, and prevention of wars and conflicts. Consequently, it is frequently but falsely concluded that if the tyrannical and corrupt rulers are removed from office and replaced by others elected by the people who want such a good life, a pluralistic change must occur in the Middle East, as it

did in Eastern Europe. The most unrealistic version of this simplistic idea was voiced by Shimon Peres in the early 1990s (and constituted the basis for the Oslo process). He also stated that this cultural metamorphosis was bound to occur, because the alternative was failure and hardship. He assumed that such failure (which, as could have been predicted, is what actually occurred) could not persist (Peres, 1993). Versions only slightly less divorced from the cultural and political reality were very common in the West, particularly among academics and the European elites, and to a great extent dictated expectations and policy in the Middle East.

The Weakness of the Arab World and the Implications for Israel

The Arab world is painfully aware of its weakness, and has lost many of its hopes. Euphoria of the type that prevailed at the peak of Nasserism, or after the 1973 war and during the energy crisis, when a great deal of wealth was accumulated, has vanished. The hope of stabilizing the situation, envisioning an economic horizon beyond bare survival, and ensuring a reasonable quality of life has also been seriously hampered. The Syrian civilian sees the ruin of his country, the Iraqi witnesses his homeland torn to pieces, and the Lebanese, beset by the plummeting situation in his country, finds it difficult to subsist at the most basic level. The environment is violent, threatening, and unpredictable. No relief is in sight, much less a solution. Even in countries that have managed to avoid large-scale outbreaks of violence, such as Jordan, the economic situation is depressing, the country is dependent on unstable external aid, internal tension is rising (for example the attempted coup in Jordan attributed to Prince Hamzah), and the regime's political base has been eroded. In a 2020 survey among thousands of Arabs between the ages of 18 and 24 from 17 countries in the Middle East, 63 percent of respondents from the Levant (Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, the Palestinian territories, Syria, and

Yemen) said that they had tried or would like to emigrate. In 2021 this number dropped to a still very high 42 percent, similar to the percent in North Africa (Arab Youth Survey, 2021). Even under Israeli occupation in the West Bank, the situation is not nearly as bad.

Ostensibly, this gloomy picture should encourage Israel: weak countries are less dangerous enemies, they are able to devote only limited energy to Israel, and they pay less attention to the struggle against it. Solidarity in this struggle is exhibited primarily in the absurd conduct of international organizations, whose marginal and biased influence on regional realities can be almost totally ignored. This weakness, however, also has a negative impact on important Israeli interests. The frailty, impasse, and hopelessness typical of the region ensures that in the foreseeable future, Israel will face an unstable and violent environment of failed states (Michael & Guzansky, 2016; Schueftan, 2020), with the violence on occasion inevitably spilling over to Israel. More importantly, the weakness of divided Arab countries invites their neighbor— Iran, a large, strong, radical country hostile to Israel—to take control of them and impose its will on the region at large.

Regional Challenges and the Arab Partnership with Israel
The Iranian Threat

The possibility of Iranian hegemony in the Middle East poses a threat to Israel of existential proportions. Since Nasser was at his pinnacle, there has been no single power threatening to control the region's economic (oil and gas), strategic (Persian Gulf, Bab el-Mandab Strait, Suez Canal), and cognitive (Mecca, Medina, al-Aqsa) resources, and to employ them, inter alia, against Israel. The Iranian threat is greater than the Egyptian threat was at the time, because Iranian society is more imposing, its science more developed, its technology more advanced, and its fanaticism more extreme. In addition, Iran is incomparably more sophisticated, and

the strategic tools that it can supply to even primitive proxies like the Houthis in Yemen have no regional precedent in any time or place.

This dangerous Iranian threat to Israel also has a welcome and revolutionary byproduct in its effect in the Arab theater. Iran is aware of the Arabs' weakness, and aiming for hegemony, seeks to impose its radical ideology on them. Cognizant of their helplessness against this threat, the Arabs need external support. A considerable and important proportion of the Arab countries realize that the traditional American prop has lost a great deal of its impact, a large part of its motivation, and most of its credibility. They know that the party most committed to resist Iran's hegemonic aspirations is Israel, and they have learned to appreciate its power and determination. Israel is much less important than the United States, but when it actually fights against Iran and its proxies utilizing a range of covert and overt measures, it is far more credible and effective.

In these circumstances, the existential threat to the Arab regimes obviously takes precedence over pan-Arab solidarity on the Palestinian issue, which in any case is dubious and fading. It is possible, even desirable, to pay lip service to the issue, but it is clear that the majority of the Arab countries do not possess many political resources they are willing to devote to this purpose. They also have much less emotional interest and deep commitment to the matter. Above all, there is no one who will threaten them and force them to even pretend on the issue of Palestine, as Nasser managed to do in his time. Public opinion in these countries is, predictably, mostly busy with other anxieties, justified and pressing. Most of the elites in Egypt, for example, accept comfortable rules of the game: they turn a blind eye to cooperation with Israel as long as it is not too public or involves symbolic matters, while their friends in the labor unions undertake meaningless gestures to resist normalization. In Jordan, where more proactive action is needed because of the country's Palestinian population, the king "punishes" Israel in attention-getting

moves, such as cancellation of the lease in Naharayim and the Arava, critical interviews, rebukes in the media, and bans on the Israeli prime minister flying through the kingdom's airspace. Security cooperation, however, is close and important. The Gulf principalities do not bother to pretend, and even Saudi Arabia no longer conceals its shared interests and the possibilities for cooperation with Israel. Leading Saudi journalist Abdulrahman al-Rashed, former editor of the Saudi-owned daily *Asharq al-Awsat* and former director-general of the al-Arabiya television channel, published an article supporting normalization between the United Arab Emirates and Israel. He added:

> Every Arab country [like the Palestinians] is entitled to handle its own international relations, including its relations with Israel. Every state makes its own sovereign decisions according to its own interests, not according to what the Palestinians or other Arabs desire…The Palestinian losses have never stopped, because of their failure to deal with reality and their refusal to understand the circumstances of the Arab countries that maintain relations with Israel, which could [actually] be of great help to them. (al-Rashed, 2020)

Shortly after this article was published, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) invited then-Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to a meeting in the city of Neom on the Red Sea coast, near the Straits of Tiran. Netanyahu arrived on a direct flight from Israel, accompanied by Mossad Director Yossi Cohen, and remained there for about four hours. Israeli censorship permitted immediate publication of the report (Blumenthal & Eichner, 2020).

The Biden administration's determination to return to a policy of strengthening Iran at the expense of the United States' regional allies, joined by Israel's inability to halt this trend, has forced Saudi Arabia to renew its contacts with Iran in an attempt to contain the damage caused by this American policy. MBS is also forging military ties with Russia, thereby signaling to Washington possible alternatives to his country's heavy dependence on the United States. Biden's partial sobering following the American failure in Afghanistan and the difficulties in its negotiations with Iran somewhat alleviates the level of anxiety in Riyadh. Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia has no illusions about the dangers of Iran, the limitations of American support, or Israel's determination to fight Iran.

United States Policy in the Region

The concern shared by Israel and Arab countries about the underlying trends of the American attitude toward the region and the emerging policy of the Biden administration is thus a critical issue compounding the Iranian threat. Three factors are currently distancing the United States from the Middle East. The first is its need to focus its efforts on the rivalry with China, requiring a robust presence in East Asia. The second is America's energy independence and the end of its dependence on fossil fuel energy resources in the region, which reduces the motivation to maintain an extensive presence there. The third is the trauma of the prolonged and ineffectual presence in Iraq and Afghanistan, which has made a massive military engagement in the region impossible in terms of domestic American politics, certainly in the absence of an immediate and critical threat to essential American interests. These considerations were joined in the Obama era by the willingness to abdicate important parts of the United States' superpower status and the attending responsibilities. In the Middle East, this is reflected in the tacit acceptance of the Iranian Islamic Revolution's efforts to achieve regional hegemony, both directly and through its proxies underminig Sunni regimes, and in a shortsighted policy toward the Iranian nuclear program. Obama's actions signaled to Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the Gulf states that

he might well replace the historic American alliance with them by an alliance with the "moderates" in Iran, and perhaps also the Muslim Brotherhood. On the nuclear issue, he essentially coordinated with Iran a delay by a decade or slightly more the time at which Iran could become a nuclear threshold state, failing to address the Iranian progress in both delivery systems and weaponization that are required to secure this status.

The focus of the Obama and Biden administrations on human rights in several of Israel's Arab allies creates difficulties for this coalition. For example, the military dictatorship of Egyptian President el-Sisi and the involvement of the Saudi Crown Prince in the murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in Istanbul prompted Washington to give a cold shoulder to the two most important Arab countries in the struggle against Iran and Turkey. This policy hinders the coalition against Iran, but it also paradoxically strengthens Arab ties with Israel. The Arabs appreciate the fact that in contrast to the purists in Washington, Israel knows that the choice in the Middle East is not between democracies and harsh autocracies. From long experience in the region, Israel knows that the choice in the real world is between pro-American harsh autocracies like the ones in Egypt and Saudi Arabia, which are willing to develop a partnership of shared interests with Israel, on the one hand, and radical, aggressive, and oppressive regimes with barbaric practices, like those in Syria and Iran, which regard the United States and Israel as enemies, on the other. Where less brutal autocratic regimes are sustainable, such as in Morocco and Jordan, they are preferable, but a regime's toughness depends on the level and dimensions of the domestic and regional threat to it.

The Turkish Challenge

Alongside the Iranian threat, Israel and Arabs alike face the threat of the Muslim Brotherhood and that of Erdogan's aggression in the Eastern Mediterranean. The Turkish challenge poses less of a threat to the region as a whole than the Iranian, and does not include a nuclear dimension. It is important, however, and affects Arab relations with Israel in the same direction as the Iranian threat and American regional policy. Erdogan's danger and potential damage lie in two spheres: he is the patron of the Muslim Brotherhood, which threatens many regimes in the region, and he is already using force to impose his will on the Eastern Mediterranean basin. In a broader context, he is also striving for regional hegemony, including in the Caucasus. El-Sisi's regime in Egypt faces a constant domestic threat from the Muslim Brotherhood. Despite cautious conciliatory measures in 2021, el-Sisi regards the Muslim Brotherhood supporters in Ankara as a dangerous enemy. Had the Muslim Brotherhood retained power in Egypt after 2013 (practically with the benefit of Obama's blessing), the entire region would have fallen into an acute predicament, and Israel would have found itself in severe tension, and possibly a confrontation, with the largest and most important Arab country. The Muslim Brotherhood in power in Turkey, Egypt, and Gaza would have endangered the Hashemite regime in Jordan by encouraging menacing opposition in the kingdom and would have contributed to a Hamas takeover in the West Bank. Saudi Arabia and most of the Gulf states also regard the Muslim Brotherhood as a danger.

In the Eastern Mediterranean basin, Erdogan, with characteristic aggression, demands an exclusive economic zone for gas drilling, while trampling over the rights of Greece and Cyprus and potentially causing severe damage to Egyptian and Israeli interests. Erdogan's close ties with the al-Sarraj government in Libya and the military aid that he proffers, including through foreign militias, threaten Egypt on its western border. Erdogan threatens the Kurds on Turkey's southern border and in northern Syria; he is bothersome to Israel, despite their stable bilateral economic ties, is an important supporter of Hamas in the Gaza Strip, and is even cautiously facilitating terrorist activity by

Hamas agents that he hosts in Turkey. Erdogan is also systematically undermining the status of Israel in Jerusalem and the special status of Jordan on the Temple Mount. Occasional efforts to ease the conflict, due to concern about the Biden administration's critical attitude toward his policy, do not change this picture.

The Tests to the Arab-Israeli Coalition

All of the factors discussed here—the Iranian threat; the uncertainty regarding American support; the challenge from Erdogan and the Muslim Brotherhood; the Arabs' weakness and their appreciation for Israel's resolve—have combined to create a new regional situation that impacts dramatically on Arab-Israeli relations. "The Arabs" no longer stand together against Israel; there are no longer merely exceptions that are on the political defensive against a hostile pan-Arab consensus. It practically amounts to a strategic coalition of Israel and most of the Arab countries against Iran, Turkey, the Muslim Brotherhood, and jihad groups. This coalition is in great need of American support, but it is not led by the United States, and sometimes even acts in opposition to American priorities. What matters to Israel is not only shared interests and cooperation with these Arab countries; it is also the recognition in Washington that there is no need to choose between the Jewish state and "the Arabs." Instead, the choice is between Israel together with most of the Arab countries on the one hand, and radical actors that are anti-American in any case on the other. There is a chance that Europe will also gradually come to recognize this, at least in part.

The Abraham Accords were designed to institutionalize this reality, and to affirm it publicly in order to enhance the message and infuse it with momentum. Under the Trump administration, the United States was willing to invest considerable effort in its relations with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and especially Sudan and Morocco, in order to promote the agreements. It also sought to add

other Arab countries to the agreements, above all Saudi Arabia. Despite its lack of enthusiasm, the Biden administration is unable or does not want to withdraw from the Accords. Although the administration did not like the fact that all of this converged to expose the myth that the Palestinians have far-reaching influence on stability in the region and veto power over Arab-Israeli relations, it cannot ignore the recognition that the Abraham Accords have greatly eroded the Palestinian bargaining position. Biden can renew aid to UNRWA and try to reopen the consulate in Jerusalem as an embassy to the Palestinians, but he cannot change this downward trend (Schueftan, 2021[7]).

The most critical test of the Arab-Israeli strategic coalition, which cannot realize its full potential when it is conducted clandestinely, is the willingness of Arab public opinion to come "out of the closet" and defy what was portrayed as treason to generations of educated and politically aware Arabs. Until recently, a broad consensus prevailed that the threshold of irrepressible riots among Arabs throughout the region, and of hundreds of thousands of Muslims beyond it, was very low. This assumption deterred players in Europe, the United States, and even Israel from acting in ways that seemed to them correct, lest the "gates of hell" be loosened and the rage of violent fanatics sweep everything away. There is a kernel of truth in these fears, and it requires that caution be exercised, particularly in the context of what can be cast as a "threat to al-Aqsa." Yet even in these sensitive areas, it emerged that the bark is worse than the bite.

One interesting and important test in this area was the Muslim and Arab world's response to the relocation of the American embassy to Jerusalem. For generations, ever since 1947, the issue of Jerusalem was regarded as so sensitive that all were afraid to touch it for fear of an outburst of Islamic and Arab rage. Even the United States and Israel's friends refused to officially recognize the hard fact that West Jerusalem has been Israel's capital since 1949.

Since 1967 there has been no real dispute about Israel's sovereignty in the western party of the city, but even then, friendly administrations in Washington refused to recognize West Jerusalem as Israel's capital, and linked such recognition to an agreement with the Arab countries, and later with the Palestinians. Although Congress passed a law requiring such recognition in 1995, Presidents Clinton, Bush, and Obama refrained from transferring the embassy by postponing implementation of the transfer every six months. When Trump relocated the embassy in 2018 with much fanfare, the few protests faded into silence. It appears that even on this question, "the Arab world" no longer exists, and predictions of global outbreaks of Islamic rage failed to materialize.

In a much less dramatic matter, but interesting and significant in its own right, the resilience of the Arab-Israeli coalition was tested by Operation Guardian of the Walls in May 2021. In the previous format of Arab-Israeli relations, the Israeli operation would have led to an outburst of rage in the Arab world that would have forced the regimes to align themselves politically against Israel and roll back relations. This time, however, Arab public opinion responded with token opposition,[8] despite systematic pounding in the heart of densely populated areas in the Gaza Strip, the killing of Hamas leaders whom Israel managed to locate, and the destruction on live television in real time of high-rise buildings in luxury neighborhoods. The Arab regimes in the countries of this coalition did not even have to pretend that they were withdrawing from cooperation with Israel ("Israel-UAE-US: A Year of Cooperation," 2021).

According to the dubious index of media reports, Arabs in Europe took advantage of the opportunity to riot in the streets more than their counterparts in Arab capitals. The fact that Hamas in the Gaza Strip constitutes part of the Muslim Brotherhood movement threatening the Arab-Israeli coalition took precedence over the fact that the Palestinians involved

were ostensibly entitled to pan-Arab national solidarity. Israel and Egypt have a common interest in increasing Hamas's dependence on Cairo, because both understand the dangers of the organization. Israel's relations with Egypt, Jordan, Bahrain, and Morocco even improved, including in the sensitive public dimension. Shortly after the conflict in the Gaza Strip, the Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs visited Cairo, the first such visit in 13 years. With the formation of the new government a few months later, a long series of meetings at the highest level took place, including a meeting between the Israeli prime minister and the Egyptian president in Sharm el-Sheikh, meetings of the Israeli prime minister and foreign minister with King Abdullah in Amman, a visit by the foreign minister to Bahrain and Morocco, including the opening of the embassy in Rabat, an exchange of ambassadors with the United Arab Emirates, and the appointment of an ambassador in Bahrain. The processes of normalization with the Gulf states were also stepped up, following an increase in direct flights to and from Israel.

> **Most of the Arab states are unwilling to go to war against Israel, contribute concrete and significant national assets to the struggle against it, or refrain from cooperation with Israel on matters of importance to them.**

Conclusion

It is important to depict accurately the new situation that has gradually emerged over the last generation, and to voice a loud and clear warning against an excessively optimistic interpretation and unfounded expectations for a transformation of Arab-Israeli relations in the foreseeable future.

On the positive side, the collective pan-Arab struggle against Israel, and even solidarity under duress involving actual contributions to the conflict under pan-Arab pressure, has ebbed, dissolved, and decreased to the vanishing point of its core. Most of the Arab states are unwilling

to go to war against Israel, contribute concrete and significant national assets to the struggle against it, or refrain from cooperation with Israel on matters of importance to them. Some are even willing to conduct joint military exercises with Israel. Outrageous condemnations by international organizations reflect in any case an absurd where "nonaligned" states with overt close ties with Israel, and even self-righteous European countries, systematically vote against it.

The pan-Arab struggle and boycott against the Jewish *yishuv* and Israel first emerged in the late 1930s. It influenced participation in the 1948 war, and peaked with the Nasserite messianic movement in the second half of the 1950s and the early 1960s. This format began to wane after the 1967 defeat and Nasser's death in 1970. A short-lived rebirth in the Yom Kippur War and the mid-1970s energy crisis was followed by the first big breach—the "beginning of the end" of the format—with the withdrawal of Egypt from the circle of war in the late 1970s. The pan-Arab format suffered another setback with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the end of the Cold War, and the unipolar reality of the 1991 Gulf War. The short-lived illusion that the weakening of the radicals in the region could be used to end the Arab-Israeli conflict has evaporated during this decade by the failure of the Oslo process to solve the conflict with a historic compromise with the PLO. This pan-Arab format was dealt a decisive blow with the arrival of the Arab Spring in the second decade of the 21st century, when the Arabs themselves recognized their failure and weakness, and realized the full significance of the Iranian threat. Following American policy under the Obama administration, many rulers in the region understood the need for a reliable strategic partnership with Israel. These understandings were publicly affirmed by the Abraham Accords.

The necessary caution from attributing to the new format final and revolutionary significance is no less important than understanding the deep change in the format of the conflict The

new reality does not resolve the conflict or eliminate its violent dimension. It is certainly not peace, certainly not regional peace. It appears that Israel will continue to face a hostile and violent environment for at least the next generation; there will be at least one important Arab country in the radical pole of the conflict in the foreseeable future. This role was previously assumed by Nasser, Saddam Hussein, and Qaddafi. When Syria recovers from its civil war, it is likely to reclaim the leadership of the radical camp. Iran is currently a bitter and dangerous enemy, and Erdogan's Turkey is hostile. Only a change in regime can change the picture in these two countries. The Palestinian society has chosen conflict with Israel as a way of life, and does not intend to focus on state-building and society-building. Hamas is concentrating on a violent challenge; in its current form, the PLO prefers political conflict accompanied by "popular" violence. Among a majority of Palestinian society, especially in the West Bank, it is hard at present to detect energies leading to a large-scale violent confrontation with Israel, but the pattern of the past 100 years has not vanished. This pattern has repeatedly dragged a majority of the public into struggles that radical groups have placed at the top of the Palestinian agenda.

The positive trends discussed here depend predominantly on Israel's power, the image of this power in the Arab environment, and also on regional and global developments. For example, should the Biden administration adopt an Obama-style American policy of hesitant and conciliatory posture toward Iran, this is liable to persuade the Gulf states that appeasing Iran at the expense of ties with Israel will contribute to their survival. Implementation of a strategic alliance between Iran and China, and American acquiescence with the Iranian momentum in regional hegemony are liable to arouse a similar response. A revolution bringing the Muslim Brotherhood to power in Egypt will dramatically change the region. Collapse of the ayatollahs' regime in Iran will steer it in a different direction.

Nonetheless, the demise of the pan-Arab format of the conflict is an important milestone for Israel's national security. Israel entered the Middle East balance of power through the front door as one of the most important actors, after having tried for many years to influence it from the rear window. Its range of opportunities has greatly increased, and its room for maneuver is much greater than ever before.

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Notes

1   Israel's total defense consumption, after deduction of defense grants, fell from 30 percent of GDP in 1973-1975 to 20 percent in 1976-1981, 15.5 percent in 1982-1985, 10.2 percent in 1986-1998, and 6.7 percent in 1998.

2   As early as 1923, the Palestinians rejected a political framework ("legislative council"), even though it would likely have given them an effective tool for thwarting the Zionist enterprise. In the late 1920s and mid-1930s, radical Palestinians thwarted further efforts. The Palestinians also rejected the Peel Commission's partition proposal, and even Britain's anti-Zionist policy formulated in the 1939 White Paper. With the exception of Jordan, the Arab states followed the lead of the Palestinian Arab Higher Committee in rejecting this white paper. Following the Arab rebellion of 1936-1939, Arab society was exhausted and fragmented, with a profound crisis of confidence in its leadership and within the society itself. In 1948, the Palestinian society adopted a radical position in the decisive struggle over its fate, leading to defeat and national ruin. The taboo on a historic compromise that would accept a Jewish state is currently as deeply rooted as ever, thereby guaranteeing at this stage that the conflict will persist, accompanied by outbreaks of violence.

3   Following an interim period, the Autonomy Plan was supposed to lead in the direction of sovereignty. In an interview with Gideon Levy in the presence of Shimon Peres, Arafat explained that he rejected the possibility of accepting it "because of the mood in the Arab world. Had it not been for this I might have been able to make peace with Begin."

4   In an interview with the Jordanian newspaper *ad-Dustour*, chief PLO negotiator Saeb Erekat described in detail the negotiations between Olmert and Abu Mazen in 288 meetings in 2007-2008, at the end of which the Palestinians rejected a far-reaching compromise agreement. He explained their refusal: "[The Israeli proposals] reached 90 percent in Camp David, and have now reached 100 percent. If that is the case, why should we hurry, after all the injustice imposed on us?"

5   In August 1995, this author screened video clips at the Knesset of Arafat's speeches in the Gaza Strip in which Arafat praised female Palestinian terrorists, inter alia for their terrorist action deep inside Israel that killed dozens of Israelis, among them 12 children (the 1978 terrorist attack on the coastal road). Arafat also compared the Oslo Accords to the seventh century agreement with a tribe in the Arabian Peninsula, which the Prophet Mohammed violated after two years. Two weeks later, Rabin was asked about it in the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee. He answered that all of the intelligence agencies had been instructed to bring such materials, and added, "I heard about this specific speech by Arafat. I contacted intelligence, and they really did not have the speech. We found the recording in the hands of Prof. Dan Schueftan. I admit that we were deficient in gathering information." Shimon Peres stated, "This is an awful recording." There were many such statements by Arafat, not just one.

6   Martin Kramer cites many detailed examples of the severe damage to academic research in the United States and to an understanding of the Middle East caused by these dictates.

7   See the article for my discussion with General James Jones, the first National Security Adviser in the Obama administration, about the weight of the Palestinian issue in the Middle East.

8   The enlistment of Hamas on behalf of Jerusalem and al-Aqsa, and what was portrayed as its heroic stance against Israel, indeed greatly enhanced its prestige among the Palestinians in the West Bank and Israel, according to surveys by Khalil Shikaki, but the strategic significance of this development is limited. The public in the Arab countries did not respond to the conflict in the Gaza Strip with large-scale outrage requiring the regimes to even pretend that they were downgrading their relations with Israel.

Photo: L-r: Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, President Bill Clinton, PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat, Washington, September 13, 1993

The Securitization of the Bi-National State: The Oslo Accords, 1993-1995

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While military measures are the most prevalent means for confronting security threats, non-military means such as diplomacy and peace agreements offer an alternative recourse for countries as they seek to overcome existential threats. This article contends that Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's decision to promote the Oslo Accords was essentially a security move to counter the threat of a bi-national state. Using securitization theory, which explores the process of how issues transform into security threats, the article analyzes how Israel chose a peace process to tackle an existential threat to its future as Jewish and democratic state. Although the Oslo Accords are widely perceived as a peace process, the article argues that the desire to create a demographic separation between Israel and the Palestinians was the main consideration driving the agreement. Departing from the literature that discusses Israel's national security through conventional historical and descriptive analytical lenses, the article proposes examining decision making processes relating to Israel's national security using theoretical tools, in this case, securitization theory.

Keywords: securitization theory, Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Oslo Accords, diplomacy, existential threats

Introduction

Since its establishment in 1948, Israel has faced numerous security challenges, including security threats that jeopardized the very existence of the state. According to Michael, this kind of threat "can be defined as a trend, process or development that substantially endangers the existence of the State of Israel as the national homeland of the Jewish people" (Michael, 2009, p. 689). To overcome these threats, Israel has chosen to act against them in various ways. Over its 73 years of existence, Israel has engaged in wars, limited military operations, and targeted military attacks, such as the destruction of nuclear reactors in Iraq and Syria, the clandestine effort to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, and the inter-war campaign aimed at preventing advanced weapons from Hezbollah known as the "campaign between wars." While in most cases Israel chose military force in order to confront a security threat, in other cases the Israeli leadership chose to act by different means, as in the case of the Oslo Accords.

Countering the widespread claim that the Oslo Accords were the first stage of an Israeli-Palestinian peace process, this article argues that the three agreements signed in 1993-1995 between Israel and the PLO were essentially a security move to contain the threat of a bi-national state.

Twenty-eight years after the well-publicized handshake between Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat on the White House lawn on September 13, 1993, the Oslo Accords remain a controversial issue. While there are those who describe the Oslo Accords as a historic breakthrough toward resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Waxman, 2019, pp. 116-117), others portray the Israeli decision to sign the agreements with the PLO as a strategic mistake stemming from the illusion that Arafat and the PLO were partners for peace with Israel (Karsh, 2016, p. 7; Schueftan,

2011, pp. 762-763; 2020, p. 42). However, while others have analyzed and presented the Oslo Accords both as part of an Arab-Israeli peace process (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1996; Barak, 2005), and as a cultural shift among Israeli decision makers (Rhynold, 2007; Barnett, 1999), this article introduces a different approach to Rabin's decision to promote the process with the PLO. Countering the widespread claim that the Oslo Accords were the first stage of an Israeli-Palestinian peace process, this article argues that the three agreements signed in 1993-1995 between Israel and the PLO were essentially a security move to contain the threat of a bi-national state. While Rabin's concern about the demographic issue has been noted in the context of the Oslo Accords and his decision to promote the Oslo process (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1996, p. 67; Even, 2013, p. 74), the demographic and bi-national state threats deserve further attention. This allows exploring the Oslo Accords as a security move within an overall national security perspective.

Adopting a theoretical perspective of securitization theory, a leading theory in international relations and security studies that explores the process of how issues transform into security threats, this article examines how the State of Israel confronted existential security threats to its future as Jewish and democratic state with diplomatic measures. In this context, the article contends that the desire to create a separation between Israel and the Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and thereby secure the future of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, was the main consideration driving Israel's support for the Oslo Accords. In order to securitize the bi-national state option, in which Israel would lose its Jewish majority, Rabin promoted the Oslo Accords with the PLO with the aim of establishing independent Palestinian autonomy for the Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. By seeking a separation between the Palestinians and the State of Israel, Rabin opted to ensure a solid Jewish majority in Israel and

thus ensure the future of the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state.

Departing from the literature discussing national security through conventional historical and descriptive analytical lenses, this article proposes examining decision making processes relating to Israel's national security from a theoretical perspective. The article contains three main sections. The first introduces securitization theory, which offers an alternative approach to describe how "normal" issues are transformed into security threats. The second section examines how the State of Israel confronted security threats with non-military measures, as emphasized by the case of the Oslo process during 1993-1995. Finally, in the third section, while critically analyzing the Oslo Accords and their implications in retrospect, the article presents how securitization theory can be used as a theoretical tool for understanding and analyzing national security decision making.

Securitization Theory: The Construction of Security Threats

One of the well-known puzzles in the field of international relations (IR) and security studies is how and why particular issues are labeled security threats to a country and its citizens, while other issues are not perceived as such. This conundrum also relates to the broad academic discussion regarding what is "security," and how it is perceived by the various disciplines in the field of social sciences. Security, in any objective sense, measures the absence of threats to acquired values; in a subjective sense, the absence of fear that such values will be attacked (Wolfers, 1962, p. 150). Traditionally, security was sought through military power, and the referent object, what was to be secured, was the state (Collins, 2016, p. 2). Thus, in historical terms, "security" is the field where states threaten each other, challenge each other's sovereignty, try to impose their will on each other, and defend their independence (Waever, 1995, p. 50). Yet after the end of the Cold War, as the term

security and the core assumptions about the referent object started to engage academic thinking, alternative approaches to security that offer different referent objects began to emerge (Collins, 2016, p. 2). Accordingly, there are other issues that are perceived as existential threats that are not related to the military realm, for example, migration (Leonard & Kaunert, 2019; Baker-Beall, 2019), lack of water sources (Stetter, Herschinger, Tiechler, & Albert, 2011), and diseases (Elbe, 2006; Sjostedt, 2011; McInnes & Rushton, 2011; Kamradt-Scott & McInnes, 2012; Hanrieder & Kreuder-Sonnen, 2014). Securitization theory, which explores the process in which social entities transform issues into security threats, was developed by Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jaap de Wilde from the Copenhagen School (CS) in a broader attempt to redefine the concept of security. Thus, securitization theory introduces a wider security perception, which comprises not only military security but also political, societal, economic, and environmental security (Waever, 1995; Buzan, Waever, & de Wilde, 1998).

There are three key main components in securitization theory: (1) *referent object*: the entity that is seen to be existentially threatened and has a legitimate claim to survive; (2) *securitizing actor*: an actor that securitizes issues by declaring something (a referent object) existentially threatened; and (3) *audience:* the target that must be persuaded that the referent object is existentially threatened. Thus, during the securitization process, the securitizing actor points to a development or potentiality claiming that the referent object is existentially threatened, and therefore aims to obtain the audience's acceptance that extraordinary measures are justified for confronting that threat (Waever, 1995, 2004; Buzan et al., 1998).

One of the significant contributions of securitization theory is how the concept of security is perceived. In contrast to the realist concept that perceives threats objectively (there is a "real" threat), securitization theory adopts a constructivist approach to security. Hence,

arguing that threats are not necessarily "real" but "perceived," securitization theory focuses on the process of how issues inter-subjectively transform into security threats. In other words, an issue becomes a security threat not only or necessarily because it constitutes an objective threat to the referent object, but rather when an audience accepts the securitizing actor's position that the issue constitutes an existential threat to the referent object. In that sense, it is impossible to verify fully whether a threat is "real" or not, as securitization theory focuses on the process of how issues transform into security threats and how those issues are perceived.

Securitization theory adopts a constructivist approach to security, arguing that threats are not necessarily "real" but "perceived."

According to the CS, security can be regarded as a "speech act." Based on the argument that in some instances language does not simply describe objects or states of affairs but also creates through its very utterance (Austin, 1962), the CS scholars argue that there is a "social magic power" of language, as the word "security" constitutes an act, and by saying it, something occurs (Waever, 1995, p. 55). Although it seems that the move from routine to emergency mode is immediate, in most cases, securitization is in fact a very gradual process and it is very rare that an issue moves directly from routine, or normalcy, to emergency (Abrahamsen, 2005). Moreover, securitization occurs even when the security issue is located at the lower level of the normalcy/existential threat spectrum, and thus securitization does not necessarily incorporate aspects of emergency and exceptionalism (Leonard & Kaunert, 2019, pp. 23-29).

In summary, securitization theory, one of the prominent theories in the fields of IR and security studies, analyzes the process of how

an issue is defined as a security threat and how decision makers decide to confront it. Yet while Israel, a good case study for security studies, does not occupy a broad place in securitization theory discourse (Lupovici, 2014), a number of scholars have used securitization theory to demonstrate how Israel has confronted security threats. For instance, in illustrating how the legalization of laws was the tool used to securitize the Arab population in Israel, Olesker (2014, p. 387) asserts that securitization theory, which enables Israel's political elite to articulate ethnicity as an issue of national security, helps us understand how laws develop the concept of national security and strengthen Israel's Jewish character. Other examples for issues that were securitized in Israel are the Iranian nuclear threat, especially in 2009-2012 during Netanyahu's second government (Lupovici, 2016), and Iran's hybrid proxy warfare through the Lebanese terror organization Hezbollah (Kaunert & Wertman, 2020). Another scholar who used Israel as a case study to explore securitization theory is Abulof (2014), who claims that the "threat culture" of the Zionists provided fertile ground for the securitization of issues such as terrorism, Arab infiltration, and the Iranian nuclear program. In this context, Abulof (2014, p. 408) claims that Prime Minister Ariel Sharon securitized the demographic issue in order to give legitimacy to the disengagement plan from the Gaza Strip in the summer of 2005. But despite his claim that the Oslo process was driven in part by the demographic incentive (Abulof, 2014, p. 406), the Oslo Accords are not portrayed as a securitization act. Against this background, using securitization theoretical tools and arguing that the agreements with the PLO can be labeled a security move, this article analyzes how the State of Israel chose to address another existential threat, the potential loss of the country's Jewish and democratic character, by signing agreements with the PLO during the Oslo process, 1993-1995.

Securitization and Peace: The Oslo Accords, 1993-1995

The Oslo Accords is a case study that illustrates an Israeli securitization act, in which Israel chose what was defined as a peace process in order to securitize an existential threat. These agreements, signed between the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) during 1993-1995, emanated from the pragmatic approach of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who thought that the Arab-Israeli conflict did not benefit Israel's national security. Contending that the continuation of the conflict could lead to a scenario that would endanger the existence of the State of Israel, Rabin believed that time was not on Israel's side and that peace had to be promoted urgently (Aronoff, 2014, p. 101; Even, 2013, p. 74). Thus, he acknowledged two factors with substantive potential to threaten the State of Israel.

First, Rabin, who was a proponent of the "separation approach" between Israel and the Palestinians (Schueftan, 1999, p. 45), perceived the bi-national state solution, in which there would be no solid Jewish majority within Israel, as an existential threat to Israel as a Jewish state (Sheves, 2020, pp. 661-662; Sneh, 2020). In fact, until the outbreak of the first Palestinian intifada, Rabin supported the so-called Jordanian option, whereby Jordan would be the partner in an agreement with Israel to resolve the Palestinian issue (Goldstein, 2006, pp. 354-356). However, the intifada led Rabin to realize that Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip was damaging to Israel's national security. He assumed that in order not to be considered by the international community as an apartheid state, Israel would need to grant full citizenship rights to the Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, an act that would eventually end Israel's existence as a Jewish state (Peri, 2006, pp. 34-35; Aronoff, 2014, p. 116; Clinton, 2005; Goldstein, 2006, pp. 366-367). Consequently, Rabin wanted to ensure a solid Jewish majority of approximately 80 percent among the Israeli population:

I belong to those who do not want to annex 1.7 million Palestinians as citizens of the State of Israel. Therefore, I am against what is called Greater Israel…In the present circumstances, between a bi-national state and a Jewish state, I prefer a Jewish state… The exercise of sovereignty over the entire Mandatory Land of Israel means that we will have 2.7 million Palestinian citizens in the State of Israel…This may be a Jewish state within its borders, but bi-national in its content, demography, and democracy...That is why I am against annexation. (Quoted in Neriah, 2016, pp. 25-26)

Given his belief that the Palestinians were at the heart of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Rabin was convinced that an agreement with the Palestinians must be reached first. Rabin posited that an Israeli-Palestinian peace pact would counter the Arab states' motivation to go to war against Israel in order to retake the territories conquered in 1967 (Neriah, 2016, pp. 26-27). Furthermore, Rabin argued that in an era of ballistic missiles, most of the territories were not essential to Israel's security (Clinton, 2005). Hence, depicting settlements located in the heart of the West Bank as not essential to Israel's security, Rabin contended that it would be enough to defend Israel from the Jordan Valley (Neriah, 2016, p. 28).

> Rabin, who was a proponent of the "separation approach" between Israel and the Palestinians, perceived the bi-national state solution, in which there would be no solid Jewish majority within Israel, as an existential threat to Israel as a Jewish state.

The second factor Rabin perceived as a threat to the State of Israel was continuation of the arms race in the Middle East, which would eventually lead to an acquisition of nuclear

weapons by enemy Arab states. In that sense, Rabin believed that an Israeli-Palestinian agreement would not only ensure the future of the State of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, but would also reduce threats posed by Israel's close neighbors. Thus, Rabin argued that if Israel lived in peace with its neighbors, the likelihood of an attack by other states, such as Iraq and Iran, would be greatly reduced, even if they were under the control of Islamic fundamentalist elites (Ross, 2015, pp. 256-257; Kurtzer et al., 2013, p. 34; Aronoff, 2014, p. 116).

In March 1992, Rabin stated: "I believe that if we succeed in reaching peace or near peace with the Palestinians, with Jordan, and then with Syria, in the next five to seven years, we will reduce a large part of the motivation for an arms race" (quoted in Inbar, 2004, p. 188). In this context, Rabin's vision was primarily based on a traditional security aspect, especially on preventing situations that could endanger the security and existence of the State of Israel (Neriah, 2016, p. 29). Rabin was worried that Russia might rise out of the ashes as a pro-Arab world power, and that Iran and Iraq might develop nuclear weapons and demonstrate their power and their policy of denying peace to the other countries in the region. Thus, recognizing that there was a temporal window of opportunity, in which the United States is the only superpower and that Israel is stronger than its enemies in the Middle East, Rabin believed that it was a ripe moment to pursue a peace agreement with Israel's Arab neighbors, which must be exploited before the opportunity vanishes. In other words, given his sense that the international window of opportunity would be closed in five years, Rabin contended that time was working against Israel (Rabinovich, 2017, pp. 198-199; Inbar, 2004, p. 187; Morris, 2003, p. 573; Ross & Makovsky, 2020, pp. 882-887).

Returning to the bi-national state scenario: in terms of securitization theory, Prime Minister Rabin, performing the role of the "securitizing actor," perceived the bi-national state as an existential threat to Israel as a Jewish and democratic state (referent object). In order to eliminate this threat, Rabin argued, Israel must achieve peace with the Palestinians. Therefore, he promoted the Oslo Accords (extraordinary measures) for providing the Palestinian people autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, which would thereby separate Israel from the Palestinians. In essence, the Oslo peace process was a gradual securitization process comprising three main agreements signed between the State of Israel and the PLO during 1993-1995. In order to securitize the bi-national state option successfully, Rabin needed to obtain the support of the Israeli government and the Knesset, both performing the role of "audience." Without the support of the government and the Knesset, which had the legal authority to approve an Israeli withdrawal from territory, the Oslo Accords would not have any legal validity and the State of Israel could not actually execute and implement any agreement.

Phase One: Declaration of Principles

Early in his term, Israeli Prime Minister Rabin announced that he intended to complete the negotiations for granting autonomy to the Palestinians in the territories within six to nine months. Thus, Rabin contended in front of the Knesset that peace agreements with the neighboring Arab countries would enhance Israel's security:

> The intention of the government, which I have the right and the honor to lead, is indeed to maximize the chances of advancing peacemaking with the Arab states and the Palestinian residents of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip…In my opinion, peace is an important element that guarantees the security of the State of Israel…A peace without any security does not mean anything to me, but real peace increases the security of the State of Israel. (Rabin, 1992)

Despite his argument that a peace agreement with the Palestinians was essential for Israel's security, Rabin rejected any negotiation with the PLO, which was the official representative of the Palestinians. Perceiving the PLO as a purely terrorist organization, Rabin preferred to negotiate with a Palestinian leadership from the territories. Thus, Rabin continued to ignore the PLO and its chairman, Yasir Arafat (Ramon, 2020, p. 1325; Bar-Zohar, 2006, pp. 604-605; Yatom, 2009, p. 300; Pundak, 2013, p. 16; Inbar, 2004, p. 199; Kurtzer et al., 2013, p. 38).

