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**The Institute for National Security Studies (INSS)**

40 Haim Levanon • POB 39950 • Tel Aviv 6997556 • Israel  
Tel: +972-3-640-0400 • Fax: +972-3-744-7590 • E-mail: editors-sa@inss.org.il

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# From the Editors

This issue is published in the midst of the war in Gaza against Hamas. The painful results of Hamas's murderous terrorist attack on October 7 are still fresh, and the fate of many of the hostages, captives, and missing is not yet known. Israeli society has experienced an enormous upheaval, and many have lost their basic sense of security. How the IDF wins the war and how the post-war reconstruction unfolds will to a large extent determine the future direction of the State of Israel. Considerable research will still certainly be conducted on what happened on October 7, the period that preceded it, the war itself, and its ramifications.

Most of the articles in this issue were written before October 7, and thus do not directly deal with the attack and the war. Nonetheless, there are important and relevant connections between many of the articles in this issue and the October 7 onslaught. Hamas may well have chosen the timing for the attack to coincide with the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Yom Kippur War, and several articles in the issue touch directly on this milestone date. Prominent among them is Zaki Shalom's analysis of the "preconception" that prevailed before the Yom Kippur War, as reflected in a speech by then-Defense Minister Moshe Dayan in July 1973. This analysis can be used to derive guidelines for assessing some of the failures that allowed Hamas to strike Israel by surprise on October 7, 2023. The article by Eviatar Matania and Erez Seri-Levy, which surveys the analysis of strategic decision making on the fateful day of October 12, 1973, in the midst of the Yom Kippur War, also sheds light on some of the strategic dilemmas that Israel faces to this day. My book review on "*The Devil's Advocate*," which examines the intelligence supervision mechanism, raises questions about whether and in what way these mechanisms failed in 2023, in that the security organizations did not foresee Hamas's murderous attack.

At the current time, when the issue of terrorism again dominates the headlines, there is particular importance in Anat Shapira's article on the European considerations regarding the possible placement of the Revolutionary Guards on the European Union's list of terrorist organizations, as part of how the West deals with the growing threat from Iran. This threat was also reflected in Hamas's October 7 attack, given Tehran's possible role in planning it, as well as the involvement of other Iranian proxies such as Islamic Jihad, Hezbollah, and the Houthis in the multi-arena nature of this war. Christian Kaunert and Sarah Leonard's article on the European Union's RAN Project (Radicalisation Awareness Network) presents a perspective that is less familiar to Israeli readers, namely, a European Union cooperation network whose purpose is to address the challenges of the fight against terrorism and radicalization. Yossi Kuperwasser's book review on *Junction 9/11: A Journey into the Terrorism Worlds of al-Qaeda, ISIS, and their Affiliates* is as relevant as ever, when many in Israel are comparing Hamas to ISIS.

Hamas's horrific attack and what happened thereafter are a difficult test for Israel's normalization with the Gulf countries, and it is clear that among other objectives, the attack aimed to stop progress toward the normalization of Israel-Saudi relations. The article by Yoel Guzansky and Ilan Zelayat on hedging and detente in Saudi Arabia's foreign policy can shed light on Saudi considerations in the current crisis. The war in Gaza also poses many challenges to Israeli public diplomacy, although there have been several successes. The policy paper by Ofir Barel on the use of artificial intelligence to improve the performance of Israel's public diplomacy framework is important in this context, and his recommendations can enhance the lessons that will be learned from the performance of the public diplomacy system during the current war.

The intense pain of the past months has diverted attention from weighty issues such as the climate crisis, but two articles in the current issue discuss the water crisis in countries in our region—Sarah Lerech Zilberberg’s article on the water crisis in Iran, and the article by Eden Kaduri and Inbar Noy-Freifeld on the water crisis in Syria. The issue of the acute shortage of fresh water and mismanagement of existing water resources in many countries in the region contributes greatly to regional instability. Another topic is featured in Yossi Daskal’s article on the connection between public transportation in Israel and national security, and on the security consequences of the lack of proper management and development of public transportation over the years. The writer even suggests that the failures are akin to a “march of folly,” as defined by historian Barbara Tuchman in her famous book that bears this name.

Finally, Chen Kertcher’s review of Amira Schiff’s book *Conflict Resolution in the International Arena*, which is the most comprehensive and complete book in Hebrew that has been published so far in this discipline, reminds us that after large-scale conflicts with many casualties, there is also calm and potential for breakthroughs and settlements that were not possible beforehand. We can only hope that in time, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will fall into this paradigm, particularly after the October 7 attack and the Swords of Iron War.

The staff of *Strategic Assessment* would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Ori Wertman for his dedicated work as coordinator of the journal over the past two years, and to welcome Revital Yerushalmi, the incoming coordinator.

This issue is also my last issue as editor. I am completing almost five years of activity that I see as challenging, fascinating, and important. During this time, I have had the privilege of helping convert *Strategic Assessment* into a peer-reviewed academic journal that is recognized by the Planning and Budgeting Committee, expand its distribution, diversify its writers and the topics they address, and above all, cultivate and maintain it as an important and prestigious platform of the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), which is a leading research institute in Israel and worldwide.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank everyone who worked with me and who helped in this important endeavor, from the previous INSS executive team, headed by Maj. Gen. (res.) Amos Yadlin and Brig. Gen. (res.) Udi Dekel, who provided me with this unique privilege, to Brig. Gen. (res.) Itai Brun, who was the INSS Deputy Director for Research and saw great importance in the existence of *Strategic Assessment* as an academic journal, and to the current INSS executive team, led by Prof. Manuel Trajtenberg and Maj. Gen. (res.) Tamir Hayman. Special thanks to my first editorial partner, Dr. Omer Einav, and to Dr. Carmit Valensi, who succeeded him as editorial partner for two years; to associate editor Dr. Judith Rosen, who helped with her wise advice and her professional dedication to all that was related to the English edition of the journal; to Mira Yallin, the superb Hebrew copyeditor, who works with impressive efficiency and was a source of inspiration and learning for me; to Dr. Ori Wertman, who as a diligent, dedicated, and professional coordinator was of great assistance; and to Dr. Gallia Lindenstrauss, who enlisted in the effort as co-editor with the March 2023 issue and succeeded in integrating in the editorial system an impressive and amazing manner. Her diligence, dedication, and skills as a professional and experienced editor will allow for a professional generational transition, and I am confident she will lead the journal to ongoing and further development. And a final thanks to the authors—without you this could not have happened. Your contribution is the most important and significant, and it is the foundation of the journal’s existence and its professional quality.

Kobi Michael and the Editorial Board of *Strategic Assessment*



# October 12, 1973: An Analysis of Strategic Decision Making Deliberations

Eviatar Matania and Erez Seri-Levy

Tel Aviv University

This article focuses on a particularly fateful day during the Yom Kippur War—the 1973 war between Israel and Egypt and Syria—Friday, October 12, 1973, the seventh day of the war, when some of the most important strategic dilemmas were deliberated. The article seeks to expand the existing literature about this particular day by analyzing the deliberations from a strategic perspective and through decision making theory, with an emphasis on three key issues. The first is the strategic confusion that existed among senior members of the Israeli defense establishment, once they understood that it was possible that the IDF would not be able to achieve its principal goal, namely, defeating the Egyptian army. Against this background, the article suggests that in retrospect, this singular moment in Israel's military history, when the entire security doctrine was on the brink of collapse, accelerated and intensified the technological trajectory of the IDF force buildup after the war. Second, using tools taken from decision making theory, the article offers several reasons why one key proposal raised during discussions was ultimately rejected—the proposed alternative of waiting for the Egyptians to launch an offensive over the Sinai passes (the Mitla Pass and the Gidi Pass), which, in the end, is what happened. Third is an analysis of the decisions' sensitivity—an important tool in the decision making process—to basic assumptions on which the decisions were based, such as the decreasing number of Air Force planes, or the intelligence report that arrived in the middle of the meeting of the war cabinet, which led to the immediate adjournment of that meeting. By highlighting these strategic angles, this article seeks to build a better understanding of the events of October 12, 1973, and to use it as a case study for the value of an analytical and strategic approach to understanding decision making in extreme conditions of war.

*Keywords:* Yom Kippur War, October 12, 1973, security doctrine, decision, decisive victory, decision making, technological superiority

The authors dedicate this article to the memory of Ehud Matania, the older brother of Eviatar Matania, who fought and was killed in Sinai on October 12, 1973, at the age 19.

## Introduction

Israel suffered significant blows, failures, and uncertainty in the first days of the Yom Kippur War—the 1973 war between Israel and Egypt and Syria—with complex considerations raised among the country’s military, security, and political leaderships regarding decisions to be taken. Blocking the advance of Syrian troops on the Golan Heights on Monday, October 8, followed by their being pushed back two days later; launching a counteroffensive on the Syrian Golan Heights on October 11; and stabilizing the southern front—all these developments breathed new life in Israel’s military leadership. At the same time, however, Israel was running low on supplies, troops on the battlefield were exhausted, and the commander of the Air Force was warning that Israel’s aerial power was declining. In tandem, there were political negotiations with the United States regarding the imminent ceasefire discussions in the United Nations Security Council. All these developments converged on a day of fateful deliberations on the seventh day of the fighting, Friday, October 12, 1973, where the main focus fell on the strategic dilemma whether the IDF was capable of securing victory on the southern front and its operational alternatives.

The course of the discussions, the dilemmas facing the decision makers, and the available options on that day are not new. They have been studied and debated in the copious literature that has been published about the Yom Kippur War—literature that includes reference to October 12 as part of the course of the war as a whole. In addition, articles have been dedicated to that day or to part of it, such as that written by Shimon Golan (1992), which describes and analyzes the military and political decision making process on that day, or the article by Aharon Levran (2017), which focuses on the important intelligence report that arrived that day. Both articles adopt a historical perspective and analytical approach. Similarly, there is literature, primarily by Golan (2013), that refers to the minutes of the day’s various meetings,

with the emphasis on providing public access to archival sources, as well as explaining and summarizing the contents.

This article seeks to add another layer to this literature and shed light on the decision making process on that day from a strategic perspective. In particular, it highlights three key issues in the context of that day. First, the article suggests that on October 12, the principle of decisive victory as the foundation of Israel’s security doctrine—as had been entrenched during the 25 years since Israel’s establishment—was challenged. The inability to defeat the Egyptian army that was conveyed that day was a significant factor in shaping the IDF’s force buildup over the decades after the war, in terms of quantity, but especially in terms of unprecedented acceleration and intensification of the army’s technological force buildup, as this trajectory was less sensitive to the quantitative asymmetry between Israel and the Arab states.

Second is an examination of the decision making process on October 12, whereby several alternative courses of action were considered for achieving a decisive victory on the southern front. We focus on the option of waiting for the Egyptians to launch an offensive in the directions of the Sinai Peninsula passes (the Mitla Pass and the Gidi Pass). This alternative, which was ultimately realized in response to an Egyptian offensive, was not presented or considered with the same gravitas as the proactive crossing (without waiting for the Egyptian offensive); a number of reasons based on research in the psychology of decision making can explain this. Third is the sensitivity of the decisions to the fundamental assumptions underlying them, such as the decrease in the number of Air Force aircraft, or the intelligence report that arrived in the middle of the war cabinet meeting and led to its immediate cessation. Sensitivity analysis is an important tool in examining decision making processes and the decisions themselves, both in real time and in retrospect.

The article does not purport to recreate the mood among IDF commanders and leaders of

the country on that seventh day of the war, nor does it attempt to stand in their shoes. The goal is far more modest: to analyze in retrospect the decision making process and deduce what the process looked like. In so doing, it hopes to add an additional layer to our understanding of the strategic decisions taken during the Yom Kippur War, with the emphasis on Friday, October 12, because of its singularity as a day of genuine concern about Israel's ability to defeat its enemies and maintain its regional deterrence.