At that time, talks were underway in Washington between an Israeli delegation and a Jordanian-Palestinian delegation, which comprised local representatives from the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In practice, however, the Palestinian team in the joint delegation was controlled by and received instructions from the PLO leadership in Tunisia, headed by Arafat (Khalidi, 2013, p. 48). In fact, these talks were futile and did not yield any significant outcome. Arafat, who wanted to prove to the Israeli side that any progress with the Palestinians could be reached only through direct negotiations with the PLO, did not grant the Palestinian delegation in Washington any mandate (Bar-Zohar, 2006, pp. 614-615; Kurtzer et al., 2013, p. 32; Indyk, 2009). Indeed, Arafat and the PLO leadership in Tunis were concerned about the strengthening of the Palestinian leadership in the territories, both from PLO supporters such as Faisal Husseini, and from Hamas, whose militant line vis-à-vis Israel gained popularity among the Palestinian public. Fearing that an alternative local Palestinian leadership would be established at his own expense, Arafat hoped to conduct direct negotiations with Israel (Inbari, 1994, pp. 172-178). In fact, already in September 1992, senior PLO official Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) submitted a proposal to Israel through Egypt to open secret negotiations with the PLO (Makovsky, 1996, p. 22). Another proposal to Israel by Abu Mazen's emissaries was sent in October to Rabin's associate, MK Ephraim Sneh (Sneh, 2002, p. 23). But Rabin, for his part, was adamant on not negotiating with the PLO, preferring the format of the Washington talks in which a local Palestinian team was a constituent member of the joint Jordanian-Palestinian delegation.

In parallel with the Washington track, a channel of secret talks began in January 1993 in Oslo between Yair Hirschfeld and Ron Pundak, two Israeli academics linked to Deputy Foreign Minister Yossi Beilin, and senior PLO official Ahmed Qurie, known as Abu Ala (Hirschfeld, 2000, pp. 92-96; Pundak, 2013, pp. 38-65). After two meetings during January-February 1993, at the end of which both parties proposed a draft interim agreement on the idea of "Gaza first" (Beilin, 1997, pp. 79-87; Pundak, 2013, pp. 90-128; Qurie, 2008, pp. 40-96; Hirschfeld, 2000, pp. 111-112), Beilin realized that it was time to involve Foreign Minister Shimon Peres. Thus, on February 14, Beilin disclosed the secret channel in Oslo to Peres and presented him with the draft as a document that could serve as a basis for American mediation between the parties. A few days later, Peres showed the draft to Rabin, who for his part did not object to continuation of the Oslo channel. In addition, while skeptical of what was underway in Norway, the Prime Minister stressed that he feared that it could harm the Washington talks. Therefore, Rabin demanded to continue the channel as private academic talks and not create the impression that he himself was behind it (Beilin, 1997, pp. 87-89).

Meanwhile, with negotiation tracks in both Washington and Oslo ongoing, Rabin continued to warn implicitly of the threat of a bi-national state, and argued that a separation from the Palestinians must be created to ensure Israel's security:

> The main question around which there are differences of opinion is what the solution is…whether to annex the two million Palestinians living in the territories and turn them into Israeli residents, or to find a way

of coexistence while preserving the Jewish uniqueness of the State of Israel as the state of the Jews…We must bring separation to provide security… Without separation, there will be no personal security…The sharper the separation, the more security will be restored. (Rabin, 1993)

In May, Rabin agreed to Peres's proposal to raise the level of the Oslo talks by sending an official representative of Israel, Foreign Ministry Director General Uri Savir. However, Rabin conditioned continuing the Oslo track on the continuation of the Washington talks, maintaining the secrecy of the Norwegian channel, and not raising the issue of Jerusalem in the talks (Beilin, 1997, pp. 100-101; Gil, 2018, pp. 127-128).

During June and July, the two sides continued to meet secretly in Oslo and held five rounds of talks (Beilin, 1997, pp. 111-119; Pundak, 2013, pp. 250-314; Savir, 1998, pp. 53-72). In parallel, Rabin used Health Minister Haim Ramon's connections to Arafat adviser Ahmed Tibi in order to advance the negotiations. Rabin's aim was to define the Palestinian positions accurately and identify whether it was possible to conclude a deal that would meet his basic demands, namely: engagement in a gradual process with interim agreements; the final status of Jerusalem would only be decided during the permanent status talks; all of the settlements would stay in place during the interim period; and security authority in the territories would remain under Israeli control. On August 16 Rabin received Arafat's positive reply to his conditions through the Ramon-Tibi channel, and thus decided that the moment was ripe to close a deal with the PLO (Neriah, 2016, pp. 63-66; Ramon, 2020, pp. 1327-1335). That day Rabin met with Peres and gave him the green light (Pundak, 2013, p. 356), and four days later, on August 20, both sides initialed the agreement in Norway (Gil, 2018, pp. 138-140; Pundak, 2013, pp. 363-367; Beilin, 1997, p. 135; Savir, 1998, p. 78).

On August 30, Rabin presented the secret agreement to his government. The 18-member government (13 from Labor, four from Meretz, and one from Shas) would clearly support Rabin's policy, and indeed, the agreement with the PLO was approved with sixteen in favor and two abstaining (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1996, p. 85). After the Israel-PLO Mutual Recognition Agreement was accomplished through an exchange of letters on September 9-10, the Declaration of Principles (DOP) was signed between the Government of Israel and the PLO on September 13 in Washington. According to the accords, the PLO acknowledged the State of Israel and pledged to reject violence, while Israel recognized the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people and as a partner for negotiations. Furthermore, both sides agreed that the aim of the negotiation was to establish a Palestinian Interim Self-Government Authority, an elected Council for the Palestinian people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, for a transitional period not exceeding five years, leading to a permanent settlement based on UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. On security, both sides concurred that during the interim period, Israel would maintain all the security responsibilities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, including the issues of external security and border crossings (Declaration of Principles, 1993; Singer, 2021a). Both sides agreed that the interim period would maintain the status quo of East Jerusalem and the Israeli settlements, meaning that East Jerusalem would remain under Israeli sovereignty and the settlements would not be evacuated. Thus, Israel and the PLO agreed that the future of the two issues would be discussed during the permanent status negotiation talks (Singer, 2021a; Morris, 2003, p. 578).

On September 23, ten days after signing the DOP in Washington, the agreement with the PLO received the support of the Knesset with 61 in favor versus 50 opposed (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1996, p. 85). In terms of securitization theory, Prime Minister Rabin (securitizing actor), who

contended that the bi-national state option posed an existential threat to the State of Israel (referent object), obtained the support of the government and Knesset (audiences). Thus, Rabin's first phase of securitization was completed.

Phase Two: Gaza-Jericho Agreement

The next step after signing the DOP was to reach an agreement with the PLO, in which the Gaza Strip and Jericho area would be transferred to the Palestinians. On October 13, negotiations began in Taba on the Gaza-Jericho agreement. The Israeli delegation was headed by Deputy Chief of Staff Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, an appointment that illustrated that the security aspect was paramount for Prime Minister Rabin in negotiations with the Palestinians (Savir, 1998, pp. 120-122).

However, not everyone in the Knesset shared Rabin's securitization policy, namely, that the agreement with the Palestinians was the way to deal with an existential threat. Rabin's most prominent critic was opposition leader Benjamin Netanyahu, who delivered a clear message against the Oslo Accords with Arafat and the PLO. In essence, Netanyahu asserted that the Oslo Accords constituted a security threat to the State of Israel, since they would lead to an Israeli withdrawal to 1967 borders and the establishment of a Palestinian state. For the Palestinians, Netanyahu argued, the Oslo Accords are part of the PLO's "phased plan" adopted in 1974, whereby all the territories of Palestine, from the sea to the river, will be liberated in stages (Netanyahu, 1993). Thus, in parallel to the negotiations between Israel and the PLO, the opponents of the peace process in the Israeli political arena increased their protest against the upcoming Gaza-Jericho Agreement. The settler leadership, Likud, and other right wing opposition parties, which rejected the negotiations with the PLO, continued their protest by conducting mass demonstrations, hoping to persuade the Israeli public to oppose

the peace process with the PLO (Goldstein, 2006, pp. 419-421; Sprinzak, 2001, p. 70).

On the Palestinian side, there were also elements that opposed the peace process. For Hamas, the largest Palestinian group opposing Arafat and Fatah, as well as for Islamic Jihad, any compromise and negotiation with Israel was considered a betrayal of the Palestinian interest and Islamic heresy (Gunning, 2007, p. 199; Bartal, 2012, pp. 96-97; Mishal & Sela, 2006, p. 83). Furthermore, Hamas leaders understood that the peace process with Israel completely distanced them from participating in the institutions of the future Palestinian state (Eldar, 2012, p. 70). Therefore, in order to sabotage the peace process, Hamas and Islamic Jihad began to execute terror attacks against Israeli targets, murdering twelve Israelis during October-December 1993. Despite the terrorism, which raised doubts among Israelis about the peace process with the Palestinians, Prime Minister Rabin decided to continue with the negotiations with Arafat and the PLO. However, there were wide gaps between Israel and the PLO regarding how to implement the DOP, mainly on issues of security and border control that according to the agreement were expected to remain under Israeli control. The breakthrough eventually was reached in February 1994, after the Palestinians had no choice but to accept the Israeli security demands. Given the lack of compromise regarding security control among the Israeli side, the Palestinians would otherwise not have been able to reach any agreement with Israel (Savir, 1998, pp. 119-144; Neriah, 2016, pp. 104-305).

Meanwhile, after an Israeli conducted a terror attack in the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron in February 1994 and murdered 29 Palestinians, Palestinian terrorism intensified. Hamas and Islamic Jihad began to conduct suicide terror attacks, especially inside buses crowded with civilians, murdering fifteen Israelis during April (Steinberg, 2008, pp. 279-280; Chronology, 1994a; Chehab, 2007, pp. 55-56; Hroub, 2006, p. 52). Israel responded directly against the

Palestinian terror organizations by arresting hundreds of their activists. Nevertheless, despite the continuation of the Palestinian violence, Rabin decided not to halt the negotiations with Arafat and the PLO (Inbar, 2004, p. 206; Chronology, 1994a).

At the end of April 1994, Israel and the PLO reached the Gaza-Jericho Agreement. The accord stipulated that Israel would withdraw from the Jericho area and 83 percent of the Gaza Strip and Jericho (Arieli, 2018, p. 162), and transfer the responsibility for public order and internal security to the PA, while the IDF would control both overall security of Israelis in these areas and the borders with Jordan and Egypt. Furthermore, both sides agreed on the establishment of the PA and its security forces, and on the release of 5000 Palestinian prisoners (Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area, 1994). On May 1, the Israeli government unanimously approved the Gaza-Jericho accord, and thus authorized Rabin to sign it three days later, on May 4, in Cairo (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1996, p. 85). On May 10, the agreement was submitted to the Knesset for its approval.

After the right-wing opposition in the Knesset decided not to attend the vote by claiming that most of the Israeli public rejected the agreement with the PLO, the Knesset voted in favor of the Gaza-Jericho agreement with 52 supporters and no opponents (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1996, p. 85). Hence, Rabin's securitization policy managed to pass the second stage, creating a partial separation between Israelis and Palestinians.

Phase Three: Interim Agreement
After signing the Gaza-Jericho Agreement, Israel began to implement the accord with the PLO, transferring control of the territories to the PA. Moreover, as agreed, Israel released 4000 Palestinian prisoners (Chronology, 1994b). One of the significant outcomes from the agreements with the Palestinians was the peace accord signed with Jordan on October 26, 1994: despite his informal relationship with Israel, Jordan's King Hussein was unable to sign a peace treaty

with it until some progress was made in relations between Israel and the PLO (Goldstein, 2006, pp. 429-432; Shlaim, 2009, pp. 456-467; Inbar, 2004, pp. 209-211).

While Rabin's expectation was that the return of Arafat and the establishment of the PA would decrease Palestinian terrorism, the reality on the ground proved otherwise. Hamas and Islamic Jihad continued to execute terror attacks against Israelis, in October 1994, murdering 23 Israeli civilians in Tel Aviv, and in January 1995 at the Beit Lid junction, killing 21 Israelis (Morris, 2003, pp. 583; Chronology, 1995a). Rabin urged Arafat to disarm Hamas and the rest of the Palestinian terror organizations, but Arafat refused to confront them. Moreover, Arafat's remarks that compared the Oslo Accords to the Treaty of Hudaybiyyah, in which the goal is to eliminate the Jews, also encouraged doubts on the Israeli side whether the PLO leader was a true partner for peace (Karsh, 2004, pp. 74-75). Yet despite the severe terror attacks and Arafat's poor effort to combat terrorism, Rabin decided to continue with the peace process, aiming to expand Palestinian control on the West Bank (Savir, 1998, p. 176). Eventually, Rabin instructed the Israeli negotiation team to present his basic security positions, whereby Israel would control the external security and borders, settlements, and bypass roads on the West Bank (Savir, 1998, p. 200).

In May, during a debate in the Knesset, Rabin reiterated his securitization policy by warning against a bi-national state:

> We are in the process of resolving the conflict between us and the Palestinians. There are indeed differences of opinions in this house between two worldviews. We believe that the dream of generations of Jews since the destruction of the Second Temple and their prayer to return to Zion are not for the establishment of a bi-national state. The dream of generations of Jews in today's reality

is to establish a Jewish state with Jerusalem as its capital…not a bi-national state but a Palestinian entity on our side. (Rabin, 1995a)

In the meantime, the negotiation saw progress, as both sides agreed that the West Bank would be divided into three areas. Within each area, the security control and public responsibilities would be divided between Israel and the PA (Area A: full Palestinian control; Area B: full Palestinian civilian control with full Israeli security control; Area C: full Israeli control). Rabin also promised that by mid-1997, Israel would transfer to the Palestinians all the areas that were not of security importance to Israel, but he did not mention what would be the size of the territory (Savir, 1998, p. 219).

Although the negotiations continued and both sides were on the verge of finalizing an agreement, Hamas launched two suicide terror attacks during July-August, murdering nine Israelis (Chronology, 1995b). In order not to allow Palestinian terrorism to dictate the agenda, Rabin ordered to suspend the talks for a week, after which the negotiations were resumed (Savir, 1998, p. 248). Realizing that Arafat was not making enough of an effort to fight Palestinian terrorism, Rabin decided that it would be possible to judge Arafat's actions only after the election. Assuming that it would be difficult for Arafat to fight against Hamas and the rest of the Palestinian terror organizations prior the elections, Rabin believed that the PLO chairman would be able to comply with Israel's demands after receiving a mandate from the Palestinian public (Ya'alon, 2018, pp. 83-84).

In late August, both sides agreed that Israel would transfer the PA 26 percent (3 percent of Area A and 23 percent of Area B) of the West Bank (Arieli, 2018, p. 165), and that the status quo in Jerusalem would remain until the permanent status agreement (Chronology, 1996a). Eventually, the Interim Agreement (Oslo II) was signed on September 28, 1995. The accord stipulated that Israel would withdraw from the

Palestinian cities and villages during October-December 1995, and that all the security and public responsibilities in those areas would be transferred to the PA. Moreover, both sides agreed that elections for the Palestinian Council and for the chairmanship would be held during January-April 1996, and that the permanent status negotiation would start in May 1996 and be completed no later than in three years (Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement, 1995).

"We prefer a Jewish state, even if not in all parts of the Land of Israel, over a bi-national state that will emerge if 2.2 million Palestinians from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank are annexed."

After the Israeli government unanimously approved the Oslo II agreement (with eighteen who supported and two who abstained), Rabin also needed the support of the Knesset (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1996, p. 86). On October 5, the Knesset convened to decide whether to support the agreement with the Palestinians. During the session, while asking the Knesset to endorse the accord, Rabin reiterated his warning concerning the bi-national state threat, claiming that unless a full separation from the Palestinians is implemented, the existence of Israel as a Jewish state would be under a significant peril:

Today, after countless wars and bloody events, we control more than two million Palestinians through the IDF and run their lives through a civilian administration…The government has decided to give a chance for peace… In the framework of the permanent solution, we aspire primarily to establish the State of Israel as a Jewish state, at least eighty percent of its citizens will be Jews…Even before the elections for the present Knesset, we have made it clear to the electorate that we prefer a Jewish state, even if

not in all parts of the Land of Israel, over a bi-national state that will emerge if 2.2 million Palestinians from the Gaza Strip and the West Bank are annexed…We had to choose between Greater Israel, which means a bi-national state with a population of 5.4 million Jews and more than three million Palestinians…We have chosen a Jewish state because we are convinced that a bi-national state with millions of Palestinian Arabs will not be able to fulfill the universal Jewish destiny of the State of Israel, which is the Jewish state…We call sincerely to all the citizens of the State of Israel, as well as the Palestinian residents, to give the opportunity to establish peace. (Rabin, 1995b)

Yet again, not all Knesset members agreed with Rabin's securitization policy. After Rabin's remarks, Netanyahu warned against the imminent agreement with the PLO:

And here lies before us the Oslo II agreement…What emerges from it is not your intention to establish a Jewish state, but to jeopardize the one that already exists; not to be separated from the Arabs living in Judea and Samaria, but to relinquish the security that the areas of Judea and Samaria give us. You abandoned Greater Israel in favor of a tiny, dwarfed and shrunken state whose security depends on your friend Arafat…You are creating an immediate threat, a terrorist threat, a strategic threat, and a threat to the very existence of the state…You are endangering the security of the State of Israel and its citizens. (Netanyahu, 1995)

Eventually, the majority of the Knesset agreed with Rabin's securitization policy, and on October 6, 1995, the Knesset approved the

Interim agreement with 61 supporters against 59 opponents (Bar-Siman-Tov, 1996, p. 86). Thus, Rabin successfully completed the third stage of his securitization policy, creating a separation between Israel and the Palestinians.

The Oslo Accords as a Security Instrument

In retrospect, 28 years after the signing of the DOP and the launching of the Oslo process, it seems that Rabin's security move to curb the bi-national state threat was successful, if only in part. Contrary to Peres's idyllic vision of a new Middle East, it seems that Rabin's security vision of creating a political separation between Israel and the Palestinians, as illustrated by the securitization theory, has stood the test of time. In practice, the agreements signed between Rabin's government and the PLO led to the establishment of the PA and the creation of an almost complete political separation between Israel and the Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, a status that significantly blocked the threat of a bi-national state. True, an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement is not in sight at this stage for many reasons. But in terms of Rabin's security vision, as expressed in his speech in the Knesset on October 5, 1995, the Palestinians have since had an entity that is less than a state, while Israel has retained all its security assets such as the Jordan Valley, settlements, and Jerusalem (Even, 2013, p. 78). Thus, the securitization process led by Rabin, who strove to separate Israel from the Palestinians, helped to overcome the threat of a bi-national state.

It is difficult to say how Rabin envisioned a permanent agreement with the Palestinians. But if his October 1995 Knesset speech did reflect his views, it is very likely that a permanent Israeli-Palestinian agreement would not have been signed. It is possible that Rabin even understood that the difference in positions between the parties did not allow a permanent agreement to be reached, and consequently saw the Oslo Accords as an instrument for creating

a separation. The fact that he continued the Oslo process even when he realized that Arafat had made no substantial endeavor to fight Palestinian terror organizations only reinforces the claim that eliminating the threat of a bi-national state and creating separation was Rabin's top strategic goal in adopting the Oslo Accords.

When it comes to the theoretical analysis of national security decision making, securitization theory and the analysis of Rabin's speech help us understand his broad set of considerations and his view of the Oslo Accords as a security move to create a political separation between Israel and the Palestinians. In addition, the examination of the Oslo Accords through securitization theory lenses provides a different angle to this historic event: not only as peace agreements and a reconciliation process with the Palestinians, but as a security move whose main goal is to curb the threat of a bi-national state, thus securing Israel's future as a Jewish and democratic state. Similar to military force, diplomacy and political agreements are also tools in the hands of the decision makers to achieve security, as the Oslo Accords well illustrate. There is no doubt that Rabin's set of considerations must have included other incentives for his decision to adopt the Oslo Accords. But viewing the Oslo Accords through securitization theory helps to focus on the main considerations before Rabin's eyes when he embraced the Oslo track, which were first and foremost to ensure the security and future of the Jewish state.

Conclusion

While military measures are the most prevalent recourse to confront security threats, non-military means such as diplomacy and the pursuit of peace are other ways in which countries can overcome existential threats. Through the prism of securitization theory, this article examines how the State of Israel, which has experienced security challenges since its establishment, tackled an existential threat

with methods of peace. Perceiving that the continued Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip poses an existential threat to the future of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, the Rabin government decided to sign agreements with the PLO, whereby a Palestinian entity would be established in those territories. Thus, by separating between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, Rabin and his government wished to securitize this imminent danger of a bi-national state. In terms of securitization theory, Rabin, who performed the role of the securitizing actor, perceived the bi-national idea as an existential threat to the State of Israel (referent object). In order to securitize this perceived danger, Rabin needed to obtain the support of the Israeli government and Knesset, which both performed the role of the audience.

Nevertheless, not everyone agreed with Rabin's securitization policy, which underscores that threats are not necessarily "real" but "perceived," as securitization theory suggests. Thus, while Rabin perceived that the agreements with the PLO were the measures needed to deal with an existential threat in the form of a bi-national state, Netanyahu asserted that these pacts themselves constituted an existential threat to the State of Israel. Eventually, this debate was decided by the audience, as at the end of the securitization process, the government and the Knesset supported Rabin's securitization policy.

This article, using a theoretical perspective of securitization theory, thus introduces a different approach to the Oslo Accords, viewing them as a security move led by Rabin to securitize the bi-national state threat. Departing from academic literature discussing Israel's national security through conventional analytical lenses, this article proposes examining decision making processes in the field of national security from the perspective of securitization theory. For example, it would be constructive to analyze other events (e.g., the Abraham Accords), from perspectives other than peace and reconciliation.

> The securitization process led by Rabin was a necessary move, to prove to the Israeli public and to the international community that Israel made an effort to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians, but above all, to counter the bi-national state threat.

In this context, while under optimal conditions the Oslo Accords could have ended in Israeli-Palestinian peace, in practice they were used by Rabin, who sought to overcome the threat of a bi-national state, as an instrument for creating a political separation, even partial, between Israel and the Palestinians. Thus despite justified claims about the failure of the Oslo process (Karsh, 2016; Schueftan, 1999), and notwithstanding its shortcomings, the securitization process led by Rabin was a necessary move, to prove to the Israeli public and to the international community that Israel made an effort to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians, but above all, to counter the bi-national state threat and secure Israel's future as a Jewish and democratic state.

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Photo: Al-Haq offices in Ramallah, November 2021. Credit: Mohamad Torokman / REUTERS

European Funding for Palestinian NGOs as Political Subcontracting

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For two decades, the European Union and individual states of Western Europe have been major funders of Palestinian NGOs, under banners of economic development, peace, and human rights. European governments together provide approximately €35 million annually to a small and largely unchanging group of selected organizations. The recipients are substantial political and economic actors, and are among the leaders of intense soft power conflict, voicing repeated allegations of fundamental Israeli wrong-doing and encouraging anti-Israel campaigns through boycotts and lawfare. This paper argues that in contrast to the formal justifications of support for independent civil society organizations, the relationship is best explained through a unique subcontracting model. The EU and West European governments provide funding and access (particularly to media and international institutions such as the UN and ICC), in return for political services from the carefully selected Palestinian NGOs. This is evidenced by a detailed examination of repeated and overlapping grants and contracts from numerous European funding frameworks to the same group of recipients, including some linked to the PFLP terror organization.

Keywords: Europe, European Union, Palestinians, civil society, NGOs, PFLP, terror

Introduction

The European Union and the individual states of Western Europe, from Finland and Sweden in the north to Italy and Spain in the south, have been and continue to be major funders of Palestinian non-governmental organizations (NGOs), under banners heralding economic development, peace, and human rights. European governments together provide approximately €35 million to these NGOs—also known as civil society organizations (CSOs)—year after year.

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This funding has weighty strategic implications, particularly for Israel, as well as for Palestinians and Europe. The recipient organizations are significant political and economic actors in the Palestinian context, and serve as important intermediaries for European government officials. From an Israeli perspective, they are among the leaders of intense soft power conflict, voicing repeated allegations of fundamental Israeli wrongdoing and encouraging anti-Israel campaigns waged through boycotts and lawfare. The decision of the International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutor to open "war crimes" investigations and the publication of a blacklist of mostly Israeli firms by the UN Human Rights Council are products of this activity.

Although European officials justify these funding policies as based on general support for civil society worldwide, an analysis of the evidence raises many questions regarding the close relationships with Palestinian NGOs, which differ significantly from other cases. These questions relate to European objectives (declared and apparent), the applicability of the "civil society" classification in the Palestinian case, and the interlocking relationships between the primary grantees and powerful political frameworks, including direct links among some of the more prominent NGOs to terror organizations.

In general, cooperation with and funding for NGOs is an important aspect of EU and Western European foreign policy, which emphasizes normative dimensions. In most cases, the processes by which governments provide NGO grants are based on periodic calls for proposals (CfPs) and detailed contracts in which the terms, objectives, and usually the recipient organizations change. In contrast, much of the funding for Palestinian NGO partners is done behind closed doors and without CfPs, and even when the CfP process is followed by EU funding mechanisms, there is very little variation in the choice of recipients or their activities. To the degree that the outcomes are evaluated after each grant cycle, this process usually relies on NGO self-reporting, and does not lead to changes. Very few, if any, of Europe's Palestinian grantees have been disqualified for lack of performance or other reasons, while the obstacles to entry for other potential applicants are formidable (Birzeit University, 2016).

In the European context, the exceptional process-related dimensions of funding for Palestinian NGOs also raise significant issues. A detailed examination reveals that EU and European budgetary support for Palestinian NGOs is channeled through at least 60 separate frameworks, in which the majority of the grants are provided to a network of approximately 20 favored organizations.[1] In most other cases of European NGO support worldwide, funding takes place through a small number of frameworks. In these, as in other aspects, the Palestinian case is unique.

In examining exceptionalities over the past 20 years, a strong pattern surfaces whereby Palestinian NGOs emerge as steady but unacknowledged subcontractors and influence-

multipliers on behalf of the EU and the individual donor governments. As demonstrated by data collected and published by NGO Monitor (a non-governmental Jerusalem based-research institute founded and headed by the author of this article), the NGOs that were funded ten, and in some cases, twenty years ago, continued, as of the end of 2020, to receive grants from the same European mechanisms, despite changing formal requirements and lack of significant impacts in advancing the officially stated objectives.

Another exceptional dimension is the degree to which many of Europe's Palestinian NGO grantees were created by or are linked to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). The PFLP is both a political framework and member of the PLO, and is designated as a terror organization by the EU, as well as the US, Canada, and Australia. For many years, these relationships were hidden, and their recent emergence has led to increased questioning.

"Civil Society" and European Foreign Policy

Analysts of modern economics and politics often divide the social order into three core sectors: government, business, and a third sector, based on civil society organizations, also known as non-governmental organizations. In theory, the structures, policies, funding, and activities of these organizations are independent of state mechanisms and political frameworks, and are therefore capable of providing independent and critical perspectives on government policies and practices (Frane, 2008; Keck & Sikkink, 1998).

In practice, however, the separation and independence is often illusory, particularly with respect to external NGOs. Western government officials develop close alliances with these groups, providing funding and blurring the fundamental distinction and boundaries between the sectors (McMahon, 2017; Steinberg & Wertman, 2018). Selected NGO partners are important sources of information and influence, particularly regarding foreign

policy issues when the operational capabilities and resources of government offices are weak. The exchange aspect, in the form of payments provided by government frameworks to the organizations in return for services, assumes central importance. In 2001, US Secretary of State Powell acknowledged this, referring to the NGOs in conflict zones that are supported by the United States as important "force multipliers" (Rieff, 2010). In contrast, European officials do not acknowledge this core factor in their close relationships with specific NGOs, even though the extent of this support, as well as the centrality of this cooperation, is far more extensive in comparison to United States activity. Instead, European policymakers, political leaders, and analysts discuss NGO partnerships in general and normative or altruistic terms as "support for civil society" and promotion of international norms (European Institute of the Mediterranean, 2020).

When NGOs depend on governmental support and work closely with their patrons, their status is inherently blurred, and they become GONGOs—government-funded NGOs (Bendell & Cox, 2006). Analyzing such relationships, Sternberg (2010) noted that "such NGOs belie the term 'non-governmental'; many are not part of civil society." The growth of foreign government funding led analysts to coin the terms FONGO or FFUNGO (foreign funded NGOs) (Dupuy et al., 2015). In these cases, the presumed independence of the recipients is clearly compromised. One prominent example is Russia's widespread use of NGOs to promote its interests on a number of issues, including vis-à-vis the European Union (AALEP, 2016).

The problematic nature of European dependence on foreign NGOs is discussed to some degree by McMahon (2017) in her examination of the European Union's extensive support for NGOs in the Balkan conflicts in the 1990s. During this period the EU and other European government frameworks funneled millions into organizations, based on the belief in their "transformative power"

and expectations that they would play a major role in ending violence, providing humanitarian aid, and advancing democratic norms. A dedicated industry arose to prepare proposals and develop personal contacts in order to access the large sums, with little or no oversight. McMahon showed that the processes were fundamentally flawed, with numerous dysfunctionalities, including funding for NGOs that had disappeared.

Europe's Palestinian NGO Subcontractors

The European relationships with favored Palestinian NGOs are significantly more extensive than in the case of the Balkans, involving long periods (often 20 years or more) of repeat grants, close cooperation, and much higher budgets. The centrality of these NGOs in European policy is expressed in numerous official reports. For example, a publication titled "Evaluation of the European Union's Cooperation with the occupied Palestinian territory and support to the Palestinian people: 2008-2013" includes over 200 references to civil society, and cites numerous meetings with NGO officials (European Commission, 2014).

> The areas under Palestinian control lack the basic criteria necessary for civil society to function—specifically, free speech, unimpaired criticism, transparency, and accountability.

References to "independent" Palestinian civil society and the justifications for the extraordinary relationships with these organizations are highly problematic. The areas under Palestinian control lack the basic criteria necessary for civil society to function—specifically, free speech, unimpaired criticism, transparency, and accountability. The PLO and the Palestinian Authority keep tight control over political activities and organizations, and only those with the necessary connections are able to function and to receive foreign money (Muslih, 1993; Shafi, 2004; Feith, 2021). Most of the main Palestinian NGOs repeatedly funded by European governments are controlled by or closely tied to powerful political factions—for example, Miftah is headed by Hanan Ashrawi, a former PLO minister and member of the Fatah leadership, and others are linked to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). A top leader of ARIJ (the Applied Research Institute Jerusalem) has also served as a minister in the Palestinian Authority. Thus, they are far from independent actors, and use of the term "civil society" or NGO in this context, and the European claim that funding policies derive from normative factors, is artificial.

Instead, the close European ties to approximately 20 favored NGOs are more accurately described in terms of an extensive subcontractor framework, reflecting three essential elements:

a. Cooperation toward shared concrete project and policy objectives (in contrast to claims of disinterested and altruistic support for civil society)

b. A hierarchical structure and division of labor in which the stronger actors (European governments) take the lead and provide the funds, and the others (Palestinian NGOs) provide important services

c. Regular, contractually-based payments from the primary policymakers to the subcontractors.

Although European decision making processes on NGO funding are tightly-held secrets, the substantive, as distinct from declaratory, objectives can be inferred from government documents, project descriptions, and interests. For EU and Western European officials, involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian arena and negotiation efforts is a central priority. The EU has a coordinator for the Middle East peace process, participates in the Quartet, and competes with the US for visibility and influence. The extensive NGO subcontractor relationship assists in these and other objectives.

The selection of specific NGOs is also consistent with European political priorities, which emphasize the importance of playing a major part in the conflict and in peacemaking efforts. In the 1980s, in response to the central role of the US in the Egyptian-Israeli peace process, the EEC adopted the 1980 Venice Declaration, which called for a PLO-controlled Palestinian state, based on the pre-1967 lines, with its capital in East Jerusalem, and leading to peace (Pardo & Peters, 2009; Hollis, 2013; Tovias, 2021). Numerous EU documents declare the objective of "a two-state solution with an independent, democratic, viable and contiguous Palestinian state" (European Union, 2021). To promote this vision, European officials and analysts emphasize symmetry or power balance, apply pressure on Israel, particularly by condemning settlement construction and other activities as violations of international law, joined by accusations of disproportionality in response to attacks from Gaza and similar claims. Europe's main NGO partners have parallel agendas and reinforce this objective.

Furthermore, although Europe's direct leverage in pressuring Israel is very limited, compared to the US, through close cooperation with NGO partners, the EU and individual European states are able to increase their visibility and impact. For example, the process (2016-2020) whereby the UN Human Rights Council published a database of Israeli and other companies accused of illegally doing business in the OPT ("occupied Palestinian territories") involved major roles for the NGOs supported by Europe. The same organizations were largely behind the EU's adoption of product-labeling regulations for the territories. Similarly, Germany and others have officially opposed the decision by the prosecutor of the ICC to open "war crimes" investigations of Israelis, but are among the main funders of the Palestinian NGOs most active internationally in supporting this effort (NGO Monitor, 2019). On these issues, the EU and the governments have generally kept an official low profile, while the NGOs take the lead.

In these soft power processes, the NGOs act as important European foreign policy subcontractors. The grantees—including those involved in agriculture, health, human rights, and education—are very active in lobbying for agendas consistent with the dominant Palestinian political narrative. While the key role of the European patrons is hidden, case studies document the significance of NGO influence on Israeli-Palestinian issues through media campaigns, lobbying efforts with members of parliament, and international institutions (Bicchi, 2013; Voltolini, 2015; Steinberg, 2016). If European officials provide direct support for boycotts of Israeli cultural institutions, universities, or sports teams, or for lobbying the ICC to open war crimes investigations of Israelis, this would be considered blatant interference and a violation of the general rules of sovereignty. Instead, they quietly fund influential Palestinian political advocacy NGOs in order to promote these policies, and when confronted occasionally by Israeli officials, claim that the civil society organizations funded by Europe set their own agenda and act independently (European Parliament, 2015; Winer & Ahren, 2018).

The EU's diplomatic delegation in Ramallah (EUREP) highlights frequent NGO consultations, including in "EU/PA sub-committees, which take place every year in six different domains." The organizations are involved with "all main EU programming exercises," including "Call for Proposals priorities"—meaning that grant recipients also make decisions on the allocations of funds (European Commission, 2014). EU documents, reports, and "action plans in favour of Palestine" specify numerous objectives to be carried out in cooperation with Palestinian NGOs that promote joint European/Palestinian policies in Area C, lawfare initiatives couched in terms of "supporting human rights defenders and human rights organisations and their advocacy at different levels," and similar efforts (European Commission, 2018). The contracts between individual countries

and their NGO grantees specify joint objectives such as providing support to Palestinian "detainees and prisoners." Shortly after the US recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital in 2017 and then relocated the embassy, EU grants to NGOs began to specify projects on the "urgent need to preserve the Palestinian identity of EJ (East Jerusalem)" and to "protect Islamic and Christian Waqf religious and cultural heritage properties against Israeli violations and threats" (NGO Monitor, 2020e).

The third element in the subcontracting structure is based on regular European funding of approximately 20 favored Palestinian NGOs, compared to the 135 members of the PNGO umbrella organization, and more than 1000 organizations registered with the Palestinian National Authority's Interior Ministry (2021). As data published by NGO Monitor demonstrate, the core group is supported through multiple European state sources (horizontal clustering). Furthermore, this pattern is repeated across funding cycles, and the recipients are dependent on these state donors for salaries and basic operational costs extending over many years (vertical clustering). The relevant decision making and evaluation processes are tightly-kept secrets, preventing substantive and independent oversight.

The clustering resulting from NGO subcontracting is facilitated by the fact that these organizations possess the wherewithal to navigate the complex application process. Preparing applications requires the services of lawyers and accountants, as well as the submission of numerous official forms, which, in the context of the West Bank and Gaza, require major investment of professional resources (EuropeAid, 2014). The working relationships between the NGO leaders and their European patrons reinforce these advantages, and the top officials among the grantees are portrayed by Palestinian analysts as forming a privileged elite (in large part due to their disproportionately high salaries) (Jamal, 2007).

The limited available information also indicates a high level of dependency by this group of Palestinian NGOs and their funders. In the case of Hanan Ashrawi's Miftah organization, as of 2018, European government frameworks provided approximately 90 percent of the total annual budget, of which approximately one-third is from the EU (Miftah, 2019). Al Mezan received about half of its income from European governments—of which the largest source is also the EU, accounting for about 20 percent.[2] This too is consistent with a subcontractor relationship.

Evolution of European Funding Frameworks for Palestinian NGOs

Evidence of the close relationships between leaders of Palestinian NGOs and their European patrons begins in the 1980s, with the development of support groups among church leaders and activists, including academics, in a number of countries. In the Netherlands, the influential leaders of Pax Christi, Novib (later Oxfam Novib), and the Palestine Committee (often with overlapping memberships) organized events and arranged for delegations to travel and meet with academics and others associated with Fatah and the PFLP. These events, presented as promoting peace and economic development, were funded by branches of the Dutch government, and nurtured close personal relationships with political figures and government officials.

Encouraged by the Europeans, the Palestinians formed NGOs in order to facilitate the funding process and to enhance the political impact. A number of their European allies were elected to political positions and appointed as government officials, where they directly influenced funding (Siebelt, 2017). Similar strategies were documented for Switzerland, Germany, Sweden, and other countries (Rickenbacher, 2017). This process gradually evolved into the deeply ingrained support for the Palestinian NGOs involving tens of millions

of euros annually, and in which the grantees became subcontractors for state officials and policymakers.

Influenced by Netherlands officials, large scale and systematic EU funding for Palestinian organizations began in the late 1990s. The 1995 Euro-Mediterranean (Euro-Med) Conference created a framework for supporting "like minded" NGOs to further "rapprochement between peoples" through "exchanges between civil society" (Union for the Mediterrenean, 2020). The Partnership for Peace (PfP) mechanism provided between €5 and €10 million annually. (In 2016, the PfP became a project of the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) and was renamed as the EU Peacebuilding Initiative.) Formally, grants to NGOs required cooperation with Israeli organizations, but very few of the projects involved actual cooperation, as the Palestinian NGOs oppose normalization with Israelis, and the EU largely accepted this stipulation (Quer, 2020). An internal EU document acknowledged that the PfP effort was hampered by "non-normalization movements and lack of acceptance of Cooperation with Israel" (European Commission, 2014). However, in this as in many other instances involvng support for and close cooperation with Palestinian NGOs, funding continued without interruption, suggesting that the official objectives are not central to these relationships.

In addition to the PfP, which is specific to the Israeli-Palestinian issue, the EU operates six generalized NGO funding mechanisms, including the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) and the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) (Table 1). These seven frameworks provide repeated and often overlapping funding to a largely unchanging group of Palestinian NGOs.

In parallel, the individual West European countries established separate NGO funding mechanisms active in supporting Palestinian organizations (Table 2). There are approximately 60 such frameworks in the EU and 13 countries,

including Norway and Switzerland (although outside the EU, they follow very similar policies). They are managed by the national Foreign Ministries and by aid agencies, such as SIDA (Sweden), NORAD (Norway), Irish Aid, the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), and ECHO in the EU. In addition, church-based organizations in these countries receive large budgets from the state in order to provide aid (Pax Christi and ICCO, Netherlands; Christian Aid, UK; DanChurchAid, Denmark, and so on), and considerable amounts are provided to the Palestinian NGOs.

Table 1. EU Funding Frameworks for Palestinian NGOs

1	Partnership for Peace (PfP)
2	European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR)
3	Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP)
4	European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI)
5	Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI)
6	Department for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO)
7	European Endowment for Democracy (EED)

Furthermore, in Germany, political foundations associated with the different parties that receive federal budgets also support these NGOs. Specialized frameworks in the Netherlands, UK, and Belgium, such as Oxfam Novib, Oxfam GB, and Oxfam Solidarité, and Norwegian People Aid (NPA "the labour movement's humanitarian organization for solidarity") are additional mechanisms that often fund the same group of approximately 20 Palestinian NGOs. In examining the available data, there is no substantial evidence of a division of labor, or specializations among the different funding frameworks, even within the same country (other than the short-lived and failed pooled mechanisms involving four European nations, and managed by the Palestinian grantees themselves) (Steinberg, 2020). This plethora of state-based funding mechanisms for Palestinian

Table 2. European State Funding Mechanisms for Palestinian NGOs

Country	Main NGO Funding Frameworks	State-Funded Church and other Aid Groups	Pooled Funding Frameworks
Belgium	Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation	Broederlijk Delen	
Denmark	Danida (Danish International Development Agency)	Dan Church Aid	HR/IHL Secretariat (ended 2017)
Finland	MFA	Finn Church Aid	
France	AFD (French Development Agency)	Comité catholique contre la faim et pour le développement (CCFD-Terre Solidaire) (5% of budget from state)	NDC
Germany*	BMZ (Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development) GIZ (Corporation for International Cooperation) AA (Foreign Office) ZFD (Civil Peace Service) Political Foundations (Stiftungen)	Misereor (Catholic) Brot fuer die Welt—EED (Protestant)	
Ireland	Irish Aid	Trocaire Christian Aid Ireland	
Italy	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation	Associazione Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII	
Netherlands	MFA	ICCO, OXFAMNovib	HR/IHL Secretariat (ended 2017), NDC
Norway	NORAD Norwegian Refugee Council Norwegian People's Aid	Norwegian Church Aid	
Spain	AECID; regional NGO funding agencies		
Sweden	SIDA	Church of Sweden Diakonia	HR/IHL Secretariat (ended 2017), NDC
Switzerland	EDA (MFA); Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC)	HEKS	HR/IHL Secretariat (ended 2017)
UK	Department for International Development (DFID); Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)	Christian Aid CAFOD OXFAM-GB	

* On Germany, see NGO Monitor

(and in some cases, also Israeli) NGOs, and the concentration of contracts and grants among a small number of recipient organizations, has no parallel, including in other conflict areas, such as the Balkans.

20 Years of NGO Subcontracting: Empirical Analysis

The primary European NGO frameworks, including those with the largest budgets involving the most influential organizations, do not publish and appear not to possess systematic and comprehensive information on funding for Palestinian NGOs.[3] Amounts, time frames, and project titles for individual grants are often posted in different forms (except for those that remain hidden), but NGO funding databases, such as the periodic reports from the PfP and EIDHR mechanisms, or the European Commission's recent online FTS (Financial Transparency System) do not aggregate the totals. In addition, most Palestinian NGOs that receive European funds do not publish annual financial reports with this information.

Therefore, in order to discern broader funding patterns across the different organizations and over multiple years and analyze their combined political impacts, NGO Monitor collected and cross-referenced this information from all the relevant actors and sources. The data, organized in the tables presented below, highlights the intensity and the subcontracting dimensions of these relationships between European governments and a small group of Palestinian NGOs, and provides the empirical foundation for this analysis.

Overall, among the various mechanisms, the EU's seven frameworks have provided the largest aggregate funding, with grants of between one and three years, in amounts of up to several million euros. Table 3 presents the available information on the 12 Palestinian organizations that have received the greatest levels of support between 2008 and 2018.

Of particular importance is the prevalence of repeat recipients (vertical clustering), with

multiple and often overlapping contracts involving a small group of favored organizations. While such clustering and a few overlapping grants can be found among the hundreds of annual EU contracts with NGOs worldwide, the extent in the Palestinian case is far greater. For example, ARIJ, in partnership with the Land Research Center (LRC), received a grant from the EU in 1999, and continued to be a major recipient for most or all of the next twenty years, via three separate EU bodies (ENI, PfP, and EIDHR). The Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC), Defence for Children Palestine (DCIP), Al-Dameer, and Miftah were funded by EIDHR in most of the years between 2008 and 2018. (The information is incomplete and it is likely that the EU funding for these NGOs was continuous.) The PNGO umbrella group that coordinates policies for 135 NGO members (as of January 2020) and negotiates with the EU on funding contracts, including attempts to add clauses that would prevent support for groups linked to organizations on European terror lists such as the PFLP (Jewish News Service, 2019), also receives EIDHR support.

For long-term subcontracting (including the political dimension suggested in this analysis), repeat grants to the same organization over many years is easier bureaucratically and more efficient than a rapid turnover, and fosters close cooperation between the European officials and the heads of the Palestinian NGOs. Both sides know what is expected of the other and function according to their experience and these expectations. If the European donors were simply providing altruistic assistance to Palestinian civil society, rather than a quid pro quo, these factors would be irrelevant.

All twelve of the core EU grantees listed in Table 3 are centrally involved in advocacy to strengthen the Palestinian position and weaken Israel (ostensibly in order to promote negotiations), as reflected in the project objectives, thus highlighting the policy dimension of the relationship. For example, in 2017, DCIP (which is linked to the PFLP,

Table 3. EU Funding for 12 Palestinian NGOs (2008-2018)

NGO Grantee	EU Mechanism	Years	Amount
Al-Dameer*	EIDHR	2016-19	€446,482
		2014-15	€100,707
		2008-10	€355,882
Al-Haq*	EIDHR	2017-20	€296,600
Al Mezan*	EIDHR	2017-20	€449,997
Applied Research Institute Jerusalem (ARIJ)	ENI	2019	$1,485,673
		2018	$1175741
		2017	$1116195
		2015	$480658
	EIDHR	2015	$480658
	PfP	2009 - 11	$374175
Defense for Children International—Palestine (DCIP)*	EIDHR	2019-20	€ 732,477
		2017	€ 961,298
		2009-12	€ 600,000
	ENI	2017	€ 699,236
Health Work Committees (HWC)*	ENI	2017	€699,236
JLAC		2019	$154,235
		2017	$386331
		2016	$639,654
Miftah	EIDHR	2017-20	€300,000
		2010	$79,906
		2008	$100,531
Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR)*	**	2017	€164,000
	EIDHR	2005	€293,225
Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO)*	EIDHR	2016-19	€446,485
		2017-20	€261,914
Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC)*	ENI (€3.6 m) and 4 DCI contracts (€14.7 m)	2011-17	€18,300,100
UPWC*	ENI	2017-2019	€ 699,236

*   Linked to PFLP
**   Indirect EU funding via grant to the Norwegian Refugee Council
Source: Based on EC documents and NGO reports as compiled and published by NGO Monitor

as detailed below) received a total of €1.7 million from two separate EU mechanisms. ENI allocated €699,236 for "Strengthening Community Resilience and Social Cohesion in East Jerusalem on Both Sides of the Separation Wall" (in partnership with a political NGO based in the Basque region that promotes the Palestinian narrative). At the same time frame, EIDHR signed a €981,298 contract with DCIP for

"Prevention, Mitigation and Rehabilitation for Palestinian Children Exposed to Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment." Although phrased in normative terminology, both contracts advance clear political objectives, promoted by the Palestinian NGO as a stand-in or substitute for the European officials.

The fact that in this, as in other cases, the Palestinian NGO received overlapping grants

Table 4. Vertical Clustering: 5 or More Confirmed Years of Funding (2005-2020)

	Addameer*	Al-Dameer*	Al-Haq*	Al Mezan*	ARIJ	BADIL	DCIP*	HWC*	Miftah	PCHR*	PNGO	UAWC*
EU	–	7	–		7	–	6	–	6	–	5	7
Belgium	–	–	–	–	–	–	5	–	–	–	–	–
Denmark	7	7	11	10	–	11	11	–	6	11	6	–
France	–		–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Germany	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	6	–	–	–
Ireland	6	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	5	–	–	–
Italy	–	–	–	–	–	–	6	–	–	–	–	–
Netherlands	7	7	7	7	–	7	11		6	7	6	9
Norway	–	–	5	–	–	–	–	–	6	5	–	–
Spain	6	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Sweden	8	7	11	10	–	10	11	5	6	10	6	–
Switzerland	8	9	11	10	–	10	11	–	6	12	8	–

* Linked to PFLP
Source: Based on country documents and NGO reports as compiled and published by NGO Monitor

(known as double dipping) highlights the importance of these groups for EU policymakers. In addition, the absence of published evaluations of these projects, and the prior funding for DCIP under numerous project titles, suggests that the expenditure and implementation details are facades of no importance. As the evaluations posted by NGO Monitor demonstrate, DCIP's activities are largely constant from year to year and project to project—the details are irrelevant (NGO Monitor, 2020a).

Similarly, in 2019, ARIJ received two large EU grants; one for a political advocacy project labeled "Towards better promotion and protection of human rights in Area C and Gaza Strip" (€649,998) and the other for "Assessing the impediments before the two-state solution" (€700,000). Descriptions of both projects are very general, with no tangible and measurable results. As reflected in these and other project descriptions, ARIJ is a highly politicized NGO consistently involved in numerous high-profile campaigns related to Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. These details are consistent with the thesis that the EU funding for

specific NGOs is a generalized form of political subcontracting.

The data also demonstrates that the EU's pattern of large-scale and repeat funding for and cooperation with a small number of Palestinian NGOs is characteristic of the policies of the individual West European countries. As reflected in Table 4, the countries have their favored NGO subcontractors—in some cases, one or two that receive multiple grants over many years, and in others, up to nine or ten, with considerable overlap between many of the recipients. As in the EU, there are also examples of overlapping contracts to the same NGO, such as Belgium government funding (through Viva Salud and Oxfam Solidarité) of the United Health Workers Committees (UHWC).

In summary, the pattern of repeat grants from different frameworks to a small group of Palestinian NGOs reflects the dominant subcontractor relationships, in which the grantees work closely with their patrons to promote political objectives, in contrast to altruistic assistance to independent civil society organizations.

The Terror Links of Core European NGO Partners

Evidence gradually surfaced indicating that many of the Palestinian NGO partners and grantees with the largest and most frequent European grants are linked to and headed by officials from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), including some that are formal affiliates (USAID, 1993; NGO Monitor, 2020c; Israel PMO, 2019).

Many of the Palestinian NGO partners and grantees with the largest and most frequent European grants are linked to and headed by officials from the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a terror organization prohibited from operating or raising funds in the EU, the US, Israel, Canada, Australia, and elsewhere.

The PFLP is a constituent group in the PLO structure, and following a series of major attacks over many years, was listed as a terror organization prohibited from operating or raising funds in the EU, the US, Israel, Canada, Australia, and elsewhere. (Levitt, 2021) The associated network consists of two types of NGOs: one group highlights agendas in the realm of human rights (such as Al-Haq, Addameer, Al-Dameer, PCHR, Al Mezan, and DCIP), and another group takes the form of economic and social frameworks—Union of Agricultural Workers Committees (UAWC), Health Workers Committees (HWC), Union of Palestinian Women's Committees (UPWC)—as well as the PNGO framework (NGO Monitor, 2020c).

Although these NGOs do not highlight this affiliation, the details are readily available from public sources. According to research published by NGO Monitor, as of September 2021, 74 officials from ten NGOs were identified as PFLP members, including a number that have been arrested, tried, and convicted in Israeli courts for involvement in terror-related activities (Harkov, 2021). The Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR), based in Gaza, is headed by Raji Sourani, a convicted PFLP member whose role is celebrated by the terror group, as seen in a February 2014 award ceremony attended by members of the PFLP central committee. These ties are also demonstrated in many other sources. In addition, the Deputy Head of the PCHR Board, Jaber Wishah, commanded the PFLP's military force in Gaza, and in 1985 was sentenced to life imprisonment for involvement in terror attacks (he was released in 1999), according to Hebrew and Arabic-language media (NGO Monitor, 2020b).

In the Health Workers Committee (HWC), which is funded by the EU, Sweden, Belgium, and other European mechanisms, finance and administration manager Walid Hanatsheh is identified on social media posts as a PFLP leader (NGO Monitor, 2021b). He was arrested and is on trial for commanding the PFLP cell that detonated the bomb that killed Rina Shnerb in August 2019. Five additional HWC officials—general director Shatah Odeh; accountant Tayseer Abu Sharbak; Said Abdat, previously HWC accountant; Amro Hamouda, the former head of HWC purchasing; and Hoani Rishmawi, responsible for HWC fundraising in Europe—were arrested for "using fraud and deception in many European countries in order to receive large-scale financing worth millions of Euros" which was diverted to the PFLP. According to the Israel Security Agency, the diversion included "reporting fictitious projects, presenting false documents, forgery and inflating invoices and receipts…forging bank documents and bank seals," and other methods (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2021; Levitt, 2021).

Similarly, DCIP has included a number of PFLP members. Some have been tried and convicted for involvement in terror attacks. Hashem Abu Maria (killed in 2014 during a violent confrontation) was acknowledged by the PFLP as a leader and "true revolutionary comrade" who participated in "the national liberation struggle and the PFLP from an early age, arrested several times, and was a model
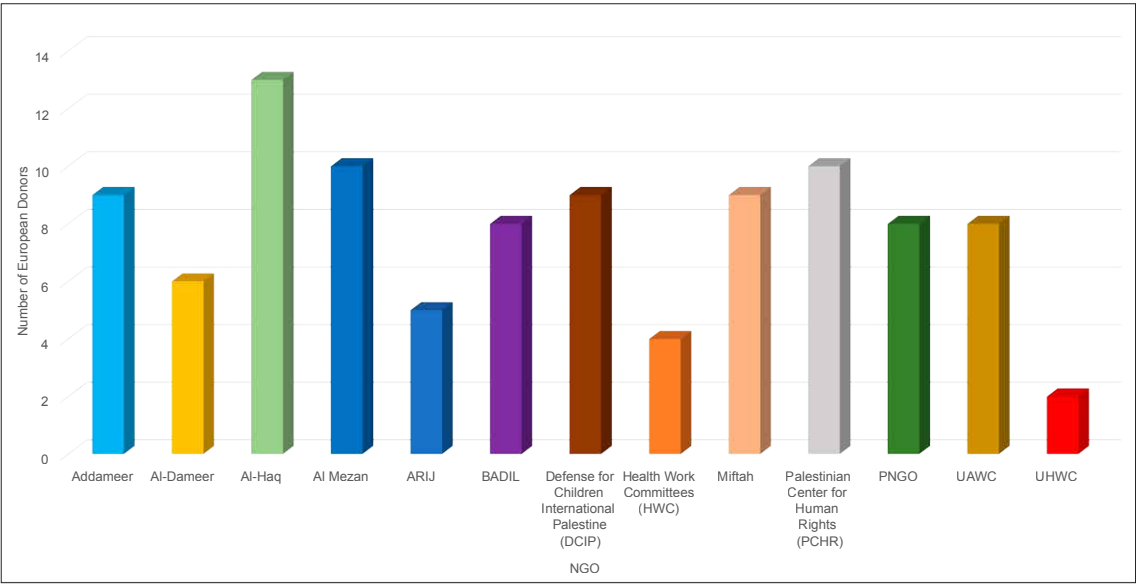
Figure 1. Horizontal Clustering in European Funding for Palestinian NGOs

for a steadfast struggler and advocate for the rights of our people through his work in Defence for Children International." Other officials have participated in PFLP events, marked by the flags of the organization and indicating active involvement. Riyad Arar, Director of DCIP's Child Protection Program and coordinator of cooperation with UNICEF on "monitoring human rights violations" addressed a 2014 PFLP event in memory of Abu Maria. Nassar Ibrahim, previously president of DCIP's General Assembly and a board member, is the former editor of *al-Hadaf*, the PFLP's publication, and a frequent participant in the organization's events. A December 2015 video shows Ibrahim praising the "right of resistance" and declaring, "The balance of power to the ground will not be changed by negotiation…only by resistance" (NGO Monitor, 2020a).

Shawan Jabarin, who heads Al-Haq, was convicted in the 1980s for arranging PFLP training, and again in 1994 for continued involvement with the PFLP. He has been barred at times from leaving Israel, as affirmed by the Israeli Supreme Court. (Jabarin is also a member of Human Rights Watch's Middle East Advisory Board, and Secretary General of the Paris-based International Federation of Human Rights.) The decision declared that he was "acting as

a manner of Doctor Jekyll and Mister Hyde, acting some of the time as the CEO of a human rights organization, and at other times as an activist in a terror organization" (High Court of Justice, 2007).

These PFLP/NGO officials have extensive connections with influential European government officials dealing with Middle East and human rights and international aid issues, including funding (Welchman, 2021). The PFLP is based in the Palestinian Christian community, and their European contacts began through Pax Christi and similar church frameworks (Rabbani, 1994). Based on these links, NGOs such as Al-Haq and DCIP began to receive funds from the Netherlands and other countries for conferences and related events (Siebelt, 2017). The structured subcontracting relationships and accompanying grants expanded to other countries and to the EU (horizontal clustering). In the period from 2005 to 2020, Al-Haq received funds from at least 13 governments; PCHR and Al Mezan from ten, and for DCIP, nine mechanisms are known (Figure 1).

In most cases, as shown in Table 4, the contracts are also repetitive (vertical clustering). For example, Norway has supported Al-Haq in most of the years since 2007, and the Dutch Foreign Ministry has funded DCIP since 2008.

As demonstrated in Figure 1 and Table 4, the relationships with these NGOs are also characterized by repeat grants over many funding cycles (vertical clustering). The amounts received by the PFLP network of NGOs from their European patrons reflect the importance of these connections. Between 2011 and 2019, the EU alone provided at least €38 million to the PFLP NGO network, and the overall European funding is estimated at €200 million (NGO Monitor, 2020d; 2021a).

In addition to salary payments, European support enables the organizations to hold events, organize press briefings, and publish numerous reports targeting Israel. Leaders of Al-Haq, PCHR, Addameer, Al-Dameer and Al Mezan visited The Hague to meet with ICC officials and held widely publicized events promoting allegations of Israeli war crimes and human rights violations (NGO Monitor, 2019). Funding specifically for this purpose comes from the EU, Germany, Ireland, Switzerland, Norway, and the Netherlands (Table 5). For example, Addameer and Al-Dameer received grants from the Swiss government in 2018 for preparing "follow up for the submission to the ICC" (Swiss Confederation, 2018). The NGOs have a similar agenda in the UN Human Rights Council, including submission of reports and sponsorship of side events during Council meetings.

Table 5. European Funding for NGOs Promoting ICC Investigations, 2016-2020

Donor	NGO	Amount	Year(s)	Brief Project Description
	Al-Dameer	€450,000	2016-19	Contributing to the respect, protection, and promotion of the right to association in the Gaza
	Al-Haq	€300,000	2017-20	Righting the Wrong: "empowering Palestinian civil society to promote effective reporting and implementation on international rights instruments Palestine acceded to in 2014"
EU	Al Mezan	€450,000	2017-20	"Strengthening monitoring, protection and rehabilitation of civilians victimized by, or at risk of, human rights and IHL violations in Gaza with relation to access restricted area and torture"
Germany	PCHR	€340,000	2017	General support
Ireland	PCHR	€80,000	2017	General support
Italy	Al-Haq	€1,190,000	2018-20	Land and Rights—Paths of social and solidarity economy in Palestine
Netherlands	Al Mezan	€200,000	2018	Bilateral support
Norway	Al-Haq	NOK 2,000,000	2018	Supporting monitoring and documentation of human rights violations
	Addameer	CHF 120,000	2018	Protection of the rights of Palestinian political prisoners in Israel
	Al-Dameer	CHF 77,221	2017-19	Promoting the right to freedom of association and the prohibition of torture in Gaza
Switzerland	PCHR	CHF 280,000	2018	Gaza Strip: protecting human rights, promoting the rule of law and respecting democratic principles

The evidence linking European NGO grantees and the PFLP was raised in a 2018 publication of the Israeli Ministry of Strategic Affairs, accompanied by a letter to EU Vice President Mogherini. In her response, Mogherini rejected the claims, labeling the report as "disinformation," but did not cite any details (Winer & Ahren, 2018). Following the 2019 arrest of NGO officials, including from UAWC and HWC, European journalists and members of parliament in the Netherlands, Belgium, and the EU raised the issues. However, European officials continued to reject the Israeli evidence as sufficient to tie the NGOs definitely to terror attacks (Harkov, 2020). This blanket rejection was repeated in May 2021, after the Israeli Ministry of Defense published a detailed charge sheet and gave detailed briefings on the diversion of funding by employees of the Health Workers Committees. Shortly afterwards, a Belgium minister declared, giving no details, that an investigation had been conducted and "no concrete evidence" was uncovered (Bové, 2021).

An exception to the European non-engagement strategy on support for terror-linked NGOs occurred in May 2020, when EU Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement Olivér Várhelyi (from Hungary) ordered an internal review of potential terror ties among Palestinian NGO grantees (as of September 2021, this review had not been completed) (Varheyli, 2020). And in 2021, the Budget Committee of the European Parliament directed the Commission to "thoroughly verify the use of Union funds by third entities, their affiliates, and/or natural persons to ensure that no funds are allocated or linked to any cause or form of terrorism and/or religious and political radicalisation; and to ensure that these Union funds are proactively recovered, and recipients involved are excluded from future Union funding" (European Parliament, 2021). Furthermore, the EU's anti-fraud watchdog (OLAF) is reported to have opened an investigation (Kaag, 2021).

As European officials had noted, although individuals were arrested for their roles in the PFLP, the activities of these NGOs were not restricted in Israel, notwithstanding the allegations of terror links. This changed on October 22, 2021, when the Ministry of Defense formally designated six organizations, Al-Haq, DCIP, UAWC, UPWC, Bisan, and Addameer, as linked to the PFLP terror framework (Israel Ministry of Defense, 2021). According to the declaration, the organizations "received large sums of money from European countries and international organizations, using a variety of forgery and deceit ways." (HWC had been previously designated as such in 2015.) This decision was apparently motivated by the 2019 attack on Rina Shnerb and other recent PFLP terror attacks, and the central roles of the NGO officials, as well as alleged diversion of funding from the NGOs.

The Israeli government did not publish details or name the individuals involved, as highlighted by officials of the European government as well as the NGO and allies, but as noted, these details are widely available. As before, the immediate response of European officials was to defend their policies and assert that the Israeli government had failed to provide additional evidence of these links. Speaking in Jerusalem, Irish Foreign Minister Coveney declared, "I don't believe the international community has been given the evidence to show that these six NGOs are contributing to terrorism" (Weiss, 2021). Coveney also repeated the European claim, not backed by evidence, that "we know where Irish money is spent, and ensur[e] that it is not spent inappropriately and certainly in the context of terrorism." The impact of these developments on funding for Palestinian NGOs and the wider subcontractor relationship remains to be seen.

NGO Subcontracting and Secrecy

From the beginning, many of the details related to European links to funding for Palestinian NGOs were hidden in extraordinary secrecy.

For many years, no reports or evaluations were made public, and there were no government presentations, debates in parliament, or oversight. The only publicly available document on the EU NGO grant-making process is a partially leaked protocol from a 1999 EU meeting on grantees and projects (European Commission, 1999). The extraordinary and extreme secrecy highlights the anomalous nature of funding for Palestinian NGOs and the importance attached to protecting the relationships from external scrutiny.

Officials offer various justifications in denying freedom of information (FOI) requests for the relevant documents (often after long delays). These include "danger to public security," privacy, and proprietary (commercial) factors. As a result, members of parliament, journalists, researchers, and others are unable to examine the funding processes independently. Potential conflicts of interests cannot be investigated, such as personal connections between government officials and the NGO. A 2014 EC report acknowledged concerns regarding "a significant level of corruption through 'easy to get funds,' lack of monitoring and poor results," but these concerns did not affect policy (European Commission, 2014). The 2021 decision by OLAF to open an investigation could lead to a major change in these policies, although this process is also conducted behind closed doors.

On occasion, members of parliament, including MEPs, have highlighted and criticized this extreme secrecy (European Parliament, 2010; Van Buitenen, 2008). The EC's responses ignored the questions and did not provide the requested information. Regarding evaluations, EC Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner made a vague statement that the EC ensures "regular monitoring of [NGO] projects" through annual external checks performed by a "team mandated by headquarters," and "ad hoc specific evaluations." She also declared that PfP grantees were "pro peace, pro dialogue, pro mutual understanding," and that the evaluations concluded that the funding "was appropriate and produced positive results," but documents, if any, to support these claims remain hidden (European Parliament, 2006). In many cases, not limited to the Palestinian NGOs funded by Europe, donors rely on self-reporting by the recipient organizations, and lack the resources to examine these reports independently. This is especially true in closed societies where outsiders in particular are unable to trace the use of donor funds.

As a general practice, and without referencing the specific Palestinian NGO case, the absence of NGO funding transparency was addressed in a special report of the European Court of Auditors (ECA) from December 2018. According to the ECA, the EU "was not sufficiently transparent regarding the implementation of EU funds by NGOs" and "does not have comprehensive information on all NGOs supported" by taxpayer funds. In the case of Palestinian NGO funding, this is particularly severe (European Court of Auditors, 2018). A single official based in the Representative office for the Palestinians in Jerusalem is charged with evaluations, among other duties. As noted in an EU report, this office "is critically understaffed and has very limited resources (one person) for supporting the demanding process of dialogue and development of partnerships with Civil Society… without adequate resources to support the process across sectors and Sections, particularly for governance" (European Commission, 2014). The implications of this secrecy and lack of independent oversight were increasingly highlighted as the European funding for PFLP-linked NGOs became the focus of the Israeli government designations.

Analysis

For over 20 years, the close relationships between European governments and a small group of Palestinian NGOs with unified political agendas highlight the role of these groups as policy subcontractors. The funding provided by approximately 60 distinct EU and European state

frameworks to Palestinian NGOs is characterized by repeat grants for the same recipients and clusters, year after year, despite changing circumstances. The absence of transparency means that decisions involving millions of euros are taken in frameworks that systematically lack (perhaps deliberately) the resources necessary to examine the NGO applicants independently. The official claim that funding is provided "for specific projects and well defined actions" and not for the NGOs is inconsistent with the facts (European Parliament, 2013).

The detailed analysis of European funding for Palestinian NGOs in this study highlights the frequency of repeat grants (vertical clustering), and the long-term subcontracting relationships. This process is reinforced by reliance on the self-reporting of the grantees themselves. A 2014 EU document on aid to the Palestinians (Evaluation of the European Union's Cooperation with the occupied Palestinian territory and support to the Palestinian people) includes numerous references to "interviews with Civil Society" officials, including Al-Haq and PCHR (European Commission, 2014). In evaluation interviews, officials claim great success in meeting the requirements specified in the contracts, thereby justifying funding in the next cycle, and so forth, indefinitely.

In addition to the repeat grants, European funding for Palestinian NGOs is characterized by horizontal or lateral clustering and reinforcement across different donor frameworks, so that "favored" recipients in the EU or a specific country leverage these relationships in order to gain additional funding at the same time from the other frameworks. After receiving funding from the EU beginning in 1999, ARIJ/LRC succeeded in gaining support from the governments of Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Switzerland (individually and through the NDC between 2009 and 2013). Al-Haq's grants from Norway in 2007 were followed by funding from at least seven other frameworks, including Ireland, Germany, Italy, and the EU. In addition, funding for the UAWC expanded

from the EU in 2011 to the Netherlands in 2013, and then France, Germany, Italy, Norway, and the Andalucia regional government in Spain. Over the years, Miftah has been supported by 14 different European government frameworks, including three from Germany, as well as two in the UK and two in Ireland. Many of the other Palestinian NGO recipients of European funds draw on five, six, or seven different funders, highlighting the lack of diversity, and suggesting that in their policies, officials from the European frameworks "follow the leader" or reflect a process of group think in decision making.

Counterproductive Political Impacts of European NGO Subcontracting

The Palestinian NGOs supported by the European governments play a central role in promoting soft-power confrontations with Israel in the context of the conflict, including boycotts and allegations of violations in the realms of human rights and international law (lawfare) centered on the International Criminal Court. The most frequent grantees such as Al-Haq, PCHR, Addameer, Al-Dameer, DCIP, and ARIJ are particularly active in these advocacy agendas across a wide range of platforms.

For example, in 2014 and 2016, Al-Dameer (a member of the PFLP-linked NGO network) received two multi-year EU grants (€100,707 and €446,482), both labeled "Contributing to the respect, protection and promotion of the right to freedom of association in the Gaza Strip." There is no evidence that the activities ostensibly performed under these grants had any impact on the Hamas-controlled government in Gaza, while Al-Dameer's advocacy targeting Israel has been very visible. Under the banner of human rights defenders, the NGO sponsors numerous events campaigning on "international accountability mechanisms" and on behalf of Palestinians jailed by Israel for involvement in terror.

Similarly, in 2017, DCIP (another member of the PFLP-linked NGO network supported for many years by European mechanisms,

including EIDHR) was among the recipients of a €981,298 grant under the heading of "Prevention, Mitigation and Rehabilitation for Palestinian Children Exposed to Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment." Analysis of DCIP social media posts and other activities shows that a significant portion of the funding is used for lobbying and for events around the world in the context of a political campaign targeting Israel. DCIP made these allegations against Israel in many significant venues around the world, including media exposure and parliamentary events in Australia, Canada, and Europe, as well as in the US Congress, where Representative Betty McCollum (D-MN) also introduced legislation based on the NGO's claims. In sharp contrast, there is no indication of DCIP programming aimed at improving the treatment of children vis-à-vis the Palestinian Authority or Hamas, or in preventing the exploitation of minors by terror organizations.

In some cases that might appear to be non-political, such as support for the Union of Agricultural Workers Committees (UAWC), health (UHWC and HWC), and women's rights (UPWC), an examination of the agendas and activities of the grantees also demonstrates intensive political campaigning. These include sponsorship and participation in boycott events, statements submitted to international bodies such as the United Nations, appearances before parliamentary committees, social media posts, and similar involvement.

For the EU member states and taxpayers, these frameworks and relationships raise numerous issues and questions under the heading of "value for money" (NGO Monitor, 2016b). There are no systematic or detailed attempts to evaluate how, if at all, the objectives of "a two-state solution with an independent, democratic, viable and contiguous Palestinian state" have been advanced. Palestinian politics and society remain deeply divided, far removed from democratic principles and processes, and no closer to acceptance of the legitimacy of

Israel (regardless of borders) than in 1948. As demonstrated, the NGOs supported by Europe pursue policies that fuel the conflict, particularly in the case of organizations affiliated with the PFLP, and the focus on terror links involving these NGOs has intensified the scrutiny and debate. But the lack of results has not led to changes in European policy, or even a serious discussion.

NGO Funding and the Absence of Due Diligence

The intense clustering of European government grants to a small group of well-connected Palestinian NGOs reflects the degree of internal referencing, in contrast to due diligence involving each proposal cycle and contract. In the absence of documentation on decision making processes (reflecting the high level of secrecy and the lack of transparency), systematic evidence is not available. However, the public comments and responses from European officials, particularly when responding to parliamentary critics and in correspondence, are indications of reliance on ostensible evaluations made in other funding frameworks and by officials from other governments.

For example, in the Netherlands, when confronted with evidence that the UAWC—one of the Palestinian NGOs that received numerous grants over the years—was affiliated with the PFLP terror group, officials claimed, "Before starting cooperation with UAWC in 2013, we conducted extensive consultations with other UAWC donors. Since 2013, other donors have also conducted due diligence and carried out screenings…None of these screenings concluded that UAWC should be excluded from funding" (Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020). At least eight other European governments, including the EU, fund the UAWC, but none of the details of these consultations, "screenings," and due diligence are available, making it impossible to evaluate their contents.

Similarly, when the Netherlands Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation

was asked by Members of Parliament to explain the funding for Al Mezan, another PFLP-linked NGO, over two decades, her response focused on the other funding sources, including the UN, the EU, Sweden, Norway and Denmark, and Switzerland (Kaag, 2020a). She quoted the denials of the organization (self-reporting), rather than credible and verifiable independent evaluations. Responding to questions related to overall assessments of NGO funding policies, she stated: "The Dutch programs in the Palestinian areas will be implemented through international organizations, such as the United Nations…. Organizations with which the Netherlands cooperates directly are pre-assessed on their ability to achieve intended goals and to manage Dutch funds responsibly" (Kaag, 2020b).[4]

When parallel issues were raised in Norway, Dag Inge Ulstein, Minister of International Development, responded: "To date, we have not uncovered conclusive information that the Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC), as an organisation, is involved in or supports acts of terrorism. Allegations of such links have been refuted previously, including in the Australian study" (Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020).[5] In 2018, Foreign Minister Ine Eriksen Søreide responded to a parliamentary question by listing a number of general evaluations carried out by Norad aid agency and the Office of the Auditor General (Søreide, 2018). However, no details are available and none of the evaluations have been made public. In 2021, the reaction of the Spanish Foreign Minister to information regarding PFLP links of grantees was similar (Bau, 2020). The prominence of terror-linked grantees and the avoidance of substantive responses, including to the Israeli government designations in 2021, further highlight the absence of due diligence and accountability.

Conclusions

Analysis of the 20-year history of European government funding for Palestinian NGOs reveals a number of important findings that

contrast sharply with the declared objectives. Of particular importance is the constancy of this funding for a relatively small group of organizations, both in terms of the repetitive grants that are provided over numerous funding cycles (vertical clustering), and the practice by the numerous government frameworks (direct and indirect) in supporting the same recipients (horizontal clustering). The primacy of political subcontracting is reflected in the detailed patterns and close examination of the evidence, in contrast to official declarations and reports.

Although the label "civil society" is used repeatedly by European officials to describe and justify these policies, the term is ambiguous and problematic in the Palestinian framework. In closed systems, as is the case in both the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank as well as Hamas-controlled Gaza, these organizations would not be able to operate or receive funding without the approval of the authorities (the Palestinian Authority and Hamas, respectively). In addition, the centrality for the PFLP's NGO network in European policy is particularly inconsistent with the concept of civil society.

These processes and relationships, through which hundreds of millions of euros were provided by European governments to Palestinian NGOs during a twenty-year period, have and continue to have substantial impacts. Instead of advancing the formal objectives of promoting peace, economic development, Palestinian democracy, and rapprochement, these policies sustained the conflict through campaigns alleging Israeli violations of "international law" and "apartheid," as well as active participation in lawfare and boycott campaigns.

The application of the political subcontractor model clarifies many of the otherwise inexplicable and inconsistent explanations for the deeply entrenched relationships between European governments and the selected group of Palestinian NGOs. When viewed from this perspective, the exchange of state funds for NGO

services, through means that European officials and diplomats are unable to pursue themselves, is consistent with the evidence and the evolution of these policies. Although European support did not begin as a form of subcontracting, as officials recognized the influence and capabilities of the NGOs, these links evolved and strengthened, while benefiting from the image of altruism and independent civil society.

The subcontractor model also helps explain the unusual scale of European support for Palestinian NGOs, the small number of organizations involved, the overlapping contracts and the clustering, both vertical and horizontal, and the intense secrecy—all of which are unique when compared to other civil society relationships. European officials give very high priority to involvement (or at least the perception of involvement) in the Palestinian-Israeli arena, and for the reasons explained in this analysis, close cooperation with the specific group of NGOs provides an important addition to the otherwise limited sources of influence. From this perspective, the actual impacts on officially proclaimed objectives (Palestinian democracy, peace) are less important than this influence.

After twenty years, however, with little to show for hundreds of millions of euros in budgetary allocations, and in light of recent revelations of terror links for a number of Palestinian NGO subcontractors, it might become more difficult to justify these relationships.

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Notes

1　In addition, a number of countries provide funds to UN agencies that in some cases fund the same NGOs. This source of indirect funding is generally not transparent.

2　The publication of financial reports including donor details by Miftah and Al Mezan are exceptional. Most of the other main Palestinian NGOs receiving European funds do not post this information.

3　Responses to requests sent to EU and government offices and officials, as well as from MEPs, for listings or total amounts of funding for Palestinian NGOs refer to the absence of such information. When the author of this article presented NGO Monitor's data on EIDHR grants before the European Union's Mashrek/Maghreb Working Group in 2014, a number of participants expressed surprise.

4　Minister Sigrid Kaag was employed as a senior official in UNRWA, and is married to Anis al-Qaq—a close ally, ambassador, and deputy minister under Yasir Arafat. See Sigrid Kaag in vijf vragen (Sigrid Kaag in five questions), *Nieuw Israëlietisch Weekblad,* October 27, 2017, https://niw.nl/sigrid-kaag-in-vijf-vragen-555/ [in Dutch].

5　This was apparently a reference to a 2011 Australian statement that "there is no evidence to support claims…that funding to a Palestinian NGO, the Union of Agricultural Work Committees (UAWC) was in violation of section 21 of the Charter of the United Nations Act, 1945" (Australian Minister of Foreign Affairs, 2011). This narrow statement and the referral to the UN, which does not list the PFLP as a terror organization, avoids the substantive issues.
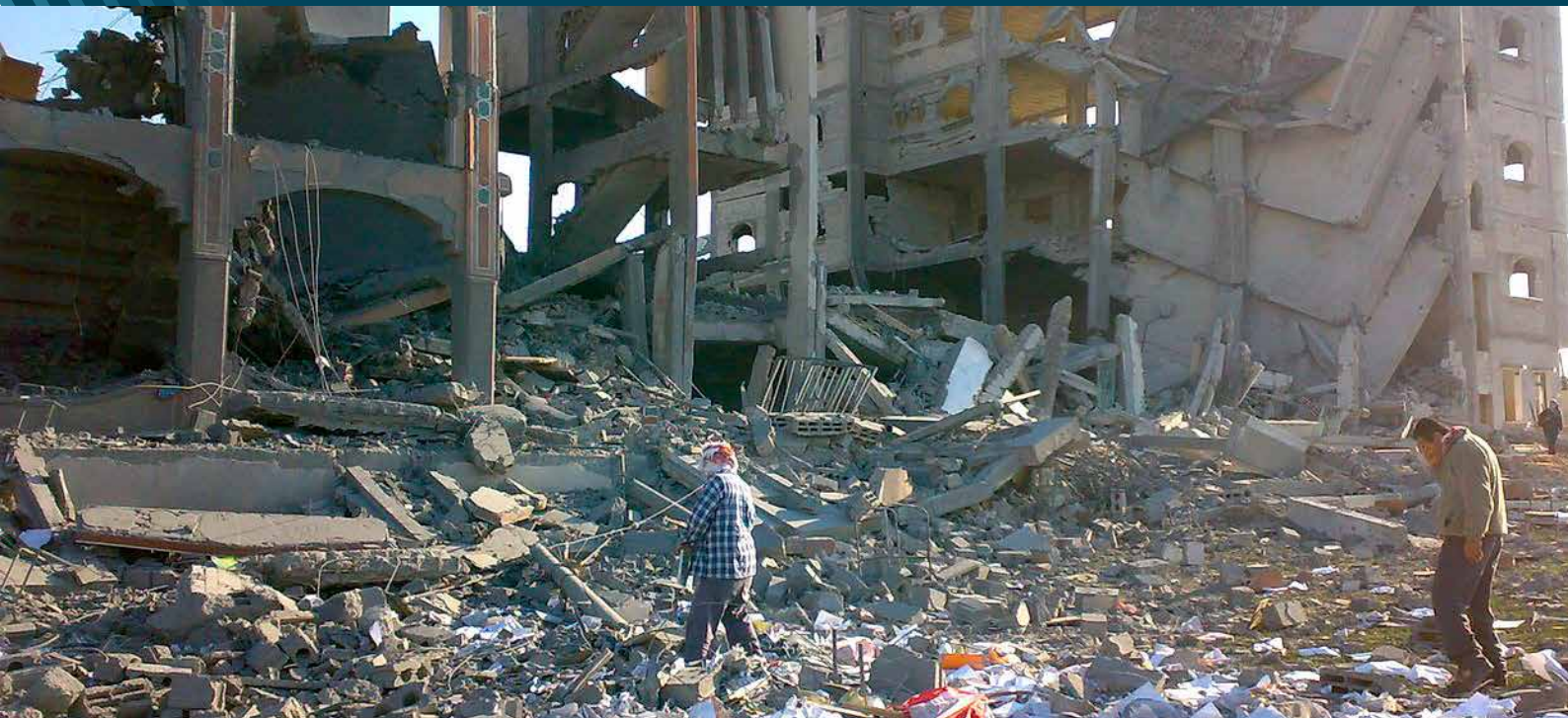
Photo: Complex in Rafah, Gaza, destroyed in an Israeli airstrike, January 12, 2009. Credit: ISM Palestine (CC BY-SA 2.0)

The Practice of "Roof Knocking" from the Perspective of International Law

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Israel first employed the practice of "roof knocking," whereby warning shots are fired at the roof of a building defined as a military target, during Operation Cast Lead, and has used it in subsequent operational strikes in the Gaza Strip. UN Human Rights Council commissions of inquiry have determined that the practice is an ineffective means of warning and amounts to an attack in itself, and thus does not uphold international law. Examining the legality of roof knocking from the perspective of international law, this article argues that the practice is an effective and necessary cautionary measure, given the unique circumstances that characterize warfare in the Gaza Strip, and that it goes above and beyond the requirements of international law. In addition, roof knocking as a means to prevent harm to civilians during an attack on military targets in a densely populated urban area is a strategic tool that can maintain and even expand Israel's freedom of operation, within its national security doctrine.

Keywords: international law, asymmetric warfare, Gaza Strip, "roof knocking"

Introduction

The IDF has employed "roof knocking" in recent years, mainly in operational strikes in the Gaza Strip during military conflicts with the terrorist organizations. As part of the practice, used when there is concern that civilians are present in a building defined as a military target, a small missile carrying a low-yield explosive is launched at the roof of a building or nearby. The small missile creates considerable noise, but does not contain an amount of explosive material that can endanger those in the building or cause significant damage. The noise from the small missile aims to warn civilians of the upcoming strike, and thus enables them to find a safe place several minutes before it occurs. The IDF began using the practice in Operation Cast Lead, the military conflict in the Gaza Strip between Israel and Hamas in 2008-9 ("The Operation in Gaza," 2009).