The methodology incorporates both primary and secondary sources regarding the deliberations of October 12, along with a strategic analysis of the events. The article begins by providing a concise background survey regarding the Yom Kippur War up to October 12, to show why so many strategic decisions converged on that day. It then describes the two main deliberations held one after the other on that day—the prolonged General Staff discussion, headed by IDF Chief of Staff David (Dado) Elazar, and the war cabinet discussion, headed by Prime Minister Golda Meir. It then analyzes the three issues mentioned above and provides a summary.

## **From the Outbreak of the War to the Morning of October 12**

### ***The Northern Front***

The Yom Kippur war broke out on Saturday afternoon at 2 PM, October 6, 1973, on the holiest day of the year for Jews (Day of Atonement). The IDF was caught unprepared for the joint offensive launched by the Egyptian and Syrian militaries. The Syrian offensive lasted around 24 hours, during which Mount Hermon and central and southern parts of the Golan Heights were captured. One of the most significant decisions taken by the Chief of Staff was to redeploy the 146th Division, the only General Staff armored reserve division, that was under the command of Moshe (Musa) Peled, to join the campaign on the Golan Heights (Bartov, 1978, p. 52; Golan, 2013, p. 358). The division that joined the fighting on October 7 was, to

a large extent, the tiebreaker that tipped the scales in the IDF's favor on the Golan Heights. It allowed Israel to block the advance of the Syrian forces on the same day, and on the next day, October 8, to launch a counteroffensive. By the morning of October 10, through intensive fighting, the IDF managed to repel all the Syrian forces, with the exception of those on Mount Hermon, back to the Purple Line (the armistice line between Israel and Syria drawn following the Six Day War) (Golan, 2013, p. 641).

The IDF Chief of Staff arrived on October 10 at the headquarters of the army's Northern Command, where he finalized details of the military's offensive over the Purple Line, with one main thrust on the northern Golan Heights and on the foothills of the Hermon. The key considerations behind his decision were threefold. First, there was the deterrence consideration—signaling to the Arab armies and their leaders, and to the entire international community, that the IDF was intent on decisive and that the Arab armies should not sense Israeli weakness. The words “victory” and “deterrence” were intertwined throughout the discussions. The second consideration was the military-political consideration—defeating the Syrian army would likely lead Damascus to request a ceasefire, which, according to the Chief of Staff, the IDF needed, but preferred of course, for obvious reasons, that the request come from the Syrians, perhaps even a joint request with Egypt. The third consideration was military in nature. The Chief of Staff wanted to thrust deep into Syrian territory before the Iraqi reinforcements arrived and while the Air Force was still able to provide close air support. In other words, the goal was to act before the Air Force was reduced to a size that it was no longer able to provide support for ground maneuvers (Bartov, 1978, pp. 154-162; Golan, 2013, pp. 658-689).

Prime Minister Meir accepted the Chief of Staff's recommendation: “We authorize the IDF to launch a concentrated offensive tomorrow, to smash army divisions and to achieve total

victory...The offensive seeks to take territory beyond the ceasefire line, to improve our positions and for the purposes of political negotiations” (Golan, 2001, p. 34). The next day, on October 11, the IDF launched its massive operation on the northern front, thrusting deep into Syrian territory.

On the morning of October 12, IDF forces were already on the Syrian portion of the Golan Heights, making steady progress, albeit slower than was expected. The IDF may have moved the war into enemy territory and secured a localized victory (with the exception of Mount Hermon, which was still in Syrian hands), but failed to secure the kind of outright victory over the Syrians that would have led to the collapse of their military.

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**On the morning of October 12, the Israeli troops were worn down after losing many soldiers and much equipment; they had no tanks or airplanes in reserve; and there were no reinforcements on the way. At the same time, after a week of intensive fighting, the IDF had no real shortage of ammunition, and its troops were able to launch an additional counteroffensive after the first one failed.**

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### *The Southern Front*

The situation on Israel’s southern front was different. Egyptian infantry, armed with anti-tank missiles, crossed the Suez Canal in boats, destroyed most of the fortifications that protected the eastern bank of the canal, and took control of the Bar-Lev (i.e., fortifications) Line. By the evening of Sunday, October 7, most of the troops from the Egyptian Second Army and Third Army were deployed on the eastern side of the Suez Canal, thereby controlling both banks. On the eastern bank, there were 1,000 Egyptian tanks and around 100,000 soldiers controlling territory several kilometers deep, up to 10 kilometers east of the canal (Bartov, 1978, p. 77; el-Shazly, 1987, pp. 163-170; Golan,

2013, pp. 455-457). The Egyptians stopped there, in accordance with their plan for the first stage of the war, but also because of the arrival at the front of two IDF reserve divisions (Golan, 2008, pp. 134-135).

The Egyptians were able to score such an impressive military achievement thanks to meticulous planning, a significant advantage in terms of troop numbers at the time of crossing the canal, localized superiority over Israeli armored forces by means of infantry forces armed with anti-tank missiles, and an array of surface-to-air missiles that prevented the Israeli Air Force from operating freely in the airspace over the canal (Shay, 1976).

In parallel to the counteroffensive on the northern front in the Golan Heights, the IDF launched a counteroffensive on the southern front on October 8, but it was not as successful as the one in the north. The entrenched Egyptian infantry, armed with anti-tank missiles, prevented Israeli forces from repelling the Egyptian bridgeheads. That was a second success for the Egyptians and a second failure for the IDF within two days. On Wednesday, October 10, Lt. Gen. (res.) Haim Bar-Lev, the former IDF Chief of Staff, took command in the south from the commander of the southern front Shmuel “Gorodish” Gonen, who was new in the position and, according to the Chief of Staff, was not yet experienced enough to manage the campaign (Golan, 2008, pp. 136-139).

In the following days until the morning of October 12, the situation on the southern front did not change significantly and the war turned static. The IDF learned the lessons of the failed counteroffensive and maintained a line of contact far from the Egyptian infantry. Tactical operations by the Egyptians to expand their bridgeheads were thwarted, entailing the loss of many of their men and tanks, while the IDF sustained far fewer casualties.

On the morning of October 12, the Israeli troops, on the one hand, were worn down after losing many soldiers and much equipment; they had no tanks or airplanes in reserve; and there

were no reinforcements on the way. The IDF had already thrown everything it had into the campaign in terms of troops and equipment, and massive shipments of supplies requested from the United States had not yet arrived. On the other hand, after a week of intensive fighting, the IDF had no real shortage of ammunition, and its troops were able to launch an additional counteroffensive after the first one failed.

### *The Air Force*

The Israeli Air Force showed a high level of preparedness when the war erupted: it defended Israeli airspace, attacked airborne enemy commando forces, engaged in dogfights, and launched bombing sorties on both fronts. The IDF in general—and the Chief of Staff in particular—saw the Air Force as the resource that could halt the enemies' forces and stabilize Israel's defensive lines until reserve forces arrived. Indeed, the Chief of Staff even referred to October 7 as "the Air Force's day" (Golan, 2013, p. 356). However, due to fast-changing needs on both fronts, the Air Force did not work according to its plans and instead diverted its efforts from front to front. Consequently, alongside the success of some of the sorties, the Air Force did not destroy enemy missile batteries, which continued to down Israeli planes, neither did it obtain aerial superiority over the Suez Canal.

On the morning of October 12, Air Force Commander Maj. Gen. Benny Peled explained that Israel was approaching the level of 220 fighter planes—below which, he argued, the Air Force would no longer be able to support ground troops without putting Israeli airspace at risk. "Below this critical line of 200, 210, or 220 planes, give or take, I can no longer go on the offensive," he said (Golan, 2013, p. 757). The Chief of Staff understood the warning and explained what it meant from his perspective: "In other words, we have to end the war by the 14th of the month, at the latest" (IDF and Defense Establishment Archive, 1975, Reel 18b).<sup>1</sup> Understanding the situation as presented by

the commander of the Air Force was one of the main anchors underpinning the Chief of Staff's considerations regarding the decision making processes on that day.

### *The Diplomatic Front*

Although the Yom Kippur War was waged between Israel and its Arab neighbors, it also reflected the struggle between the two blocs that existed at the time—the democratic West, under the leadership of the United States, and the Communist Eastern bloc, under the leadership of the Soviet Union. On October 10, the Soviets began to be concerned over an Israeli victory on the northern front and floated the idea of a ceasefire proposal between the sides, which would come into effect within a few days. On the afternoon of October 12, the Prime Minister's Office sent a message to the United States, saying "any delay would be good for us" (Cables, 1973, p. 97). In other words, Israel was leaning toward accepting the ceasefire proposal, but asked the United States to delay implementation so that it could complete its offensive on the northern front, make territorial gains, and restore its deterrence. By the time Israeli leaders gathered for a series of discussions, negotiations over a ceasefire had gone into high gear and it appeared that the fighting would end on October 13 or 14, unless the Egyptians objected (Golan, 1992).

## **Decision Making Deliberations on Friday, October 12**

### *The Decision Making Circles*

Two decision making circles that led Israel through the war were also the key forums for the decision making process on October 12 (Figure 1). The first and limited circle was headed by IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Elazar and included Deputy Chief of Staff Maj. Gen. Israel Tal, Military Intelligence Chief Maj. Gen. Eli Zeira, Air Force Commander Maj. Gen. Peled, and two of the Chief of Staff's aides—Maj. Gen. (res.) and former Military Intelligence chief Aharon Yariv and Maj. Gen. Rehavam Ze'evi. On October 12, this forum

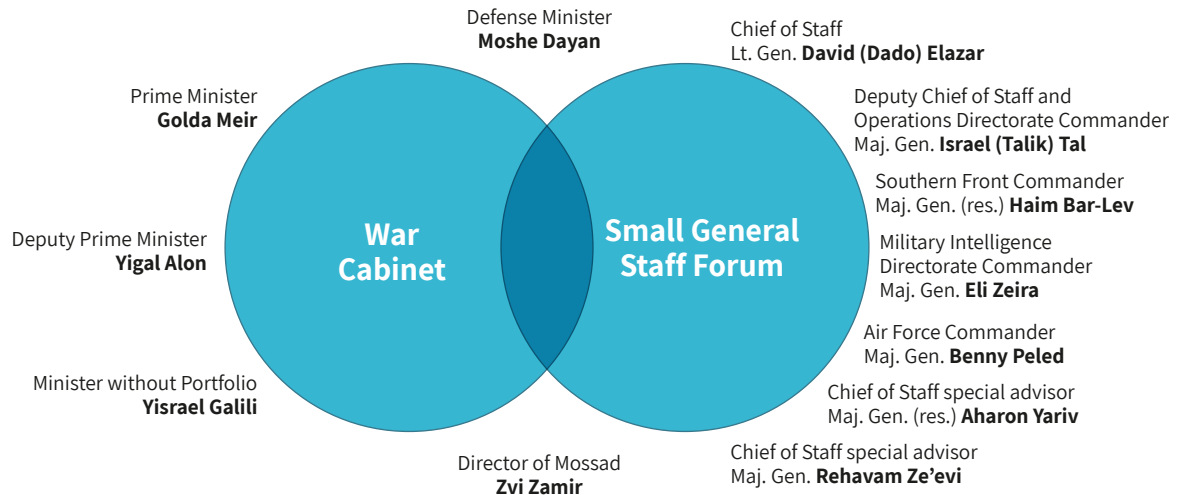


Figure 1. Decision Making Circles on October 12

was joined by the commander of the southern front, Lt. Gen. (res.) Haim Bar-Lev.