The military conflicts in the Gaza Strip are asymmetric conflicts that highlight the challenges inherent in operational activity in densely populated urban areas. The urban war zone is a complex combat arena fraught with obstacles for Western armies, which makes it difficult for them to achieve their military objectives through traditional doctrines of warfare. Consequently, success in asymmetric conflicts depends to a great extent on the ability to learn, quick adaptation to changing conditions, and creativity (Dekel, 2014). Unlike classic warfare, the campaign is generally waged against non-state organizations that do not have an organized army. In Israel's case, the unorganized forces at the disposal of the terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip use mainly tactics of guerrilla warfare and terrorism. In many cases the terrorist organizations position themselves intentionally in areas populated with civilians to blur the difference between groups of individuals and make it harder to distinguish fighters from civilians (Cohen & Cohen, 2014, pp. 176-177). These conditions are exacerbated in the Gaza Strip, one of the most densely populated regions in the world,

which further illustrates the challenges inherent in fighting on the modern battlefield, that is, in densely populated urban areas.

In this context, there is a longstanding debate on the most appropriate format of warfare in asymmetric conflicts. One approach holds that maneuver warfare is essential for victory in asymmetric conflicts, reflecting the principle stated by Ben Gurion regarding taking the war into the enemy's territory (Segal, 2008). In addition, those who support the maneuver warfare approach believe that airpower is less effective when the enemy is embedded in a civilian population and not sensitive to state-governing logic and the cost of attacks on national infrastructure (Eiland, 2007; Shelah, 2021). On the other hand, the supporters of aerial warfare believe that even though airpower alone is insufficient for victory in classic wars, it is certainly capable of achieving strategic victory in asymmetric conflicts, by temporarily creating deterrence, eliminating capabilities, and restoring quiet, in accordance with the strategy of "mowing the lawn" (Major A., 2017; see also Ivri, 2005). Furthermore, aerial warfare significantly reduces harm to IDF forces, especially among combat units, and simplifies the stage of planning the exit strategy.[1]

In practice, Operation Guardian of the Walls once again illustrated the clear preference that Israel's national and military leadership have for deterrent operations based mainly on airpower (Brun, 2021). Indeed, it is clear that airpower—whether used as a central tool or alongside full or partial maneuver warfare—will continue to play a cardinal role in future conflicts in the Gaza Strip. At the same time, there is no dispute that airpower in asymmetric conflicts must be used moderately and with particular precision, in order to avoid disproportionate harm to the civilian population. To this end, Israel has been compelled to develop creative solutions that enable it to reduce the harm to Gaza's civilian population, but at the same time maintain, and perhaps even expand, the military's freedom of operation.

Israel must balance between the immediate military need—namely, striking Hamas's military infrastructure and that of the other terrorist organizations—and the obligation to avoid disproportionate harm to civilians. Due to the uncertainty and confusion that exist among the civilian population in times of war, the standard means of precaution and warning, such as phone calls, printed flyers, and radio broadcasts, have not always produced satisfactory results when it comes to reducing harm to civilians, and as a result, have limited Israel's freedom of operation. Consequently, a real need arises for an innovative means of warning, which enables Israel to strike the military infrastructure of the terrorist organizations but at the same time reduce as much as possible the harm to civilians who live in the combat theater. The knock on the roof method aims to address this need, by implementing a unique technique.

Roof knocking is only used when there is concern that civilians are located in a building that constitutes a legitimate military target and have remained there despite prior warnings to evacuate. Consequently, the launching of the small missile is accompanied by real-time visual surveillance in order to ensure that the civilians heed the warning, and that the military target is indeed emptied of those inside it. After launching the missile, and based on visual surveillance, the operational forces must assess whether the expected collateral damage, that is the amount of harm to civilians—including those who have chosen to remain in the building—is not excessive in proportion to the anticipated military advantage from striking the target, and accordingly, confirm or cancel the strike. Israel contends that the process occurs only in cases in which civilians have not heeded the traditional warnings already provided. As such, roof knocking is in fact the final stage in a series of warnings and precautions taken before striking a military target, and is actually a cautionary addition to the customary methods.

The Legal Framework

The judicial context for the issue of roof knocking is Article 57 of Protocol I of the Geneva Convention. The State of Israel joined the Geneva Convention in 1951, but it is not a party to the two additional protocols, because similar to the United States, Israel expressed general opposition to the protocols when they were drafted (Lapidot, Shany, & Rosenzweig, 2011, p. 58).

Israel must balance between the immediate military need—namely, striking Hamas's military infrastructure and that of the other terrorist organizations—and the obligation to avoid disproportionate harm to civilians.

However, even though it is not a party to Protocol I, and although its content has not been adopted in internal state legislation, Israel recognizes the customary validity of some of the Protocol's provisions. The legal system in Israel has adopted the customary law of international rulings without ratifying the specific conventions that the provisions stem from, as long as there is no contradiction between them and state law (Affo v. Commander of IDF Forces in the West Bank). And indeed, in cases in which the Supreme Court has discussed the question of the protocols' standing in Israeli law, it has ruled that some of the provisions of Protocol I constitute customary law, and as a result, apply to IDF actions (Lapidot, Shany, & Rosenzweig, 2011, pp. 55-59).

The obligation to take precautions before a strike and derivative measures, enshrined in Article 57 of Protocol I, are included in this definition, as they reflect customary international law (Henckaerts & Doswald-Beck, 2005, Rules 15-20), and thus are seen as having obligatory legal applicability for Israel. Article 57 includes several sub-articles, as follows:
1. Article 57(1) lays out the basic standard for conduct in war, imposing a positive

obligation to take "constant care" to prevent harm to uninvolved civilians.

2. Article 57(2) breaks down the obligation of caution into particular obligations, the main ones being:
   a. Article 57(2)(a)(ii) sets an obligation to take all feasible precautions in the choice of means and methods of attack, in order to prevent or minimize harm to civilians.
   b. Articles 57(2)(b) and 57(2)(a)(iii) impose an obligation to avoid, cancel, or suspend an attack whose anticipated damage to the civilian population is excessive in relation to the military advantage anticipated.
   c. Article 57(2)(c) imposes an obligation to provide effective advance warning of attacks that may affect the civilian population, unless circumstances do not permit.

On the face of it, it seems that the article relevant to roof knocking is Article 57(2)(c), because it obligates the attacking side to provide effective warning of attacks that could harm civilians. This goes hand in hand with the principle of proportionality, which requires that the harm to uninvolved civilians be proportional to the military advantage anticipated from the attack. Consequently, the fewer civilians there are in a structure that constitutes a military target, the easier it is for the attacking side to abide by the standard of proportionality. Thus, the connection between warning and meeting the standard of proportionality illustrates that from the perspective of the attacking side, this is not a zero sum game—effective warning is an important and strong means of minimizing harm to civilians, and is also a tool in the hands of the attacking side to expand its freedom of operation. Consequently, aside from being a legal and moral obligation (Kasher, 2014), providing effective warning to civilians is a clear interest of the attacking side (Sharvit Baruch & Neuman, 2011, p. 373).[2]

However, departing from the common conception, roof knocking can be seen as a precaution measure, pursuant to Article 57(2)(a)(ii) of the Protocol, and not as a warning measure pursuant to Article 57(2)(c). As noted, Article 57(2)(a)(ii) requires taking all feasible precautions in choosing the means and methods of attack, in order to minimize harm to civilians. The precautions include, inter alia, the requirement that the attack take place at a time that reduces the potential harm to civilians, and the requirement to choose the most precise ammunition that will minimize the potential for casualties and injuries among the civilian population (Limon, 2016, p. 249). Accordingly, roof knocking can be seen as part of choosing the means and methods of attack, as the practice includes elements connected to the timing of the attack and the choice of suitable means, requirements that naturally stem from the obligation to take precautions. In addition, the practice is consistent with the rationale of precautions—preventing or reducing harm to uninvolved civilians. At the same time, the European Court of Human Rights has determined that the requirement to take precautions is not absolute, but is examined according to the standard of reasonableness given the circumstances, in a way that does not impose an unrealistic burden on the attacking side (Limon, 2016, p. 249).

There are also signs that suggest this change in perception in Israel's official position, as reflected in its reports on the military conflicts in the Gaza Strip. Thus, in a report on Operation Cast Lead, the explanation of roof knocking was made under the title of Advance Notice to Civilians, alongside a discussion of other means of warning, such as radio broadcasts, phone calls, and distributing leaflets. In contrast, in an Israeli government report on Operation Protective Edge, the explanation of the practice was made under the title of "Means and Methods of Attack," alongside a discussion of other precautions, such as the timing of the attack and the choice of means.

Comparison with "Advance Warning"

One of the cases in which the Supreme Court related to the provisions of the additional protocols was on the issue of the Advance Warning practice (Adalah—The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel v. GOC Central Command, IDF). On this issue, the Supreme Court mentioned Article 57(2) in order to strengthen the validity of the obligation of warning in international law, and thus it is worth discussing its interpretation of the said obligation.

In Operation Defensive Shield the IDF developed a method of searching buildings in areas in which there was concern as to the presence of terrorists, which was called the "Neighbor Practice." According to the practice, before the forces enter, the military force sends one of the local neighbors to the house it intends to search, in order to recommend to the residents of the building that they turn themselves in, and thereby avoid being arrested by force. Following a petition to the High Court of Justice and in light of the criticism from international human rights organizations, a new procedure called "Advance Warning" was adopted, which included a significant change from the neighbor practice: the use of the practice was aimed only at protecting civilians, and not also IDF soldiers, as previously. However, this change did not prevent another petition to the Supreme Court (Cohen & Cohen, 2014, pp. 177-178).

The Supreme Court ruled that the practice is contrary to international law. Justice Barak invalidated it, and was joined in this conclusion by Justices Cheshin and Beinisch, based on four reasons, three of which are relevant to our topic: first, based on the general principle in the laws of belligerent occupation regarding the prohibition against using civilians as part of the war effort, the court derived that the use of local residents in advance warning should also be prohibited; second, the court ruled that the advance warning practice violates the principle of distinction and the obligation imposed on the attacking side that is derived from it—to keep civilians away from the combat area; third, the court noted the risk imposed on the local resident conveying the warning—both the immediate risk of physical harm and the broader risk of having the status of a "collaborator"—especially given the difficulty of properly assessing the existence of danger under conditions of war.

However, the court's rulings and the reasons for invalidating the advance warning practice do not apply to roof knocking due to the completely different nature of the practice. Regarding the first reason, the prohibition against using civilians, not only does roof knocking not make use of civilians, but it also aims at keeping them away from the area of dangerous military activity. Regarding the second reason, the principle of distinction, the entire purpose of roof knocking is to distinguish between the civilian population and military activity. The practice seeks to empty the military target of uninvolved residents before the strike is carried out, and thus in fact it works in accordance with the obligation imposed on the attacking side to distance civilians from the combat zone. Regarding the third reason, the potential risk to civilians, the situation is a bit more complicated. On the face of it, it can be argued that in the case of roof knocking too, there is a certain risk to civilians, especially in cases in which they are located on the roof of the building when the practice is used; this may have occurred in the unfortunate event that took place in 2018, when two youths who were on the roof of a building that served as a military target were killed, apparently as a result of roof knocking (Kubovich, 2018). However, the risk of harm to civilians as a result of roof knocking is vastly lower than the risk inherent in advanced warning, if only due to the fact that real-time visual surveillance is part of implementation of the practice and accompanies the launch of the small missile, which significantly reduces the risk of harming civilians located on the roof

of the building at the time. The fact that the example cited is a rare case indicates in itself that in essence roof knocking does not incur a substantial risk to civilians.

Another essential difference between the roof knocking and advance warning practices relates to the accompanying conditions. In the framework of the third reason, the court addressed the difficulty of assessing risks under conditions of war.[3] In contrast, roof knocking is carried out as a surgical action from the air, in which the decision to use the practice is not made on the ground in stressful conditions but rather in IDF bases under supervision and in a "sterile" atmosphere. Therefore, the mechanism of approving and implementing roof knocking in effect neutralizes the concern about improper assessment of risks and hurried decision making (see also State Comptroller, pp. 51-54).

Thus, an analysis of the ruling shows that roof knocking is completely different from the advance warning practice in that it does not involve or make use of civilians at all; on the contrary, it seeks to keep them away from the combat zone. In addition, the mechanism of approving and implementing the practice occurs far from the battle zone, and thus presumably in a controlled manner. Roof knocking therefore neutralizes the main problems that stem from the use of the advance warning practice, which led the Supreme Court to prohibit its use. Consequently, based on the rulings of the Supreme Court on advance warning, it seems that its interpretation of the obligation of warning does not invalidate the use of roof knocking.

Criticism of Roof Knocking

The practice of roof knocking was examined by the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) commissions of inquiry on the military conflicts in the Gaza Strip, which stated that Israel failed in its obligation to take sufficient precautions to reduce harm to uninvolved civilians. At the same time, the commissions criticized the effectiveness of the warning from roof knocking and the very use of this method as a warning measure. It seems that the criticism can be divided into two main arguments: one is directed at the ineffectiveness of the practice as a means of warning, while the second is directed at the method of issuing the message, which purportedly amounts to an attack in itself.

The Effectiveness of the Practice

The effectiveness of the warnings that Israel has used in its conflicts in the Gaza Strip have been harshly criticized by the UNHRC's commissions of inquiry, including the reports on Operation Cast Lead and Operation Protective Edge.

In its report on Operation Cast Lead, known as the Goldstone Report, the commission of inquiry's criticism focused on the effectiveness of the roof knocking practice in the parameter of the clarity of the message (UN Human Rights Council, 2009, ¶532-541). According to the report, during large-scale military conflicts that include air strikes, as in Operation Cast Lead, civilians cannot be expected to distinguish between explosions that aim to warn of a future attack and explosions caused by the fighting itself. Consequently, it stated that roof knocking failed to issue the warning to civilians clearly enough, considering the above circumstances. It also stated that roof knocking could cause confusion among civilians to whom the warning is addressed, which of course significantly impairs its effectiveness, and thus it in effect subverts its intended purpose. Therefore, the commission stated that roof knocking practice cannot be considered an effective warning, as required in Article 57(2)(c).

This criticism was leveled at Israel even more stringently by the commission of inquiry on Operation Protective Edge (UN Human Rights Council, 2015, ¶235-237). Based on an examination of several cases in which Israel made use of roof knocking, the commission stated that the practice raises serious concerns about the level of effectiveness. It stated that in some cases examined by the commission, civilians did not understand that their homes

were about to be attacked, and as a result did not flee the danger zone. At the same time, the commission placed a special emphasis on the residents of lower floors, who, according to the commission, might not understand whether the warning was directed at them or at one of the nearby buildings. This confusion could lead to concern among these residents about leaving their home, and could even discourage them from moving away from the danger zone.

In addition, the commission criticized the short timespan between the roof knocking and the attack itself as not providing residents with enough time to leave the building. The commission claimed that the practice is usually implemented only a few (3-5) minutes before the attack, and in their view this is not enough time to evacuate buildings populated by families with children and elderly people, including people with disabilities. Finally, the commission stated that roof knocking is not an effective warning, in particular if it is not implemented in combination with other kinds of warnings.

Thus the first criticism argues that roof knocking is not an effective warning, primarily because of insufficient clarity and not providing enough time to evacuate, and consequently does not meet the requirements of Article 57(2)(c) of the Geneva Convention.

Issuing the Warning

The second criticism of roof knocking was first made in the UNHRC's commission of inquiry on Operation Cast Lead, which harshly criticized the method of issuing the warning. In the opinion of the commission, the practice is a kind of attack against the civilians living in the building, and an attack, limited as it may be, cannot be considered an effective warning according to the meaning of Article 57(2)(c). The commission also criticized the element of causing fear, which stems from the noise caused by the explosion of the small missile launched toward the roof of the building. Accordingly, in its conclusions the commission stated that roof knocking cannot be described as a warning, due to its belligerent

nature, and is a dangerous practice that is more similar in essence to an attack than to a warning:

> The Mission also examined the practice of dropping lighter explosives on roofs (so-called roof knocking). It concludes that this technique is not effective as a warning and constitutes a form of attack against the civilians inhabiting the building. (UN Human Tights Council, p. 19, ¶ 37)

Unlike the first criticism, this argument does not depend on factual findings, but rather rejects outright the operational technique of the practice. The second criticism opposes defining roof knocking as a means of warning, and in effect states that it does not meet the definition of Article 57(2)(c) of Protocol I of the Geneva Convention.

In summary, while the first criticism sees roof knocking as a means of warning, albeit ineffective, the second criticism rejects this conclusion and sees the practice as an attack in itself that in principle cannot be considered a warning.

The Israeli government report on Operation Protective Edge stated that although the practice is not perfect, roof knocking was certainly highly effective, and prevented the injury and killing of many civilians during the conflict.

Response to the Argument on Effectiveness

The conclusions of the Israeli government regarding the effectiveness of roof knocking as a warning are completely different. The Israeli government report on Operation Protective Edge stated that although the practice is not perfect, roof knocking was certainly highly effective, and prevented the injury and killing of many civilians during the conflict ("The 2014 Gaza Conflict," 2015, ¶313). According to the report, the practice was especially important

given Hamas's efforts to encourage or force Gazan civilians not to heed the warnings and to remain in the buildings that were targeted for attack. Consequently, a warning that is more tangible than standard means such as flyers and radio broadcasts was needed in order to encourage civilians to leave the buildings, over Hamas's entreaties and persuasion efforts.

According to the common assumption, the level of effectiveness of a warning is not assessed by examining the result of reduced harm to civilians in practice. In other words, the obligation imposed on the attacking side amounts to the warning being transmitted effectively, and not to a result of uninvolved civilians indeed acting in accordance with it (Cohen & Mimran, 2015). Consequently, the occurrence of unfortunate incidents in which warnings did not prevent harm to civilians does not necessarily indicate a lower level of effectiveness of the warning methods in principle, as long as the lack of success is the abnormal result. The fact that in some cases roof knocking did not achieve its objective of preventing harm to civilians does not in itself prove categorically that this is an ineffective method of warning (Sharvit Baruch, 2016, p. 41).

The level of effectiveness of the warning should therefore be examined in accordance with three essential parameters: the clarity of the message; the credibility of the warning; and the possibility of flight, including in relation to the amount of time allowed (Lieblich & Alterman, 2017, p. 142). Consequently, in order to derive conclusions regarding the level of effectiveness of roof knocking as a warning method, the practice must be examined according to the three parameters.

The Clarity of the Message

The commission of inquiry on Operation Cast Lead stated in relation to roof knocking that civilians cannot be expected to distinguish between explosions that aim to warn of a future attack and explosions that are part of the fighting itself, and thus the practice failed in issuing the warning clearly enough to civilians. Similarly, the commission of inquiry on Operation Protective Edge also stated that sometimes citizens did not understand the warning intended by roof knocking and refrained from fleeing the danger zone. In this context, the commission related specifically to the residents of lower floors, who might mistakenly think that the warning was directed at one of the nearby buildings. In the opinion of the commissions, this insufficient clarity might cause an opposite result, meaning that civilians would be afraid of leaving the buildings and moving away from the danger zone.

However, this criticism ignores the fact that roof knocking is the final stage in the chain of warnings given to civilians before an attack, such as phone calls, flyers, and radio broadcasts, and thus the clarity of the knock on the roof cannot be examined separately from the standard warnings given beforehand. Even in cases in which due to the circumstances roof knocking serves in practice as a first warning, it is accompanied by real-time visual surveillance that aims to ensure that the residents evacuate the building.[4]

In terms of the complementary aspect of the identity of those receiving the warning, roof knocking, in contrast with other customary warning methods, is aimed directly at the specific civilians who are in danger, in the most precise and explicit manner possible. This fact highlights the conclusion that roof knocking fulfills the requirement of the clarity of the message, as part of the warning's effectiveness (Sabel, 2011).

The Credibility of the Warning

In order to maintain the credibility of the roof knocking practice in the eyes of the civilian population, it is important to ensure as high correlation as possible between the number of times the practice is used and the number of times a strike is actually carried out. For a variety of reasons it may be necessary to cancel or postpone the strike, but it is important to

strive to reduce these instances to the bare minimum. In this context, it goes without saying that the practice should not be used for purposes other than warning, in order not to erode its credibility as a warning method among the civilian population.

An interesting question that raises legal and moral dilemmas in the context of the parameter of the threat's reliability is how to act in the case of civilians intentionally ignoring a warning and not leaving the building targeted for attack. This question is not purely theoretical, given that Hamas and the other terrorist organizations encourage and sometimes even force civilians to remain in a building that is targeted for attack. First, if civilians do not heed a warning, this does not deny their protected status as civilians, and thus the attacking side is obligated to take into account the presence of civilians in the building when assessing the proportionality of the attack (Lieblich & Alterman, 2017, p. 142). However, it is possible that there is also room for considering the anticipated consequences of the erosion of the warning, in terms of civilians heeding it, when deciding on the proportionality of the attack. Consistently choosing not to attack a building in the case of civilians not heeding warnings could encourage the terrorist organizations to place heavy pressure on civilians not to heed the warning, and in effect use them as human shields to protect the military targets. Given that roof knocking is the final stage in the chain of warnings conveyed to civilians in Gaza, the erosion of its impact is very dangerous, and ultimately could leave Israel without a method of effective and credible warning, and as a result place the civilians of Gaza in greater danger. Of course, this concern does not categorically legitimize attacking military targets addressed by roof knocking, regardless of the number of civilians who refuse to leave the building, but rather illustrates the importance of using the practice in a calculated manner in advance, in order to avoid the erosion of its credibility.

In any case, given the circumstances that characterize warfare in the Gaza Strip, including

that Hamas and the other terrorist organizations encourage and sometimes even force civilians to remain in a building targeted for attack, the credibility of the warning is especially important. Consequently, a warning that is conveyed in a relatively forceful manner, such as roof knocking, could be seen by the civilian population as more credible, and as a result achieve a better result in practice in terms of evacuating civilians and protecting them than a warning conveyed in a standard form.

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The Possibility of Flight

One of the main arguments in the report of the commission of inquiry on Operation Protective Edge focused on the amount of time between the warning and the attack itself, which does not provide the residents with enough time to evacuate the building. According to the report, roof knocking, which occurs only a few minutes before the attack itself, sometimes actually serves as the first warning for the civilians. Accordingly, the commission claimed that the few minutes granted to civilians to evacuate are not enough time to evacuate buildings populated by families with children and elderly people, as well as people with disabilities. In addition, according to the report, it is necessary to take into account the amount of time civilians need to understand that the early attack, meaning the use of the practice, is in fact a warning before the upcoming attack itself. Furthermore, the commission of inquiry argued that the very fact that Israel used means of warning indicates that the target of the attack does not require the element of surprise. Therefore, seemingly, there is no reason not to provide more time to the residents of the building to complete the

evacuation of their homes, at least in cases in which the effect of surprise is not a necessary part of attacking the target.

However, criticism that roof knocking is used as a first warning is unjustified, even if there were indeed certain cases in which this was the case. Such criticism does not take into account the actions by Hamas to obstruct the standard means that Israel uses to warn the civilian population of an imminent attack. In principle, roof knocking is the final stage in a chain of warnings to civilians prior to attack, and in effect is only an additional warning beyond the standard methods. In other words, Israel uses the roof knocking warning practice only after civilians have not heeded, or could not heed, the standard warnings given beforehand. Consequently, the use of the practice as a first warning is due to the efforts by the terrorist organizations to prevent civilians from heeding the standard warnings issued in advance, to the point of rendering them useless. For example, terrorist organizations work to encourage or force civilians to remain in buildings that are targeted for attack, alongside calls from official Hamas figures not to heed Israel's warnings (Sharvit Baruch, 2016, p. 41). Thus, it seems that the early use of roof knocking as a first means of warning is sometimes a function of the situation and not an intentional policy (Schmitt, 2010, pp. 828-829).

Similarly, the argument directed at the short amount of time given to civilians to evacuate the building before attack reveals a mistaken conception on the part of the commission of inquiry regarding the nature of Israel's military struggle against the terrorist organizations. The commission ignores the fact that a significant portion of the military targets that do not involve a necessary element of surprise are buildings used for storing terrorist organizations' weapons, such as short-range and long-range rockets that are intended for launch into Israeli territory, or war rooms and intelligence offices that are used for operational purposes. This is what makes such buildings legitimate military

targets in the first place under international law. Significantly extending the amount of time could enable Hamas's operatives to remove the weapons or the intelligence-operational information from the target and transfer them to another building, and thus nullify the very purpose of the attack.

Furthermore, according to the commission, the ineffectiveness of the practice stems mainly from the confusion that it creates among civilians. As an example, the report notes a case in which after evacuating a building, the residents returned to their homes because they thought the danger had passed. It is thus claimed that extending the amount of time given to civilians for evacuating a building could cause confusion among the civilians and undermine the effectiveness of the warning, and as a result lead to additional casualties. This claim amounts to holding two contradictory positions—since according to the commission of inquiry, the amount of time granted to civilians to evacuate is simultaneously too short and too long. Thus, it is clear that there is a need to balance between leaving enough time for civilians to heed the warning and evacuate the building, and refraining from providing a warning too far in advance in a way that could mislead civilians and place them at risk.

Consequently, we can say that the amount of time given to civilians to evacuate the building must balance two objectives: first, the military need of the attacking side, meaning preventing the possibility of removing the weapons or intelligence materials from the target; and second, increasing the effectiveness of the warning in order to prevent harm to uninvolved civilians. While the first objective (the military need) seeks to minimize the amount of time between the practice and the attack, the second objective (preventing harm to civilians) is divided into two sub-objectives pulling in opposite directions: on the one hand, the need to provide civilians living in the building with enough time to evacuate the building suggests a preference to lengthen the amount of time

between the practice and the attack, while on the other hand, the need to choose the proper timing for providing a warning in a way that does not create confusion among civilians indicates a preference for shortening this amount of time.

The best option, therefore, is to adhere to a relatively short amount of time, a few minutes, as this balances the different needs best. Otherwise, not only could the military need be significantly undermined, possibly to the point of making the attack pointless, but also roof knocking could mislead civilians and cause them to think that the attack has ended, and as a result lose its effectiveness as a means of warning aimed at protecting uninvolved civilians. Furthermore, because the roof knocking is accompanied by real-time visual surveillance, presumably the amount of time between the warning and the attack will be lengthened in accordance with the speed of the evacuation, and enough time will be given for all of the building's civilians to evacuate, including those who need a longer time to do so, such as children, elderly people, and people with disabilities, as the effectiveness of the warning is in Israel's clear interest. However, it is important to avoid prolonging the time between the warning and striking the target so that the roof knocking leads to confusion among the civilians, thus losing its effectiveness.

In any case, it seems that the question of the ideal amount of time between the roof knocking and the attack is a complicated question that cannot be unequivocally determined, but rather depends on the concrete circumstances of each individual strike and requires flexibility and the use of judgment. My purpose here is not to draft a formula for the precise amount of time required according to international law, as this is not possible in a theoretical framework, but rather to present the rules of thumb and guiding principles according to international law that should be applied in each case according to its concrete circumstances. For example, in a hypothetical case in which the visual surveillance indicates that the residents

of the building are continuing to evacuate the building, while it does not clearly identify actions to remove the military infrastructure, such as transporting weapons, then it seems that the amount of time given for completing the evacuation of the residents of the building can be extended without endangering the operational aspect of the attack.

Summary of the Response to the Argument on Effectiveness

According to media reports, the United States military has adopted a warning method that is similar to roof knocking in its strikes in Iraq and Syria against ISIS, which are also mainly characterized by asymmetric warfare. A senior commander in the US military even admitted that the new warning method was adopted under the inspiration of the Israeli roof knocking practice ("US Learns from IDF," 2016). The very fact that a foreign army saw fit to adopt the roof knocking practice, a warning method that requires significant efforts and financial costs, may well suggest an opposite conclusion to that presented in the commission's reports regarding the level of effectiveness. It is unlikely that a foreign army would adopt a costly practice that imposes voluntary limitations on itself unless it believed that this was an effective warning method that produces results that meet the test of reality and can help reduce the challenges stemming from asymmetric warfare in an urban setting.

It seems that the fact that Hamas and the other terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip seek to thwart Israel's standard warnings in effect requires the use of the roof knocking practice in order to abide by the provisions of Article 57(2) of Protocol I. In addition, the frequency of the phenomenon of intentionally ignoring Israel's warnings is a critical element in examining the level of effectiveness of the practice and must be taken into account, as clearly even the most effective warning is doomed to failure if the person it addresses ignores it knowingly and intentionally (Sharvit

Baruch, 2016, p. 42). Moreover, examining the level of effectiveness of roof knocking as a warning in accordance with the relevant parameters shows that the practice meets the test of effectiveness, especially considering the unusual circumstances surrounding its use. Consequently, in the absence of more effective alternatives, it seems that roof knocking as a warning instrument is the least bad alternative, and is clearly far preferable to not providing a warning at all—which is usually the practical implication of relying on standard warnings only, without resorting to roof knocking.

Response to the Argument on Issuing the Warning

The second criticism surrounds the legal definition of roof knocking as a warning. According to this argument, the roof knocking practice is a kind of attack against civilians living in a building, and an attack, limited as it may be, cannot be considered an effective warning under Section 57(2)(c) of Protocol I. Thus, the second argument rejects outright the operational technique of roof knocking as a warning.

International Law and the Aim of Article 57 of Protocol I

The conclusion to be drawn from the second criticism raises a complicated question. Will the attacking side be asked to abandon a warning method that can prevent harm to civilians just because its method of operation does not meet the technical definition of a warning? This seems completely contrary to the purpose of international law, and undermines the intention of Article 57 of Protocol I of the Geneva Convention. However, it is possible that the seemingly literal distinction actually stems from the fear of blurring the boundaries, which in turn could lead to excessive flexibility toward the rules presented in the Protocol. This could lead to legitimizing the use of aggressive means of warning that would subvert their intended objective and be exploited by military elements

to exercise force even when it is unnecessary, under the guise of a warning technique. While this is a claim that should not be taken lightly, it appears that in the case of roof knocking, the immediate benefit produced by its use in the form of protecting civilians outweighs the potential damage in the long term due to concern of a slippery slope.

Roof Knocking does not Amount to an Intentional Attack against Civilians

The second argument therefore brings up the question of the legitimacy of warning shots, as in both cases the warning is conveyed through the use of force (Lieblich & Alterman, 2017, p. 142). While this is a complicated issue beyond the scope of this article, the fact that the legal manuals of many armies include the use of warning shots as a legitimate method of providing warning, alongside the extensive use of this method among law enforcement authorities around the world, leads to a conclusion opposite to that reached by the UN commission of inquiry (Sharvit Baruch & Neuman, 2011, pp. 387-388). In addition, *The Harvard Manual on International Law Applicable to Air and Missile Warfare* recognizes, "In some situations the only feasible method of warning may be to fire warning shots using tracer ammunition, thus inducing people to take cover before the attack" (Program on Humanitarian Policy and Conflict Research, 2013, p. 154, ¶11).

The *Manual* thus relates to warning shots as a legitimate warning method in circumstances in which it is the only feasible possibility, when the objective is, of course, to reduce the harm to uninvolved civilians. Roof knocking is likewise used as a last resort, meaning only after the civilians have not heeded, or were not able to heed, standard warnings given to them beforehand by Israel. While roof knocking is not implemented using tracer ammunition as written in the *Manual*, it uses a small missile that does not contain an amount of explosive material that could endanger the residents of the building or cause significant damage.

Furthermore, it seems that other kinds of ammunition meet the purpose of permitted use warnings shots and cause civilians to take cover before an attack (Sharvit Baruch & Neuman, 2011, p. 387). Consequently, not only does the *Manual on Air and Missile Warfare* confirm the legality of warning shots, but an analysis of the text suggests that the permission also applies to roof knocking. Further reinforcement for this appears later in the *Manual,* which states the following about warnings in general: "Warnings need not be formal in nature. They may be issued either verbally or in writing, or through any other means that can reasonably be expected to be effective under the circumstances" (p. 155, ¶15). Considering that the residents of Gaza are already very familiar with roof knocking and are aware that Israel uses it frequently during military conflicts, it is clear that the practice is within the definition of "means that can reasonably be expected to be effective under the circumstances." Thus, the roof knocking practice is similar in essence to the method of warning fire, and reflects an accepted practice that is compatible with international law.

According to the UNHRC's commission of inquiry on Operation Cast Lead, the roof knocking practice constitutes a kind of attack against the civilians living in the building, and an attack, limited as it may be, cannot be considered an effective means of warning under Article 57(2)(c). Article 49 of Protocol I of the Geneva Conventions defines the meaning of "attack" and states that "'Attacks' means acts of violence against the adversary, whether in offence or in defence." This definition of attack thus includes three conditions: (1) act of violence; (2) against the adversary; and (3) whether in offense or in defense. Regarding the first condition, it seems that roof knocking can indeed be considered an act of violence, as it involves the use of weapons that seldom cause harm and damage to the building or to those located on the roof of the building. However, regarding the second condition, that the act be directed *against* the adversary, it seems

that in the case of roof knocking the element of "against" does not hold, as the practice does not aim to harm or to cause damage, but rather to serve as a means of warning for civilians in order to protect them, and therefore it does not meet this condition. For the same reason, even if roof knocking is considered an attack according to international law, its use should certainly not be seen as an intentional attack *against the civilians* in the building, as stated by the commission. Because the building in question constitutes a legitimate military target according to international law, since otherwise the attack does not meet the principle of distinction in the first place, then the presence of civilians is in effect an issue of proportionality, and the use of the practice does not amount to attack (Schmitt, 2010, p. 829; Sharvit Baruch & Neuman, 2011, p. 388).

Considering the unique circumstances of warfare in the Gaza Strip as a densely populated urban space, the relatively aggressive mode of operation of roof knocking is therefore a necessity. That said, the practice is not contrary to the rules of international law, and even helps fulfill their purpose more effectively, considering the high level of credibility attributed to it among the Gaza Strip population. Israel has been lauded by foreign armies for its use of roof knocking, which have claimed that the practice is a cautionary measure not required by international law, and could become fixed as a custom and raise the standard of caution required (Efroni, 2014, p. 82).[5] Consequently, it is clear that roof knocking cannot be seen as an intentional attack against civilians. On the contrary, it is a cautionary measure that raises the standard of caution taken by Israel in relation to the standard required and customary in international law.

Roof Knocking as a Precaution

Roof knocking can thus be seen as a precautionary measure, in the framework of Article 57(2)(a)(ii) of the Protocol, and not as a warning according to Article 57(2)(c). In

other words, the use of the practice includes requirements that naturally stem from the obligation to take precautions, such as the need for precise timing of the attack and for choosing appropriate means of attack. Furthermore, the practice corresponds with the rationale of precautions—preventing or reducing harm to civilians. Consequently, its use can be seen as part of choosing the means and methods for an attack. Therefore, it seems that roof knocking's mode of operation does not preclude its use as a precaution according to Article 57(2)(a)(ii). Consequently, even if according to the UNHRC commission of inquiry on Operation Cast Lead the practice is problematic as a warning due to its specific issuing, this does not affect the legality of the practice's use as a precaution.

> During Operation Guardian of the Walls, relatively extensive use was made of roof knocking. Targets included towers and high-rise buildings in Gaza.

A possible consequence of this distinction between warning and precaution could arise in the case of a significant military target that is located on a street that is so crowded that attacking it could also damage a nearby building that is not a military target. In such a situation, if the practice is defined as a warning then it might not be possible to use it on the nearby building, which is in effect a civilian target, certainly according to the stance of the commissions of inquiry. This would make it difficult to attack the military target, and perhaps even lead to its cancellation, as it would have difficulty meeting the test of proportionality without recourse to the practice. In contrast, if the practice is defined as a precaution, then it might be possible to use it also on the nearby building, with the purpose of preventing, or reducing as much as possible the harm to civilians, and as a result enable the attack on the target.[6] However, this is a complicated issue beyond the scope of this article.

Thus the roof knocking technique, which is similar in essence to the method of warning fire, does not amount to an attack directed against civilians according to international law and does not negate the legality of the practice and its use as a cautionary measure—whether as a warning or as a precaution.

Roof Knocking in Operation Guardian of the Walls: Strategic implications

During Operation Guardian of the Walls, relatively extensive use was made of roof knocking, proving once again its importance and necessity for Israel in the struggle against the terrorist organizations in Gaza, especially given the continued erosion of the effectiveness of the standard means of warning. Targets included towers and high-rise buildings in Gaza. For example, roof knocking was used as part of striking and destroying the al-Jalaa tower (Tunik, 2021), which contained the offices of the AP news agency, al-Jazeera, and the headquarters of additional broadcasting stations (Kubovich, 2021). According to the IDF, along with the civilian offices, the building contained intelligence and technological assets of the terrorist organizations in Gaza, such as a research and development unit of Hamas's military intelligence. The destruction of the tower, which was broadcast live, was widely publicized and led to many responses in Israel and worldwide. Consequently, it was especially important for Israel's freedom of operation that the strike on the tower and its destruction occur without any harm to uninvolved civilians, and indeed, thanks to roof knocking, this is what happened. Even Human Rights Watch, which criticized Israel for the attack on the towers, noted that there were no reports of casualties following the attacks. Had the destruction of the tower harmed uninvolved civilians, then international public opinion, and its diplomatic and operative consequences for Israel, would presumably have been completely different.

Israel in any case had to cope with significant international pressure, and it is clear that harming uninvolved civilians would have led to harsher and more forceful responses that could have made it harder to continue to wage the operation in its planned format. Heavy pressure from the international community can shorten the time span of the fighting, including under conditions that are unfavorable, and thus preventing or softening it is a primary strategic objective for Israel.

Strikes on targets that are located in the heart of a densely-populated urban setting, and all the more so demolition of high-rise buildings in such conditions, cannot take place in a "sterile" manner, meaning completely avoiding harm to uninvolved civilians, without the knock on the roof. Consequently, without the practice, it is possible that the destruction of the towers, and many other strikes carried out during Operation Guardian of the Walls, would not have been possible while abiding by the principle of proportionality according to international law, or would not have been strategically worthwhile for Israel, considering the potential public relations damage. Roof knocking enabled Israel to destroy military assets of the terrorist organizations while reducing international criticism, at least regarding harm to uninvolved civilians, and hence its strategic importance for Israel. In other words, roof knocking helps Israel achieve simultaneously two important objectives: it grants it the ability to strike strategic infrastructure of the terrorist organizations while overcoming their concealment in civilian buildings, and at the same time reduces the damage that could be caused in the sphere of legitimacy as a result of attempting to attack these targets without the use of the practice, meaning with more extensive harm to uninvolved civilians.

Consequently, the use of roof knocking in Operation Guardian of the Walls proved that it is an effective method under the unique circumstances that characterize warfare in the Gaza Strip. It reduces harm to uninvolved civilians and at the same time expands Israel's freedom of operation, while also easing the intensive media-cognitive efforts (see also Mandelblit, 2012).

> **Strikes on targets that are located in the heart of a densely-populated urban setting cannot take place in a "sterile" manner, meaning completely avoiding harm to uninvolved civilians, without the knock on the roof.**

Conclusion

Presuming that the reality of frequent conflicts with the terrorist organizations in the Gaza Strip will continue to accompany Israel in the near future, it is particularly important to use roof knocking as an effective cautionary measure, especially in light of its success, which goes beyond the purely operational aspect, as reflected in Operation Guardian of the Walls. Maintaining the effectiveness of the practice will only be done by ensuring proper operating rules in the spirit of international law: judgment must be used regarding the timing of its use, which should be coordinated as much as possible with the timing of the strike on the target, in order to maximize its effectiveness; the practice should not be used or exploited for purposes other than warning or caution, in order not to erode its credibility among the civilian population; and in general, it is important to ensure wise and careful use that is compatible with the basic principles of international law.

Ensuring these principles, while constantly using operational and legal judgment, will preserve the effectiveness of roof knocking both as a means of preventing harm to uninvolved civilians and as a tool for expanding freedom of operation in war, as part of Israel's national security doctrine.

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Notes

1 For a current perspective, see interview with the outgoing commander of the ground forces (Harel, 2021).

2 However, there are instances in which the warning can exact a cost of the attacking side, for example when there is importance to the element of surprise. In such a situation, especially salient is Article 57(2)(c), particularly the clause on circumstances permitting (Sharvit Baruch & Neuman, 2011, pp. 388-390).

3 Similar to Justice Barak, Justices Cheshin and Beinisch also related to the stressful conditions surrounding combat soldiers who take part in operational activity on the ground, as a central factor in their decision.

4 Regarding the residents of the lower floors, it is not clear what the commission's statement is based on. Since there is no dispute that the residents of the upper floors should understand that the action is directed toward them, it is hard to assume that the residents of the lower floors would be unaware that their neighbors from the upper floors are evacuating the building, as this flight would certainly involve considerable noise and commotion. The concern that the message would not be conveyed clearly enough to the residents of the lower floors is further reduced given that the practice is accompanied by real-time visual surveillance, and in this way it is possible to ensure that a reasonable number of people in relation to the size of the building have indeed evacuated before the strike is carried out.

5 Similarly, the former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the US military praised Israel after Operation Cast Lead for its efforts to reduce the harm to civilians, including through roof knocking (Benhorin, 2014).

6 While Article 57(2)(a)(ii) seeks also to reduce the damage to the property of civilians, it is clear that the desire to reduce the harm to their lives or their physical wellbeing is a higher priority, all the more so when the harm to the property is minimal, as the small missile is not meant to cause significant damage to the building.

Photo: Prime Minister David Ben Gurion with senior GHQ staff officers, June 1, 1957

Aberrations in Civil-Military Relations in Times of Political Instability

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Relations between the political and military leaderships in democratic countries are a frequent subject of academic research and often cause for suspicion. This is likewise the case in Israel, where security issues are at the core of state business. Since Israel was founded, relations between the leaders of the two echelons have traditionally maintained a reasonable balance between controversies and agreement. In recent years, this balance has appeared to be at risk, due mostly to politicization caused by the substitution of personal and party considerations for statesmanlike and objective reasoning. The prevailing political instability is another reason why this matter must be addressed. The article examines the elements that have caused this disturbing deviation, and proposes measures for restoring the traditional balance for the sake of strengthening the democratic regime in Israel.

Keywords: civil-military relations, civilian control, IDF, joint responsibility, national security

The Problem

Civil-military relations in democracies in general and in Israel in particular, where the security situation is always difficult and complex, affect many aspects in the life of the country and its society, and wield decisive influence on how the national security concept is shaped. It is therefore important for the reciprocal relations between the political and military echelons to be based on trust and cooperation, mutual learning processes, and shared responsibility. The absolute subordination of the military leadership to the political leadership must be preserved even when the two echelons disagree, because the supreme authority always rests with the elected political leadership. Relations without crises are rare, but crises must be managed and contained, and should constitute a basis for developing the relations as infrastructure for improving mutual learning.

With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the IDF was deeply involved, some would say too deeply, in management of the crisis, while the National Emergency Management Authority (NEMA), which operates in the framework of the Ministry of Defense and is supposed to coordinate government activity in cases of mass disasters, was ignored. The National Security Council (NSC), which is directly subordinate to the prime minister, emerged as the leading staff organization for dealing with the pandemic, although this is not part of its job. Alongside the military's significant role in the COVID-19 crisis, there were several recent examples of distressing events regarding civil-military relations in Israel. These included the exclusion of the senior military command from the discussions that took place with the United States on then-President Trump's "deal of the century" and then-Prime Minister Netanyahu's plan to annex parts of the West Bank; exclusion of the IDF from the Abraham Accords negotiations, including the military aspect involving the purchase of F-35 aircraft by the United Arab Emirates; concealment of the Prime Minister's visit to Saudi Arabia; and

failure to approve the IDF's multi-year budget and work plan ("Tnufa") and questions about the submarines deal with Germany.

These examples are not unprecedented. Among the most prominent exceptions were the military's exclusion from the 1977 preliminary talks with Egypt before the beginning of the peace process and from the discussions that led to the Oslo Accords, and the decision by the political leadership to withdraw from Lebanon—a decision that was imposed on the military leadership, which objected to it. There were also cases when the military leadership acted against the political leadership's opinion. For example, then-IDF Chief of Staff Mordechai (Motta) Gur spoke about possible deception in Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's historic visit to Israel, and later opposed Israel's total withdrawal from Sinai. The military took control of the Abu Snena hill in Hebron during Shaul Mofaz's term as IDF chief of staff at a time when then-Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was abroad. In both cases, the Chief of Staff was threatened with dismissal.

> Alongside the military's significant role in the COVID-19 crisis, there were several recent examples of distressing events regarding civil-military relations in Israel.

Some of these events can be interpreted as limited irregularities that were aired in public because of the singular political circumstances prevailing in Israel at the time. Others, however, raise questions about (im)proper management and decision making involving the connection between the military's actions and the desired political benefit, while political coalition considerations (in contrast to policy and strategy) affect the relations between the echelons. The recent increase in such cases comes at a challenging time of political instability and conflicts within the political leadership,[1] and coincides with allegedly biased political criticism directed at other professional

authorities in the Israeli system, in particular the judicial system, the State Attorney, and law enforcement institutions, as well as the professional staff in the Ministry of Finance, including threats to restrict their professional responsibilities.

This article reviews the principal trends in relations between the political leadership and the professional military leadership. It analyzes the risks incurred by these trends given the political situation in Israel, and proposes directions for dealing with these risks.

Civil-Military Relations: Background and Principal Characteristics

Ever since the Zionist vision first materialized in the land of Israel, security has been a central part of the Israeli experience, due to Israel's geographic location and the threats posed to it by its neighbors. Furthermore, since Israel was established, the IDF has also served as a tool for nation-building. The military was charged with civilian tasks, among them education, settlement, immigrant absorption, and more. The military's expanding responsibilities (role expansion), combined with its role as sovereign in the territories conquered in the Six Day War, resulted in its involvement in one of the most sensitive political issues in Israeli society. Under such conditions, it was inevitable that a large security establishment with a major influence on the entire state apparatus would arise in Israel. One prominent example is that the military is responsible (through the IDF Military Intelligence Directorate) for presenting to the government an assessment of the external threats (known as the national intelligence assessment). Some therefore classify the professional military leadership as an attendant partner, albeit not in all cases, in the decision making processes and their implementation in national security affairs.

The nature of the security threats and the Israeli understanding of them have changed over the years. These threats, which were once regarded as "existential," have not been seen

as such for a long time. Israel's strength as a country and its defense capabilities are now far more solidly established in face of the current and expected risks. There are naturally always arguments about the right way to maintain national security: not merely between Israel's governments and the political opposition, but also within the successive coalitions and among the ruling parties themselves. As a rule, there is disagreement between those calling for a more activist approach in military intervention and those advocating a more restrained approach, with an emphasis on the inherent advantages of political measures. These disputes of principle obviously have direct consequences for various actions planned or executed over the course of generations. On occasion, the IDF presented its own (not always uniform) opinion and exercised influence (sometimes decisive) on the policy adopted, although there were several prominent cases in which the political leadership imposed actions on the military, for example in the peace agreement with Egypt, the Oslo process, the withdrawal from Lebanon, and the disengagement from Gaza.

In the professional literature on civil-military relations, various theories have been developed that depart from the normative aspects typical of the conventional theories in the field. Relations between the echelons in Israel and other Western countries were presented in concepts of partnership, shared responsibility, dialogue, learning, and more. What many of these later-revised conceptual frameworks have in common is the basic contention that relations between the political and military echelons in Israel, or in other Western democracies, especially in an era of hybrid and asymmetric conflicts, should not be viewed in a stratified hierarchal way that positions the politicians in the upper stratum that makes decisions and the professional military commanders in the subordinate stratum carrying out the politicians' orders. Rather, many claim that the borders between the strata are blurred and indistinct, and in effect create a dynamic symbiosis featuring changing levels

and forms of the military's partnership, both in designing policy and implementing it, and not only in the military sphere.

An important question arises, therefore, involving authority and responsibility for the military in both force buildup and application. The IDF chief of staff's subordination to the political leadership was anchored in a basic law only in 1976, following conclusions reached by the Agranat Commission that investigated the circumstances at the outset of the Yom Kippur War. In its conclusions, the Commission issued a warning about the ambiguity that prevailed concerning the military's authority, and concerning the reciprocal relations between the military and the political leadership. The Agranat Commission also stated, "One thing, however, is clear from the constitutional aspect. It has never been decided that the Minister of Defense is a 'meta-Chief of Staff' who is required to guide the Chief of Staff in the latter's area of responsibility on operational matters, or a kind of supreme commander of the IDF by virtue of his being Minister of Defense."

The Basic Law: The Military (March 31, 1976) states that the military is subordinate to the government, and that the Minister of Defense is the minister responsible for the military on behalf of the government. The law does not define a specific officeholder as the supreme IDF commander; it assigns this role to the government as a collective in vague wording in Section 2(a): "The military is subject to the authority of the government." Consequently, there were many interpretations of the law and proposals to amend it. The main advantage of the Basic Law: The Military lies in its stipulation that the military and its leader are subordinate to the political leadership. A number of topics, however, were not addressed by the law:

a. The law does not define the IDF's role and the prime minister's status with respect to the military.

b. The law does not clarify the role of the defense minister as the person responsible for the military.

c. There is a gap between the law and the reality. For example, following the Second Lebanon War, the Winograd Commission gave great weight to the prime minister's influence on the IDF, while according to the law, the military is under the cabinet's authority.

d. The general provisions of the Basic Law: The Government likewise do not define the status of the prime minister with respect to the military.

An echo of the problems with the constitutional framework was heard again following the Second Lebanon War in 2006, when the Winograd Commission concluded, "The political echelon must direct and steer the actions of the professional echelon in the security institutions and foreign policy, and oversee them….To this end, the political echelon will require—and the professional echelon will provide it with—the information that will enable it to conduct such direction and oversight." The Israeli government (Cabinet Resolution No 3115, February 10, 2008) decided "to adopt the principles of the report, and to implement the recommendation in it"; however, this resolution was not implemented.

The General Security Services Law (2002) differs significantly from the Basic Law: The Military. It is very detailed, and addresses a long list of issues, such as subordination of the GSS, the role of the GSS and its tasks, its authority, reporting by the head of the GSS to the government and the Knesset, and more. The bill introduced in 2020 by then-MK Ofer Shelah, which addresses all of these questions, corresponds to the question of civilian oversight (institutional and non-institutional) of the military.

The Political Aspect

From a political and organizational standpoint, the governmental system in Israel has always featured coalition governments. This has made it difficult, especially in recent decades, to maintain orderly governance. In such

governments, which often comprise opposing political parties and factions, deep disputes have surfaced. During periods when the prime minister also served as minister of defense (Ben Gurion, Eshkol, Begin, Rabin, and Barak), there was a greater degree of coherence in civil-military relations, even in cases of sharp disagreements, such as the waiting period in the Eshkol government before the Six Day War and the appointment of Moshe Dayan as minister of defense, and the military's conduct at the outset of the second intifada, when it appeared that the military was not following the orders of Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Barak concerning restraint in the use of military force.

The situation has worsened in the past two decades. The coalitions became more complex and sensitive, and the attitude of some of the defense ministers (such as Liberman, Bennett, and Gantz) featured political rivalry, for example between them and Prime Minister Netanyahu. In many cases, the state security cabinet also does not act as an organized mechanism. The State Comptroller's Report following Operation Protective Edge stated, "The cabinet's authority, including the question of what matters are subject to the cabinet's decision, is not regulated or established in writing. As a result, even the cabinet ministers do not know…which matters require a cabinet decision." This situation is liable to have challenging implications for the relations between the political echelon and the senior military echelon, and certainly in the context of making decisions about actions in the field. The basic laws determine only a general framework for relations between the political leadership and the military leadership in Israel in general, and for decisions about embarking on military operations in particular.

Another problem is the political echelon's inclination to be vague in decisions requiring the IDF to take action in the field. This vagueness is useful for decision makers because it provides them with room to maneuver in rapidly changing circumstances, and perhaps also for preventing a situation that will require them

to assume responsibility in the event of failure. This vagueness, however, exacts a high price in relations with the military echelon, which is forced to interpret the policy directive, or to seek validation for it from the political echelon, and not always successfully. In this way, Israeli governments avoid discussions about the security concept, even if an "oral national security doctrine" exists in Israel in practice. As such, it is shared by most generations of decision makers, with each government choosing its particular emphases.

Former IDF Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot publicly challenged these trends in two exceptional papers published during his term as chief of staff: *IDF Strategy* (2015 and 2018). In these documents, the chief of staff called for correcting distortions in the political echelon's relations with the military echelon by creating a dialogue for developing a common language, coordinating expectations, and receiving guidelines from the political echelon in a way that ensures that military action corresponds to the policy's purpose. He also raised the need to clarify the chief of staff's status at the head of the military pyramid, and his authority and responsibility for how the military is used after guidance is received from the political echelon. In other words, the political echelon determines when the military will be used and for what purpose, and the military echelon is responsible for how military force is used. These statements by the chief of staff did not spark an extensive public discussion, and did not even evoke a renewed discussion between the echelons, or a change in the behavioral patterns reviewed here (even if their influence on the means of building and using military force was clear).

In these circumstances, there are ramifications for the status of the chief of staff vis-à-vis the political echelon concerning his ability to exert influence. When the political echelon is divided or occupied with an internal conflict, the chief of staff's influence becomes relatively stronger, and his ability to maneuver between the prime minister and the minister

of defense and the other ministers ostensibly increases. It is also likely to put him in a more powerful position on certain issues, including operational issues in the use of force, and also budget questions in the sphere of force buildup. This possible scenario is liable to weaken the political echelon's status in matters pertaining to the effectiveness of civilian oversight on both the military and military policy in the sense of the decision to use military force in order to achieve a policy goal. It could make the military an active partner with influence extending beyond the limits of its obligatory professional influence, rather than merely an instrumental agency and a tool in the hands of the elected political leadership, in the processes of designing policy and making decisions of significance for policy and internal politics.

Thus despite the ongoing systemic faults presented above, which have more than once resulted in mishaps and even crises between the echelons, the general picture has always featured some degree of cooperation, and in general has facilitated a base of agreements, usually in the spirit of the military's recommendations, about the needs and strategic principles guiding the building and use of force, and in many cases, about the need to use or not use force in order to achieve policy goals. This attribute is also based on an agreement in principle between the echelons—certainly by most of the senior commanders—about the binding authority of the elected political leadership over the military professional echelon. This agreement is also supported by a broad public consensus in Israel.

Is the Traditional Framework of Relations Weakening?

It appears that in recent years, developments have emerged that are liable to change the rules of the game—and not for the better—in all matters pertaining to civil-military relations in Israel. For our purposes, three of these are the most important:

a. The first is the (fragile) security stability, which was challenged in May 2021 by the events that culminated in Operation Guardian of the Walls (when the violent disturbances in cities with a mixed Jewish-Arab population prompted consideration of using the military to restore public order).

b. The second is the constitutional-political crisis of recent years, which upset Israel and its governmental systems. Even after the formation of the new government, the political situation remains fragile and unstable.

c. The third is the COVID-19 crisis, which raised questions about various spheres of life in Israel, and throughout the world.

Other matters in dispute can be added, headed by the issue involving the right way to deal with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In the security sphere, Israel faces challenges both on the external front—against Iran, against Hezbollah in the north, and in the Palestinian theater, with an emphasis on Hamas in the Gaza Strip—and on the internal front, where Israel confronted and still faces the multi-faceted COVID-19 crisis, involving health, the economy, social aspects, and governance. This contributed, especially in the first and second waves, to the virtual removal of security issues from the public agenda. The proportions of the traditional threats assumed a different complexion when the risks from natural causes were given priority. The violent clashes between Arabs and Jews during Operation Guardian of the Walls were a setback for Jewish-Arab relations, due to the nationalistic sentiments attributed to the Arab violence.

The role of the military in managing the efforts to counter the pandemic raised questions, even if the role of the Home Front Command in the civilian campaign won universal praise. During the pandemic, however, the IDF found itself, to its detriment, a topic of political dispute between rival political groups, and no less important, between then-Prime Minister Netanyahu and two of the ministers of defense who served during the crisis period: Naftali Bennett and Benny Gantz. They both

advocated greater IDF involvement in managing the civilian crisis, and received public and media support from many opinion makers. Sixty-five percent of the public wanted the COVID-19 crisis to be handled by the military. Bennett and Gantz were nevertheless blocked by Netanyahu, likely due at least in part to political considerations. The IDF preferred the middle road, whereby it would contribute to the best of its ability and as needed aid in the national effort, but would refrain from taking responsibility for managing the crisis or parts thereof. Overall, the pandemic left, or at least coincided with, deep scars in the social order in Israel, reflected, inter alia, in plunging public confidence, at various levels, in leadership, governmental institutions, the government, and even the IDF. The IDF, the Mossad, and the Israel Security Agency still enjoy a high level of public confidence—around 80 percent, which is, however, less than in previous surveys. In contrast, there is a clear and steep drop in confidence in the Supreme Court—43 percent, Israel Police—34 percent, and the Israeli government—only 25 percent.

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At the same time, it is clear that the greatest influence on the processes discussed in this article are related to the severe constitutional-political crisis that has afflicted Israel in recent years: four elections campaigns with no winner, with transitional governments, governmental chaos, poor performance by important government ministries, the absence of a state budget, and an almost complete loss of public confidence in the government. The formation of a new government has not yet stabilized the political system or increased public confidence in it, and it is therefore unclear whether the new government will succeed in changing these characteristics.

The Impact on Inter-Echelon Relations

How do these trends and challenges affect civil-military relations? The answer is framed by a multi-level picture, including the potential weakening of the value and institutional base of Israeli democracy, undermined functional capabilities of the central government in Israel, and growing public indifference, reflected in a lack of confidence in the government, protests against it, and relatively low voter turnout in the frequent Knesset elections in Israel. Another reflection of destabilization in the foundations of democracy is the behavioral norms that shape the relations between the political and professional military echelons described in the first part of the article. While this also occurred in the past, such occurrences have become more frequent and more acute in recent years. Politicization has increased greatly in Israel's governmental systems, in the sense of decision making at the state level affected by considerations of political survival and by considerations that are perceived as personal and political party-based, rather than statesmanlike and objective. In the absence of adequate regulation anchored in detailed legislation that clearly defines the relations between the political and military echelons, behavioral norms that have developed over the years governing the complex relations between the two echelons and the substance of shared responsibility in the broader sense are especially important.

An instructive example is the government's failure to address the IDF's Tnufa multi-year plan. Enormous planning efforts are invested in each five-year IDF plan, which constitutes the basis for the military's force buildup in the years ahead, and for adapting the IDF's deployment to the security challenges. In late 2019, the IDF began advancing the plan, but it has yet to obtain official approval from the state security cabinet, and is therefore not backed by a multi-year budget agreement. For lack of choice, the IDF is furthering the plan according

to the current resources allocated to it. This resounding failure is a result of Israel's political instability. Beyond the severe problem posed by the absence of an approved annual budget, a difficult phenomenon is involved (in addition to the unsolved problems of the military draft law and shortened compulsory military service, which is unacceptable to the IDF), indicating extreme irregularity in the management of state resources in an essential matter involving the core of national security. The reason for this disruption was essentially political, pertaining to the decision to not approve the state budget in order to avoid implementation of the prime ministerial rotation agreement. Presumably, however, had the personal relations in the prime minister-minister of defense-IDF chief of staff triangle been on a proper footing in their normative sense before the formation of the new government, rather than influenced by narrow personal and party-political considerations, a solution to this grave problem would have been found, as well as to the issue involving the conscription model.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Since the political instability will likely continue, perhaps for a prolonged period, the characteristics described above can be expected to continue to create additional difficulties in the dialogue between the political system and all elements of the professional security system. Although the Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and Chief of Staff apparently acted in reasonable harmony during Operation Guardian of the Walls, care should be taken to avoid damage resulting from the disruption of relations, which is liable to severely damage the system's ability to realize its purpose and potential in the long term. In order to reduce the damage, constitutional and normative steps should be taken to restore balance in relations between the echelons. A number of principal recommendations can be cited:

a. Changing the wording of the Basic Law: The Military so that it clarifies the substance of

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the relations, the obligations, and authority of the political and military echelons. In principle, the amended law should explicitly and fully address a number of critical matters, such as the military's purpose and functions, the nature of its subordination to the government and the minister of defense, the appointment of the IDF chief of staff, delineation of his fields of responsibility and of term limitation to four years, and the appointment of a deputy chief of staff and general staff officers. The law should also address the issue of management of wars and campaigns, including the functions of the government and the Ministerial Committee on National Security; presentation of the external and internal threats in the framework of intelligence agencies assessments; fundamental questions of force buildup, and especially the multi-year plans; the role of the military secretary to the prime minister; and civilian areas in which the IDF is entitled or not entitled to act. The General Security Services Law, in particular its mention of a ministerial committee for General Security Services affairs (Section 5) can serve as a worthy example for the amended Basic Law: The Military. In this context, also proposed is the enactment of a "Mossad Law" according to the special characteristics of this organization that define the principal elements presented above.

b. Improvement of the concept of civilian control of the military and military norms, together with the establishment of clear rules for managing the regular dialogue

between the government and the Ministerial Committee on National Security and the security agencies, especially the IDF, aimed at clarifying the situation and infrastructure for shared responsibility. These rules should define, for example, which security spheres are brought up for discussion in these forums, what the format of the dialogue and the required learning in them should be, what the security agencies are required to present in these discussions, and what the format should be for government/cabinet directives to the security agencies, including the aim of the necessary action and guidelines for delineating the boundaries in the use of military force.

c. The Basic Law: The Government should stipulate that it is the government's duty to formulate a document of principles for the security concept. This should be done at specified intervals through the NSC and in cooperation with the security agencies, and certainly whenever a new government takes office. An updated defense directive is to be derived from this document summarizing the map of security threats to Israel and the proper directions for response. It is important that part of the security concept document and security directive derived from it be made public. Even if it is part of the NSC's defined functions and not part of an amendment to the law, this necessary document can serve as a reference framework for a principled discussion between the echelons (and with the public), certainly on matters of principle.

d. Clear and up-to-date rules should be established for Knesset oversight of the security agencies, in particular through the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee and its subcommittees.

e. The role of the Office of the State Comptroller as an important public agency for examining the conduct of the security agencies should be strengthened and expanded.

f. In the short term, the government should find a way to approve the IDF's Tnufa multi-year plan and ways of budgeting it.

Above all, and even if it seems obvious, it is important to emphasize that the necessary solutions for putting relations between the political and professional military echelons on a proper footing must be based on accepted norms of public discourse and appropriate governmental behavior in a liberal democracy. Principles of transparency, objectivity, cooperation, and non-partisan national interest should also be implemented. This requires the total removal of any trace of politics from the security agencies and the way they are used by the government.

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Note

1   This article was written before the formation of Israel's current government, and its main points refer to the preceding period.

Photo: Return of Iranian casualties in Syrian civil war, August 30, 2016. Credit: Tasnim news agency (CC BY-SA 4.0)

Here to Stay: Iranian Involvement in Syria, 2011-2021

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Since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, and driven by the ideology of exporting the revolution, Iran has bolstered its efforts to expand its regional influence. The events of the last decade, marked by the Arab Spring, the undermining of traditional state frameworks, and the ongoing weakening of the pan-Arab system, gave Iran a unique opportunity to achieve this objective, including the attempt to consolidate territory under its control from Iran to the Mediterranean coast. Focusing on Iran's tightening grip on Syria, this article contends that in spite of Tehran's extensive investments thus far, it has not managed to build a strategic military front there. At the civilian level, however, it has scored some success by embedding itself more deeply in Syria's state mechanisms in a way that will be hard to reverse at any time soon. Israel must therefore reconsider its policy on this issue, and work toward supplementing an offensive military approach with long term political moves.

Keywords: Iran, Syria, Hezbollah, Shiite militias, soft power, Israel

"If we lose Syria we will not be able to maintain Tehran…The key is to hold on to Syria. In this sense, Syria is our 35th province and has strategic importance. If we have to choose Syria or Khuzestan— we should choose Syria."

Hujjat al-Islam Mehdi Taeb, 2012

In the years 2011-2012, the regime in Tehran reached a strategic decision to intervene in the Syrian civil war. Its goal was to preserve the strategic alliance between Iran and Syria that began back in the early 1980s and retain hold of Syria as an area of Iranian influence and activity, particularly with respect to support for Hezbollah in Lebanon. Since then, Iran has made a number of military, economic, and cultural-religious moves to establish its grip on the country, while saving the regime of Bashar al-Assad. In addition, Iran has exploited its foothold in Syria to build up its proxy forces that could challenge Israel and attack it when it so chooses.

Even after the civil war declined into relative calm, many of the pro-Iranian militias remained in Syria and continued to receive monetary and military support from Tehran, working according to the Hezbollah model in Lebanon.

The Military Dimension
Participation in the Civil War and Establishment of Militias
In the first two years of Syria's civil war, Iranian military activity was relatively minor, and centered on sending Hezbollah fighters to the country as advisors. In the summer of 2014, in view of widespread ISIS success in Syria and the growing threat to the Assad regime, the Iranians strengthened their forces with hundreds of Revolutionary Guards, increased the Hezbollah contingent to about 5,000, set up and equipped Shiite militias using foreign volunteers such as the Afghan Fatemiyoun and the Pakistani Zainebiyoun, and even "imported"

Iraqi Shiite militias that it had cultivated for many years—in particular, Hezbollah Brigades, Harakat Kezbollah al Nujaba, and Asa'ib Al-Haq. However, these moves were not enough to tip the scales in Assad's favor, and in the summer of 2015 the regime reached its lowest point of the civil war. At that point Moscow and Tehran made a joint strategic decision to save the Syrian regime, and significantly increased their involvement in the fighting: Iran reinforced its ground forces, and Russia provided aerial support. By 2016 the number of Iranian Revolutionary Guards in Syria peaked at some 2,500 fighters. Since then, as the fighting has subsided, their numbers have declined. Over the last two years there has been a perceptible Iranian attempt to reinforce the pro-Iranian militias and rely more on local Syrian fighters as a substitute for a physical Iranian presence.

In this framework Iran has worked to build the militias in Syria, just as it did in Lebanon and Iraq. First, it united the local militias all over Syria into one umbrella organization, the National Defense Forces—NDF. These forces, which were trained and directed by the Revolutionary Guards and operate throughout Syria, were organized according to the Basij model—a large armed militia, serving as a basis for popular support and a source of intelligence about public opinion toward the regime. Second, the Iranians exploited the attacks by global jihad organizations on Shiite towns in Syria—mainly along the Syria-Lebanon border, but also in the Syrian desert in the east—and set up locally-based militias, principally the Quwat al-Ridha forces. Finally, they created links with local Sunni militias such as the Baqir Brigade, which is located in Deir ez-Zur and comprises primarily two of the largest tribes in Syria, al-Baggara and al-Uqaydat, supplying them with weapons and combat know-how.

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According to a study conducted in June 2021 by the Turkish research center Jusoor, Iran and the militias under its authority occupied about 131 military sites scattered throughout Syria, from Daraa and Damascus in the south through Aleppo and Idlib in the north, and to Deir ez-Zur in the east. In addition, Hezbollah has several military strongholds in the country, 116 in all, many of which are near the borders with Lebanon and Israel. To date, however, Iranian attempts to build strategic military arrays in Syria have failed almost completely due to Israeli attacks. Nevertheless, the Iranians are trying to strengthen their military infrastructure in the country, in order to use it to promote their interests, both within Syria and in the battle against Israel.

The Syrian Army: Collaboration, Infiltration, and Arms Deals

Revolutionary Guards officers advised the Syrian military from the start of the civil war, and as the fighting dragged on and the regime lost control of large swaths of territory, Damascus's military dependence on Tehran grew. First, the Iranians helped the army fill its ranks following the massive erosion in manpower due to the war, and by the end of 2014, about 125,000 militia fighters (both foreign and local) were active in Syria—almost half the regime's fighting force. Second, as part of the joint efforts to rebuild the Syrian army, in October 2015 Russia and Iran set up a new military framework, the 4th Corps. This formation consists mainly of the 4th Division, the elite Syrian force under the command of Maher al-Assad (the President's brother), Alawite militias, and parts of the NDF. It is stationed in the northwest of the country and considered the military force most loyal to Iran. By establishing this corps the Iranians achieved two goals: extending their reach and influence in the Syrian army, and uniting most of the militias loyal to them under a joint command.

Iran is even financing Syrian purchases of Russian arms as well as itself supplying weapons to the regime, mainly in the field of air defense (in limited fashion), in order to offset Israel's aerial superiority. Relevant here is the Iranian-Syrian agreement to extend military and security cooperation, signed in Damascus in July 2020. In this framework it was agreed that Iran would send anti-aircraft missiles of two kinds to Syria: Bavar-373—a long-range ground-to-air missile that is an Iranian recreation of the Russian S-300 system with a range of 250 km; and Khordad-3—ground-to-air missiles with a medium range of 50-75 km (and which Iran used to bring down a US Hawk drone in June 2019). It is not clear whether the agreement has been implemented and if Iran has indeed sent such missiles to Syria.

Action against Israel

Since 2014 the Iranians have been trying to open an additional front against Israel on the Golan Heights, using Hezbollah fighters (wearing Syrian army uniforms and using their vehicles) and by setting up local militias in southern Syria, both Sunni and Druze. These in turn have exploited the difficult economic situation in the region and local fears of Islamist organizations that spread through the area during the Civil War. Iranian activity on this front translated into laying explosive devices along the border fence and building a rocket array facing the Israeli Golan Heights. Thus far, Israel's offensive efforts to thwart attacks, combined with Russia's partial restraint, the ongoing armed resistance of rebels (mainly in the south), and the elimination of Qassem Soleimani from the arena have denied Iran and Hezbollah success on this front.

The Iranians exploit their military presence to promote economic, cultural, religious, and other interests.

Soft Power

In addition to its military involvement in Syria, Iran invests considerable resources in elements of soft power, which is a complementary and sometimes even central element of its policy

to export the revolution. The Iranians exploit their military presence to promote economic, cultural, religious, and other interests. In this they have made gains, both in the short term, by signing economic agreements in order to bypass sanctions and using civilian sites as cover for military action; and in the long term, with their penetration into an array of civilian areas—society, economy, education, religion—and the creation of dependency on their services, until it becomes almost impossible to uproot them.

The Economic Dimension
Top-Down: Bilateral Agreements and Infrastructure Development
During the war Tehran signed a series of economic agreements with Damascus, ranging from long term loans given to the Syrian regime by Iranian banks, through the supply of Iranian oil, reconstruction of war-damaged areas, and the Syrian power system, down to mining of its quarries. As such, Iran seeks to recoup some of the enormous economic resources it invested over the war years (estimated in the tens of billions of dollars), and to expand economic cooperation in order to strengthen its grip on the country.

Iran sees Syria as an important geographic link in its goal for regional hegemony, and therefore seeks to advance two significant strategic moves: the creation of a Shiite transport corridor between Tehran and Beirut (with a railway crossing Iraq and Syria) and an established presence on the coast. In April 2019, after years of futile attempts to gain a foothold in one of Syria's ports, which failed largely because of Russian opposition, the Assad regime gave Iran permission to lease part of Latakia Port, and in March 2021, a regular marine supply line was launched, linking it to the Bandar Abbas Port in southern Iran.

Nevertheless, there is a difference between declarations and signed contracts, and facts on the ground. Numerous bureaucratic hurdles as well as Syria's obvious reluctance to rely on Tehran as its sole source of aid interfere

with Iranian attempts to take control of the Syrian economy. Moreover, in spite of all the declarations regarding Latakia Port, it is not entirely clear if it was in fact leased to the Iranians.

Bottom-Up: A Shiite Social Network
A decade of bloody civil war joined by the COVID-19 pandemic and the imposition of American sanctions on the Assad regime in June 2020 (Caesar Act) caused severe damage to the Syrian economy. According to a World Bank Report of March 2021, over the past decade the Syrian economy has shrunk by about 60 percent, and the Syrian pound plummeted from a rate of 46 pounds to the dollar in December 2010 to over 3,000 pounds to the dollar in June 2021. Average wages also fell sharply, from around $300-600 a month in 2010 to the present low of $20-50 a month. There have likewise been many accounts of shortages of basic foods and soaring prices. For example, the price of eggs is one hundred times greater (jumping from 3 to 300 pounds per egg), while bread is sixty times more expensive. According to a report from the UN Global Food Program, about two thirds of the Syrian population require monthly assistance to avert starvation.

Apart from the economic agreements designed to increase the dependence of the Assad regime on the Islamic Republic, the Iranians and their proxies also exploit the socioeconomic crisis to intensify Iranian influence at the popular level, with the focus on the most needy groups in weak peripheral areas. The Deir ez-Zur district in eastern Syria is a main focus of Iranian efforts of this kind. The inhabitants of this desert region, who rely mainly on agriculture and raising sheep, suffered high rates of unemployment even before the war, and were severely affected by the ongoing drought that struck Syria at the start of the 21st century. It is therefore no wonder that this region, strategically located on the border with Iraq and relatively sparsely populated, became fertile ground for the growth of Islamist rebel

groups during the war, and in the years 2014-2017 was largely controlled by ISIS.

When the province was liberated from the Islamists, the Iranians and their proxies set up a number of military bases (in Deir ez-Zur there are 13 Iranian bases and seven Hezbollah bases). Thereafter, with the aim of increasing their influence among the local population, the Iranians targeted civilian life: they give money and food baskets to the needy, offer free medical treatment, and organize trips to Shiite holy places throughout Syria. At the same time, because of the tribal nature of the population, the Iranians seek the support of local sheikhs, while driving a wedge[1] between them and the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF)—a largely Kurdish military alliance, supported by the United States that is also present in this region.

Those who live in the region, Sunnis in origin who fled for their lives during the war, returned home under Iranian protection, and some of them even joined the pro-Iranian militias active in Deir ez-Zur because of the pay almost unimaginable in Syrian terms—$200 a month, and double promised to those who convert to Shia Islam. Without precise data about local recruitment to the militias, it is reasonable to presume that the response is not marginal, if only because of the militias' involvement in the daily lives of the community. Thus, in al-Bukamal, one of the largest towns in the Deir ez-Zur province located near the Iraqi border, the Iranians renovated the local park that was destroyed by ISIS, and each week the militias organize leisure and cultural activities there for the locals, which naturally carry Shiite messages. The Iranians operate in a similar way in other weak areas of Syria, particularly in the south—Daraa, Suwayda, and Quneitra—and direct their dawaa and recruitment efforts at the poorest populations and minority groups.

The Religious Dimension—Shiite "Missionaries" and Indoctrination

One of the most interesting methods used by Iran to establish its status in Syria is the attempt to increase the number of Shiites in the country. The goal is to achieve two objectives at once: first, the Shiite residents will serve as the vanguard of Iranian ideology in Syria, and second, the presence of a large Shiite population in Syria will provide Iran with an ongoing pretext for intervention, as the "shield of Shia Islam." But unlike in other countries (Iraq, Lebanon, and Yemen), the relatively small number of Shiites in Syria, only 2 percent, makes a significant change of the demographic balance impossible. Therefore the Iranians, with the encouragement of the Assad family, are working to bring the Alawites—who constitute about 15 percent of the population and hold all senior government and military positions—closer to Twelver Shiism (the largest Shia faction and the most common in Iran).

The idea of Shiite missionizing activity toward the Alawites in Syria is not new, and is a shared interest of both Iran, eager to spread Shiism, and the Assad family, which seeks religious legitimacy for its rule. For hundreds of years the Alawite sect was considered heretical in Islam, and it was only in 1974 that the well-known Shiite scholar Musa al-Sadr, who was in alliance with Hafez al-Assad, published a *fatwa* (religious ruling) stating that the Alawites were part of Shia Islam. Alawite-Shiite links grew stronger after the Islamic Revolution in Iran, and since then there have been a number of Syrian-Iranian attempts to bring the Alawites closer to Twelver Shiism. For example, in the 1980s, Jamil al-Assad, the brother of then-President Hafez al-Assad, set up a charity under the name al-Murtada, which called on Syrian Alawites to adopt Twelver Shiism, and also sent hundreds of Syrians to Shiite religious studies in Qom, so they could act as missionaries in their country.

The missionary process gathered pace when Bashar al-Assad came to power. The Iranians opened *hussainiyas* (Shiite meeting places) in poor towns of Deir ez-Zur and a-Raqqa; they donated money to build hospitals in Syria and gave aid, in money and subsidies for basic food

items, to needy Sunni groups in Syria; and they also tried to lure public opinion figures to convert to Shiism with money and gifts (mainly given to the heads of the large tribes in the east, who had the most influence over their followers). However, the Alawite sect in Syria has a clearly educated and secular character, and tends to regard Iranian efforts at Shiization with at least some suspicion.

Since the outbreak of the civil war and Tehran's uncompromising loyalty to Assad, the Syrian government has allowed the Iranians to do almost anything they please. First, the Iranians have significantly increased their "cultural centers" in Syria. Those centers that were ostensibly intended to enrich local leisure culture were actually used to spread the Shiite message, mostly through sermons from clerics. Second, in 2014, following an Iranian request, Assad required the Ministry of Education to include Shiite studies in all schools, colleges, and universities in the country. At the same time, and not by chance, restrictions were imposed on the role of the Sunni *ulama* in Syrian public education. In addition, since the start of the war, Iran opened some 40 Shiite schools in Damascus and several more in Latakia, Deir ez-Zur, and al-Bukamal, where the Iranians subsidize the studies and also give small stipends to the pupils (which are like oxygen in economically suffocating Syria). With Iranian encouragement, the Syrian regime set up ten institutions of *sharia* studies all over the country, which teach according to the Jafari system (the most common system in Shiism). Iran is likewise active on the academic front; in recent years it established five extensions of Iranian universities, which also encourage applications from Shiite students from the region (Iranians, Iraqis, Afghanis, and others) with generous scholarships to encourage them to remain in Syria after their studies. Finally, targeting informal education, the Iranians established two youth movements in Syria, Imam al-Mahdi Scouts and al-Wilayah Scouts,

which combine Shiite education with semi-military training.

Another step taken by Tehran to strengthen the Shiite identity in Syria is to promote Shiite holy sites in the country, by encouraging religious tourism (such as the Shiite Ziyara) and establishing centers of Shia studies. They have renovated holy sites that were damaged in the fighting and established some new ones, encouraging Shiites from all over the Middle East to visit and study there, and some have even settled permanently in Syria. The best example is the shrine to al-Sayeda Zeinab on the southern outskirts of Damascus, which according to Shia faith is the burial site of Zeinab, the daughter of Ali and Fatma and the granddaughter of Mohammed. In the civil war the shrine became a symbol: local Shiites took refuge inside from repeated attacks by global jihad organizations; several severe suicide attacks took the lives of dozens of pilgrims; and the desire to defend the shrine led to impressive recruitment of Shiite fighters, while Hezbollah and Iranian fighters were sent repeatedly to try and break through to the besieged shrine. In recent years, after the final conquest of the site, Iran purchased several buildings in the area to create a protective belt around it. Today the entire area, like other Shiite sites in the country, is a base of Hezbollah control and of pro-Iranian militias.

The Demographic Dimension: Resettlement and Encouraged Shiite Migration to Syria

Another method adopted by Tehran to strengthen Shiite identity in Syria is to resettle Shiites in towns that were destroyed or abandoned during the war. The Iranians understand that Syrian demography is far from ensuring Shia hegemony, so they focus on areas of more strategic importance for them: the larger towns, for their proximity to economic and government centers, and the borders with Iraq and Lebanon, because of their goal of achieving

an above-ground corridor and securing the Hezbollah rear.

Accordingly, in the course of the civil war, Iran and its proxies carried out Shia-Sunni population exchanges, sometimes by force and sometimes as part of ceasefire agreements with rebel groups. A prominent example is the town of al-Qusayr, a Sunni enclave in an Alawite and Shia region on the crossroads from the Lebanese border to Homs. The small town was the main focus of the rebel forces at the start of the civil war, and the heavy fighting in and around it prompted the residents to flee, until in mid-2013 it was captured by Hezbollah and Syrian army forces. Iran, which understood the strategic importance of the location, turned the area into a Hezbollah base and resettled Shiites from Lebanon and Syria there. The Qusayr refugees who tried to return to their homes were arrested.

In September 2015 a ceasefire was signed between the regime and the rebels under siege in the towns of Zabadani and Madaya to the west of Damascus. Iran insisted on including a clause in the agreement whereby the rebels would leave these towns and be replaced by a Shiite population from the besieged villages of al-Fu'ah and Kafriya near Idlib. A year later, in August 2016, in Daraa, west of Damascus, the Iranians settled 300 Shiite families from Iraq to replace the Sunni rebels who had left. There are also reports that during the civil war, pro-Iranian militias systematically set fire to land registration offices in many towns so that the original residents would find it difficult to prove their links to the region, making the resettlement project simpler.

In April 2018 the Syrian parliament passed the 10-2018 Law (which was amended in November that year), enabling the regime to requisition land all over the country for "redevelopment." Under this law, once the state declares that a region has been designated for development, the local authority must provide a list of all land owners within 45 days, and anyone who is not on the list can appeal the decision within a year from the declaration, to receive compensation. In one way or another, after the declaration all residents of the area must leave. In effect, the regime and the Iranians are using this law to complete the resettlement and population exchange project in Syria.

Conclusion

Iranian activity in Syria is conducted on several levels—military, economic, social, religious, and educational—in order to create a strong support network that is not dependent on a physical Iranian presence. Tehran is seeking to build a power base that can rival the regime by unseating its monopoly on the use of force and by wielding leverage in civil society, and is loyal to itself and the Islamic Republic. The depth of Iranian social and economic penetration will make it hard to remove Iran from Syria, or to limit its influence on the country. However, Iran has encountered some difficulties that prevent it from taking complete control of Syrian systems, such as the Russian presence, the demographic balance that is clearly tipped against the Shia, the secular nature of the Alawite minority, and the Syrian bureaucracy.