The second circle was “Golda’s kitchen cabinet,” also referred to as “the war cabinet,” comprising Prime Minister Meir and several of her ministers: Deputy Prime Minister Yigal Alon, Minister without Portfolio Yisrael Galili, and Defense Minister Moshe Dayan. In practice, this informal political-security cabinet was responsible for all decisions relating to the war on behalf of the government. These were in part symbiotic circles, because of Dayan’s presence in a large portion of the Chief of Staff’s decision making discussions (Golan, 2001, 2013, pp. 1267-1268).<sup>2</sup>

### *The Flow of the Deliberations on October 12*

On the morning of Friday, October 12, the IDF in military terms was close to completing its operation on the northern front, and the Chief of Staff was in a position to make strategic-military decisions about the southern front. From his perspective, three clocks were ticking. First, in his view, the status quo on the southern front was counterproductive for the IDF; in other words, the IDF was worn down and did not have significant reserves, while the Egyptians were in a position to deploy fresh troops to combat, if necessary. The second clock was the

erosion of the power of the Air Force, prompting its commander to warn that within a day or two, it would just be able to defend Israel’s airspace and would not be able to provide support to ground forces, which the Chief of Staff thought to be crucial. Finally, there was the political clock, the imminent ceasefire—but, rather absurdly, that clock was ticking in both directions. On the one hand, the Chief of Staff wanted a ceasefire, sooner rather than later, because his forces were fewer. On the other hand, he was worried that a ceasefire agreement would be reached while Egypt had the upper hand and before the IDF was able to record any significant achievements in its campaign against the Egyptian military. It was necessary to navigate between these two poles with military and diplomatic acrobatics and to ensure that the ceasefire agreement was reached at the best time for Israel.

In the early hours of the morning, the Chief of Staff began a series of consultations about what Israel’s next move should be on the southern front, on the assumption that “every day past the 14th of the month we will find ourselves in a worse situation, and every development on that front from the 14th of the month and onward could be to our detriment.” This working assumption led the Chief of Staff to the general conclusion that “we must do

everything possible against Egypt to secure the best possible balance of power between us by the 14th of the month; I say the 'best possible' because I do not believe that we can reach the same situation with the Egyptians as we have with the Syrians" (IDF and Defense Establishment Archive, 1975, Reel 18b).

### **General Staff Deliberations**

The question posed by the Chief of Staff to his generals was: "What do we have to do to secure a ceasefire," adding, "We need this ceasefire. Now the question is how we get the ceasefire on the 14th of the month."<sup>3</sup>

Bar-Lev, who came directly from the front, summed up the various operational alternatives. Regarding the possibility of driving Egyptian forces westward, from the eastern bank of the Suez Canal, he said, "clearing the canal is possible, [with] very many casualties...and our armored forces will be completely depleted." Bar-Lev also presented the option of attacking Port Said, but added, "I do not think that Sadat would agree to a ceasefire if Port Said is taken." The third possibility was to launch an operation to cross the canal with two divisions. Beyond the heavy price of establishing a bridgehead on the western bank of the canal, Bar-Lev noted that the operation was contingent on a single crossing bridge: "They can pound this single bridge; with artillery, they could by chance hit it with 10 shells while it is being dragged or when it's here—and then there's no crossing." The fourth option was for Israeli forces to maintain their current positions and wait for an Egyptian attack over the passes, which would include its armored reserve forces. On this option, Bar-Lev said: "If we wait for them to attack, we could be waiting two weeks or a month, and in the meantime, there will be no ceasefire, and meanwhile every day we are attacked, every day we use ammunition, and this does not add to the morale of the troops."

Of the four options, Bar-Lev preferred the more extensive crossing operation—not necessarily in the knowledge that it would

achieve all expectations, but since he had ruled out the other options. Air Force Commander Peled came to a more simplistic but essentially similar conclusion: "Go in as hard as possible, as soon as possible." Military Intelligence chief Zeira also thought that Israel should cross the canal: "The only option we have is to attack on the Egyptian front and cross the canal, and the only question I believe that we face today is: how to cross."

Accordingly, there was almost complete unanimity among the top military echelon that the IDF should launch an offensive—preferably as comprehensive an operation to cross the Suez Canal as possible. Rather than helping the Chief of Staff formulate a recommendation for the political echelon, this wall-to-wall agreement made it more complicated. "I invented [the proposal] that we need to launch a massive offensive, so don't try to persuade me to do it," the Chief of Staff told his generals at one point. Later, he said, "I would be happy, and you have no idea how happy, if you have better ideas than this one."

Defense Minister Dayan joined the meeting chaired by the Chief of Staff, and after being briefed, said: "I am not enthusiastic about the idea." Analyzing the proposal, Dayan concluded that while an attempt to cross the canal would change the military situation on the southern front, it would not resolve the Air Force's problem, would not lead to the collapse of the Egyptian army, and would not help Israel secure a political victory. Moreover, Dayan believed that the presence of Israeli troops on the western bank of the Suez Canal would make it hard for Egypt to accept a ceasefire. However, since he was not familiar with all the military details, he did not reject the idea out of hand. Dayan asked for participants to separate the military and political considerations and said that it would take him time to study the military details before weighing the considerations.

After hearing the Defense Minister, the Chief of Staff summarized the symbiosis, as he saw it, between the political assessment and military

operation, in a way that was telling about the complexity of the dilemma before him: “I have said that my assessment is contingent on the political assessment. My recommendation: I am prepared to attack only on condition that there is a chance of reaching a ceasefire within a very short period after the offensive. I do not believe that the IDF can attack, capture part of the bank, and remain in that position without a prolonged ceasefire. Unquestionably during this period there will be even more attrition and exhaustion and no possible recovery for force buildup. Therefore, I want to reach a final decision, and I will be willing in a discussion of this sort to present my final recommendation—but only in confrontation with the political assessment. If there is anyone who believes that it is unreasonable to achieve a complete ceasefire, then I do not recommend an offensive and there is no need for me to go down [to the Southern Command] to examine the plans. If anyone believes there is a chance, then I will go down this afternoon, examine and formulate plans, and then I will return with my military recommendation as to whether it is feasible or not from a military perspective.”

### *The War Cabinet Meeting*

The war cabinet convened at 2:30 P.M., with the addition of the General Staff forum and the Director of the Mossad. After a short briefing on the state of Israeli forces on the southern front, the war cabinet was presented with the various operational alternatives on the Egyptian front. The leading proposal was an operation to cross the Suez Canal with two divisions, creating a bridgehead on the western bank of the canal. The other options were presented by Bar-Lev, both of them in negative fashion: The IDF can repel Egyptian troops from the eastern bank of the canal, but at the cost of a high number of casualties—so much so that the IDF would no longer have a strike force on the southern front capable of launching an attack, while the Egyptians would still have significant reserves. Similarly, Bar-Lev ruled out

another non-offensive alternative, which was to withdraw from the line of contact to better defensive positions in the passes. He did not think this would advance a ceasefire, reduce clashes with the Egyptian forces, or encourage them to attack the passes—a situation in which Bar-Lev believed Israel would have the upper hand (Consultation, October 12, 1973). Consequently, the military leadership brought the political echelon just one realistic military option, an option that the Chief of Staff wanted to make contingent on an assessment of its possible political ramifications.

Ministers Galili and Allon pressed the generals and tried to ascertain what their recommendation would be if it were possible to disconnect the military considerations from the political considerations. In this respect, the two ministers adopted a stance similar to Dayan’s previous line: political considerations must be separated from military, operational considerations. Shimon Golan summed it up well: “The political leadership believed that the Chief of Staff should not condition the operation to cross the Suez Canal on whether it would contribute to the ceasefire efforts, and that he should restrict himself to purely military considerations. His position, which tied the two aspects together, created a dilemma” (Golan, 1992, p. 11).

Especially interesting at that meeting are the comments of deputy Chief of Staff Maj. Gen. Tal. He refined the dilemma and focused on the Air Force, since the state of the Air Force determined the military timetable. An operation to cross the canal, he believed, would not ensure that the Egyptians request a ceasefire. Moreover, even success on the Syrian front did not guarantee that Damascus would seek a ceasefire. Therefore, the demand that the Air Force assist ground forces remained. The obvious conclusion, therefore, is that the declining state of the Air Force could not be the main consideration when debating whether to cross the Suez Canal. He added that there was much uncertainty regarding the next military

operation that the Egyptians were planning to launch (Consultation, October 12, 1973).

### ***The Intelligence Report and the End of the Deliberation***

Before the deputy Chief of Staff had finished his comments and before the ministers voiced their opinions, the Director of the Mossad was called outside, and when he returned, he stopped the discussion and read a report out loud he had just received about an Egyptian plan to deploy paratroopers on October 13 or 14, in order to launch an offensive against the Sinai passes (Levrant, 2017).

His interlocutors immediately understood the significance. The military commanders were well aware of the Egyptians' war plans: after a week of consolidation at the bridgeheads, the Egyptian army would enter another stage of fighting, during which it would try, with a combination of paratroopers and armored divisions—including the reserves remaining on the west bank of the Suez Canal—to capture the Sinai passes. Those present, therefore, expected two developments. The first was that the Egyptians would engage in an armored battle in open ground, in which the IDF would have a decisive advantage and would be expected to destroy many Egyptian forces, or, as the deputy IDF Chief of Staff said immediately upon hearing the news: "There will be 900 [Egyptians tanks] and we will have 700. It is inconceivable that the Israeli armored forces, with that kind of troop balance, while it is waiting for their armored forces, and such an excellent Air Force, which would help to land a massive blow of this kind—it is inconceivable that, as a result, hundreds of tanks will not be blown up and the battlefield set ablaze. It would be a dramatic and sensational blow, the likes of which we have not seen, and it will take the wind out of the sails of the Egyptian offensive and burst their balloon, on condition that we prepare for this battle" (Consultation, October 12, 1973, p. 17). The second development was that an Egyptian offensive, as senior IDF officers understood it,

would leave the western bank of the Suez Canal without effective defense against the Israeli forces that may cross the canal.

If the scenario suggested by the intelligence report came to pass, the situation the IDF had longed for would also come true: a battle between armored divisions in open ground, in which the IDF would wield a significant advantage. From that moment on, the dilemma was resolved. The confusion was dispelled, or, as the Prime Minister put it: "Well, I understand that Zvika has brought the discussion to an end." The Chief of Staff returned to General Staff headquarters and said: "Now I know what to do. We will prepare well; we will repel the advance of the Egyptian armored divisions on October 13-14, and we will hit them hard. After that, we will cross the canal" (Levrant, 2017, p. 32).

### **In Retrospect: A Strategic Analysis of the Decision Making Process**

#### ***The Principal Dilemma: The Challenge to the Security Doctrine and the Strategic Turning Point***

October 12 was entirely different from every other day of the war. During the first days of the war, the IDF was shell shocked and preoccupied with efforts to repel the enemy, and after October 12, the momentum was in Israel's favor (despite the challenges). Between October 10 and 12, the political and military leadership was at the junction between defensive action and offensive action. The IDF was already back on its feet and could be sent on the offensive to achieve military and political gains, as occurred with great success on the northern front.

On October 12, Israel's leaders were forced to decide on an offensive on the southern front, but without an alternative that the IDF would, to a high degree of certainty, secure decisive victory, as dictated by the country's security doctrine. Instead, they were presented with scenarios that if successful, could at best improve the situation on the front or even lead to a ceasefire, which, since left with no other real choice, had

become their main objective, but would not necessarily secure victory.

To be sure, some researchers believe that already by October 8, after the failure of the counteroffensive in the south, some senior members of the security establishment began to understand that Israel would not be capable of defeating the Egyptians (Milstein, 1993, 2022); this would be reflected later, in advance of the discussions on October 12. We do not take issue with this argument, primarily because even victorious armies lose battles sometimes, and we should be wary of extrapolating anything from one failure with regard to the doctrine in its entirety—especially since in tandem, the IDF was recording success in its offensive in Syria, which changed the course of the war. In addition, our focus is on the strategic decision making processes about the various strategic alternatives themselves—processes that were clearly evident in the discussions between members of the General Staff and the political echelon—and not the processes that led them to their conclusions, recommendations, and decisions.

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**We see the deliberations held on Friday, October 12, as a series of strategic discussions, during which, for the first time in the 25 years of the State of Israel’s existence, Israel found itself in a situation whereby one of the key elements of its security doctrine—achieving a decisive victory over the enemy in every round of combat—was about to be punctured, compounded by a potentially significant blow to Israel’s deterrence.**

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Therefore, we see the deliberations held on Friday, October 12, as a series of strategic discussions, during which, for the first time in the 25 years of the State of Israel’s existence, Israel found itself in a situation whereby one of the key elements of its security doctrine—achieving a decisive victory over the enemy in every round of combat—was about to be

punctured, compounded by a potentially significant blow to Israel’s deterrence.

The fundamental assumption underlying Israel’s security doctrine is that the country will always face inherent asymmetry vis-à-vis the other countries in the region—in terms of population, area, strategic depth, and resources. The asymmetry forces Israel to formulate a singular security doctrine in order to survive in a hostile region. This understanding led to what is known as Israel’s “trifold defense doctrine.” The first of the three pillars is the ability to decisively defeat the enemy any time it attacks, and in so doing, leave it incapable of continuing its offensive and needing a ceasefire. This pillar has immediate ramifications for Israel’s force buildup and operation. This includes an emphasis on a powerful Air Force as a technology-based strategic branch of the military, which allows for swift action even without early warning, as well as an emphasis on rapid offensive maneuvers inside enemy territory. In order to be able to call up enough reserve forces to carry out this decisive military operation, Israel needs timely intelligence warnings. Since even the decisive defeat of the enemy in a battle cannot bring about the total surrender of the enemy, due to the extreme asymmetry between Israel and the Arab states, it can only ever serve as a momentary and localized victory. Repeated decisive victories will deter the enemy from any further attempts to destroy the State of Israel, and (accumulated) deterrence will be achieved after a number of rounds of conflict (“theory of rounds”) (Ben-Israel, 2013; Matania & Bachrach, 2023).<sup>4</sup>

The early warning pillar was found wanting at the very start of the war. The IDF was forced to repel Egyptian and Syrian troops with just its standing army and support of the Air Force until the reserve forces arrived. As a result, Israel suffered the loss of much territory on the Golan Heights, the breach of the Bar-Lev line and the Suez Canal, and the establishment of Egyptian bridgeheads close to the canal. Moreover, the absence of early warning also affected the Air

Force, which sustained many losses when it was forced to operate in a more frenetic and less ordered manner than it had planned.

On October 12, however, the principle of decisive victory, one of the most important elements of the defense doctrine, was undermined and faced significant difficulties. For all intents and purposes, on that day the IDF Chief of Staff instilled the awareness that the total defeat of the enemy armies was not the primary goal, since there was a very high probability that it could not be achieved. Instead, he proposed military moves that entailed no small degree of risk, which he believed would near Israel as close as possible to the point of political negotiations and a ceasefire, not out of loss, but also not in the aftermath of a decisive victory in combat. The option that the Chief of Staff proposed, which stemmed both from political logic (the desire for a ceasefire) and military rationale, was to cross the Suez Canal. This was not in order to achieve the decisive and final victory that the country's political leaders sought, but as the best alternative at that time, as he told the war cabinet: "It seems to me that one of the criteria for carrying out an attack tomorrow is whether it increases the chances of a ceasefire... This, for me, is almost the main criterion for carrying out this offensive... I must work on the assumption that this operation will be a major blow to the Egyptians, but I am not certain that we can lead to the collapse of their army" (Consultation, October 12, 1973, p. 2).

In our eyes, the Chief of Staff's analysis of the situation prompted his recommendation departing from the rationale behind the offensive in Syria—attacking the Syrian Golan in order to capture territory while threatening Damascus and the destruction of the Syrian army, that is, securing an outright victory that would restore and bolster deterrence. In contrast, on the southern front, against the Egyptian army, the Chief of Staff officially abandoned the pillar of total victory and, as a result, the principle of cumulative deterrence underlying the security concept. This deterrence

was supposed to be created after repeated victories over the enemy in each conflict. The inability to decisively defeat the enemy clearly has an immediate impact on Israel's cumulative deterrence over the years against all its enemies, who could come to believe that Israel is a temporary phenomenon. Accordingly, failure to secure decisive victories could lead to the collapse of the entire security doctrine.

In other words, on October 12, the security doctrine that Israel had embraced until that moment experienced significant difficulties and reached an impasse; some people would say that Israel's security doctrine collapsed on that day. This was an unparalleled situation, not just in terms of the Yom Kippur War, but in terms of the history of the State of Israel. Until that point the security doctrine had never faced such a massive rupture—and it never would again. That is: On the morning and in the afternoon of October 12, there was severe strategic confusion among senior IDF commanders and members of the Israeli government as to whether the Israeli military was able to fulfill its role in the country's security doctrine. In the early afternoon hours, after the arrival of the intelligence report, the confusion was replaced with an understanding that the tables were about to be turned. This eventually happened after 12 days of intense fighting, during which total victory was achieved and the security concept was reaffirmed. The phrase "strategic confusion" does not mean here surprise, difficulty, catastrophe, and so on; rather, it means helplessness in light of a situation whereby the system's foundational principles are collapsing. For the leaders seeking to navigate the stormy waters of that war, the strategic compass, the principle of decisive victory, was no longer of use.<sup>5</sup>

From a historical perspective, the strategic confusion was not merely a singular event that had no influence on Israeli decision makers. Despite the success of the operation to cross the Suez Canal after the launch of the Egyptian offensive and the achievement of clear military victory on the southern front, the nadir reached

during the October 12 deliberations is also the foundation for the turning point in Israel's force buildup after the war. Even if the outcome of the war merely strengthened Israel's cumulative deterrence vis-à-vis the Arab states—i.e., Israel cannot be destroyed and cannot be defeated in localized combat, exactly because of the IDF's ability to record decisive victories notwithstanding the challenging opening conditions: "Our military situation on October 24 was at an all-time nadir" (el-Shazly, 1987, p. 196)—the view was very different from the Israeli side, and Israeli leaders did not bask in the glory of a military victory.

In other words: the helplessness when it came to the IDF's inability to secure a decisive victory and the ramifications thereof, as experienced first-hand by Israeli leaders on October 12, left a weighty concern about this ability in the future if Israel were ever to find itself in a similar situation. This is clearly evident in the changes to Israel's force buildup in the years after the Yom Kippur War (Bar-Yosef, 2023).

The October 12 deliberations, therefore, reflect an important turning point in implementation of Israel's security doctrine, with two force buildup vectors. The first was to increase the size of the IDF by almost doubling the number of troops. This move increased defense spending and severely damaged the Israeli economy; in retrospect, many people say it was unnecessary and question the learning process behind it (Bar-Yosef, 2023). After a decade or so, following the peace accord with Egypt and the First Lebanon War, Israel began to reverse this process, and instead focused on the buildup of the second force—the technology-based force.

The first signs that the IDF was turning in a technological direction were visible even before the Yom Kippur War and were already evident in the writings of David Ben-Gurion. Science and technology, he believed, alongside elements such as morality and the capabilities of soldiers, especially the commanders, were the key factors in establishing a decisive qualitative

advantage to offset the numerical asymmetry. They formed the foundation of the national security doctrine (Ben-Israel, 2013, pp. 51-58).

Indeed, Israel's technological-military capabilities were not born in a single day. The first steps that were taken in the first two decades of the state's independence were vitally important to build the ethos, the intention, the system, and the foundation that would eventually turn the IDF into an army for which technology was a key factor. Nevertheless, these steps were still a long way from creation of cutting-edge capabilities in terms of research and development (Mardor, 1981, p. 75). Accordingly, early in its history, the IDF was not a military that relied on very different technologies than those employed by its enemies and did not enjoy technological superiority. This was also the case during the Yom Kippur War. The IDF's main advantages were the quality of its fighting force and its commanders, and not any significant technological advantage (Finkel, 2020).

After the war, however, technology became a key issue for the IDF, with the effort to obtain a qualitative edge leaning increasingly and to an unprecedented extent toward technology and the ability to use it (Lifshitz, 2011, p. 10; Matania, 2022; Finkel & Friedman, 2016). Over the years, technology came to be seen not only in the direct context of obtaining a tactical advantage, but also as linked to conceptual operational changes implemented to obtain the strategic upper hand (Sharvit, 2004). Moreover, it began to appear consistently, clearly, and centrally in the IDF's official literature (for example, Kochavi, 2020) and in writing by researchers on Israel's security doctrine and force buildup (for example, Eilam, 2009, pp. 497-508; Amidror, 2020).

One example of the direct influence of the Yom Kippur War on this process was the establishment in 1979 of the Talpiot program to provide world-class training to Israel's scientific and technological workforce for defense research and development, with special emphasis on people capable of operating in both the realm of operational problems and

in the world of providing the technological solution, all at the same time (Matania, 2022). This is a direct lesson from the Yom Kippur War, as suggested by two professors from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Felix Dothan and Shaul Yatziv (1974): “The military and political trends in the short and long term appear bleak. This raises the question: what can be done to take action against these trends, and how the IDF’s force can be greatly strengthened... We propose a concentrated and systematic effort to invent and develop new weapons... with ‘new’ defined as what is not used by other armies.” They went on to propose what would become the Talpiot program: “A necessary condition for the success of such a program is the creation of a team of creative people, who ‘spawn’ the ideas and afterwards translate them [into practice].”

Another example is the development of the Air Force’s extraordinary technological and operational capabilities in dealing with surface-to-air missiles, as exemplified by Operation Mole Cricket 19 during the First Lebanon War in 1982. This unique capability, which was developed as a partnership between the Air Force and Israel’s defense industry, changed the reality that the Air Force faced during the Yom Kippur War, as it sought to deal with surface-to-air missiles (Finkel, 2019). Not only was this the development of a specific capability that restored the Air Force’s superiority in the face of anti-aircraft weapons for several decades (Lorber, 2022); it also ushered in an age in which technology was not just a tactical force multiplier, but part of a comprehensive change in doctrine aimed at securing technological superiority (Sharvit, 2004). This was also part of Israel’s revolution in military affairs, which later became a comprehensive doctrine for the United States.

Another example of processes from the 1980s that evolved from developments that began even before the Yom Kippur War but were accelerated because of it, is the deliberate and planned restructuring of the country’s defense industry into an industry with impressive

cutting-edge exports and world-class expertise. This would allow these industries to grow and progress far beyond their size relative to the size of the IDF, thereby providing the IDF with R&D and arms and ammunition that are at the very center of the quest for technological superiority (Rubin, 2018).

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**The shift toward relying on technology as an element that builds quality and leads to technological superiority in combat, which is an essential element in reaching military superiority, was accelerated as a result of the Yom Kippur War in an unprecedented manner, in order to allow the IDF to secure a decisive victory under any circumstances.**

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Therefore, the shift toward relying on technology as an element that builds quality and leads to technological superiority in combat, which is an essential element in reaching military superiority, was accelerated as a result of the Yom Kippur War in an unprecedented manner, in order to allow the IDF to secure a decisive victory under any circumstances. Decisive victories no longer relied exclusively on “our best people” in the battlefield or on the inferior capabilities of the enemy; rather, there was an effort to focus on elite human qualities (“our other best people”) in the creation of advanced technology as a self-perpetuating cycle that grows stronger over the years (Matania, 2022).