Israeli policymakers should reconsider Israel's response to the Iranian threat posed by the entrenchment in Syria. First, it should be understood that Iran sees Syria as a primary strategic asset, and that the Iranians are working on a long term plan. In other words, military strikes on pro-Iranian militias in Syria will not deter Tehran or make it recalculate its route on the Syrian issue. If Israel does indeed wish to frustrate Iran's long term goals in Syria, it must carry out a number of political moves to supplement its military actions:

a. Russia on board: Iranian moves in Syria are contrary to the Russian interest of strengthening the central government. The Russians should understand that as long as Iranian forces remain in the country and the local militias are not integrated into the

Syrian security framework, the situation could deteriorate and resemble the situation in Lebanon or Iraq, making it harder for the Russians to reap any economic or political gains from a rehabilitated Syria.

b. Carrots and sticks for Damascus: Israel should send a message to the regime (through the Russians) that it accepts Assad's rule in Syria and will not endanger it. However, if Iran continues its entrenchment in Syria, then Israel will consider attacking targets that will damage the regime's stability. Apart from that, if Assad takes steps to restrain Iran and Hezbollah in Syria, Israel will make an effort to persuade Washington to remove the onerous sanctions.

c. Economic recovery: It is extremely important to promote a regional move toward investment in services and infrastructures in eastern and southern Syria. Israel should use its new contacts in the Arab world and enlist its friends in the Gulf on this matter (although of course its involvement must remain secret, in order to avoid endangering the process). In this way everyone wins: the dependence of the Syrian regime and population on Iranian funds will decrease and Damascus will also gain renewed recognition by the Arab states; the Gulf states will gain a foothold in Syria and be portrayed as leaders in the inter-Arab system that provide aid to an Arab country in distress; and the Russians can reverse their image as the destroyers of Syria, and even earn points in the international system.

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Note
1   In the past year a number of tribal leaders in eastern Syria were killed by unknown assailants. This has raised the already high level of tension between the tribes and the SDF.

Photo: Muslims burn the Israeli flag in Palu City, Indonesia, May 21, 2021. Credit: Opan Bustan/Opn Images/Cover Ima via Reuters Connect

Israel-Indonesia: Nurturing People-to-People Ties without Diplomatic Relations

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Indonesia, which has the largest Muslim population and is the world's third largest democracy, is an important and growing Southeast Asian power. Indonesia stresses that diplomatic relations with Israel cannot exist before an independent Palestinian state is created with its capital in East Jerusalem. This position is based on Indonesia's constitution, which obligates opposition to colonialism. The commitment by Indonesia's Muslim majority to the Palestinian cause, primarily out of religious feelings, further solidifies the country's stance on this issue. Indonesian society thus takes a negative, and even hostile, view of Israel, grounded in the rejection of the Israeli narrative on the conflict and the absence of bridges between Israeli and Indonesian society. Nurturing people-to-people relations/ties between non-governmental entities on both sides is therefore of increasing importance, with an emphasis from the Israeli perspective on educated Indonesian Muslim opinion makers. Though these ties are not a channel toward diplomatic relations, they can help improve Israel's image and cultivate some empathy toward it.

Keywords: Israel, Indonesia, diplomacy, people-to-people ties, Islam, Palestinian Authority, Hamas, academia

Indonesia is the world's fourth most populous country, the third largest democracy, and home to the world's largest Muslim population; it is an important Southeast Asian actor and has an economy headed for a high global rating. Nonetheless, it largely remains an amorphous entity for the majority in Israeli society, partly due to the absence of diplomatic relations between the two countries. While Israel awaits the day when Indonesia will be prepared to establish formal ties, Jakarta's position has thus been unequivocal and uncompromising: no diplomatic relations with Israel before the realization of the two-state solution and the establishment of a Palestinian state based within the June 4, 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Meanwhile, as it has done for decades, Indonesia continues to demonstrate a strong commitment to the Palestinian cause in the international and Islamic theaters, inevitably accompanied by an anti-Israel tone.

> Wide circles within the huge Muslim population in Indonesia, as part of the affiliation with the *umma*, have a strong emotional identification with the Palestinian people, and regard the Palestinian cause as a global Muslim struggle.

The National and Religious Dimension

Wide circles within the huge Muslim population in Indonesia, as part of the affiliation with the *umma*—the general community of Muslim believers—have a strong emotional identification with the Palestinian people, and regard the Palestinian cause as a global Muslim struggle. This is especially prominent on the question of Jerusalem/al-Quds, with an emphasis on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif. This situation seems to restrict the Indonesian government's decision making on the question of relations with Israel, out of a realization that any softening of its position is liable to exact a high price in Indonesia's internal theater.

Beyond this, the state itself endorses a national approach, without Islamic symbols, that since 1967 has increasingly demonstrated its commitment to the Palestinian cause and its view on the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel. This commitment, which pervades all public political discourse, is based mainly on the state's historic commitment to anti-colonialism. The principle is enshrined in the preamble to the 1945 founding Indonesian constitution, which opens, "With independence being the right of every nation, colonialism must be eliminated from the face of the earth as it is contrary to the dictates of human nature and justice." The historic roots of this attitude are echoed in the 1945-1949 Indonesian war of independence against the Netherlands, and were also anchored in Indonesia's key role in the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement in the 1950s. In accordance with this attitude, Indonesian support for the Palestinians is often couched in terms of justice, legitimate rights, and freedom.

A Look at Israel: Two Test Cases— Individual, but Instructive

Following the events in the spring of 2021 in East Jerusalem and the fighting between Israel and Hamas, Indonesian intellectual Zuhairi Misrawi published an article entitled "Mengapa Israel Salah dan Kalah? ("Why Did Israel Err, and Why was it Defeated?").The article, which was replete with anti-Israel rhetoric, treats the Gaza Strip and the West Bank as a single entity, accuses Israel of brutality (*kebiadaban*) and apartheid, and also, to no one's surprise, describes Israel as a colonial (*penjajah*) country. The statements and arguments are highly slanted, including a reference to the asymmetry in the number of fatalities and injured, with no comment on Iron Dome and the defense of the Israeli home front. The fact that Hamas launches rockets from the midst of the civilian population, stations rocket launchers there, and uses civilians as human shields is totally ignored.

This decidedly one-sided presentation alleges that Israel used powerful and sophisticated deadly weapons indiscriminately in crude violation of international law with the continual excuse of fighting against Hamas. The writer lists what he regards as Hamas's achievements, including strengthened popularity and political power among the Palestinians, growing sympathy in the Arab world for the Palestinian cause, and definition of a red line for Israel on Jerusalem. He refers separately to Hamas's success in launching over 4,000 rockets, mainly at Israeli cities.

There is nothing new in this, certainly not for observers of events in Indonesia, where a negative image of Israel prevails among a significant part of the dominant Muslim majority. A great many members of the mainstream movement, which holds moderate Islamic views and supports the democratic process, share it. However, important here is that the writer is a member of Nahdatul Ulama (NU)—the largest Islamic organization in Indonesia, regarded as a reliable cornerstone of the country's strong and massive civil Muslim society. This organization is also an important partner of the regime in promoting democracy, combating religious extremism, fostering interfaith tolerance, furthering understanding of the need to resolve conflicts peacefully, and exporting the advantages of Indonesia's moderate Islam to Muslim societies worldwide as a response to the growing religious extremism in the Middle East, while advancing a global interfaith dialogue.

The NU is identified with the pluralistic and humanitarian legacy of Abdurrahman Wahid (1940-2009), the organization's charismatic leader for many years, who served as Indonesia's first president in the democratic era (1999-2001). He also was noteworthy in his friendly attitude toward Judaism, his belief in the historic affinity between Judaism and Islam, his visits to Israel before and after his term as president, and especially as the first and last Indonesian leader so far to try (unsuccessfully) to reverse his country's policy toward Israel through a plan for consolidating official trade relations between the two countries.

At the same time, it is becoming clear that in the Indonesian discourse on the Palestinian question, different voices are emerging—not in substance, but in rhetoric and tone. In a quite rare event, probably made possible by the COVID-19 pandemic, I was invited to speak at a webinar entitled "Normalization of Relations between Arab Countries and Israel: Political Interests & the Status of Palestine," organized by the Students Association of the Department of International Relations (KOMAHI) at Universitas Islam Indonesia (UII). Located in the center of Java Island, known as a center for institutions of higher education, this university has deep roots in Indonesia's national history. Issuing an invitation to an Israeli to speak in the heart of Indonesian academia is no small matter, especially on such a sensitive issue. It is difficult to separate the subject of normalization of relations, certainly from an Indonesian perspective, from the Palestinian issue.

The advance text for discussion highlighted the challenge involved; inter alia it stated that it would be interesting to discuss whether the normalization of relations between Arab countries and Israel is a shift in political interests, or "there is another conspiracy behind this normalization, and most importantly what is the current condition of Palestine." The unique opportunity provided was used to explain to the Indonesian students in their home country why Indonesia should reconsider its position on diplomatic relations with Israel. The opportunity was also utilized to illuminate issues of which they were completely unaware, namely, geostrategic data and current and potential threats to Israel that make the slogan "returning Israel to the 1967 borders" more complex than their perspective might ordinarily deem.

It soon became clear that the other participant in the webinar, Mohamad Rezky Utama, a lecturer in the host department, in effect met the challenge. It was obvious that he was aware of the complexity of the conflict

in our region and the map of threats to Israel within the geostrategic context, including topographic aspects. His remarks about the Golden Age in Muslim-Jewish relations in Spain and his clear statements that the Jews in Israel had deep historic roots in the country were impressive. He also chose to tell the students that the situation of the Arab population in Israel had improved, and that its representatives constituted part of the political system. At the same time, he underscored the Palestinians' right to an independent state, and insisted on the need for his country to continue providing humanitarian aid to the Palestinians, while taking care that it reaches the right hands.

Both Mohamad Rezky Utama and Zuhairi Misrawi are part of the wider circles of young educated Muslims in Indonesia, many of whom are prominent advocates of religious tolerance, pluralism, democracy, gender equality, interfaith dialogue, and peaceful resolution of conflicts in their country. When it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, they clearly support the strong state commitment to the idea of establishing an independent Palestinian state with its capital in East Jerusalem living in peace next to Israel. But at the same time a distinction can be noticed as regards Israel's image and the tone of rhetoric, evident in the article by Zuhairi Misrawi cited above, compared with Utama's talk in the webinar. It appears that Misrawi's antagonistic approach toward Israel in this specific article reflects pervasive opinions in wider segments of dominant Muslim majority, whereas Utama seems to represent a minority view in his "soft" attitude toward Israel and his openness to the Israeli narrative.

The most prominent hint of the extent of Utama's empathy toward Israel is probably rooted in his participation in a visit to Israel by an Indonesian delegation of religious and educational figures organized by the Australia/ Israel & Jewish Affairs Council (AIJAC) under the title of "In the Footsteps of Gus Dur" (an Indonesian term of respect for Abdurrahman Wahid). Utama himself drew a straight line

between his remarks at the webinar to this visit, which also included the Palestinian Authority (PA) territories. The delegation members were able to hold intimate meetings with Israelis, including Arabs in Israel; Palestinians; and Jewish, Muslim, and Christian religious figures. He told his students, Indonesians, that the visit had changed his view of the region. The tour of the Golan Heights and the fact that the visit took place during one of the escalation periods in the south, including rocket fire into Israeli territory, especially increased his understanding of Israel's geostrategic situation, including topographical aspects and the potential threats.

Yet notwithstanding the apparent strong link between Mohamad Rezky Utama's approach and the impact of the visit to Israel, the added value of such visits is more complex in the case of Zuhairi Misrawi. Misrawi too visited Israel in 2006, allegedly at an invitation of the nascent Israeli government at the time, under Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, "to provide a second opinion on Israel's policy towards Palestine." Moreover, unlike other Muslim scholars, he supported the establishment of relations between Indonesia and Israel then, hinting that since Israel is the only superpower in the Middle East, establishing relations with it "could pave the way for Indonesia as the biggest Muslim country to capitalize on its leverage over the ongoing conflict, which has cost millions of innocent lives." More than a decade has been passed since these words were published. Therefore—and this is a conjecture only— perhaps Indonesian scholars who look at Israel now, both its politics and public opinion, get an impression that the endorsement of the idea of the two-state solution has weakened. In other words, in an Indonesian perspective, it may now be harder to bridge the gap between the vision of a peaceful solution, including establishment of an independent Palestinian state, and reality. Nevertheless, the importance of people-to-people ties between Israel and Indonesia should not be underestimated or ignored.

People-to-People Ties So Far

Ties between people in terms of interaction between non-governmental elements from various countries also take place when diplomatic relations exist. As such, they can be integrated in public diplomacy aimed at furthering a variety of state interests by appealing to foreign audiences, and in effect become an additional and supplementary tool in diplomacy. In the case of Israeli-Indonesian relations, people-to-people ties are likely to be of special importance because of the absence of diplomatic relations and formal bridges between Israeli and Indonesian society. In the current situation, such ties are expressed to a large extent through occasional visits to Israel by Indonesian delegations; notable are initiatives of the Australia/Israel and Jewish Affairs Council (AIJAC), an important organization of Australian Jewry, not as initiatives by Israel or Indonesia.

AIJAC is a strongly pro-Israel body that cares deeply about Middle Eastern issues, and Israel in particular, and seeks to promote Israel's interest among the Australian public, in part through media and journalism activity. Due to Australia's proximity to Indonesia, AIJAC also takes an interest in the Indonesian archipelago. Thus its initiatives have brought to Israel various players from Indonesian civil society, such as religious figures, journalists, academics, and educators, rather than representatives of government ministries or senior officials. All this occurs without any involvement by the Indonesian state, but certainly with its knowledge. Moreover, these visits are not covered by the Indonesian media, except for a few cases in which they are criticized, usually in response to the participants meeting with the Israeli elite, including the President of Israel, and even with the Prime Minister. In contrast to visits to Israel by Indonesian Muslims and Christians focusing on the holy places, these visits provide the participants with close and systematic knowledge, rare in the Indonesian context, of Israel as a country and society. This includes awareness of the security challenges and Israeli politics, with a visit to the Knesset and a meeting with Knesset members, the question of Israel's Arab sector, and the issue of Jerusalem. It appears that for the Muslim participants, prayer at al-Aqsa Mosque constitutes a supreme religious experience. Additionally, and this is very important from an Indonesian perspective, the visits include the PA territories, involving meetings with PA officials, religious figures, journalists, and members of non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

> People-to-people ties are likely to be of special importance because of the absence of diplomatic relations and formal bridges between Israeli and Indonesian society.

Elements of people-to-people ties also come from cooperative efforts involving civil society that are not of an official state character. One example is a specific cooperative venture in agriculture—a private initiative that brought a delegation of Indonesian students to Israel for advanced agricultural training. Another specific effort a decade ago, in medicine, produced a cooperative agreement on emergency medical services between Magen David Adom and Muhammadiyah, an Islamic organization that is a basic element of the dominant Muslim civil society in Indonesia, together with the NU, and is involved in a wide range of civil spheres. At that time, senior officials of the Indonesian health system and community organizations also received training in emergency medical services and emergency medicine in Israel at Magen David Adom workshops. From the Indonesian perspective, such cooperation is perceived as an opportunity to promote interfaith dialogue.

In addition, academic activity that includes elements of ties between people from both countries is underway. Although there are no official relations between academic institutions, an interesting academic interaction is being formed that brings people together and contributes to the building of bridges

of understanding. A unique and important breakthrough in Indonesia studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem has occurred in recent years, including instruction in the Indonesian language. Indonesian academics are also involved in this. In cooperation with an Indonesian scholar, I wrote a chapter on Israel-Indonesia relations for a book on relations between Israel and Asia. This book will be published as a project of the University of Haifa, which regards joint research by an Israeli scholar and an Indonesian scholar as a matter of importance.

The Indonesian delegations and groups who visit Israel are not seeking to express a desire to promote diplomatic relations. Some wish to further Jewish-Muslim understanding and Israeli-Palestinian understanding, and to convey an Indonesian commitment to help promote the establishment of an independent Palestinian state by fostering a process of reconciliation and peace. The impression is that as a country, Indonesia has no interest in creating a corresponding experience of an encounter for Israelis with Indonesian society. Most Israelis visiting Indonesia, which involves a rather involved procedure, do so as part of tourist trips in the ordinary sense of this concept. Any attempt at a comparison, for example between the current situation and "ping pong diplomacy"—sports competitions between the table tennis teams of the United States and China in the early 1970s, which paved the way for US President Nixon's visit to China in 1972 after many years of estrangement, and the instituting of diplomatic relations in the late 1970s—is unfounded.

An Exceptional Indonesian Voice from an Unexpected Direction

Against this background, of particular interest is an article published in early 2020 by Ary Aprianto, a diplomat from the Indonesian Foreign Affairs Ministry, who specializes in issues pertaining to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Emphasizing that the opinions expressed are his alone, the article was published in the *Jakarta Globe*, a highly regarded English-language Indonesian newspaper, under the headline "How Indonesia Can Help Promote Dialogues between Ordinary Israelis and Palestinians." Early in the article, Aprianto argues that Israel's actions show that peace in "Palestine" is not imminent. In his opinion, Indonesia should therefore consider other options for promoting a peace process in the Middle East. One of these options is dialogue outside the centers of power. In his view, the absence of such dialogue in relations between Israelis and Palestinians has aggravated the conflict and the difficulty in solving it. More responsibility should therefore be delegated to local residents in creating conditions that support peace. Intermediate level leaders from outside the political establishment and local communities should be part of an overall peace strategy. According to him, there is nothing new in this idea, since the Oslo Accords, for example, encouraged dialogues between non-governmental players on both sides. Indonesia has the means and proven experience in helping to improve ties between people in Israel and "Palestine." This requires time and long-term planning, but most of the necessary elements are already at hand, thanks to the aid programs for the Palestinians to which Indonesia contributes.

He therefore believes that people-to-people ties should be placed at the forefront, in contrast to the previous peace processes controlled by the United States, which involved primarily Palestinian and Israeli political elites. The author acknowledges that it is not easy for Indonesians to communicate with Israelis, due to Indonesia's lack of official diplomatic relations with Israel. In his view, the more practical solution is therefore to work through networks of non-governmental players in Indonesia, many of which are capable of leading programs of people-to-people ties. He argues that "the trickiest part" would be "managing the sentiments" of certain elements of Indonesian society, since it is likely that such programs

will also include visits of Israeli citizens to Indonesia. The opposition to this can be reduced by providing proper information about the importance of such programs for Indonesia. The inclusion of Islamic organizations can help avoid a negative response from within.

Aprianto adds that it is now also important to educate the Indonesian public about the facts of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; while the "Israeli occupation" and violence against Palestinians are a fact, the existence of people on both sides who want peace is also a fact. It is now the time for many Indonesians to learn that perhaps a significant part of their feelings about the conflict are no longer valid. Islam, he notes, is not the only religion in "Palestine," and the Middle East and the Arab world are changing. For years, a number of countries with an Arab majority have maintained diplomatic relations with Israel, and ties between it and its Arab neighbors are becoming friendlier, even if only because of growing hostility between Arab countries and Iran. At the end of his article, Aprianto emphasizes that the Indonesian constitution dictates both opposition to colonialism and the diplomacy of peace. All of the relevant parties should be engaged in any effort to achieve peace. The perception of Indonesian foreign policy as "free and active" (*bebas dan aktif*, in Indonesian—a perception that was formulated by the country's founders) requires creativity. Facilitating dialogues between ordinary Israelis and Palestinians, he argues, affords an example of creative diplomacy. If this is done properly, Indonesia will create a basis for a more important role for it in promoting a peace process in the Middle East.

Conclusion

The article by the Indonesian diplomat was written not long before the normalization of relations between Israel and a number of Arab countries, late in the term of US President Trump. This development may support the Indonesian writer's arguments, although the Indonesian state continues to adhere to an uncompromising stance on the question of diplomatic relations with Israel, with no sign of change. Nevertheless, attention should be paid to the final section of the article, in which Aprianto hints at Indonesia's clear interest to play a more important role in settling conflicts in the region, with an emphasis on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This Indonesia interest also seems to reflect its hope that lowering the level of violence in the Middle East will lessen the force of the shockwaves of religious extremism headed in Indonesia's direction, and that its involvement for supporting conflict resolution will improve its international standing.

Encouragement and expansion of people-to-people ties between Israel and Indonesia are in Israel's interest.

It appears that there is a certain degree of understanding in Indonesia that the lack of diplomatic relations with Israel will make it difficult for Indonesia to fulfill its ambition of playing an important role in promoting a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In the current situation, it is therefore possible that some in Indonesia realize that the little that can and should be done lies in person-to-person ties, even though if this is practiced on a larger scale, it might arouse a negative response among the Muslim majority, and certainly in the circles of political Islam.

Finally, encouragement and expansion of people-to-people ties between Israel and Indonesia are in Israel's interest. This is so especially due to the lack of diplomatic relations between the two countries, the almost complete alienation from the Israeli narrative in Indonesian society, and Israel's highly negative image, primarily because of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. An effort in this matter should concentrate on an appeal to educated Indonesian Muslims, especially those who are opinion makers, such as academics, journalists, religious figures, and educators.

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A range of organizational systems, institutions, and NGOs from the Israeli side can be enlisted in this effort, e.g., institutions of higher education and academic research institutes. Their great potential is far from fully utilized; there is quite a bit of curiosity among Indonesian academics about Israeli higher education. Entities interested in promoting interfaith dialogue and understanding can also contribute; this matter attracts much attention from extensive circles in moderate mainstream Muslim movement in Indonesia. Entities in Israel that have already demonstrated a degree of involvement in the matter, including notably the Israel-Asia Center (IAC), which seeks to further people-to-people ties between Israel and Asian countries, can also provide useful assistance. This includes a current program aimed at organizing encounters between suitable parties in Israeli and Indonesian society for the sake of cooperation, in a search of solutions for a variety of challenging issues, such as health, food security, and education. Likewise noteworthy are the Israel-Indonesia Chamber of Commerce, which acts as a subordinate office of the Israel-Asia Chamber of Commerce and the Israel Council on Foreign Relations (ICFR),

which operates under the auspices of the World Jewish Congress.

To this can be added initiatives aimed at encouraging communications on social networks for the purpose of reaching a large audience of young Indonesians who are major consumers of such communications. This array of activities is likely to some extent to lower the barriers of alienation between Israeli and Indonesian society, and temper Israel's negative image among large sections of the Indonesian public. However, the effects of increasing people-to-people ties on softening Indonesia's position on diplomatic relations with Israel are likely to be limited as long as a real peace process on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict does not move forward.

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Photo: A destroyed armored vehicle in Hawzen, Ethiopia, June 6, 2021

Is Ethiopia Collapsing?
Implications for Israel and the Region from the Tigray War

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A bloody civil war has waged for the past year in the Tigray region of Ethiopia between the Ethiopian federal army and its allies and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). The significant operational achievements by the rebel forces in recent months have raised doubts regarding the federal government's ability to impose its authority over the country and rebuff other separatist threats, and may even threaten its political survival. Meanwhile, the instability and violence are spilling over beyond the local combat zone, involving additional states and threatening a volatile area. On the political level, the conflict has distanced Ethiopia from Washington, which aims to impose sanctions on Ethiopia, and brought it closer to Moscow, Beijing, Ankara, and perhaps even Tehran. Israel and the Gulf states are thus in a dilemma regarding how to relate to the events in Ethiopia, especially given their longstanding close relations with Addis Ababa. This article surveys the geopolitical implications of the developments in Ethiopia, analyzes the considerations of the various actors, and offers strategic recommendations for Israel.

Keywords: Ethiopia, Tigray, Egypt, United States, Red Sea

Main Developments

A series of military confrontations in the Tigray region in November 2020 led to the outbreak of a bloody civil war between the Ethiopian federal army and its allies—mainly the Eritrean military and the Amhara militia—and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the governing party in the Tigray region. This is a struggle between different elites for dominance in Ethiopia and to a large extent is also based on internal ethnic divisions. From the early 1990s until 2018, the TPLF was the dominant party in the political structure of federal Ethiopia, and constituted the country's ruling elite. The party represented the Tigray region, with only about 6 percent of Ethiopia's total population. For this reason, the TPLF was considered disproportionately powerful in the eyes of many Ethiopians, including its former allies—who represented other regions, sometimes much larger ones—in the governing coalition.

> A series of military confrontations in the Tigray region in November 2020 led to the outbreak of a bloody civil war between the Ethiopian federal army and its allies—mainly the Eritrean military and the Amhara militia—and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the governing party in the Tigray region.

In 2018 Abiy Ahmed was elected Prime Minister of Ethiopia and aimed to make far-reaching changes in the balance of power in Ethiopia. Abiy, himself of Oromo descent, aspired to strengthen the central government in Ethiopia and to weaken the Tigrayan centers of power in the federation. In practice, the rise of Abiy signaled the end of the TPLF's dominance within the Ethiopian federal government, for the first time in three decades. In Abiy's view, the TPLF leadership was the main and most powerful bastion of opposition to the comprehensive governmental reforms he hoped to pass in Ethiopia to strengthen the central regime. From the TPLF's perspective, Abiy's

rule signaled not only a reduction of the party's power within the Ethiopian system but also a possible threat to the country's ethnic-federalist structure, which provides the various ethnic groups with extensive autonomy, thus further decreasing the weight of the Tigrayan minority in the country.

One year ago these power struggles escalated to the point of a large-scale war, and ethnically-based militias, as well as the Eritrean army, joined the fighting alongside the Ethiopian army. The war dragged on and the rebel forces scored several operational successes, including an invasion of the Amhara and Afar regions, located deep into the north-central part of the country and bordering Tigray, the conquest of the historic town of Lalibela last summer, and arrival at the outskirts of Addis Ababa in late October 2021; meantime, the humanitarian situation in the combat zones deteriorated. Military tensions also developed between Ethiopia and Sudan in the Al Fushqa district, which is disputed between the countries.

It is estimated that tens of thousands have been killed so far in the hostilities in Tigray, thousands of women raped, and millions displaced from their homes. Rhetoric of demonization and even more or less implicit calls for genocide of the Tigrayans have been made by several Ethiopian leaders. The Jewish community in Tigray, which reportedly numbers a few thousand people, is also in distress due to the fighting. Despite Ethiopian government restrictions on access for journalists, stories of atrocities from the region have started to reach the international press at a greater rate in recent months. Meanwhile, Ethiopia has prevented the arrival of humanitarian aid, including American aid, to the battle zones, which in turn has prompted greater international pressure on Ethiopia. Ethiopia continues to enjoy Chinese and Russian backing, and the support of the majority of African countries. The TPLF is also accused of massacres and other crimes, some of them in response to Ethiopian violence.

As part of the "war of narratives" that has developed between the sides over the fighting, Abiy and his government label the TPLF a terrorist organization led by a tyrannical elite that refuses to accept the spirit of democratization of the new government in Addis Ababa, while the Tigrayans claim that they are resisting Abiy's tyranny and megalomania and his intention to undermine the basic principles of the Ethiopian state that have existed over the past few decades.

Facing the various fronts and given the federal army's limited capability, the Ethiopian government has increased its political and military reliance on members of the Amhara group (about 28 percent of the country's population), including the use of the Amhara militias. The recent operational achievements of the rebel forces have raised serious doubts about Ethiopia's ability to restore its governance over all of its territory, and have also encouraged other ethnic groups and separatist parties—led by the Oromo Liberation Army (OLA), which joined the rebels' attack on the capital—to challenge the central government in Addis Ababa, and thus to place the future existence of the Ethiopian federation in tangible danger.

The War in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa

Facing the increasing domestic challenge, the Prime Minister of Ethiopia is trying to enlist the assistance of foreign countries in handling the crisis. Eritrea, which until recently was considered a bitter adversary of Ethiopia, has become perhaps its central ally in the fighting against the Tigrayan rebels. Isaias Afwerki, President of Eritrea, signed a historic peace agreement with Abiy in 2019, and sees the Tigrayan rebels as a possible threat to his territory too: the majority of Eritrea's population is Tigrayan, and the Tigrayan national movement threatens Afwerki's dictatorship. During the days of the TPLF's dominance in Ethiopia (before Abiy came to power), Ethiopia and Eritrea were in an

ongoing state of war, and Afwerki is interested in weakening the party.

Against this backdrop, Eritrea joined the fighting alongside the Ethiopian federal army in the first stages of the war and stationed combat troops in Tigray and even in Amhara, with its forces participating in some of the atrocities against the civilian population. As a result, the developments in Ethiopia have raised the regional standing of the Eritrean regime. This situation highlights the stability of the Eritrean regime and its military strength: Ethiopia, one of the biggest military powers in the region, needs help from little Eritrea (its population is equal to about 3 percent of Ethiopia's population), which is one of the most internationally ostracized countries in the world. If his rule survives the war, Abiy will owe Afwerki a big debt.

The developments in Ethiopia also have an impact on Sudan, where at least tens of thousands of refugees have fled from the battle zones. Khartoum has even exploited the opportunity to tighten its hold on the fertile Al Fushqa region, which borders Tigray and which has been disputed for many years between the two countries. In December 2020 the Sudanese army took control of key areas in the region and attacked Amhara farmers, actions that led to military clashes in the area and caused the killing of dozens of people and the displacement of thousands. Ethiopia also accused Sudan of aiding the rebels in Tigray— an accusation that Khartoum denied. For its part, Khartoum accused Ethiopia of efforts to agitate the internal arena in Sudan. In the background there is also a conflict between the countries over the construction of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, which Sudan sees as a strategic threat to the flow of the Nile into its territory, and Sudan's convergence over the past two years with the more hawkish Egyptian position, which demands agreement and gradualness regarding the filling of the dam.

It seems that the Abiy government has broad support in Africa. The offices of the African Union are located in Addis Ababa and the organization

has expressed support in principle for Ethiopia, although recently has tried to initiate ceasefire talks between the sides. The rest of Ethiopia's African neighbors (except for Sudan)—some of which have very close relations with Israel, such as Kenya—also support the government in Addis Ababa, and many African leaders attended Abiy's second inauguration ceremony in October 2021.

> The growing alliance with Turkey also comes against the backdrop of the ongoing tension between Ethiopia and Egypt, one of Ankara's main adversaries in the region.

The War in Ethiopia and the Middle East

The war also has links to and significance for Middle East alliances, particularly for strengthened Ethiopia-Turkey relations. Abiy visited Ankara in August and declared that "Ethiopia will never forget the aid that the Turkish people and the Turkish government extended to us at this critical time." During the visit several agreements were signed (including a military agreement), and Turkey expressed support for the integrity of Ethiopia and offered to mediate the tension between Addis Ababa and Khartoum. A few months ago, unconfirmed reports claimed that Turkey also supplied about 10 UAVs to the Ethiopian army. The tightened relations come as part of the Turkish strategy of deepening its involvement in Africa (and particularly in the Horn of Africa), and also because Ankara has many investments in the country (it is the second largest investor in Ethiopia after China, and Ethiopia is Turkey's largest investment site in Africa), and therefore it has a significant interest in the stability of the government in Addis Ababa.

The growing alliance with Turkey also comes against the backdrop of the ongoing tension between Ethiopia and Egypt, one of Ankara's main adversaries in the region. Egypt is in an ongoing dispute with Addis Ababa regarding the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam, and the

apparent strengthening of relations between Ethiopia and Turkey is an especially negative development for Egypt. In recent years claims have been made—though denied in Cairo—about an Egyptian interest in agitating rebels within Ethiopia in order to delay or prevent the dam project, such that it seems possible that from Cairo's perspective the current civil war in Tigray is not necessarily a negative development. This was illustrated in Ethiopia's claims that the TPLF tried to attack the dam construction site, and that the organization receives the support of Egypt and Sudan for these efforts. However, it appears that the internal crisis in Ethiopia has arrived too late for Egypt, as the Ethiopian dam is already nearly completed and the main dispute surrounds the rate it is filled. The Ethiopians have shown determination in their intention to bring the dam to full operation, and it appears that the worsening of the internal situation is actually pushing Abiy to complete the project as a seemingly impressive achievement of his regime, while willing to sustain increasing tension with hostile foreign powers such as Egypt or Sudan.

The Gulf states (and to a certain extent Israel as well) are in a more complicated position. On the one hand, Addis Ababa is a regional ally. On the other hand, they do not have a substantive ideological objection to the Tigrayan rebels, and in a scenario of a Tigrayan victory and the removal of Abiy, they do not want to be harmed by overly deep identification with the regime. Furthermore, they are also considering the American approach (even though they are not bound by it), which is critical of Ethiopia's conduct, and are looking with concern at the strengthening Ethiopian-Turkish and Ethiopian-Russian relations. It seems that in the meantime they are keeping a low profile regarding the crisis and trying to avoid direct involvement: they seek to maintain good relations with Addis Ababa (and it is possible that the United Arab Emirates has even provided Ethiopia with military equipment during the past two months), but on the other hand they have refrained from

political activism on the issue. Some of them, especially the United Arab Emirates, could aspire to serve as mediators between the sides, in order to reduce the Turkish/Iranian foothold in the region.

In contrast, the developments in Ethiopia pose opportunities for Iran. Iran's standing in the Horn of Africa has suffered significantly in recent years, especially since 2015 with the increasing detachment by its former close ally, Sudan, and with the growth of the Gulf influence in the region. The Horn of Africa region is important to Iran, if only because of its proximity to the combat arena in Yemen and its being Saudi Arabia's back yard. Soon after his inauguration, Iran's President Raisi placed greater emphasis on Africa in the foreign policy that his government intends to implement, and Tehran has made clear that from its perspective Ethiopia is of special importance. Currently, Ethiopia itself is the most open to Iran of the countries in the Horn of Africa, and Addis Ababa houses the only Iranian embassy in this region. According to certain assessments, it is possible that Iran is already involved in the fighting in Ethiopia: analysts are concerned that Ethiopia is using an Iranian-produced UAV (the Mohajer-6), perhaps even for offensive purposes, and there have been several suspicious flights between Tehran and Addis Ababa (including by airlines identified with the Iranian Revolutionary Guards).

The War in Ethiopia and the Great Powers

The crisis in Ethiopia has placed the Biden administration in an uncomfortable position. On the one hand, Ethiopia is an important American ally in the region, and its army is considered one of the strongest in Africa and a partner in the war on terror in the Horn of Africa, especially in Somalia (where it is also deployed to cope with the threat of al-Shabaab). Ethiopia is the largest recipient of American aid in sub-Saharan Africa (about $1 billion in 2020). On the other hand, due to the reports of Ethiopian war crimes, human rights organizations and other influential bodies

are pushing Washington to place pressure on Ethiopia to stop the fighting, including stopping the economic aid and imposing other sanctions.

In the spring of 2021 the United States intensified its call for an end to hostilities in the area, and Secretary of State Blinken even demanded an investigation of allegations of ethnic cleansing in Tigray. In August the Biden administration sent Samantha Power (head of USAID, which provides economic aid to Ethiopia) to the region, in order to assess the humanitarian situation and to speak with the Ethiopian leadership. The visit ended in embarrassment after Prime Minister Abiy refused to meet her. Shortly afterward, Abiy (who at the same time met with Erdogan in Ankara) also refrained from meeting with the White House Special Envoy for the Horn of Africa, Jeffrey Feltman, during a visit to Ethiopia. Meanwhile, while the US administration expressed some support for maintaining Ethiopia's unity and denounced the rebels' invasion of the Amhara and Afar regions, it also accused the regime of preventing the transfer of humanitarian aid to Tigray and ascribed the main responsibility for the entire crisis to it. In September the Biden administration declared that it had given approval to impose a series of personal sanctions on individuals that the United States sees as responsible for the violence in the war, most of whom are officials in the governments of Ethiopia and Eritrea, and the Department of Defense intends to add Ethiopia and Eritrea to the list of countries where military exports are restricted.

In response, Abiy was quick to express his disappointment with Washington's policy and to frame the narrative of the war in Tigray within the American war on terror that began two decades ago. In an open letter to Biden, Abiy claimed that the TPLF is a terrorist organization that for several decades imposed terror on the residents of Ethiopia (including with American backing). He contended that the current Ethiopian government under his leadership is the one fighting for democracy in Ethiopia,

and not the reverse. He claimed that Ethiopia expects that just at it helps the Americans fight al-Shabaab in Somalia, Washington should back its war in Tigray.

Russia and China have identified the tension between Addis Ababa and Washington, and it seems that they are working to expand it and increase their influence in Ethiopia. Last July Russia and Ethiopia signed a military cooperation agreement, which joins other steps that Russia is taking on the continent to reduce the foothold of the Western countries on the continent. China for its part denounced the American intention to impose sanctions on Ethiopian figures connected to the fighting, and expressed confidence that both sides in Ethiopia will be able to resolve their internal disputes on their own. China itself has extensive investments in Ethiopia (which owes a significant debt to Beijing), and the Ethiopian army relies on Chinese weapons in its fight against the rebels. The disputes between the West and the non-Western powers have also emerged in UN Security Council discussions, where Ethiopia has met Western criticism for its responsibility for the situation in Tigray. In contrast, Russia and China (as well as India) backed the regime in Addis Ababa and denounced the rebels, which satisfied Ethiopia.

> The breakup or significant weakening of the Ethiopian state could lead to instability close to the Red Sea, which could in turn also impact Israeli interests and encourage the strengthening of forces hostile to Israel, such as Iran or global jihad groups.

Conclusion and Implications

The war in Ethiopia is a tragic, complex, and ongoing conflict that reflects longstanding power struggles, combines conflicting national and ethnic loyalties, and is gradually expanding to additional circles. Thus, in the coming years as well, the war threatens to destabilize the Horn of Africa region, among the most volatile and violent areas in Africa.

Geopolitically, the war exposes the limited power of American influence on Addis Ababa (and perhaps in general in the Horn of Africa and the Middle East), both in Washington's inability to restrain the violence and in Ethiopia's strengthening relations with Russia and Turkey, which occurred in the wake of the conflict. The conflict has led to a distancing of Ethiopia from the West, and from the United States in particular, and to the strengthening of its relations with authoritarian countries that are antagonistic toward Washington. These are therefore negative developments for Washington that also harm the American standing in the region—a standing that recently has already suffered significantly with the events in Afghanistan.

For Israel the conflict raises a serious dilemma. On the one hand, Israel has good relations with the regime in Addis Ababa (Abiy visited Israel in 2019 and had a friendly phone call with Prime Minister Bennett last August). Israel is interested in a strong and united Ethiopia as a basis for regional stability and as a force fighting against (both Shiite and Sunni) extremism, and also as a potential civilian and military customer. The breakup or significant weakening of the Ethiopian state could lead to instability close to the Red Sea, which could in turn also impact Israeli interests and encourage the strengthening of forces hostile to Israel, such as Iran or global jihad groups.

On the other hand, the TPLF rebel party also maintained close relations with Israel when it was dominant in the Ethiopian political system (until 2018). Furthermore, Ethiopia's currently improving relations with Turkey and Russia (and possibly also Iran), along with the increasing tension between Addis Ababa and the United States and Egypt, close allies of Israel, are a negative development for Jerusalem. Above all, the war crimes attributed to the Ethiopian army pose a heavy moral dilemma with regard to cooperation—especially military—with Ethiopia, as well as a cause for concern for the fate of the Jewish community of Tigray.

Israel might need to take a stance on the conflict or intervene in it in one way or another. This could occur, inter alia, following a request from one of its allies: Ethiopia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, or the United States, or as a result of additional escalation in the course of events. Thus, Israel may find itself compelled to make political decisions on the issue following a demand to express support for the Ethiopian government—whether declarative or through practical aid—or of an opposing demand (on the part of the US or Egypt) to refrain from such support. Alternatively, it is possible that Israeli involvement might be sought for initiatives to mediate the conflict, or, in contrast, an operational need for targeted activity to protect specific interests in the region, if the conflict escalates further.

In the face of these risks and the conflicting interests of the various forces in the region, Israel must adopt a cautious position concerning the civil war in Ethiopia. It should maintain proper relations with the regime in Addis Ababa but refrain from military support for the Ethiopian army, which could entangle Israel in relation to war crimes and in tension with Washington, Cairo, and even Khartoum (with Khartoum, Israel is currently seeking to advance the normalization between the countries, which is at a standstill).

At the same time, Ethiopia's apparent movement in the direction of actors that are negative or problematic for Israel (from Iran to Turkey and Russia) could be tempered by alternative regional action led by the Gulf states, which at the current time are only involved in a very limited manner in the issue. Israel could

therefore encourage the Gulf states, which have economic and diplomatic leverage over Addis Ababa, to create an alternative—not Turkish or Iranian—for ending the conflict in the country. In any case, Israel must strive for maximum coordination and cooperation on the issue with the United Arab Emirates, which is the country with the most similar interests to Israel in this context, especially when it comes to curbing Iran's influence in the region.

Furthermore, Israel must also be prepared for the scenario that the deteriorating regional humanitarian situation will have an effect on issues more closely related to Israeli interests, whether due to waves of refugees or a need to quickly intervene to ensure the security of the Jewish community still living in Ethiopia.