This process created significant technological superiority for the IDF on the conventional battleground—an advantage that is less sensitive to the numerical asymmetry between Israel and the other countries of the region, and accordingly provides a suitable answer to the IDF’s need to achieve a decisive victory against the numbers it faces. Decisive victories are no longer based primarily on efforts to narrow the numerical gap using a service model that has a standing army and reserves, as well as huge budgets for the procurement of arms

and ammunition, but also on an orthogonal direction to those efforts.

The question is rightly asked why we ascribe the accelerated turn toward technology to the events of October 12, rather than to the Yom Kippur War as an entire single event. However, this is not our intention, nor do we argue that the decision to move in this direction was taken on that day. We also do not suggest that other events during the war did not contribute to the decision. What we do assert is that October 12 demonstrates best the strategic confusion over the inability to achieve a decisive victory, and the strategic helplessness during the war, and, as such, it was a turning point. Without that specific concern over Israel's ability to secure a decisive victory and everything that this failure entails, the significant post-war developments of the IDF's force buildup would not have happened.

In other words: it is possible that had the IDF's counteroffensive on the southern front on October 8 been successful, as was the counteroffensive on the northern front, or had the Chief of Staff been presented with better options than an attempt to secure a decisive victory in the south (options that would have turned the tables after October 12 without reaching a situation in which he said that the IDF could not win a decisive victory), the war might have looked different from the Six Day War, but might not have spurred such an accelerated and significant revolution in force buildup. These changes were primarily the result of losing the ability to win a decisive victory, as was stated and understood on that day. Therefore, it is appropriate for us to ascribe the entire force buildup effort, quantitative and technological, to the deliberations of Friday, October 12, which reflected the lowest strategic and military point that Israel had experienced until that point and, in our view, ever since—up until October 7, 2023.

### ***The Overlooked Alternative***

The difficult war cabinet meeting, laden with the weighty dilemma, ended at once when

the intelligence report arrived indicating that Egypt was planning Stage 3 of its offensive—an attempt to break out of the bridgeheads, capture the passes in the Sinai Peninsula, and stand to their east (on the planned Egyptian offensive, see, for example, Shai, 1976). At that moment, it was clear to all what the correct course of action was: wait for the Egyptian army, set ambushes, destroy their forces, and then launch an offensive over the Suez Canal in between the two Egyptian armies, taking advantage of the fact that the Egyptian forces were dealt a blow that would stun them and fewer troops would be stationed on the western side of the Suez Canal to halt the Israeli crossing. That was clearly the best option presented that day—and it even resolved some of the difficult dilemmas that Israeli decision makers were facing.

How, then, is it that the option of waiting, which is the alternative that was selected in the end, was not discussed in depth? It was mentioned, primarily at the start of the discussions, but was not put properly on the table at any time—not even to reject it and choose another alternative. The IDF commanders recognized it and hoped for it, since it was without doubt the best option for the Israeli military at that moment. However, as indicated below, it was ruled out almost without second thought, while other options were discussed at length.

At the start of the war cabinet meeting on October 12, the Chief of Staff raised the possibility that the Egyptians would attack, but he was consistent in his assumption that he had at most two days before the IDF attacked the Egyptians (because of forces' erosion, the state of the Air Force, and the political clock), until the night of October 13. In other words, according to the Chief of Staff, an Egyptian offensive was a variable that could impact the nature of the attack initiated by the IDF, but waiting for an Egyptian offensive was not seen as a viable alternative compared to an initiated Israeli offensive—neither passive waiting nor waiting while taking steps in

attempt to lure the Egyptians into expanding the bridgeheads eastward.

Bar-Lev, the commander of the southern front, did mention at the meeting the option of waiting for the Egyptians, but he portrayed it as defense for the sake of defense, not defense before offense. Therefore, he concluded that waiting for an Egyptian offensive would not “knock the course of the war off balance” (Consultations, October 12, 1973, p. 8)

At an assessment meeting with the Chief of Staff that morning, the head of Military Intelligence addressed the chances that the Egyptians would launch an offensive toward the passes, saying: “Once again, we have seen no signs of preparations to move their armored divisions. I have no reason to change my assessment from yesterday that the chances that they will move them are not above 50 [percent], and it is possible that they will never move them” (IDF and Security Establishment Archive, 1875, Reel 18B). This assessment was not challenged in any significant way, notwithstanding the additional information that was available to IDF commanders and could have been used to formulate an assessment of when the Egyptians would launch their offensive.

For example, army officers were well aware of the Egyptian war plan to launch an offensive after around seven days of operational pause, from the moment that they established their presence on the bridgeheads on the eastern bank of the Suez Canal.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, in the October 12 discussions, there is no evidence of an inter-front analysis—in other words, an analysis of how the Israeli military’s progress toward Damascus on the northern front might have impacted the Egyptian front. It was conceivable that Egypt would come to the aid of its ally and try to halt Israeli progress in Syria by executing the next stage of its Siani offensive. Moreover, one could have expected Israeli leaders to think of ways to lure the Egyptians into attacking the passes, if they viewed that as an optimal scenario. That is, they did not have to accept the lack of certainty over the timing of an

Egyptian offensive as an edict that could not be challenged.

There are a number of reasons why this alternative was not raised as one of the main options, stemming from the nature of the alternative on the one hand and the way in which the decision making process was conducted on the other. They are important not only from a historical, analytical perspective, but precisely to study and learn lessons for the future with regard to strategic decision making processes. The reasons offered here are based on the psychology of decision making and do not rule out the possibility that the generals, from their perspective, examined this option thoroughly and chose to reject it for pertinent reasons. Nevertheless, they highlight the possibility that the process and the nature of the other alternatives were highly influential in the disregard of this option—or explain why it was not discussed in depth.

The first reason we propose is that the Chief of Staff and his generals were anchored in thinking in terms of a war that would last only a few days. Anchoring is a concept in decision making that suggests that whether they are aware of it or not, decision makers are anchored to numbers or to rhetoric that influence their assessments (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). Sometime, even mentioning an issue in terms of days rather than weeks can influence the assessment (Yaffe & Matania, 2011). The option of waiting might perhaps have been implementable only a day or two after the deliberations, while the Chief of Staff was not willing to postpone the offensive until a later date, mainly because of the state of the Air Force.

While the Chief of Staff may have been right, it is also possible that he thought in terms of days because the Six Day War was his starting point and his point of reference for intensive combat (unlike the War of Attrition). In other words, the Six Day War still anchored his conception of the possible length of the war. In practice, the Yom Kippur War lasted for almost three weeks and not for a few days.

The IDF withstood the attacks and the Chief of Staff led the army successfully even before the supplies from the United States began to arrive, from the second week of the war. Thus it is possible that his rush to make a decision and to act—which stemmed from the three swords he felt were hanging over his head: the state of the Air Force, the state of the ground forces, and the timing of a ceasefire—led to the anchoring of his thought process in a scale of days. This was the opposite of how the Defense Minister, Dayan, for example, viewed the timetable. He told Bar-Lev: “The Suez Canal is not the Temple Mount nor the Golan Heights... It does not endanger the State of Israel and it’s not like the Golan Heights, where, if we don’t do something within two days... what can happen in two days?” (IDF and Defense Establishment Archive, 1975, Reel 20).

The second explanation is also connected to the nature of the alternatives and stems from status quo bias, an effect that suggests that decision makers prefer to continue with their current course of action, i.e., the status quo. That is, they cling to the traditional or existing alternative, even if it is not the course of action they would have chosen without the option of the status quo (Kahneman et al., 1991). Somewhat paradoxically, even though none of the various alternatives debated were already existent, in the case of the southern front the option that best suited the IDF, which in principle was the default option of the IDF as a proactive army, was to cross the canal and not to wait—something that also fit very well with the Chief of Staff’s assessment regarding the swords hanging over his head. The passivity of waiting versus the proactivity of attacking: a military accustomed to managing and controlling the battlefield in almost every incident and war thus far cannot simply wait for the enemy to make a mistake before acting. That was against everything that the IDF knew and upon which it was driven. Hence, the “status quo” for the IDF was to attack proactively, and not to wait passively.

Compounding this is the uncertainty or the risk involved in waiting for the Egyptian offensive, which might not happen at all. Nevertheless, one should keep in mind that the alternative of crossing the canal also entailed risks. Different risks, certainly, but risks nonetheless: the Egyptian units that were still positioned on both banks of the Suez Canal could, according to assessments, cut off the crossing corridor on the eastern side of the canal or block IDF troops on the western side. In other words, the proactive attack alternative suggested also entailed considerable risks, that the deputy Chief of Staff, for example, believed would be wrong to incur.

Thus both options contained an element of uncertainty and risk, albeit in different ways: one, gambling on an Egyptian decision to launch the next stage of their offensive relatively soon, and the other, gambling on the ability of IDF forces to execute the plan to cross the Suez Canal successfully—a risk that depends not only on the capabilities of Israeli forces, but also on those of the Egyptian enemy (albeit to a lesser extent than with Egyptian decisions). The difference between the two types of risk is clear and it was, *inter alia*, at the heart of the decision to opt for the option of crossing the canal: with the option of waiting, the risk appears to be one of military passivity, which is not appropriate for an army like the IDF that aspires to decisive victories and is not its usual *modus operandi* (not its familiar status quo). With the option of crossing the Suez Canal, however, the risk is considered legitimate in terms of military decisions taken throughout history and is also seen as proactive, which matches the culture of the IDF.

The third explanation proposed is based on regret theory. According to this theory, and as has been borne out by experiments, one of the considerations of decision makers when choosing between various courses of action is, in simple terms, to what extent they might come to regret their decision if, in the end, it would have been preferable for them to choose

a different option that would have yielded a far better outcome. The key point here is that the choice is not made according to the optimum outcome of the various options at the moment of the decision taking, but rather according to the degree of possible regret each would engender (if they were to fail), according to the level of potential regret one ascribes to each option in the first place, and to its minimization (French, 1988, pp. 16-17; Loomes & Sugden, 1982).

In the case of waiting for an Egyptian offensive that never comes, the regret would be severe. This is especially true for an army like the IDF, which is used to being proactive, taking the battle into the enemy's territory, eliminating enemy formations, or in short: reaching a decisive victory over the enemy. Even today, there are many people who urge the IDF to secure a "decisive victory," even though it is far from clear what that is. Regret over superfluous waiting could be immense, especially when weighed against the alternative of crossing the Suez Canal: during the time that was wasted, Israeli troops, especially the Air Force, were worn down even further, the apparently imminent ceasefire became ever closer, and it was conceivable that Israel would no longer be able to choose the alternative of crossing the Suez Canal.

In contrast, in the event of an attempted crossing that did not fulfill its mission, IDF commanders would be able to say to themselves and to others, with a great degree of justification, that they did their best. Any comparison would only be between the other proactive options, and the risk they took would be clearly evident. The option of waiting would not be on the "regret table" at all in this case, as Bar-Lev himself said: "In the case of total success, the situation will be fine, while 'if our belief and faith does not come true' the situation will be as it is now, with one difference—the IDF did the best it could; if it continues to wait, it will leave the enemy with the choice of when to launch an offensive—and it will choose the

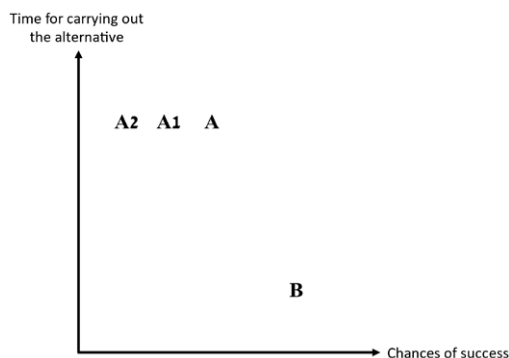
best moment from its perspective" (Golan, 2013, p. 772).

Another interesting possible explanation of the decision to ignore the option of waiting for an Egyptian offensive almost totally stems not from that option itself, but from the general decision making process between the two alternatives, each of which had a clear advantage over the other on one axis and a clear disadvantage on the other axis (Figure 2). The option of crossing the canal (A) performed well on the time axis but was weaker on the axis of chances of success in achieving its goals with a high degree of certainty. Option B was the option of waiting for the Egyptians to launch an offensive, which was very strong in terms of achieving its goals (as indeed happened), but very problematic in terms of the time dimension when it was under consideration.

Psychology research in the field of decision making that examined the choice between weak and strong alternatives on two axes that cannot be easily compared, discovered that the decision is influenced by the starting point of the decision making process and by the other alternatives on the table (Kahneman et al., 1991; Tversky & Kahneman, 1991). Inter alia, when alternative options are proposed for just one side of the equation—for example, Options A1 and A2, which are very close to the original Option A—without similar and approximate alternatives to Option B, there is a marked increase in the chances that Option A will be selected, rather than Option B. This is because the comparison between those new options presented, A1 or A2, and the original option is easy. They resemble each other (and lie, more or less, on the same axis), so it is relatively easy to decide between them. The important point here is that the very existence of Options A1 and A2, and the ability to compare them to Option A, even if they are inferior to it and perhaps not even relevant, can often draw the choice toward the original Option A, while ignoring Option B, which did not have anything to be compared to. Decision makers are not aware of

the subconscious process that persuades them to prefer Option A simply because Options A1 and A2 exist. The opposite is also true, of course: were similar options to Option B presented, there would be a greater chance that Option B and not Option A would be chosen, simply because there were similar options to Option B and, again, decision makers would not be aware of this bias (Shafir et al., 1993).

This, more or less, is what happened during the discussion on October 12: While the option of crossing the Suez Canal with two divisions, thrusting in between the two Egyptian armies (henceforth, Option A), was compared to the option of attacking Port Said (A1) or attempting to repel the Egyptians from the eastern bank of the canal to the western bank (A2), the option of waiting for the Egyptians to launch an offensive (henceforth Option B) stood alone. It is entirely possible that the very existence of a number of proactive alternatives in addition to the option of crossing the Suez Canal, even though they were considered inferior to that option, and the ease of comparison between them, as was reflected in the operational discussions about them, led senior military commanders to prefer it to Option B, without even being aware of why.



**Figure 2. Comparative examination of the options**

Option A is crossing the Suez Canal; Option B is waiting for the Egyptians to launch an offensive and not crossing; Options A1 and A2 are, respectively, attacking Port Said and pressing Egyptian troops back to the western bank of the Suez Canal.

In conclusion, there is no way of knowing in retrospect whether any of the explanations

offered here, which come from the field of the psychology of decision making, were part of what led to the war cabinet being presented with just one option and to the almost total disregard, without proper discussion, of the option of waiting for an Egyptian offensive. Having said that, an analysis of the discussions shows that it is entirely possible that the explanations presented here played some role in pointing them in a certain direction, even if that was entirely subconscious. We cannot learn any lessons about the past from any of this, but we can do so for the future, especially when it comes to engendering heightened awareness of the approaches that are at the center of the decision making process and to the cognitive biases that exist within them, which influence us all.

### ***Sensitivity Analysis of the Decision Making Process***

It is customary to examine the decision making process and the chosen path (the decision) according to their sensitivity to information and to the basic assumptions at the heart of the process. A sensitivity test examines to what extent a small change in the basic assumptions or information at the center of the decision can change the final decision. Or, in other words, how a small change in the independent variables (assumptions or information) can lead to a major change in the dependent variable (the decision). Why is this important? Not only for a retrospective analysis of processes and decisions, but also in real time. When decision makers lean toward a certain decision, which they recognize as highly sensitive to a certain basic assumption, it is expected of them to thoroughly examine the validity of that assumption. The more doubt that is cast on that assumption, and since the process is highly sensitive to it, it is feasible that a small change in the assumption could lead to a totally different outcome.

An analysis of the October 12 discussions indicates that the Chief of Staff formulated

his recommendations according to several assumptions. The first was that the effort on the Syrian front had exhausted itself. The offensive was a success but had not brought about the collapse of the Syrian army. The second was that within two days at most the Air Force would no longer be able to provide support to the ground forces in an offensive. The third was that a war of attrition was being waged on the static front, that Israel could not remain in that situation for long, and that the Southern Command was capable of launching one large offensive and no more than that (Golan, 2013, p. 773). In addition, there was also the assumption that the diplomatic stopwatch was moving rapidly toward a ceasefire. Therefore, the Chief of Staff only presented one plan—the plan to cross the Suez Canal and capture territory on the western bank. However, the assumptions on which this sole recommendation was based were not necessarily solid. One small change could have led to fundamentally different decisions.

For example, the assumption that the Air Force would, within two days, no longer be able to support a ground offensive was not even brought up for discussion. The immediacy with which those present accepted statements by the Air Force Commander—namely, that once the Air Force dipped below a certain number of aircraft, it would no longer be able to support ground forces and that it was currently close to that level—is surprising, especially given the success of the Air Force in carrying out all its missions throughout the war with great success for two full weeks. While it is true that Israel had demanded additional aircraft from the United States because of the tough position the Air Force found itself in—and, in the end, it received those planes—in the test of reality, the Air Force continued to operate for many more days without getting additional planes. In the end, those additional aircraft only carried out a small fraction of the sorties during the war.<sup>7</sup> It is possible that had this assumption been examined more thoroughly, the Chief of Staff would have reached different conclusions,

especially in terms of the urgency of the operation and perhaps his ability to bolster forces in the south, or to wait for an Egyptian offensive. This is not an attempt to delve into the realm of “what would have happened if...” Rather, we seek to highlight the importance of the thorough examination of sensitivity of the basic assumption at the heart of the recommendations, to which there is a high degree of sensitivity.

Another interesting sensitivity analysis concerns the sensitivity of the deliberations and the eventual decision (waiting for an Egyptian offensive) to the intelligence report that determined the fate of the discussion: To what extent was the decision making process sensitive to the arrival of the intelligence report and the precise timing during the cabinet meeting?

This question falls into two parts, first, sensitivity to the timing of the arrival of the intelligence report. If it had arrived before the start of the war cabinet meeting, it would probably have made that whole discussion superfluous, just as it brought about its abrupt halt the moment it arrived. If it had arrived after the meeting, but before IDF forces had started advancing toward the Suez Canal, the Chief of Staff could still have halted them and prepared for the Egyptian offensive. In other words, the decision to wait for an Egyptian offensive and then to cross the canal was not sensitive to the precise timing of the arrival of the alert within a range of one day either way.

Second is the obvious question of the sensitivity of the decisions to the very arrival of the intelligence report. To what extent were the discussions and the decision to wait for the Egyptians to launch an offensive sensitive to the intelligence about that attack? What would have happened had the Egyptians executed their next move and attacked without Israel having prior intelligence?

In that case, as long as the attack happened before the IDF received the order to move toward the Suez Canal, presumably the Israeli

forces would have contained it. Perhaps less successfully than they did when they were forewarned, thanks to the intelligence alert, but it was still this Egyptian move that the Chief of Staff and his top commanders had been waiting for the week since the war broke out. Bar-Lev himself said as much when he arrived at the General Staff headquarters on October 12 and stressed that his continued presence at the discussion was dependent on an Egyptian decision to suddenly move their armored divisions to the west of the Suez Canal “to complete what they refer to as Stage B—which is to reach the straits” (Golan, 2013, p. 764). In other words: the real sensitivity was not to the intelligence report but to the start of an Egyptian offensive before IDF troops began moving toward crossing the Suez Canal, a move that would have thwarted the Egyptian offensive or led to battles with the divisions crossing the canal at a time and place that were less planned for.

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**This article suggests viewing October 12, 1973 as a singular event in the history of the State of Israel, in which the three pillars of Israel’s defense doctrine—decisive victory, early warning, and deterrence—faced extreme difficulties. The challenge to the doctrine on that day stemmed from the IDF’s inability, according to the Chief of Staff and his top generals, to achieve a decisive victory over the Egyptian army.**

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Thus, there is no question that the arrival of the intelligence report at the time that it arrived, in the middle of a war cabinet meeting, was almost perfect in terms of the decision making process and is well suited to many war-time narratives. “It was as if it were taken from the storyline of play written by an expert playwright” (Bartov, 1978, p. 192). Yet despite the huge importance that the literature has attached to the intelligence report, in our analysis the decision making process had no real sensitivity to it.

## Conclusion

On Friday, October 12, 1973, the leaders of Israel’s security establishment gathered for a series of crucial decision making meetings to discuss how Israel would deal with the Egyptian army on the southern front. The subjects discussed converged on this one day after the failed counteroffensive on the southern front on October 8 and the stabilization of that front between October 9 and 11 and, at the same time, the success of the counteroffensive inside Syrian territory the previous day, which despite being a welcome accomplishment, failed to lead to the collapse of the Syrian army.

These fascinating discussions, whose minutes have been declassified over the years, highlight the extent of the dilemma Israeli decision makers were facing, at a time when the military and political timetables were tight and, as they saw it, they did not have a viable alternative at that time to defeat the Egyptians and restore Israeli deterrence.

Using primary and secondary sources, this article attempts to analyze in retrospect those discussions, but from the perspective of what was known on that day, in order to shed light on the three main elements in the strategic decision making process. It therefore suggests viewing that day as a singular event in the history of the State of Israel, in which the three pillars of Israel’s defense doctrine—decisive victory, early warning, and deterrence—faced extreme difficulties. The challenge to the doctrine stemmed from the IDF’s inability, according to the Chief of Staff and his top generals, to achieve a decisive victory over the Egyptian army. In our opinion, this had ramifications on various aspects of the IDF’s force buildup after the war, especially the extraordinary investment in technological force buildup and the establishment of technological military superiority, an advantage that is less sensitive to the quantitative asymmetry between Israel and the other countries in this region.

The second issue tackled in this article is the decision making process itself in the context

of the alternatives that were proposed and examined during the marathon consultations on that day. The alternative of waiting for an Egyptian offensive, repelling that offensive, and subsequently crossing the Suez Canal in order to secure a decisive victory—the option that in the end was employed—was not given, to our understanding, enough room for in-depth discussion. This is despite the fact that there were some present who did not think that the option of crossing the canal was a good one (the deputy Chief of Staff); despite the fact that this very day marked the number of days in Egypt's plan until it launched the next stage of its campaign; despite the fact that the possible ramifications of the operation in Syria on Egypt were not considered; and especially despite the fact that the political echelon, headed by the Defense Minister, asked the Chief of Staff to indicate which military option was the best, without taking the political consideration of a ceasefire into account.

We suggested, based on studies from the field of the psychology of decision making, that perhaps some of the reasons that this option was overlooked were not related to the information available to the decision makers—i.e., to the content of the options themselves—but to various aspects of their characteristics, to the way they were presented, and to the other alternatives that were on the table. This leads to an option not being selected due to various psychological parallaxes and in this case: anchoring the decision to think in terms of days instead of weeks; adhering to the status quo concept of the IDF as a proactive army that secures decisive victories; possible regret in the case of failure; and alternatives compared on opposing axes. All of this happens without the decision makers being at all aware of these parallaxes and their influence on them.

Finally, since one of the most important variables when it comes to examining the decision making process is an analysis of its sensitivity to various basic assumptions and

to the information that forms the basis of the decision making process, we conducted a sensitivity analysis on the Chief of Staff's basic assumptions, those that led him to recommend his preferred course of action. We showed that it is feasible that a sensitivity analysis of these assumptions—especially the assumption that the Air Force was reaching the point when it would no longer be able to provide support for the ground forces—could have led to a reevaluation of the options being discussed, the timing, and the rush to make a decision.