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Photo: Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, 1949

Parliamentary Oversight of the Security Establishment and Security Policy from the Perspective of Six Years of Experience as an Active MK

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The Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee is unique among the Knesset's committees in both its disciplines and its mode of operation. An examination of the Committee's work from the perspective of one who served on it in senior roles, however, reveals structural and conceptual faults that prevent optimal fulfillment of the Committee's purpose—overseeing Israel's foreign policy and security bodies. The weakness of government and civilian oversight of the security establishment renders this failure even more serious. This article analyzes these said weaknesses, and offers practical proposals to solve the problem and strengthen the critical oversight framework.

Keywords: Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, IDF, Mossad, Israel Security Agency, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, security establishment, civilian oversight, security budget

Introduction

In 2013-2019, I was a member of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee ("the Committee"). I was a member of many of its subcommittees, among them the Subcommittee for Intelligence, Secret Service, and Captives and Missing Soldiers. During this entire period, I chaired the Subcommittee for Security Doctrine and Force Buildup, one of the most active subcommittees, and I was a member of the Joint Committee of the Finance Committee and the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee on the Defense Budget and its subcommittees dealing with the budget of the Israel Security Agency (ISA) and the Mossad and the Israel Atomic Energy Commission.

From a comparative viewpoint, these were years in which the Committee, chaired most of the time by MK Avi Dichter, was especially active, with a relatively high public profile. With this vantage, it is possible to analyze how the Committee performs its role, defined in the Knesset Rules of Procedure as overseeing the "foreign policy of the state, its armed forces, and its security" (*Knesset Rules of Procedure*).

This is the perspective underlying this article, which aims to portray from the inside the capabilities and limitations of the Committee, the body responsible for parliamentary oversight of the security establishment, and to propose ways to improve performance. I believe that the Committee's optimal functioning is critical for both the proper operation of this essential establishment and for improving public awareness of security matters in Israel. The proposals for change and improvement will be presented in the article's concluding section.

The first paragraph of the Wikipedia entry for "Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee" states that the Committee is one of the two most important Knesset committees. Together with the Finance Committee, it is one of the two Knesset committees that continue their work even when the Knesset itself is not in session (for example, immediately following elections, before a government and coalition are formed), because it alone has the authority to approve a call-up of military reserves in an emergency. MKs compete for a seat on the Committee, and its subcommittees are usually described as "secret" and "prestigious," without anyone outside of them knowing what actually happens there. At the same time, a meticulous examination of the Committee's actions raises essential questions about both its power as a parliamentary committee and the significance of its oversight of the government and the security bodies.

In recent decades, the status of the Committee plenum as a forum for substantive discussion has declined.

The Committee Plenum

By the nature of its duties, the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee differs from the other Knesset committees. The Committee site in the Knesset is closed and guarded, and only Committee members and their substitutes are allowed to enter. In addition, entry is barred to the advisers of the Committee members and to MKs who are not Committee members. In any other Knesset committee, a non-member MK can appear, speak, raise objections to bills, and even vote as part of his faction's representation on the committee. At the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, minutes of meetings are made public infrequently, even when the discussion is open or deals with legislative matters.

In recent decades, particularly after subcommittees for specific issues were established (in 1977, at the initiative of then-Committee Chairman MK Moshe Arens), the status of the Committee plenum as a forum for substantive discussion has declined. Other than on legislative matters, which the Committee deals with less frequently than other Knesset committees, the full Committee has become a symbolic and ceremonial body. Even when it convenes for a specific "secret" discussion,

the ministers and security personnel appearing before it treat the occasion as a press conference.

To illustrate this situation and the relative unimportance that the government attributes to the Committee's oversight, it is possible to compare the Committee plenum's activity during the Yom Kippur War to its activity during Operation Protective Edge in 2014. In 1973, the full Committee convened almost daily. Between October 6 and October 24, the prime minister appeared before the Committee three times, the minister of defense three times, other ministers three times, the IDF Chief of Staff once, and the head of the IDF Military Intelligence Directorate twice (Meetings of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, 2016-2017). Minister Maj. Gen. (res.) Aharon Yariv, who was called up for service as assistant to the Chief of Staff during the Yom Kippur War, appeared at most of the Committee's discussions as a liaison between the Committee and the IDF General Staff.

During Operation Protective Edge, Prime Minister Netanyahu appeared once before the Committee plenum, and later expressed justified anger about leaks there. I know from experience that Committee members asked Netanyahu questions for the purpose of leaking the answers, and used them in statements to the media even before the Committee meeting ended. After that, Netanyahu met only with a selected group of members of the Subcommittee for Intelligence and chairs of other subcommittees. The number of appearances of senior officials before the Committee was far fewer than the corresponding number during the Yom Kippur War, while Operation Protective Edge lasted for 51 days and was far less intense.

In all honesty, I see no way of correcting this situation. Fundamentally, it is a result of the ongoing general erosion in the status and power of the Knesset, which is one of the weakest parliaments in the democratic world. The worst example is that the Ministerial Committee for Legislation, i.e., the executive branch, convenes weekly and in effect determines the stance of the Knesset—the legislative branch—on every bill proposed. In this state of affairs, it is no wonder that the Committee plenum's sessions are meaningless.

Following the dispute between the Committee and the security establishment in 2003, described below, Knesset Speaker Reuven Rivlin and Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee Chairman Yuval Steinitz established a public commission, headed by Prof. Amnon Rubinstein, to examine parliamentary oversight of the security establishment (the Rubinstein Commission). Former Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee Chairman Dan Meridor told the Rubinstein Commission that the decline of the Committee plenum and the corresponding rise of the subcommittees constituted an irregular situation because "the Knesset's original, correct, and appropriate intention was that the full Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee would take the place of the Knesset plenum in performing the duty of parliamentary oversight of the security establishment" (Report of the Public Commission for Examining Parliamentary Oversight of the Security Establishment, 2004, p. 6). However, I do not foresee the Committee plenum returning to its former glory, even if the Knesset's general oversight authority, and specifically that of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, is properly restored.

The Subcommittees

The subcommittees have in effect replaced the Committee plenum in the oversight of the government and the security bodies. Arens's logic in establishing them was twofold. First, the Committee plenum serves as a quasi-substitute for the Knesset plenum, since only a Committee member or substitute member can enter. In this sense, the subcommittees bear the same relationship to the Committee plenum as the Knesset committees bear to the Knesset plenum.

Second, the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee addresses numerous areas. In other

parliaments around the world, topics such as foreign policy, the armed forces, the secret services, the security budget, intelligence, and cyber security are all under the responsibility of separate committees. I have participated in overseas trips of Committee delegations on a number of occasions, during which I met our counterparts in local parliaments. In the United States Congress, for example, there are at least six different committees for the areas of responsibility corresponding to those within the purview of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee that are handled by the latter's subcommittees.

On the other hand, on more than one occasion, subcommittees have been established in response to demands by specific MKs, and enjoyed a life span of only one Knesset. These committees usually held only a few lightly attended meetings. For example, a legal warfare subcommittee, founded during the 20th Knesset, met exactly twice in the first two years of its existence (Avital, 2018).

Other than the Subcommittee for Intelligence and Secret Services, which has statutory authority under the General Security Services Law of 2002, the subcommittees have no established status, and there is no obligation to form them. In the 23rd Knesset, Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee Chair Zvi Hauser refrained from forming most of the subcommittees for many months on the grounds that he was evaluating the Committee's organizational structure (Shalev, 2020). Even today, according to the Knesset website, only a few subcommittees are active, far fewer than in the 20th Knesset. Under these circumstances, a considerable portion of the knowledge accumulated in the Committee is lost, and there is no continuity of processes already launched.

The Oversight Authority and the Duty to Appear

The Knesset Rules of Procedure state that employees and officeholders summoned by a committee must appear before it when asked

to do so. In the security realm, however, the situation is more complicated. The supervised *political* elements, headed by the government and the cabinet, including the Ministry of Defense, pay lip service to the importance of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee and the obligation to appear before it, but not infrequently try to avoid doing so. Before appearing before the Committee, negotiations often take place between the Committee chair and his professional staff and the governmental elements. Furthermore, a minister sometimes forbids his subordinates in the professional echelon to appear before the Committee because the topic of discussion, or its presumed tone, is not to his liking.

The professional staff usually behaves differently, but here too, matters are not anchored in any real statutory power, and are subject to personal whims. For example, the IDF (with the minister of defense's approval) refused to cooperate with the decision by then-Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee Chairman Yuval Steinitz when he established a commission to examine the intelligence system following the 2003 war in Iraq (Report of the Commission for Investigating the Intelligence System following the Campaign in Iraq, 2004). Only after a public struggle did the security establishment agree to cooperate with the committee. From my experience, however, I know that such disputes occur almost daily, and are also likely to result from personal animosities, not just disagreements on matters of principle.

The legal basis for summoning officeholders in public service to appear before Knesset committees is Basic Law: The Knesset–1958. The law, however, establishes no sanctions for those refusing to appear. It states only that the responsible minister is entitled to notify the committee that he himself intends to appear in place of the officeholder. This sanction is meaningless, because it is impractical for the minister of defense to appear before the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee in

place of every officer summoned to appear before the Committee. In practice, long periods of my membership on the Committee were accompanied by tension on this point with the prime minister and the minister of defense, and sometimes with appointed officials as well.

In 2013, then-Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee Chairman Avigdor Liberman sponsored a bill for improving the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee's oversight. The bill was formulated primarily by MK Eitan Cabel and me and was endorsed by the most senior representatives on the Committee from all of the Knesset factions represented, including former President Reuven Rivlin (Improving the Oversight of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee Bill, 2013). The bill stated, inter alia, that failure to appear before the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee or one of its subcommittees, or failure to deliver a requested document to the Committee, was liable to result in a referral of the matter to the Civil Service Commission, the Military Advocate General, or the Knesset Ethics Committee, depending on the identity of the recalcitrant party, after which the party failing to appear would be subject to a personal fine.

The bill also stated that the Committee and its bodies would have the right to visit any element under its supervision, and that "the Committee chairman and the chairs of the subcommittees will be entitled to enter at any time any facility maintained by an agency subject to the Committee's oversight, and speak to any employee, officeholder, employee, or (soldier), and to demand from him the information necessary for executing the work of the Committee or subcommittee" (Improving the Oversight of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee Bill, 2013, p. 3).

Full disclosure: the bill was part of a demonstration of force initiated by Liberman against then-Minister of Defense Moshe ("Bogie") Ya'alon for personal motives, and because Ya'alon's office was quite aggressive in its relations with the Committee (Ya'alon was IDF

Chief of Staff at a time of friction with the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee when Steinitz was chairman, involving the examination of intelligence). Later, when Liberman became Minister of Foreign Affairs, he opposed exactly the same bill when it was proposed anew, but this does not mean that the bill had no merit.

Maintaining the Secrecy of the Discussion and MK Responsibility

In other Knesset committees, the reluctance of officeholders to appear before the committee is often attributed to the emotional, unruly, and demagogic atmosphere of the debate caused by the presence of the media. The Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee is different in this respect: a large majority of its discussions take place with no media presence, and its minutes are not made public. In the many hundreds of deliberations that I attended (in most of the years in which I was on the Committee, there were over 250 discussions a year by the plenum and the subcommittees of which I was a member), the atmosphere was almost always serious and businesslike. The fact that the discussions did not usually conclude with a vote and were not publicized also helped to blur the divide between the coalition and the opposition.

At the same time, the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee has a fixed element that those summoned before it find surprising, especially members of the security establishment: its MK members are given access to the most top secret material in Israel. The knowledge base to which an MK on several of the subcommittees is exposed is much more extensive than that of a cabinet member, and in certain cases, more extensive than any minister other than the prime minister. These MKs, however, do not undergo any security checks—not even the check required of a parliamentary adviser. This is, of course, because of the Law of Knesset Members Immunity, Rights and Obligations (1951). Immunity is an essential part

of MKs' work, and must not be compromised under any circumstances (Segal, 2013).

In point of fact, there have been very few leaks from the thousands of discussions by the Committee's subcommittees over the years. In the political-security cabinet, whose members are also not required to undergo any security check before taking office or during their term, there have been far more serious leaks in recent years, including in wartime. One prominent example was the leaked IDF presentation about the number of casualties expected in a campaign to take control of the Gaza Strip, which was presented and leaked during Operation Protective Edge (Ravid, 2014). Demands for security checks for ministers have also been raised occasionally, including a bill stipulating compulsory polygraphs for ministers (Azulay, 2017). Individual demands for polygraph testing in the past in cases of suspected leaks were nothing more than political posturing. During his chairmanship of the Committee, Steinitz proposed that "MKs sign a declaration of secrecy in which they commit, inter alia, not to disclose information to journalists during meetings of the plenum—including contents and derivative action—and not to disclose to anyone information about the subcommittees without approval from the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee chairman (Steinitz, 2005, p. 10). However, I believe there is a better solution that will alleviate the uncomfortable feeling of a senior officeholder that a periodic polygraph test is a condition for being appointed and keeping his job, while the elected official before whom he appears has no such obligations. This and other recommendations are presented below.

The Number of Members on the Committee and the Subcommittees

Under Knesset law, the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee is one of three committees that can have up to 17 members, while the maximum number of members on all other committees is 15 (Basic Law: The Knesset,

1994). Since only a member or substitute member can enter meetings of the Committee or its subcommittees (except for meetings dealing with legislation), the institution of a substitute member on the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee has real significance, while meaningless for any other committee. The result is that the Committee plenum has 34 members (17 regular members according to the Knesset Law and 17 substitute members), amounting to more than one fourth of all MKs, and its subcommittees have 14 or 16 members and substitute members.

There have been complaints in the past that the number of members on the subcommittees is improperly inflated for political reasons. This state of affairs, it is argued, further aggravates the sense of those testifying before the Committee that it is a political body, and enhances their reluctance to disclose to it not only facts, but also opinions and disputes.

The Rubinstein Commission recommended that "only official Committee members be part of the discussions, and that substitute members not be entitled to attend the Committee's discussions. The Knesset factions will retain the option of replacing their representatives on the Committee, provided that they do so only once a year" (Report of the Public Commission for Examining Parliamentary Oversight of the Security Establishment, 2004, p. 7).

In my experience, membership on the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee or its subcommittees—particularly the most prestigious of them, especially the Subcommittee for Intelligence and Secret Services—is indeed used as a tool for soothing dissatisfied MKs, mainly in the coalition. I was a member of this subcommittee when it had only five members, and also when it had more than 10. The size of the forum inevitably affects the intimacy of the discussion in both the exposure of secret material and the expression of opinion.

On the other hand, there is a known tendency for MKs, particularly those serving in leading positions in their political parties who have

become members of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee and its subcommittees mainly for reasons of prestige, to refrain from attending meetings themselves. Such facts are revealed from time to time in reports by various organizations, such as Shakuf ("Transparent") (Binyamin, 2020). The spectacle of a discussion conducted with only the subcommittee chairman present, sitting opposite an entire panel of summoned individuals, is no less embarrassing for the Knesset—and I witnessed such a situation more than once.

This is part of a general problem in the Knesset's work, particularly with coalition members, who are members of many committees, and whose vote is needed in order to maintain the coalition's majority. They find themselves running from one committee meeting to another, which makes it difficult for them to participate in long subcommittee deliberations. Actually, in most of the other committees, the oversight and discussion work is done primarily by the opposition members. This situation is less of a problem on the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, where the political dividing lines are less significant, except where legislation is concerned, and are almost nonexistent in a closed discussion room and in a confidential discussion. During long periods of my work on the Committee, opposition members (Eitan Cabel, Omer Barlev, and I) led its important subcommittees—a situation that could not prevail in more "executive" committees.

Where substitute members are concerned, I believe that the Rubinstein Commission was wrong. As someone who chaired one of the most important and busiest subcommittees, I can say that substitute members did much more thorough and important work on it than the official members.

Ideally, it would be best to return to the fundamental situation that prevailed for many years: 17 members on the Committee plenum with no substitutes, with the Committee's resumed role as a worthy forum for confidential and discreet discussion. The subcommittees

would be small (five to seven members, who would commit to participate in most of the meetings). In practice, however, it is difficult to envision how this situation could exist in today's parliamentary atmosphere. In the current situation, it is liable to culminate in a non-functioning Committee, with many meetings of both the plenum and the subcommittees left virtually unattended.

External Experts

In certain periods, the Committee plenum and the subcommittees were aided by external experts, either regularly or for a specific matter. This practice was introduced by Moshe Arens when he first founded the subcommittees in 1977 (Yaari, 2004, p. 25). Former Mossad Director General Shabtai Shavit was a special adviser to the investigative commission on intelligence (Report of the Commission for Investigating the Intelligence System following the Campaign in Iraq, 2004). The late Yitzhak Ilan, former ISA Deputy Director, was a professional consultant to the Subcommittee on Intelligence in the 19th Knesset. This practice, however, did not become a fixed routine, and the approval of various experts as permanent advisers not infrequently encountered bureaucratic and legal difficulties.

I believe that the circle of those present at the Committee table should be expanded, for the following reason: when all other Knesset committees hold a regular meeting, they publicize the scheduled meeting and its subject in advance. Discussions by the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, however, are often not announced in public, and subcommittee meetings are never publicly announced ahead of time. Again, they are closed even to MKs who are not members of the Committee or substitute members, let alone members of the public—except in matters of legislation.

This prevents expansion of the Committee members' knowledge base by elements that are not part of the security establishment. The Committee never hears facts and opinions from parties other than security sources regularly

summoned to a discussion. In quite a few matters of policy, issues pertaining to socio-military affairs, and budgetary matters, there is extensive knowledge outside the establishment that is important for the MKs, and is also likely to influence the issues addressed by the Committee.

Weakness of Governmental Oversight

It is impossible to relate to the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee's oversight of the security establishment without mentioning that the *governmental* supervision of this establishment is, in the words of the Rubinstein Commission, "partial, faulty, and arbitrary" (Report of the Public Commission for Examining Parliamentary Oversight of the Security Establishment, 2004, p. 9). In order to illustrate this ongoing and dangerous situation, which prevails in almost all security affairs, I will cite one example—the intelligence bodies.

The main intelligence organizations, the Mossad and the ISA, have always been under the prime minister's direct responsibility (like the Israel Atomic Energy Commission, on which I will not comment here). It is obvious that no prime minister, whatever his experience and capabilities, is able to exercise the same oversight for them that the minister of defense exercises over the IDF, for example. The prime minister has no oversight mechanism to help him in this matter. In recent years, governments have included a minister of intelligence, but this position lacks authority and is meaningless. The cabinet, which is authorized to approve important military operations, does not deal at all in such operations by the intelligence agencies. The prime minister approves these operations, just as he is responsible for the use of military force. He is unable, however, to devote appropriate time and attention to regular and multi-year force buildup programs, budgets, and ongoing activity.

The result is that two important organizations, whose combined budget is

nearly NIS 10 billion (Levinson, 2017), and whose successful or unsuccessful actions have the potential to create enormous benefit or damage, are in effect run without any governmental oversight. From experience, I can say that both organizational changes of enormous significance and changes of policy on the use of force were not infrequently made without the knowledge of any authorized decision makers— not because the heads of these organizations wanted to conceal the changes from the political leadership, but because there was no one whose regular job it was to oversee such measures.

> **It is impossible to relate to the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee's oversight of the security establishment without mentioning that the governmental supervision of this establishment is, in the words of the Rubinstein Commission, "partial, faulty, and arbitrary."**

The work done by the Committee's subcommittee responsible for the intelligence bodies is only slightly better. The subcommittee is shown any material that it requests, and the presentations to it are detailed and frank. Its members, however, even those who have served in senior positions in those same intelligence organizations, have no up-to-date knowledge about them or independent sources of information like the sources they have for the IDF, where the media and Israeli society are by nature far more aware. During the years in which I was on the Subcommittee for Intelligence, all the questions we raised were answered in detail, but there were many topics on which we did not know what to ask, because you never know what you do not know.

I proposed a Secret Services bill several times during the 20th Knesset for the purpose of anchoring the status of the minister of intelligence as a minister in the Prime Minister's Office who will continue to be directly responsible for the ISA and the Mossad, and the government's supervisory authority over

the intelligence agencies (Secret Services Bill, 2019). In what became a fixed, predictable ceremony, Minister Yariv Levin would rise to respond in the cabinet's name, praise the bill and its necessity, and announce that the coalition would vote against it. Nothing changed, and the unreasonable situation of almost no governmental oversight over these two extremely important and powerful agencies still exists. This is only one example of the "partial, faulty, and arbitrary" governmental oversight that detracts from the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee's work.

Need for Supplemental Legislation

Also relevant is the very deficient legal framework for security matters. The Knesset is both a legislative and a supervisory body, and the more complete and detailed the legal framework for its actions, the more solid the basis for its work as a supervisory authority. For example, it is possible to assess whether the National Security Council is fulfilling its duty under the 2008 National Security Council Law, which lists no fewer than 11 different functions of the National Security Council.

Where the operations of the IDF, the structure and approach of the political leadership, the functioning of the cabinet, and other core matters handled by the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee are concerned, this legal framework is highly deficient. A law exists—Basic Law: The Army. It contains six short general articles that do not say much. In contrast to the Basic Law: The Knesset and the Basic Law: The Government, however, there is no supplement to the Basic Law: The Army listing and defining the military's functions, its subordination to the political leadership, and other core matters. Such a detailed bill was proposed in 2008 by the late Shmuel Even and Zvia Gross and published by the Institute for National Security Studies (Even & Gross, 2008), but my effort to steer it through the Knesset failed.

My bill for anchoring the role and function of the State Security Cabinet was repeatedly

blocked by the coalition (State Security Cabinet Bill, 2016), despite the structural defects in the cabinet's functioning, which the State Comptroller also cited in his reports on the Turkish flotilla affair and Operation Protective Edge (State Comptroller, 2012; 2017), and despite recommendations by a special committee headed by Maj. Gen. (ret.) Yaakov Amidror and formed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu following the State Comptroller's report on Operation Protective Edge.

Foreign Affairs and Defense, or Defense and Defense?

When the Committee's activity is assessed, it is obvious that "Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee" is a misnomer. Almost all of the Committee's activity is in the security realm. During most Knesset sessions, only one subcommittee, the Subcommittee for Foreign Policy and Public Diplomacy, dealt with foreign relations. This subcommittee met infrequently, and attendance at its meetings was usually poor. For example, a review of attendance by MKs at meetings of the Committee plenum and the subcommittees showed that over the 2.5 years of the 20th Knesset (from April 2015 until September 2017), during which the Committee plenum held 177 meetings (almost all on security matters) and the Subcommittee on Intelligence held 98 discussions, the Subcommittee for Foreign Policy and Public Diplomacy met only 34 times (Avital, 2018).

A bill for dividing the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee into two committees, one for foreign affairs and one for security issues, has been proposed more than once. It was usually proposed as a possible solution for personnel problems, for example the argument over who would chair the Committee in 2014, when the Committee was left without a chairman for many months.

In most of the world's parliaments, such a separation exists and is regarded as natural. The symbiotic connection between foreign affairs and security, which exists only in Israel, results

from concepts, some of them outmoded, in which foreign affairs are viewed mainly through the security prism.

Yet while this separation is ostensibly natural and obvious, in practice, it would almost certainly further weaken the Knesset's measures pertaining to foreign policy. The emphasis on security results from its place in Israeli consciousness, which is inclined to perceive many issues, not just foreign relations, through security lenses. Many Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee chairmen in recent decades were previously part of the security establishment. This state of affairs also reflects the relationship between security and foreign affairs in the government's work—the Ministry of Defense is a very powerful ministry with a large budget and a great deal of influence, while the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is a weak ministry that has had to struggle against loss of its authority (in the 2015-2019 Netanyahu government, some of the Foreign Ministry's authority was divided among no less than six different ministries) and budget cuts. If the Committee is split into a Foreign Affairs Committee and a Defense Committee, foreign policy is liable to completely disappear from the parliamentary map.

The Security Budget

Responsibility for oversight of the security budget is in the hands of the Joint Committee of the Finance Committee and the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee on the Defense Budget ("the Joint Committee"), whose existence and authority are anchored in the Budget Foundations Law (Budget Foundations Law, 1985). Since the budget is defined in the law, the committee has the same authority as any other Knesset committee to formulate legislation, but it hesitates to use it and thereby influence the priorities in security spending. This is one of the biggest and most unrecognized missed opportunities of the Knesset, which knowingly forgoes its ability to exert substantive influence in security matters.

From the outset, the emphasis on the Joint Committee has been on financial matters and the adjustment to the overall state budget. This is even reflected in its name, stipulated in the law: Joint Committee of the Finance Committee and the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee on the Defense Budget (Budget Foundations Law, 1985). This is not just a semantic point. According to the Knesset Rules of Procedure, when there is a joint committee of two permanent committees, the chairman will be the chairman of the committee whose name appears first.

For this reason, the Joint Committee's name was changed in the last Knesset, with the name of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee appearing before that of the Finance Committee. This happened, inter alia, because during most of Netanyahu's term as prime minister, the Finance Committee chairs were MKs from the United Torah Judaism party (Yaakov Litzman and Moshe Gafni), who showed little interest in security issues. The change of name made it possible to make the chairman of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee chairman of the Joint Committee. The Joint Committee comprises equal numbers of MKs from its two constituent committees. In the years in which I was a member, however, a decisive majority of the MKs present at the Joint Committee's deliberations were from the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee.

The discussions themselves were long and detailed, at very high resolution, down to details of a few million shekels in a budget amounting to NIS 80 billion a year. The knowledge accumulated in these discussions was to a large extent broader than that of a cabinet member voting on approval of the budget at the government level. As such, the security budget differs from other items in the state budget. Other items are usually discussed by the Finance Committee for a few hours and approved by power of the coalition majority, without any serious scrutiny of their details. When this knowledge is likely to be translated into real

influence, however, the Joint Committee is reluctant to do so, as shown below.

The state budget is discussed and approved at varying resolutions. There is an overall budget total of all the items—in this case, Item 15, the defense budget—and it must be approved by the Knesset plenum by the end of the year; otherwise, the government's continued existence is in jeopardy. For these political reasons, the Knesset committees usually have no practical way of changing the total of each item in the state budget.

Each such item, however, is divided among spheres of activity and programs (for example, the air force budget, and within it the budget for munitions). Since the budget is for all intents and purposes a law, each Knesset committee has full authority to change components within its sphere of activity and programs without affecting the overall budget's chances of being passed by the plenum, unless the relevant government ministry decides to withdraw the budget bill because of the changes, just as the government can withdraw any government bill from the Knesset if it does not like the changes made by the committees.

In the usual frenzied state of affairs, in which the budget is approved at the last minute or in the legal grace period (the first three months of the year), this procedure does not enable the Knesset committees to exert any real influence on the division of the budget. A rare event in 2018, however, which gave the Knesset such an extension, illustrated the point that the Knesset knowingly forgoes its ability to exert its influence. For political reasons, the discussions of the 2019 budget were pushed up to early 2018, because Prime Minister Netanyahu and Minister of Finance Moshe Kahlon wanted to avoid the regular drama involved in budget approval before an election. The 2019 budget indeed received final approval by the Knesset plenum on March 15, 2018, eight and a half months before the budget took effect.

There was a consensus in the Joint Committee that the priorities appearing in the budget were misguided, and that resources should be diverted from certain areas to others (for obvious reasons, I will not elaborate on which areas were involved). At a certain stage, other Joint Committee members and I proposed taking advantage of the unusual timetable for the 2019 budget: we proposed to Joint Committee Chairman Dichter approving the overall total for Item 15, which would make it possible for the budget to pass in the Knesset plenum, but to withhold approval of the budgets for the spheres of activity and programs. A precedent for such an action existed—we did it for other reasons in the 2014 budget discussions.

We proposed that the Joint Committee prepare its own changes according to what it regarded as the right priorities, discuss them with the security establishment, with the knowledge that the final authority lay with the Knesset legislative committee, and commit to the Ministry of Finance that the spheres of activity and programs would be approved by July-August 2018, long before January 1, 2019, when the budget was scheduled to take effect.

This was a rare opportunity for the Knesset to exercise the authority routinely vested in other parliaments. For example, US Congressional committees regularly use their budgetary authority to change priorities, and even to determine production and procurement quantities for the United States defense industries and armed forces. In only one example of many cases, in 2001, Congress halted financing for the V-22 Osprey program, an innovative combined airplane-helicopter in which Israel had also expressed interest (Congressional Bills, 2001), and later changed the number of aircraft that would be manufactured and procured. In Israel, such an initiative—to change the scope of the IDF's procurement of a main platform—would not be considered by MKs, even if they had valid and reasoned objections to the military's decision (involving the Namer APC or the new cannon project, for example).

I can attest from personal experience that in his years as Committee chairman, MK Dichter did not hesitate to oppose the government, or to stand behind documents formulated by the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee that were highly critical of the government's actions. Dichter did not accept our view in this matter, however, and did not take advantage of the atypical timetable to leave the Committee's mark on matters that he also regarded as important and requiring correction.

In truth, the Knesset usually behaves in this way with the state budget in general. Despite its legal authority, and the fact that the level of expertise of its members generally exceeds that of the government ministers, and the breadth of its outlook is greater than that of the Ministry of Finance officials, it seldom changes the priorities set in the budget.

Informed or Knowing in Advance?

One of the recurring central questions in relations between the Committee and the political leadership and the security bodies is the extent of the Committee's knowledge about the various bodies with respect to specific actions. In its detailed comments on this question, the Rubinstein Commission stated:

> The question in this context is whether there exists a duty to report to and consult the Committee about decisions scheduled for future implementation… It is clear that no such duty for reporting or consultation exists for routine operational actions, because the Committee does not command the security establishment, and governmental oversight is sufficient… The question is the fate of decisions for implementation that have strategic consequences for Israel's standing, its international relations, and the risk of war or the lack of such a risk. It is true that in Israel's special circumstances, every operational action can escalate

and assume a strategic dimension. It appears to us, however, that there is a substantial difference between an ordinary operational action, even if it takes place on the other side of the border, and a decision, such as the bombing of the nuclear reactor in Iraq, that is liable to have long-term consequences of some kind. (Report of the Public Commission for Examining Parliamentary Oversight of the Security Establishment, 2004, p. 12)

In contrast to the past, when there was a clearer distinction between a decision to go to war and a situation of routine security, campaigns on the borders in recent years did not begin with an orderly decision by one of the sides; they resulted from escalation beginning with an operation that did not stem from any intention to begin a war. In such a situation, the significance of oversight of decisions about a specific operation has become greater than in the past. One such example is the action in which an Iranian general and Jihad Mughniyeh, son of Imad Mughniyeh, were killed (Kais, 2015). Both the global media and Hezbollah attributed this operation to Israel.

In response, Hezbollah fired several anti-tank missiles at a Givati Brigade force in the Har Dov area, and a company commander and a sergeant in the brigade were killed (Buhbut, 2015). Had the results of the anti-tank missile ambush been worse, there would likely have been a risk of a significant conflagration on the northern front, only a few months after the end of the Operation Protective Edge. Such a response by Hezbollah was predictable from the moment the organization attributed the killing of Mughniyeh and the Iranian general to Israel.

The campaign against Hezbollah's buildup and Iranian entrenchment in Syria has been discussed many times in the relevant Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee subcommittees. Without going into details, dilemmas, policy changes, and even arguments between different

security bodies were brought before the Committee. For example, issues were presented to the Committee such as the red lines of the two sides, which if crossed might well result in escalation. These lines are also mentioned from time to time in both the Israeli media and in speeches by Hassan Nasrallah (Schneider & Yaari, 2019). At the same time, it is obvious that advance notice cannot be provided for every operation, and in my opinion should not be provided. I think that there is no need or justification for requiring the political leadership or the security bodies to report in advance to the Committee on planned operations, even if their failure or success could bring Israel closer to the risk of war.

It should be noted in this context that Basic Law: The Government was amended in 2019 to authorize the cabinet (instead of the entire government, as was formerly the case) to approve going to war. At the same time, the definition in the law of an operation requiring government approval was changed from "war" to "war (or) a significant military operation liable to lead, with a level of probability close to certainty, to war" (Basic Law: The Government, 1968). This was done in the recognition that in the current era, conflicts usually result from escalation originating with an operation not intended to cause a war, rather than a deliberate decision by Israel or the enemy. It is mandatory under this law to report an operation very likely to result in escalation to the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee "as soon as possible" (Basic Law: The Government, 1968), but not in advance.

Approval of Senior Appointments

Bills are occasionally proposed to make senior civil service appointments contingent on a public Knesset confirmation hearing. Such hearings are conducted in the United States for many civil service positions, including both cabinet secretaries and senior officeholders. In the past, then-Minister of Justice Ayelet Shaked and then-Minister Yariv Levin proposed

that appointments of senior officeholders be preceded by a Knesset hearing, and only afterwards brought to the cabinet for approval (Azulay & Ynet, 2017).

Some of these bills were proposed in the framework of the political struggle concerning the relative power, real or imaginary, of senior civil service officials (attorney general, state attorney, and more) vis-à-vis the elected echelon. Keep in mind that there is an evaluation process for appointments by both an appointments committee chosen by the government and, once a candidate is selected, by the advisory committee for senior appointments in the civil service. This committee, which was founded following the Bar-On-Hevron affair, evaluates the candidates for the seven most senior civil service positions in Israel: IDF chief of staff, police commissioner, ISA director general, Mossad director general, prison services commissioner, governor of the Bank of Israel, and deputy governor of the Bank of Israel.

The advisory committee, however, considers only whether there is a suspicion of ethical offenses in the candidate's record, "to ensure… that improper appointments are not made for reasons such as personal relations, business relations, or political relations with people in the government" (Cabinet resolution 2225, 1997). It does not examine the candidate's views or outlook concerning the position that he is designated to fill.

The Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee's spheres of actions directly affect three of the seven positions reviewed by the advisory committee: IDF chief of staff, Mossad director general, and ISA director general. These are the three most important appointments in Israel approved by the government, but the selection is in the hands of a single person (the prime minister, in the case of the ISA director general and the Mossad director general) or two people (the prime minister and the minister of defense, in the case of the IDF chief of staff). The procedure is unregulated and no explanation is required. This process has been severely

criticized in recent years, including in cases in which there were reports that the name of the candidate was changed at the last minute, and that improper efforts were made to influence the process.

Even if the process unfolds impeccably and the candidate is worthy, it is very important for the heads of the security organizations in Israel—where the importance of the bodies that they head sometimes exceeds their stated roles—to present their outlook to the Knesset, and to the public, wherever possible. This becomes even more necessary when the weakness of governmental and parliamentary oversight of these bodies' operations, as noted above, is taken into account. This is particularly true of the IDF chief of staff. He is selected to head the largest organization in Israel, the people's army that conscripts people under the Defense Service Law, 1986, and his character and actions affect social, budgetary, and ethical matters of the utmost importance.

Making Defense Accessible to the Public

One of most important but less frequently mentioned roles of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee is to constitute the gate through which various security issues are communicated to the public in credible and unbiased fashion. The media in Israel discuss security matters a great deal, but their reports are inherently touched by the interests and viewpoint of their sources, as well as by the knowledge that the security bodies mentioned in the media reports are the most popular and esteemed institutions in Israel—far more so than the media themselves, which frequently earn especially low marks for credibility and prestige in public opinion.

Most of the significant discussions in the Committee take place behind closed doors, and cannot be followed and studied directly like similar discussions in other Knesset committees. The right way to make security affairs accessible to the public is therefore

by means of periodic publication of reports, documents, and opinions by the Committee or some of its members. For long periods, however, the Committee functioned as a quasi-House of Lords in which the members convened, usually under the leadership of one of the former senior security establishment figures, in order to hear what was happening in their former workplaces, and to express their opinion to the current officeholders. The public remained outside, even when there were no security-related grounds for non-disclosure.

It is very important for the heads of the security organizations in Israel—where the importance of the bodies that they head sometimes exceeds their stated roles—to present their outlook to the Knesset, and to the public, wherever possible.

As the Rubinstein Commission put it, even a closed discussion, none of which is reported, is significant, because "it is not infrequently the only discussion taking place outside the security establishment itself, and it is very important for security establishment members to hear other divergent and diverse opinions within the Committee (Report of the Public Commission for Examining Parliamentary Oversight of the Security Establishment, 2004, p. 7). It is no less important, however, for the public—which in essence is represented by the MKs, which provides the resources used by the security establishment, and which the security establishment is mandated to defend—to be aware and informed on these matters. There is much information that if reported will enhance state security, not harm it.

An example of the difference between a discussion behind closed doors, however thorough, and a discussion with a result that is disclosed to the public can be found in deliberations conducted by the Subcommittee for Security Doctrine and Force Buildup in 1986-1987, on the subject of Israel's security concept, chaired by then-MK Dan Meridor.

The subcommittee submitted a detailed and thorough report challenging quite a few of the then-prevailing doctrines (Yaari, 2004, p. 25). It was submitted, however, only to the decision makers and the agencies involved in execution of policy, and made no impact on the public.

This state of affairs is harmful in two ways. First, the public is not a "customer" of the security establishment that is supposed to accept its rhetoric and activity as divinely inspired; it is an important partner. The resources used by the establishment and the legitimacy of its actions come from the public. Elsewhere in the world, the shaping and publication of the security concept is part of every government's clearly recognized duties, and its publication is an integral part of security itself. Israel's security concept, however, has never been published in an official document. Second, concealment from the public makes it easier for those mentioned in the report to ignore its conclusions, because the entire discussion takes place in a closed room, and the only "damage" involved is barbed commentary by the Committee members.

The Rubinstein Commission had valid insights on this subject: "We believe that subject to the rule requiring the maintenance of secrecy when disclosure is liable to cause direct damage to state security, the principle should be adopted that the more open the discussion, the better for both Israeli democracy and its security" (Report of the Public Commission for Examining Parliamentary Oversight of the Security Establishment, 2004, p. 3).

During Avi Dichter's term as Committee chairman, together with MK Omer Barlev and with the chairman's backing, I led an effort in which a detailed classified edition of the Committee's many documents, and certainly its important reports, was sent to the relevant entities, while an open public edition, which was subject to censorship, dealt with matters on which it was important to educate the public and present to it the view of the country's main oversight body. This was the case with the report published by the Subcommittee for Readiness and Continuous Security, chaired by Barlev, on the subject of the IDF's readiness for war (Report of the Subcommittee for Readiness and Continuous Security, 2018).

MK Barlev and I also issued an open version of a document that we wrote as chairmen of the relevant subcommittees about the future of the IDF ground forces. This document reflected a view that was not approved by the Committee, and was therefore not an official Committee document, but both we and MK Dichter regarded it as part of the Committee's duty to the public on a critical matter for security and the budget. I recently published an updated version in the framework of my work at the Institute for National Security Studies, because the issue has become even more important since the document was first written, and was the focus of a public dispute following Operation Guardian of the Walls (Shelah, 2021).

Two especially good examples of an entire process that reflect all of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee's functions can be found in two areas that the Committee dealt with during the 20th Knesset: the IDF's Gideon multi-year plan and the regulation of cyber affairs in Israel.

With the consent of then-IDF Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot, and contrary to the usual policy in which IDF plans are approved at all levels and only then presented to the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, the Subcommittee for Security Doctrine and Force Buildup under my chairmanship was a full partner in the process of shaping and implementing the Gideon plan for two years, from the time Lt. Gen. Eisenkot became IDF chief of staff in January 2015 until the concluding discussion of the plan in early 2017, a year after the plan was first formulated. The result was a comprehensive report that dealt with both the process and the outcome of designing the multi-year plan. The report's comments provided a basis for adjustments and changes in the plan by the military from 2017 onwards. The full report was kept classified, but was accompanied by an abridged public report

that dealt mainly with the process of formulating the plan and the approaches behind it. It is important for the public to know these matters; they must not be concealed under the cloak of secrecy (IDF Gideon Multi-Year Plan, 2017).

A process that was even more complete, because it included legislation, took place in the Subcommittee for Cyber Affairs under Chairman MK Anat Berko on the question of responsibility and authority in the field of cyber defense in Israel. The subcommittee held discussions, reached conclusions, and published a classified and an unclassified report (Report on Division of Responsibility and Authority in Cyber Defense in Israel, 2016). Its conclusions served as a basis for legislation by the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee for regulating this sensitive area.

I believe this entire array—deliberation and investigation; formulation of conclusions; relay of conclusions to the political and the executive echelons in a classified version and report of what can be publicized; and legislation, if necessary—constitutes the complete and proper cycle of events in the Knesset's work. Unfortunately, such a comprehensive process takes place in the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee only rarely. The changes proposed in the next section, and others, can redress this lapse at least in part and help the Committee realize its mandate, to the benefit of the public and Israel's security.

Recommendations for Change
Oversight Authority, Appearances before the Committee, and the Disclosure of Documents

No specific legislation is needed for the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee; what is needed is to anchor in law the oversight authority of the entire Knesset. The authority of every Knesset committee to summon witnesses, view documents, and visit relevant sites should be anchored in a general oversight law that will strengthen the Knesset's capabilities in what I regard as its essential role. The authority listed in the bill for Improving the Oversight

of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee should be vested in every committee in its field of responsibility, as defined in the Knesset Rules of Procedure.