Moreover, we analyzed the sensitivity of the decision making process to critical information that arrived in the middle of consultations—the intelligence report about a planned Egyptian offensive to expand its bridgeheads. We suggested that despite the prevalent view on the importance of that report to the strategic decision making process, it may have brought about the immediate end of the war cabinet meetings, but the IDF's preparations for such an eventuality were not particularly sensitive to the timing of its delivery. Moreover, as long as the Egyptians launched their offensive before the IDF tried to cross the Suez Canal, the very fact that the report arrived at all, and not just the timing of its arrival, was not at all critical to what happened on the ground.

In conclusion, we attempted to offer a novel angle to the historical analyses of the Yom Kippur War, especially the analysis of the strategically dramatic seventh day of the war—Friday, October 12, 1973. This is an attempt to introduce a strategic analysis perspective, taken from the field of decision making, in order to better understand the deliberations behind the decisions that were taken that day, from both historical and prospective viewpoints.

Prof. Eviatar Matania is a tenured professor at the School of Political Science, Government and International Affairs at Tel Aviv University, where he heads the MA program in Security Studies, the MA international program in Cyber Politics and Government, and the Elrom Air and Space Studies

Research Center. Prior to this, Prof. Matania was the founding father and director general of the Israel National Cyber Directorate (INCD) for six years, until 2018. [eviatarm@tauex.tau.ac.il](mailto:eviatarm@tauex.tau.ac.il)

Erez Seri-Levy is a PhD student at the School of Political Science, Governance and International Affairs, Tel Aviv University. [erezserilevy@mail.tau.ac.il](mailto:erezserilevy@mail.tau.ac.il)

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## Notes

- 1 Transcripts of the meeting were also published on the website of the Yom Kippur War Center: <https://tinyurl.com/mrbz5jc6>
- 2 The article hereafter refers to this circle as the "war cabinet," as did Shimon Golan.
- 3 All quotes in this section are translations of the minutes of the consultations that the Chief of Staff held with his small forum on October 12 (IDF and Defense Establishment Archive, 1975, Reels 18a side 2, 20 and 21).
- 4 This is Israel's fundamental security doctrine, as appears in many articles and books, until it was amended in the mid-1990s. But at the time under discussion, 1973, those three pillars were the key elements of a security doctrine that was inculcated deeply in all the country's leaders.
- 5 Even though the principle of decision or total victory continues to appear in official literature as one of the pillars of the Israeli security concept (*IDF Strategy*, 2018), as well as in research literature (one excellent example: Amidror, 2020), some people argue that in practice, the post-Yom Kippur War leadership of Israel's security establishment abandoned the principle (Milstein, 2022; Sion, 2016). This is a separate discussion meriting deeper research, but it does not contradict or limit the decisive victory dilemma and its significance on October 12, 1973, or during the Yom Kippur War as a whole.
- 6 Avi Shai (1976, p. 35) presents in his article the conservative estimate from October 15.
- 7 Bar-Yosef (2021) found that the number of usable aircraft at the time was at least 31 more than the Air Force Commander told the Chief of Staff. For more on the underestimate presented by the Air Force commander, see also Brun (2022).



# The Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN): EU Operational Counterterrorism

Christian Kaunert and Sarah Leonard

University of South Wales and Dublin City University

This article analyzes the operational expansion of European Union cooperation on counterterrorism through the prism of the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN). It focuses on RAN's collaboration model, its origins, and its overall contribution, and presents a new framework and multidisciplinary perspective for EU policy actors to tackle counterterrorism challenges. The core argument is that RAN has been successful in achieving its central aim of establishing an overarching and responsive pan-European network of practitioners and civil society actors. However, RAN has thus far not been able to augment its efficacy through rigorous academic review and evaluation of its practices.

*Keywords:* EU, counterterrorism, operational cooperation, RAN, radicalization

## Introduction

This article analyzes the expansion of European Union cooperation on counterterrorism (Kaunert & Leonard, 2019) by examining a particular aspect of the EU's extension of its counterterrorism (CT) mandate in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, specifically the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN). The formation of RAN saw the addition of a supranational dimension to what was previously an inter-governmental system. However, the network has not been studied sufficiently in order to realize its full potential.

9/11 was a seminal event that thrust terrorism in the global spotlight, and sufficiently impacted the collective understanding of the security threat posed by terrorism. In turn, what was previously considered a national issue became a shared issue, encouraging a common policy framework. 9/11 was therefore used by EU actors to convince the EU member states that they

all faced one collective terrorist threat, rather than each of them facing a distinctive threat.

The creation of the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) is one product of this approach. The case of RAN is both singular and innovative at many levels, because it demonstrated a willingness at the EU level to engage with civil society in areas of national security. It was created as a "network" specifically to bridge gaps in the understanding of CT policy and manifested the increasing supranational and crisis-driven approach. These factors can be seen as processes ushering in a tangible shift in CT approaches in the European context, from national security-centric and intelligence-led work to early detection and prevention efforts that require appropriately positioned social actors to play a significant role (Kaunert, McKenzie, & Leonard, 2022).

This article links to the broader literature on the EU's Area of Freedom, Security and

Justice (AFSJ). Most scholars have argued that EU policy developments have been mainly driven by security concerns (Monar et al., 2003; Baldaccini, Guild, & Toner, 2007; Balzacq & Carrera, 2006; Huysmans, 2006; Guild & Geyer, 2008; van Munster, 2009; Bigo et al., 2010). The literature on AFSJ in general has also been complemented by more specialized studies, such as on EU counterterrorism policy (Spence, 2007; Eckes, 2009; Brown, 2010), EU cooperation on criminal justice matters (Fletcher & Lööf, 2008; Eckes & Konstadinides, 2011), and EU police and judicial cooperation (Anderson & Apap, 2002; Occhipinti, 2003). However, institutional issues have received less attention overall, apart from some early works focusing on the legal intricacies of the then “third pillar” (e.g., Bieber & Monar, 1995), and works by Kaunert (2007, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2010d, 2010e; Kaunert & Della Giovanna, 2010) on the role of the European Commission and the Secretariat of the Council in the AFSJ, as well as the studies on the European Parliament’s role (Ripoll Servant, 2010).

Less is known about operational cooperation on European counterterrorism and frameworks such as RAN. This article thus focuses on RAN as an example of operational cooperation in EU counterterrorism, its collaboration model, its origins, and its overall contribution. It offers a new framework for EU policy actors to tackle counterterrorism challenges. The core argument is that RAN has been successful in achieving its central aim of establishing an overarching and responsive pan-European network of practitioners and civil society actors. However, thus far RAN has not been able to augment its efficacy through rigorous academic evaluation of its practices, and at present, is not able to engage the most at-risk communities in both its work and development in a truly bottom-up approach. The primary contentions will be backed by publications and statements by RAN and the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG Home) during its development, alongside up-to-date academic and practitioner

perspectives. After examining the historical evolution of RAN, the article analyzes RAN’s structural and operational aspects from a process and protocol standpoint, in order to better understand its core areas of success and areas that require improvement. In the final section, these arguments are brought together as indicators of performance, outcome, and effect, to ascertain RAN’s developing legacy and its place in EU counterterrorism from a practitioner viewpoint. The article posits that RAN has been a success story, but to date lacks the scholarly teeth and a global presence to be a clear intellectual pioneer for the EU in the counterterrorism arena.

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**Less is known about operational cooperation on European counterterrorism and frameworks such as RAN. This article thus focuses on RAN as an example of operational cooperation in EU counterterrorism, its collaboration model, its origins, and its overall contribution.**

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### **The Origins and Creation of RAN: Radicalization and EU Counterterrorism**

Although there has long been a scholarly interest in matters relating to “radicalization,” only in the aftermath of 9/11 did this concept command significant attention among policymakers and researchers alike. When it comes to the EU, the idea of radicalization did not initially command a prominent place in its conceptualization of terrorism and its counterterrorism policy. The understanding of terrorism that underpinned the first phase of the development of the EU counterterrorism policy following 9/11 was that it was largely an external security threat. The European Security Strategy, which was adopted in 2003, depicted terrorism as a consequence of “regional conflicts” and “state failure.” It also argued that “the most recent wave of terrorism is global in its scope and is linked to violent religious extremism,” and presented terrorism primarily as a threat external to the EU

(European Council, 2003). A turning point came with the Madrid terrorist attacks in March 2004, in which 193 people were killed and nearly 2,000 were injured. Those came to be widely seen as a case of “homegrown terrorism,” which led to a new emphasis in the EU’s official discourse on addressing radicalization.

The EU’s first strategic document on radicalization—“EU Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism”—did not explicitly define “radicalization.” Published in November 2005, the document drew on work carried out since the adoption of the European Council’s “Declaration on Combating Terrorism” of March 2004. The 2005 document appears to understand radicalization as the process through which “people are drawn into terrorism” (Council of the European Union, 2005a, p. 2). In contrast, the 2014 Revised Strategy was significantly different from its predecessors. Notably, it built on the Communication on Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism, which the European Commission published in January 2014 and which itself drew upon the work of RAN. Since then, although further documents relating to radicalization have been issued by EU institutions, such as a Communication of the European Commission (2016) on Supporting the Prevention of Radicalisation Leading to Violent Extremism, the EU Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism has not been revised further. Nevertheless, some discussions have been held within the Council to that effect. In 2017, it was noted that a “revision of the guidelines should duly reflect the changed threat picture and recent policy developments,” including “the growing challenge of Europeans returning foreign terrorist fighters, including women and children, from Syria and Iraq” (Council of the European Union, 2017, p. 3).

### What is RAN?

RAN is a network working with both those vulnerable to radicalization and those who

have already been radicalized. It is led by frontline practitioners, including civil society representatives, social workers, youth workers, teachers, healthcare professionals, local authority representatives, police officers, and prison officers who are engaged in both preventing and countering violent extremism. Since it was founded, RAN has engaged over 6,000 practitioners, who collectively represent all EU member states (RAN, EU).

Created in 2011 and making its public appearance in 2012, RAN can be seen as a positive aspect of the EU’s counterterrorism policy that aims to prevent radicalization leading to violent extremism. RAN hopes to achieve this through:

- a. Networking and collaboration: RAN brings together a diverse group of actors, including practitioners, policymakers, and civil society organizations, to collaborate on preventing radicalization and violent extremism. This network provides a platform for sharing knowledge, exchanging best practices, and developing common strategies.
- b. Community empowerment: RAN recognizes that local communities are crucial in preventing radicalization and violent extremism. Therefore, RAN promotes community empowerment by engaging with local actors, such as religious leaders, educators, and social workers, to help them identify and address the root causes of radicalization.
- c. Evidence-based approach: RAN’s approach is evidence-based, and it draws on research and analysis to identify risk factors and effective prevention strategies.
- d. Inclusivity: RAN promotes inclusivity by recognizing the diversity of factors that can lead to radicalization and violent extremism.
- e. Partnership with member states: RAN works closely with EU member states to support their efforts to prevent radicalization and violent extremism. RAN provides training, expertise, and support to member states, and helps to coordinate their efforts through

the development of common strategies and best practices.

RAN's working groups address different types of extremism, including far right, far left, and jihadist extremism, recognizing the need to address social, economic, and political factors that can contribute to radicalization. As of 2019, the working groups include: Communication and Narratives (RAN C&N); Education (RAN EDU); Rehabilitation (in the sense of rehabilitating people away from violence) (RAN EXIT); Youth, Families and Communities (RAN YF&C); Local Authorities (RAN LOCAL); Prison and Probation (RAN P&P); Police and Law Enforcement (RAN POL); Remembrance of Victims of Terrorism (RAN RVT); and Health and Social Care (RAN H&SC).