> **The authority of every Knesset committee to summon witnesses, view documents, and visit relevant sites should be anchored in a general oversight law that will strengthen the Knesset's capabilities in what I regard as its essential role.**

In addition, the same bill should anchor rules for appearing before the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee and disclosing documents to it. The Rubinstein Commission also recommended as follows:

> As in the provisions of Article 12 of the General Security Service Law, the IDF chief of staff shall report on IDF activity from time to time to the Committee or the appropriate subcommittee—as decided by the Committee chair. The current practice of a report once a month appears to us to fulfill the needs.
>
> In cases of an urgent discussion, which the Committee chair believes cannot be delayed, the Committee chair is entitled to summon the chief of staff or his deputy for an urgent discussion within 48 hours. If the minister of defense takes issue with this summons, the Knesset speaker shall decide the matter.
>
> Investigations by the military shall be included in the documents that the Committee and its subcommittees are authorized to obtain and examine. For this purpose, Article 593A of the Military Justice Law should be amended accordingly (Report by the Public Commission for Examining Parliamentary Oversight of the Security Establishment, 2004, p. 11).

Confidentiality

I propose that each member of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee sign a commitment that if he is shown to have leaked the contents of a discussion classified at any level of secrecy whatsoever, he will not request immunity against prosecution, and will not accept such immunity if it is granted to him. This commitment will be deposited with the Knesset legal advisor, as is done with declarations of capital given by each MK upon taking office. This will increase public trust, and the trust of those appearing before the Committee, in the Committee members' responsibility.

Subcommittees

The identity and roles of the subcommittees must be regulated and anchored in the Knesset rules of procedure. This will establish the status of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee plenum as a "substitute Knesset" for foreign affairs and security matters, and give the subcommittees a status similar to that of the permanent Knesset committees with respect to the Knesset plenum.

Historically and objectively, the principal subcommittees are as follows:
a. Subcommittee for Intelligence, Secret Services, and Captives and Missing Soldiers
b. Subcommittee for Security Doctrine and Force Buildup
c. Subcommittee for Readiness and Continuous Security
d. Subcommittee for IDF Human Resources
e. Subcommittee for Foreign Policy and Public Diplomacy
f. Subcommittee on Home Front Affairs
g. Subcommittee for Israel Atomic Energy Commission Affairs

The identity and size of these subcommittees should be anchored in the Knesset Rules of Procedure, so that their existence does not depend on the caprices of the Committee chairman. No additional subcommittees should be added, except in special cases of ad hoc committees required for reasons of secrecy of the discussion or a necessary reduction in the number of participants.

The Number of Members and the Question of Substitute Members

A solution should be found to prevent political inflation of the number of members of the Committee and the subcommittees, while on the other hand ensuring a respectable attendance at discussions and the proper work of these bodies: the number of substitutes will be limited, and a large majority will be members of the opposition, so that the total number of members and substitute members on the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee does not exceed 25. This will not impact negatively on the coalition majority in legislative matters. The number of members on a subcommittee will not exceed nine, including substitutes. There will be no more than five members each on the Subcommittee for Intelligence and the Subcommittee for Israel Atomic Energy Committee Affairs.

Preservation of Knowledge and Consultation with External Experts

The Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee has a highly skilled permanent team of veterans that maintains the Committee's organizational memory and is very knowledgeable in the Committee's fields of responsibility. It is important for this team to maintain ongoing and fixed contact with relevant parties outside the Knesset, and to propose that the Committee chairman utilize their help from time to time— with obvious restrictions for maintaining secrecy—in order to expand the base and scope of the Committee's discussions. When the Committee receives all its information from the security establishment, which in any case has a virtual monopoly on the data, the discussion is liable to be channeled to this knowledge base, which will detract from proper oversight.

Governmental Oversight

Suitable legislation should be enacted immediately in order to institutionalize governmental oversight of the intelligence agencies. Such institutionalization will facilitate the work of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee's subcommittee, which will be able to obtain answers more easily, not only from the intelligence bodies themselves, but also from the responsible governmental echelon and those with appropriate knowledge. Similarly, the entire governmental oversight mechanism for the security establishment should be institutionalized and improved, which will also improve the Committee's work and make it more effective.

The legal framework for the actions of the security bodies, their structure, and their subordination to the political echelon should be supplemented. A complete framework of this sort will also help the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee in fulfilling its oversight functions. An IDF law, a State Security Cabinet law, and other laws should be enacted for this purpose.

The Lack of Discussions on Foreign Affairs and the Proposal to Split the Committee

I recommended against splitting the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee into two committees. Instead, the Knesset speaker and the Committee chairman should agree on a minimum threshold of attention to foreign affairs and their proper weight in the Committee's activity. Israel's foreign relations are a critical matter with an influence on the country's security and prosperity equal to that of security activity. This should be reflected in the Committee's activity, but not through a mechanical division.

The Security Budget Approval Process

The process for approving the security budget can be improved as follows: the Joint Committee will examine the budget in detail, as it does now.

It will propose, debate, and eventually approve changes in the fields of action and the programs, while approving the overall budget total, in order to avoid delaying Knesset approval of the budget and threatening the government's viability. History shows that MKs are better able than government ministers to detect errors and bias in the security establishment's actions. There must be no hesitation in doing this in the main area in which it is possible.

I recommended against splitting the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee into two committees. Instead, the Knesset speaker and the Committee chairman should agree on a minimum threshold of attention to foreign affairs and their proper weight in the Committee's activity.

Advance Notice of Operations and Campaigns

There should be no obligation to report actions and operations to the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, and I agree with the finding of the Rubinstein Commission: "It is not desirable for a parliamentary committee or its subcommittees to have direct command authority, or to bear any responsibility whatsoever for the decisions and actions of the defense establishment" (Report of the Public Commission for Examining Parliamentary Oversight of the Security Establishment, 2004, p. 8). At the same time, it is mandatory to inform the Committee of ongoing matters, policy disputes, and a change in red lines, and to discuss them before its appropriate body. The Committee chairman is updated regularly by the political echelon, and has the authority to bring a given matter up for discussion in the appropriate subcommittee. However, the current situation also depends on the will of the political echelon or the extent of the Committee members' external knowledge, which leads them to ask the Committee chairman to schedule a discussion on a given matter.

Confirmation Hearings for Senior Officials

In the Israeli system, there is no need to make any appointment whatsoever for a senior position contingent on Knesset approval, including the three security appointments: IDF chief of staff, ISA director general, and Mossad director general. Such a condition would constitute a change in the system of government on a single arbitrary point. Rather, I propose that someone appointed to one of the leading positions examined by the appointments committee appear before the relevant Knesset committee after final approval of his appointment, and present his plans and outlook in the matters for which he will be responsible. For the three security positions, this will be the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee and its subcommittees. Part of his appearance should be public—particularly that of the chief of staff and a specific part of the ISA director general's appearance—and part should be before the Subcommittee for Intelligence, or a different body selected by the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee chair. This will not be a hearing for confirmation purposes, and the Committee will have no authority over the appointment itself.

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A Post-Zionist Perspective on the Death of the Two-State Solution

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Paradigm Lost: From Two-State Solution to One-State Reality
by Ian S. Lustick
University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019
194 pages

Prof. Ian Lustick of the University of Pennsylvania, who specializes in modern history and Middle East politics, analyzes the death of the two-state paradigm as a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Since in its place, he contends, a one-state reality has been created, this must be the focus of the current debate. According to his approach, therefore, the emphasis should be on finding ways for Jews and Arabs to live together in full equality in the expanse between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.

In the first three chapters of the book, Lustick presents three main factors that he believes preclude the opportunity to implement a two-state solution. In the first chapter, he analyzes the Zionist policy of the "Iron Wall," intended to demonstrate power that will halt any attack on the State of Israel and create an understanding among Arab states that they must come to terms with its existence. The next step is to leverage these achievements to conduct negotiations that will lead to the resolution of the conflict, taking into account the collective rights of the peoples. However, Lustick claims, the military successes led Israel to escalate its demands for territory, security guarantees, and recognition for the legitimacy of Zionism (pp. 22-23, 140). This impedes the chance of reaching the compromises necessary for a peace agreement. Instead, a policy of territorial expansionism was adopted, which led to denying the prospect of a two-state solution (p. 26).

In the following chapter, Lustick analyzes the second component, which he holds responsible for the rejection of finding a solution through compromise. He calls it "Holocaustia," i.e., the Holocaust as a template for Jewish life that reveals the perpetual threat to the Jews and is a reminder that non-Jews must not be trusted (p. 37). This perception, which, Lustick claims, is the dominant perception of the Jewish public in the country, leads in his opinion to heightened feelings of fear, suspicion, and hatred toward Arabs, and to the fact that "compromise" has become a dirty word. This has thwarted the possibility of reaching a peaceful resolution of the conflict (p. 140).

In the next chapter, the author presents the third element that led to the death of the two-state solution, namely, the unqualified support by the US administrations for the State of Israel, due to the enormous power of the pro-Israel lobby in the United States. Consequently, the United States has not pushed Israel to make painful compromises to advance peace, and Israel came to believe that it could adopt any policy without undermining American support. Thus the right wing hawks and supporters of the policies of settlement and territorial expansion became stronger, while the moderate elements and the peace camp weakened, after their repeated warnings that Israel's policy would lead to the loss of American support did not materialize (pp. 70-71, 140).

In the fourth chapter, Lustick describes the actual collapse of the two-state paradigm. The main reason, in his view, is the growing number of settlements and their residents, which has made the settlement enterprise irreversible. In tandem, the peace camp in Israel collapsed and the right gained strength. Lustick presents analyses of several supporters of the two-state solution who list in detail all the obstacles that prevent this solution from realization, yet who nevertheless adhere to this solution as the dominant paradigm due to the destructive implications for the State of Israel of a one-state alternative. In this, Lustick claims, confusion blurs the line between what exists and what is desired. The fear of the dire consequences of abandoning hope for two states cannot justify the continued existence of this unfounded hope (p. 118).

In the fifth chapter, Lustick presents his central thesis, namely, that the idea of two states has become a hopeless fantasy that must be converted into an analysis of the existing situation, which is a one-state reality. According to him, there is currently one country controlled by Israel between the Mediterranean and the Jordan. Six and a half million Arabs live in this country: one and a half million are citizens of the state and have full political and civil rights, but lag in terms of access to resources and opportunities to exercise their rights; 350,000 Palestinians living in East Jerusalem are residents of the state but not citizens; two million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip live under Israeli control in a ghetto sealed from the outside world; and 2.7 million Palestinians in the West Bank live in an archipelago of cities, towns, and villages under a regime that allows Israel to restrict their movement. Alongside them, 620,000 Israelis live in the West Bank and East Jerusalem in their own communities, enjoying unrestricted freedoms and the full political rights of "first-class" Israeli citizens. The Palestinian Authority, which is presented as an independent body, in fact functions as a body that helps Israel maintain security in order to protect the privileges of those close to it, as well as a contractor of the Israeli government for tasks that Israel prefers not to perform directly (pp. 123-124).

Lustick argues that when one examines the reality of one state as a dominant paradigm and stops pursuing the false magic of the two states, there is no need to continue to engage in futile attempts to prevent the spread of settlements and find a way to produce a physical separation between the Jewish and Arab localities. Instead, the focus should be on the demand for full political equality, including equality in the allocation of resources, housing, and employment to all residents of the state (p. 131). In this context, Lustick praises the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, which emphasizes the demand for equal rights while challenging Israel's claim to be a legitimate member of the international community as long as it continues to discriminate against non-Jews (p. 129).

Lustick harshly criticizes Israel's "managing of the conflict" policy, which he says is reflected in brutal treatment of Palestinians, while cultivating the notion that Palestinians are not a partner for peace and carrying out actions on the ground that ensure the failure of any two-state negotiations. This is enabled by the unconditional support of the United States, which defends Israel against efforts to consign it to international pariah status (p. 141).

The main flaw in Lustick's book is the unequivocal focus on Israel's responsibility for the deadlock created in attempts to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

After this critical analysis, Lustick offers what in his view is an optimistic solution to the current situation. He notes that statements from the Israeli right support the one egalitarian state solution, although some support the granting of full civil rights under conditions designed to prevent the actual exercise of these rights.

However, he claims that as history shows, such moves eventually lead to full equality, for example in relation to African Americans in the United States (p. 146). This is partly because progressive Jews in Israel will join the Arabs' struggle for equality to ensure the preservation of democracy in Israel (p. 149).

> The book is important in that it allows us to see how Israel is portrayed in the eyes of progressive Jews in the United States and in the eyes of liberals around the world.

The main flaw in Lustick's book is the unequivocal focus on Israel's responsibility for the deadlock created in attempts to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This has substantial ramifications. Since Lustick looks at only one side of the conflict a distorted picture emerges. For him, the Palestinians are clear victims who played a passive role in the conflict. The historical description of the conflict presented in the book is adapted to this perception. For example, Lustick neglects to state that Israel accepted the partition plan in 1947, while the Arabs rejected it (p. 18); the Yom Kippur War is described as an attempt by Arab states to force Israel to negotiate (pp. 7, 21); the second intifada, the wave of Palestinian terrorism that led to attacks every two or three days in Israel's population centers, is mentioned several times without any details of the intensity of the casualties in Israel, and sometimes with reference only to the forceful Israeli response (pp. 25, 85). Similarly, Israel's attempts to resolve the conflict are referenced briefly, if at all. Thus the Camp David summit from 2000 is presented as an idle Israeli attempt to end the conflict (pp. 25, 101), although President Clinton himself stated that it was the Palestinians who caused the failure of the summit; the disengagement from the Gaza Strip, which led to Hamas's takeover of the Gaza Strip and continued rocket fire from there at Israel, is hardly mentioned; the Annapolis process, in which the Olmert

government presented far-reaching proposals rejected by the Palestinians, is also mentioned for the first time on page 102 without any details. Similarly, Lustick does not refer to the peace agreements that Israel has signed with its neighbors, including the fact that it agreed to give up the Sinai Peninsula under the peace agreement with Egypt.

As presented, the contents portray Israel as a forceful, predatory entity that indiscriminately suspects any non-Jew, suffers from paranoia resulting from post-Holocaust trauma, and ignores all the signals of peace from Arab states and peace-loving Palestinians. Even if we accept that Jews do feel that they are under constant existential threat in light of hundreds of years of persecution, then, as the saying goes, "the fact that you're paranoid doesn't mean that they aren't after you." The existential threat is not imaginary; it is quite real. The security concerns stem from a tangible threat: from actual enemies who do not recognize Israel's right to exist and from many rounds of violence and fighting. In addition, every time Israel withdrew from territory, handing it over to Palestinian control—in the West Bank, as part of the Oslo process, and in the Gaza Strip during the disengagement—it found itself under severe terrorist attacks and rocket fire. This is not to say that Israel's policy cannot be criticized and that there is no room for territorial compromises, but a complete disregard of this reality and the exclusive imposition of blame on Israel undermines the validity of the book's arguments.

Moreover, Lustick refrains nearly entirely from mentioning the Palestinian demands that make it difficult to reach a compromise solution, such as insisting on the right of return. It seems that in his view this is a justified demand. Thus, he criticizes those who expect the BDS movement to focus its criticism on the occupation of the West Bank and the settlements, and explains that the settlement policy is in fact a natural continuation of what the State of Israel essentially is: "an expansionist settler state" (p. 118). When this is the writer's

starting point and when his sympathy for the BDS movement—a movement whose main purpose is to dismantle the State of Israel—is clear (p. 129), then his critical analysis of Israel should be read cautiously, if not skeptically.

Beyond that, the utopian future that Lustick paints of one democratic and egalitarian state ignores the depth of the rifts and hostility between the parties. Given the passive role that the Palestinians play throughout the book, there is almost no mention of the existence of a large section of the Palestinian public that is not at all willing to accept the presence of Jews in the area, the religious background and worldviews of militant Islamic organizations such as Hamas, and the deep hostility that exists toward Israel and Israelis. Beyond these, the idea that a state with an Arab majority and a Jewish minority would be democratic and even liberal in nature seems no less detached from reality than the way Lustick paints the two-state solution.

Nonetheless, the book is important in that it allows us to see how Israel is portrayed in the eyes of progressive Jews in the United States and in the eyes of liberals around the world. Beyond that, the analysis of the fading chance of implementing a two-state solution and regarding the dangers of further drift toward one state should serve as a warning sign to anyone who fears for the future of the country.

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A Conflict Difficult to Explain

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Why Peace? The Political Motives of PLO Engaging with [the] Oslo Process
by Shimon Karmi
Resling Publishing, 2020
563 pages

In *Why Peace?* Shimon Carmi explores the causes and processes that led the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to turn to a peace process that culminated in the signing of the Oslo Accords. The author examines the issue on the basis of political science theories dealing with the abandonment of the military option by terrorist organizations or resistance movements and their moving toward political processes. These theories are reviewed at length, and

The book constitutes a useful and credible source of information and education for readers interested in the roots and development of the conflict. It can help verify or compare different accounts of similar events.

through them he seeks to answer the central question in the book.

The first half of the book, which deals with questions of background, contains two sections: one theoretical and one empirical. In the theoretical section, the author contends with the motives spurring terrorist organizations to act, and those that lead them to pursue peace or a settlement that ends such acts. He considers a wide range of motives, characteristics, sources of power, and authorities of the organizations included in this category.

In the empirical section, the author cites a series of conflicts within countries that ended with the signing of agreements settling the relations between the hostile parties, or with the victory of one of them. Inter alia, he cites as an example the conflict in Burundi between the Hutu and Tutsi tribes, which ended in a ceasefire following intervention by many actors in the international theater. He also cites conflicts between organizations and governments in northern Uganda, Sierra Leone, the Ivory Coast, and Nepal.

At the end of this section, the author divides the factors that motivated the groups to enter a negotiating process into categories: internal factors, such as weakening of the group and damage to its public stature; external factors, such as aid that encourages movement in one direction or another; and political motives, such as a wish to obtain representation and recognition, survival, and integration in politics. These factors are the parameters whereby the author seeks to assess the process the PLO underwent before signing the Oslo Accords, which he discusses in the second part of the book.

This is unquestionably a very clear and informative book that goes into great detail about many events that occurred in the Fatah movement, which led the PLO since Egypt and other Arab countries lost control of it; the changes that took place in the organization as a result of its clashes with Israel, as well as with Arab countries; the internal disputes that

emerged; and the sacred need, as perceived by most of the Palestinians, to preserve its status as the sole representative of the Palestinian people.

The book constitutes a useful and credible source of information and education for readers interested in the roots and development of the conflict. It can help verify or compare different accounts of similar events. The wealth of sources used by the author (although an imbalance exists between the small number of sources in Arabic and those in Hebrew and English) as a basis for his arguments also enhances the book's reliability.

The great detail provided on the events covered by the author, however, and his commitment to the theoretical background leaves readers interested in the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with a sense of a missed opportunity. The assortment of factors that he cites as an explanation for the motives that led the PLO to abandon the armed struggle and adopt the peace negotiations format does not provide a clear answer.

The questions that the author presents at the beginning include (p. 12): what brought the Palestinian leadership to turn to peace; how was the armed struggle transformed into political negotiations; what made the PLO leadership want to enter the Oslo process; and more. However, the answers to these questions provided in the rest of the book are partial and not sufficiently clear.

It seems that the uncertainty left by the author is a result of his attempt to utilize tools from political science in order to conduct what is essentially a historical analysis. These tools examine events through models, parameters, formulas, and paradigms that restrict the author to the comparative perspective. This sometimes makes it difficult to give proper weight to the dimensions of time and space and the concrete context of the events described in the book, or the declarations, announcements, and statements published by important people in the organization.

For example, at the outset (p. 12), the author wonders how the Palestinian leadership turned to the peace process when the Palestinian National Covenant, which negates the existence of Israel and states that the only way to liberate Palestine is through armed struggle, had not yet been changed. Does every practical change require denial of the old ideology, or does history almost always show us that the new is destined to supplant the old, particularly as political movements by nature are in no hurry to repeal their seminal ideological document as this would constitute a confession of failure? In these circumstances, it is preferable to accept the constraints of reality that impose the change.

Similarly, the author does not attempt to specify the events and does not state their identifying characteristics. Nor does he order them according to the extent of their influence on the changes that occurred in the PLO leadership's thinking about the obligatory adjustments and revisions needed in its concept of the conflict with Israel and ways of dealing with it. Much has been spoken and written about the changes in the views of the Palestinians and the PLO in the post-1967 era. It appears that it is difficult to deny the centrality of three events in the changes that occurred in the PLO leadership's concept during this period.

The author wonders how the Palestinian leadership turned to the peace process when the Palestinian National Covenant, which negates the existence of Israel and states that the only way to liberate Palestine is through armed struggle, had not yet been changed.

The first event was the expulsion of PLO members from all of the organization's factions from Jordan in September 1970, referred to by Palestinians as "Black September." This deprived the Palestinians of any contact with the Israeli border, and highlighted the questionable reliability of Arab countries and the use of their

territory as a base for conducting the armed struggle against Israel. Is there a connection between the first changes that occurred in the PLO's stance on the struggle against Israel in the early 1970s and the events of Black September? The answer is probably yes, but the author does not consider this question.

> The author does address the results of the expulsion and analyzes the PLO's weakness, but does not give it sufficient weight as an influence on the changes that occurred in Palestinian thinking and in the PLO, and on the PLO's opting for political negotiations.

The second event was the PLO's expulsion from Lebanon following the First Lebanon War in 1982, after having become established there and having gained control over parts of Lebanon's territory for use as a base to continue the armed struggle against Israel. This expulsion removed the PLO from the conflict area, dispersed its forces throughout the Middle East, and highlighted the unreliability of the Arab countries. Egypt, which signed peace agreements with Israel in 1979, maintained its commitment to these agreements. Syria, which was then Lebanon's patron, tried to take the PLO under its wing, and created a rift with it in the process. The PLO was left weakened and its institutions dismantled. Its search for a political crutch to help it escape the pit into which it had fallen was largely fruitless.

The author does address the results of the expulsion and analyzes the PLO's weakness, but does not give it sufficient weight as an influence on the changes that occurred in Palestinian thinking and in the PLO, and on the PLO's opting for political negotiations. In one of his speeches in January 2018 in response to President Trump's "deal of the century," Abu Mazen described what the PLO experienced following its expulsion from Lebanon, which he said was worse than Trump's term in office. He tried to encourage his listeners by saying

that in the years following the expulsion from Lebanon, the situation was more desperate. Even holding conferences of PLO institutions was impossible, because their members had given up and refused to participate.

The third event, and that which possibly shaped the Palestinian stance in this context, was the outbreak of the first intifada in late 1987. Many scholars, among them Moshe Shemesh (Shemesh, 1999), Avraham Sela (Sela, 2019), Matti Steinberg (Steinberg, 2008), and others, assigned considerable weight to the first intifada and the change that it caused among the Palestinians. On the one hand, the intifada was initiated by those living in the territories, most of whom were under Israeli control. It indicated a change taking place from below, which Israelis like to call bottom-up. On the other hand, it threatened the hegemony of the already weakened Palestinian leadership, which was languishing in Tunisia, and was looking for an opportunity to escape the dead end in which it was mired. This was an opportunity that played into the hands of the moderates in the PLO leadership and bolstered the pressure exerted by the population of the territories. They remained loyal to the PLO, regarding it as their sole legitimate representative, but pressured it to make a decision that would change the nature of the conflict. They delivered messages and sent petitions of the residents in support of these demands.

Expressions of this can be seen in many stories by journalists during this period following the new messages formulated by the perpetrators of the intifada, and in books such as *From Beirut to Jerusalem* (Friedman, 1989, chapter 14), *Intifada* (Schiff & Yaari, 1990, pp. 106-126), and others. This process, combined with King Hussein's disengagement from the West Bank a few months after the intifada began and the pressure exerted on the PLO by the United States and other actors in the international theater, culminated in the Palestinian declaration of independence in November 1988, which substantially changed

the nature of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.

This declaration contained acceptance of the principle of a partition into two states, one Jewish and one Arab (UN Resolution 181), and a commitment to respect all of the UN resolutions, without citing their numbers. The declaration thereby in effect determined that the conflict was no longer an existential one, and had become a conflict over borders. It was clear to both the Palestinians and Israel that Israel would not be able to begin any political process whatsoever without such a declaration. The author takes note of the declaration, but minimizes its contribution to the change in the PLO's stance, writing, "There was therefore nothing new in the declaration; it was a withdrawal of willingness to accept an international conference under UN sponsorship for a solution to the question of Palestine" (p. 358).

In other words, in the author's view, willingness to accept an international conference, which is nothing more than willingness to sit at a table, is more far-reaching than a new starting position that the Palestinian institution at the highest level created, which redefined the character of the conflict. Furthermore, the rhetoric of the Fatah and the PLO leadership accompanying the declaration, which was also stated many years later, enhanced this direction, and left no room for doubt about the significance of this declaration.

The author cites most of these factors: the PLO's exile in Tunisia, Arafat's public support for Saddam Hussein in the 1991 Gulf War, the strengthening of the internal leadership in the territories, the desire for survival and continued relevance, international pressure, and more (pp. 484-486), but does not comment on the weight of each of these factors.

An examination of the internal Palestinian dialogue at the time would have made the weight of each of these factors very clear. This is a parameter that reflects the mood: whether the declaration of independence inspired the masses, whether they regarded it a new hope, and how they dealt with opposition movements like Hamas, which took an aggressive line and accused its opponents of treason and surrendering the important principles of the Palestinian people.

In fact, the public strongly supported the declaration, and regarded it as an innovative measure giving hope and heralding a change. In the Gaza Strip, this rivalry led to violent clashes between Fatah and Hamas members throughout the intifada, both before and after the declaration. In all of the clashes, Hamas was the Palestinian underdog. The majority looked to the new hope created following the declaration, which was actually the result of an effort in which the local residents played a respectable role.

It appears that the continued evolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will continue to enrich the disputes between various scholars about the changes in the conflict, its nature, and its development.

Such an examination could also have indicated the weight of each of the events that took place in the years preceding the signing of the Oslo Accords. It could have shown that the internal Palestinian division dated back to the beginning of the first intifada. Its roots lay in the discovery revealed by Hamas when it was first founded that the perpetrators of the intifada, members of Fatah and the national movement, had no intention of persisting in the old demand for a country that would supplant Israel; they were demanding a country next to Israel. For Hamas, the declaration of independence was proof of its many public arguments and proclamations during the first intifada. It was also one of the main reasons why Hamas did not join the united national headquarters of the intifada.

Except for perusal by the author (p. 476) of issues of the more independent East Jerusalem newspaper *al-Quds* in 1991-2005, through which he tries to clarify the extent to which the PLO's leadership was speaking in positive terms about peace, the book does not comment on the internal dialogue.

In the concluding chapter, the author adheres to the comparative dimension of the study. He weighs the explanations cited above against the parameters raised in the theoretical section, and considers how his findings fit in with these parameters. This is a kind of integration and adaptation job, whose contribution to the important question of what motivated the PLO to embark on the Oslo process, or in the author's language, "why peace," is large, but inadequate.

It appears that the continued evolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will continue to enrich the disputes between various scholars about the changes in the conflict, its nature, and its development. In this respect, the book is a large contribution to the discussion's enrichment. The influence of the external factors, above all Israel, on the internal events on the Palestinian side is sizable. The processes taking place within the Palestinian side, however, such as the Palestinian declaration of independence, are also significant catalysts.

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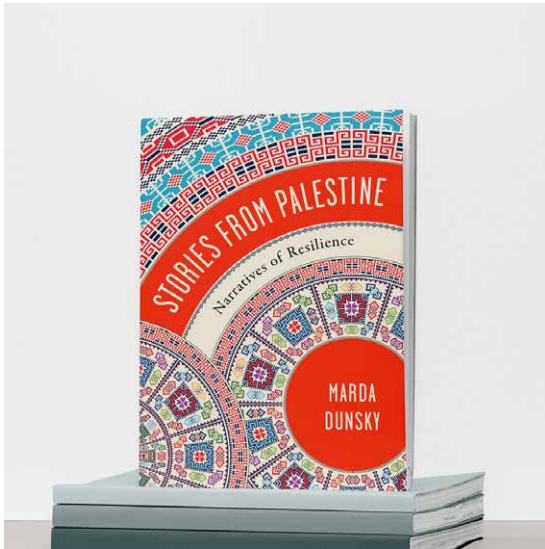
The Palestinians as We Have Never Seen Them

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Stories from Palestine: Narratives of Resilience
by Marda Dunsky
University of Notre Dame Press, 2021
262 pages

What does the world know about the Palestinians, their daily routine and their ambitions, apart from the fact that they are "victims of occupation"? Indeed, occupation is not pleasant, and Palestinian lives are marked by major hardships, including long lines at roadblocks, limited access to water, and confiscation of land. At the same time, according to this book, which presents the stories of some 30 Palestinian men and women from different areas, Palestinians are optimistic, determined, and talented. The individuals portrayed here include entrepreneurs who have succeeded at the international level, artists, professors who studied abroad, and more. Author Marda Dunsky is anxious to show that the Palestinians are not only victims, but also people who create, achieve, and seek to live in freedom.

In the preface, Dunsky discusses the rationale behind the book, and then proceeds to the chapters, each telling the stories of people who share a core characteristic, together with supporting data: farmers who successfully market local produce, artists who express their opposition to occupation in their work, children who experience and respond to the occupation in psychological and physical terms, a woman doctor who describes how the restrictions on leaving the territory have led to marriages of cousins, and others. Finally, Dunsky places the Palestinian narrative in a broader context. She ends with the conclusion that in spite of the wide range in outlook she encountered, those she interviewed cling steadfastly to the narrative, which is evidence of its strength and continuity.

Marda Dunsky is an American journalist and lecturer on journalism, with expertise in the contemporary Middle East. She taught journalism at Northwestern University and worked at the *Chicago Tribune*. As part of her work, she spent time in Israel and met Palestinians and witnessed their daily reality—an encounter that sowed the seeds for this book. "When you know that there's more to a story than what you have been told, more than what you have read and seen from a distance, what do you do?" said Dunsky in an interview with the publisher. Dunsky listened to her subjects' stories. When she was unable to meet these individuals, she conducted the interviews remotely. Among them was an interview with a gifted girl from Gaza who takes part in global mathematics competitions, which gave her a rare opportunity to leave the Strip.

Many books have been written about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, some of them personal memoirs of participants in the negotiations; some by academics, researchers, or media figures; some by professional writers and intellectuals. All these authors don specific glasses that reflect their particular views of the conflict, their political positions, their recollections, or the influence of their homeland. A quick survey of the library seems to show

that Dunsky's book is different in its nature and purpose from other books on the conflict.

Dunsky's subjects don't want to be pitied; they want their stories to be heard. They want the world to know that the Palestinians are not only linked to terrorism and violence, but to much more as well. Through their personal stories, amorphous images and stereotypes give way to concrete biographies and perspectives.

Dunsky's book is different in its nature and purpose from other books on the conflict.

Take, for example, Nazmi Jubeh, a professor of history at Bir Zeit University who lives in Beit Hanina. For 25 years, five days a week, he has traveled 50 kilometers from his home to his workplace and back, and waits for hours at the Qalandiya roadblock. He estimates that a quarter of the time of his workday is actually spent waiting at roadblocks. Indeed, who could keep calm in such a daily reality? From 1993 to 2000, he read about 100 books in line at roadblocks. "My car was a library," he says (p. 201). Dunsky points out that the complex logistics of this daily reality take their toll, and, reading is Jubeh's way of dealing with the anger he feels:

> In general, every conflict produces a lot of violence. Societies are becoming more violent and more aggressive, in every aspect of life.…Not everybody can get rid of the violence inside them in a positive way. Some do not manage. Some manage. I found my way of getting rid of anger at the checkpoints by reading.…The difference between us and others (occupied people) is that we are living in this conflict for more than five decades. They (the Israelis: AE) decide which books are allowed to come to the West Bank; they decide which kind of goods we can import. (pp. 201-202)

Jubeh could have overcome the logistical difficulties and avoided waiting at roadblocks by moving to Bir Zeit, and in that way also save a lot of money, because a home in Bir Zeit would cost him about $100,000, while a home in Jerusalem costs five times as much. But the trauma of 1948, which is embedded deep in the Palestinian consciousness, as their stories show, does not allow him to do that. "Nothing will move me out from my city," says Jubeh. "We were driven from our homes in 1948. We will not repeat it" (p. 202).

Or in the words of Imad Khatib, president of the Palestine Polytechnic University in Hebron: "There is no Palestinian who will accept becoming a refugee again" (p. 120). Khatib earned his doctorate in Germany and returned five years after the Oslo Accords, during the honeymoon—that is how he describes that time, when money flowed into the region. He was exposed to the Israeli left and was disappointed, and when an Israeli colleague who was one of the architects of the Oslo Accords said to him once that to tell the truth, it's not their land, Khatib understood that the Israeli left, or at least parts of it, does not recognize the legitimate rights of the Palestinians (pp. 112-120).

"Living under years of occupation" says Nadia Harhash, a divorced woman residing in Beit Hanina, "has diminished the value of life among the Palestinian people. Life feels so miserable and worthless that death seems merely to be a change, not a loss. Young men are eager to go and fight, knowing they will likely be killed, because this would not be a loss to them…Living in that state of humiliation, oppression, and suppression changes the nature of our souls and robs us of our joy for life. Life needs a space for hope to thrive, and such spaces have been shut and locked for young Palestinians." (p. 143). In periods of tension she is afraid that her daughters will become *shaheeds* (martyrs). She often goes with her daughters to Jerusalem's Old City and this is her way of expressing opposition, of seeking to show that the place belongs to them.

Alongside the human interest stories, Dunsky cites various data and figures relating to the routine of life in the territories: demographics, territory, infrastructures, and more. These figures, taken from reports from the UN, UNRWA, human rights organizations, Israeli and Palestinian government sources, NGOs, academic sources, and the media are intended to support the stories and the greater Palestinian narrative. For example, there is the demographic contradiction of Palestinians living in East Jerusalem: 95 percent are not citizens, but residents. From 1967 to 2017 the Arab population in East Jerusalem increased five-fold—double the rate of population growth in the Jewish population. Nevertheless, since 1967 the Israeli government has promoted the construction of 55,000 housing units for the Jewish population, compared to 600 units in Arab neighborhoods for the Arab population. According to Peace Now, only 16.5 percent of building permits are granted to Palestinians, although they represent about a third of Jerusalem's population. This reality has led to unauthorized building in Palestinian neighborhoods, for lack of choice. According to estimates, about 20,000 housing units are destined for demolition. In the years 2004-2019 about 1000 units were demolished.

Dunsky also describes discrimination against the Arabs of East Jerusalem: from 1967 to 2014 some 14,500 Palestinians lost the right to live in Jerusalem, and since 2006, when Israel added the condition of declaring loyalty to Israel, other Palestinians—those defined as terrorists—have also been barred. A Palestinian who goes abroad for a long period loses the right to return, contrary to Jews, whose right to the land is a given in the Israeli system.

Palestinians in East Jerusalem can vote in local elections, but not in the Knesset elections. They do not have Israeli passports. They can apply for citizenship, but this can take years. From 2003 to 2014 some 10,000 Palestinians applied, and about 3,000 are in the process of obtaining citizenship. Dunsky does not describe

the other side of the coin: the anti-Israel political activity that leads to threats against residents who apply for citizenship.

According to Jubeh, the Palestinians in East Jerusalem have no political address in the city, that is, no institution to contact that will respond to their problems, so that in their distress, people find refuge and strength in their families, "because the law is not there to help us," he says, "the law is the law of the occupier." Discrimination against the Palestinians in East Jerusalem is not only geographic but also social, claims Jubeh. "There are some services that we use together like hospitals, transportation. We are living with Israelis but absolutely separated. Both sides try to ignore the existence of the other" (p. 201). Mahmoud Muna, the organizer of the Palestinian Festival of Literature in Ramallah and (some other places), describes it in a more extreme way: "The future will have to be better. I don't think anything can happen that is going to be worse than what we have already seen" (p. 132). Muna was born in Jerusalem in 1982. The trip to al-Quds University, where he studied, became much longer when the contiguity between the Palestinian villages was severed: five minutes became an hour and a half, and three kilometers became 25. Some of his friends were killed in clashes with the Israeli army. He is frustrated by the fact that the Palestinians have difficulty telling their story to the world.

It is unnecessary to read to the last page to understand that Dunsky presents a pro-Palestinian approach with no account of the essential circumstances affecting Israeli interests and needs, Palestinian political stubbornness and lack of willingness to compromise, a national struggle that has adopted terror tactics, and more.

That is what Dunsky has tried to do, but the picture she presents is not symmetrical. For example, she lays out the main points of former US President Trump's "deal of the century," presents its lack of balance, and details the

broad American support for Israel during his presidency. However, she omits any information about the external aid amounting to tens of billions of dollars that the Palestinians have received over the years, and that have come to naught. Presumably she feels there is no need to present these facts, nor does she pretend to be neutral. It is a mistake to think that this is a case of two equal parties: both parties have equal rights to security and dignity, but they do not have the same power to achieve them (p. 198).

It is unnecessary to read to the last page to understand that Dunsky presents a pro-Palestinian approach with no account of the essential circumstances affecting Israeli interests and needs, Palestinian political stubbornness and lack of willingness to compromise, a national struggle that has adopted terror tactics, and more. According to Dunsky, many books have dealt with this, and the purpose of this book—which is mainly aimed at the international public—is to deepen the reader's knowledge of the human-interest angle and arouse empathy and support for the routine and daily lives of the Palestinians. She seems to have succeeded in this task.

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Call for Papers for *Strategic Assessment*

The editorial board of the INSS journal *Strategic Assessment* invites authors to submit articles to be published in the journal's updated format. Proposals for special themed issues are also welcome.

Strategic Assessment, a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary peer-reviewed journal on national security, cyber, and intelligence, was launched in 1998 and is published quarterly in Hebrew and English by the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) at Tel Aviv University. *Strategic Assessment* serves as a platform for original research on a spectrum of issues relating to the discipline of national security, cyber, and intelligence. The purpose of the journal is to spark and enhance an informed, constructive debate of fundamental questions in national security studies, using an approach that integrates a theoretical dimension with policy-oriented research. Articles on topics relating to Israel, the Middle East, the international arena, and global trends are published with the goal of enriching and challenging the national security knowledge base.

The current era has seen many changes in fundamental conventions relating to national security and how it is perceived at various levels. As national security research evolves, it seeks to adjust to new paradigms and to innovations in the facets involved, be they technological, political, cultural, military, or socio-economic. Moreover, the challenge of fully grasping reality has become even more acute with the regular emergence of competing narratives, and this is precisely why factual and data-based research studies are essential to revised and relevant assessments.

The editorial board encourages researchers to submit articles that have not been previously published that propose an original and innovative thesis on national security with a broad disciplinary approach rooted in international relations, political science, history, economics, law, communications, geography and environmental studies, Israel studies, Middle East and Islamic studies, sociology and anthropology, strategy and security studies, technology, cyber, conflict resolution, or additional disciplines.

In the spirit of the times, *Strategic Assessment* is shifting its center of gravity to an online presence and availability. While INSS will continue to prepare issues on a quarterly basis, articles approved for publication, following the review and editing process, will be published in an online version on the journal's website in the format of "published first online," and subsequently included in the particular quarterly issues.

Strategic Assessment publishes articles in five categories:

Research Forum – academic articles of a theoretical and research nature on a wide range of topics related to national security, of up to 8000 words in Hebrew or 10,000 words in English (with APA-style documentation). Articles should be researched-based and include a theoretical perspective, and address a range of subjects related to national security. All articles are submitted for double blind peer review. Submissions must include an abstract of 100-120 words; keywords (no more than ten); and a short author biography.

Policy Analysis – articles of 1500-3000 in Hebrew words and up to 3,500 words in English that analyze policies in national security contexts. These articles will be without footnotes and bibliography and use hyperlinks to refer to sources, as necessary. Recommended reading and additional source material can be included. Submissions must include an abstract of 100-120 words; keywords (no more than ten); and a short author biography.

Professional Forum – panel discussions on a particular topic, or in-depth interview, of 2000-3000 words (up to 3500 words in English) including source material (APA-style). Submissions must include a short author biography.

Academic Survey – a survey of 1800-2500 words (up to 3000 words in English) including references and recommended reading (APA-style) of the latest professional literature on a specific topic relating to national security. Submissions must include a short author biography.

Book Reviews – book reviews of 800-1300 words (up to 1500 words in English) including source material (APA-style) on a wide range of books relating to national security. Submissions must include a short author biography.

Articles should be submitted electronically to editors-sa@inss.org.il and indicate the category of the attached article. You may also use this e-mail address for questions or additional information about the journal.

Kobi Michael and Carmit Valensi
Editors, *Strategic Assessment*