Within each working group, participants exchange knowledge, experiences, and practices relevant to the specific dimension of radicalization. As a result, a large number of guidelines, handbooks, recommendations, and reports on best practices have been produced over the years, such as a manual on "Responses to Returnees," aiming to support member states in addressing the challenges posed by returning foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs), which was presented in June 2017 (European Commission, 2017c, p. 8). There are ongoing debates as to the future inclusion of more categories of practitioners (European Commission, 2017, p. 15). All working group leaders sit on the RAN Steering Committee, which is chaired by the European Commission. Also represented on the Steering Committee is the RAN Centre of Excellence (CoE), which the European Commission has described as "the main policy tool in countering and preventing radicalisation" (European Commission, 2017, p. 15). It has developed state-of-the-art knowledge about radicalization and has supported both the European Commission and the member states in their efforts to counter and prevent radicalization. Nevertheless, it has its limitations, as it is a virtual entity that provides its services under a five-year procurement

contract (2014-2019) (European Commission, 2017, p. 17). RAN's origins and its reliance on DG Home for funding suggest it was created to bring civil society closer to the EU in the image of the supranational look and feel that was evident during the last ten to fifteen years of work at this level, and thereby offer at least a window for CT policy and strategy to have some dissemination route and two-way feedback loop in place.

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In order for these aims and related practices to be considered viable and successful, consider the "network effect" proposition. The network effect is a phenomenon in which the value of a product or service is proportional to the number of individuals who utilize it and grows with an increased number of users. This effect is frequently observed in technological products and services, including social media platforms and online marketplaces. Robert Metcalfe, the inventor of Ethernet, introduced the concept of the network effect in the 1980s. According to Metcalfe's law, the value of a network is proportional to the number of consumers squared (Metcalfe, 2013). For the RAN context, it remains unclear whether the network was created to serve the most at-risk communities, and thus be measured on community responses, acceptance, and amplification (substitute for "squared") of the networks core aims, or if the network was created to bring together and expand a professional cadre of people, who in essence, share similar ideas and therefore reinforce prevailing norms around the subject area. This perspective would imply that RAN is something of an "echo chamber."

RAN's presence and publications suggests there is an active and long-term aim to better

safeguard communities from the threat of terrorism and those driving it. While the RAN initiative can clearly attempt to leverage the network effect to increase the value of the network, echo chambers might potentially form within such an environment. An echo chamber would be a situation in which people are surrounded by others who share their beliefs and opinions, reinforcing their existing views and preventing them from being exposed to diverse perspectives. In the context of the EU RAN, echo chambers could develop if practitioners, policymakers, and researchers are only exposed to like-minded individuals and ideas (Sunstein, 2017). It is within such contexts that claims of tokenism and preaching to the converted can emerge. A definite aim of RAN's future development must be to endeavor to engage the very communities it seeks to protect in a holistic process of engagement, design, delivery, review, and learning. This would negate notions of an echo chamber and forge pathways to amplify the network's core value, and in doing so create a positive network effect.

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Part of the fabric of a networked entity like RAN is the emphasis on engagement and partnership with civil society actors. This effort forms part of the essential elements of how RAN's work filters through the EU policy rubric to the grassroots levels of member states. RAN is ostensibly a network of practitioners and policymakers, merged with a number of technology and commercial sector actors. Its publications point to the network's ability to leverage and engage localized knowledge with best practices, in order to facilitate knowledge exchange and innovation.

An alternative view is presented by Melhuish and Heath-Kelly, who assert that RAN's civil society approach suffers from a top-down pattern of engagement and as a result fails to account for the diverse perspectives and experiences of local communities. This point indeed has merit, but could benefit from a better explanation of the relationship between security needs, community cohesion issues, and the role of engagement as an arbiter for trust building, transparency, and greater accountability. The presence of these elements, it is argued, would increase RAN engagement dynamics between its policy needs and community development focus. The authors make a similar point regarding RAN's "simplistic" and "homogenizing" understanding of radicalization (Melhuish & Heath-Kelly, 2022). While this too is a valid analysis, radicalization as a concept does not attract universal consensus, and therefore is subject to ongoing critical scrutiny, development, and nuance.

An example of this would be Paul Hedges's research into the use of the term "socialization" rather than radicalization, as the former offers process-driven understanding of normative, social process dynamics that can account for pre-radicalization, the actual process of taking on extremist beliefs, and the factors that can lead to rejection or use of violence in a behavior or action context. It is important for RAN's future development to be mindful of these nuances and the contested nature of radicalization as a theory and paradigm (Hedges, 2017). As a network-based entity that seeks to envision the EU's overarching policy directive of tackling extremism and terrorism, RAN should consider problematic issues within this sphere, as well as solutions. RAN's work suggests this is part of the network's intention, and further external evaluation and more nuanced civil society representation would facilitate this process.

RAN was designed to be a touchpoint for a civil society, practitioner, and local government "ideas exchange" platform. As such, its operational processes were devolved

to external organizations from within a loose cadre of public sector and commercial interest actors. This RAN look and feel still has a close resemblance to the supranational development of EU workings, in that the network cuts across national boundaries when it brings practitioners and officials together.

The suggestion here is that the RAN operates outside of the political influence of EU institutions, but it is questionable whether the same can be said for RAN's strategic aims and (a)political origins. Indeed, whenever there is funding involved, it stands to reason that the awarding body has some level of sway and influence over the operations and outputs of the receiving agent, in this case RAN.

The idea behind the creation of RAN in 2011 by the European Commission was clearly to distance politics from the process of countering radicalization and terrorism. This was achieved through outsourcing the management and administration function to a Dutch company, RadarEurope, which would become responsible for building and maintaining RAN's network element (Foret & Markoviti, 2019). In terms of structure and makeup, RAN was intended to have different working groups that could enhance understanding and best-practices of counterextremism through specific areas of sectorial work such as policing, health, and education.

This was launched with a small number of working groups in 2012, one of which was the "counter-narratives" working group (later renamed "communications and narratives"). The basis of RAN's operations was the idea that by engaging with civil society actors, local government practitioners, tech sector companies, and selected experts, a holistic picture of "what works" and "how it works" would emerge and form the basis of a best practice approach. This model would then serve the enhancement and development of the EU's overall understanding and response to terrorism, as well as civil society's capacity to lead the fight per se.

The presence of a diverse set of actors within a working group structure is actually a highly effective way of leveraging different levels of understanding and perspective with the overall aim of building good practice. The RAN model was successful in bringing these different actors together and in many ways, brainstorming toward ideas, approaches, and considerations for future use.

Overall, by the time the RAN Prevent working group was established in 2012, only the UK Contest strategy had a clear articulation of the prevention approach as applied to the threat from al-Qaeda at the time. There were, of course, other national CT strategies in existence, but the prevention angle was firmly and most substantively stacked in the UK context. At the time, this was considered a trailblazing approach to addressing radicalization and provided much by way of narrative and discourse for the RAN environment (Baker-Beall & Health-Kelly, 2015). With the new model of the EU Counter-Terrorism Agenda's 2020 Prevent pillar, a strong emphasis on "finding best practises in community policing and engagement to develop trust with communities" became an established method for the EU (RAN JCES, 2022).

In a similar vein, the counter-narrative working group hosted corporate heavyweights Google, Facebook, and Twitter during its development, alongside emerging think-do tanks such as the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD). At a surface level, the assembly of such illustrious and innovative actors was an ideal foundation for emerging knowledge, tech, and creativity to flourish with the aim of making a counter-radicalization response fit for purpose and effective. This paradigm quickly expanded beyond the semantics of an EU mandate, incorporating a larger global perspective on radicalization and extremism challenges through an anticipatory lens that in essence was a mirror of a problem set clearly not constrained by geography.

## Assessing RAN's Achievements

To assess the extent to which the objectives have been achieved, it is important to delve deeper into the broader area of terrorism studies and counter-radicalization. Counterterrorism approaches could be criticized for pouring money into an underdeveloped problem set without clearly measurable objectives in place. It can be argued that simply throwing together a network with anyone who accepts the invitation is a similar approach. The aim here is to identify areas of good practice and areas that require further work and development at the EU/RAN level.

In many ways, RAN was created at an ideal time, given that after the onset of the so-called Arab Spring, ISIS was poised to be unleashed (Fishman, 2016). The visceral rise of ISIS and the organization's global offer to disgruntled, disaffected, or disorientated Muslims living in the West was the perfect time for the EU and the RAN to flex their respective muscles (Weilnbock, 2019; Grinin et al., 2019; Braddock, 2020). One of the main stumbling blocks was the confusion around defining the problem set. Much of the time spent within RAN working group events and meetings were convoluted debates regarding what terrorism is, what extremism looks like, and who is the actual adversary, in often semantic discussions and conjectures based on localized understandings (Weilnbock, 2019). The lack of a decisive will at the EU level to frame the problem adequately gave rise to ongoing speculation and conjecture about both the causes and potential solutions to extremism and radicalization. The national efforts to counterterrorism provided a major resource for information, interconnected factors, and response strategies. There was, however, a fundamental flaw in how this national effort would translate into an EU wide outlook.

The key to effective counterterrorism is a well-connected mix of insight, intelligence, risk-benefit modeling, communication, and legislation, as well as inter-agency partnership (European Commission, 2020; Horgan, 2008). At

the EU level, this suggests that the supranational intention requires intricate and delicate juxtapositions to be applied successfully to counterterrorism efforts. At the member state level, law enforcement agencies, intelligence agencies, and local government officials are technically able to coalesce around emerging, current, and future threats with relative efficiency. This model and approach simply cannot translate any further sharing of basic details of successful pursuits, prosecutions, and anecdotal risk analysis at a cross-agency and inter-nation working group levels.

In the prevention context, this becomes a non-starter due to safeguarding, privacy laws, and national security protocols. RAN's approach of publishing its various working groups outputs means that sensitive data cannot be included toward potential breaches of data, operational processes, and intelligence efforts. Case studies were heavily redacted and management of information was the domain of each respective representative's institutional affiliation.

The RAN Police and Law Enforcement Working Group (RAN POL) facilitated best practice exchanges alongside operational considerations for its various participants and their day-to-day experiences of working within domestic counterterrorism contexts. A similar approach applied to the Prisons Working Group, as one of the primary ways in which civil society actors were invited to RAN through informal means and often through these actors seeking access to RAN themselves. The network seeks to share good practices about what works, but without formal vetting and security processes or empirical evaluation built in, anomalies such as restricted information sharing will exist (Mattson et al., 2016; Foret & Markoviti, 2019).

The working groups were often used for process-orientated discussion and consideration how these compared in different countries. Ultimately, this means that some RAN working groups were unable to build the level of knowledge and collaboration needed due to the national security "paywall" in place (Mattson

et al., 2016). Experiences of RAN practitioners who participated at both the working group level and the steering group level paint a picture of surface level information sharing being one of the key weaknesses in RAN's approach (Weilnbock, 2019; Fitzgerald, 2016). That essentially precludes certain sensitive information from civil society participants, and places such a context in the RAN POL working group and RAN Prison and Probation working groups instead (Alia, 2019). This suggests a more rapid-response need was the primary function of RAN's work, with empirical validity a clear secondary afterthought.

The argument can be made that the EU and its supranational leanings needed to be seen as doing something significant in the counterterrorism domain from a joint/cooperative standpoint, and that ideas of robustness or reliability of outcomes were not the major concern (Lindekilde, 2015). Many national counterextremism strategies ended up basing much of their respective rationales around values debates, which seemed to irk many migrant diasporas (end-users) even further.

A key example of this approach is found in extensive literature on the UK government's preventive agenda and its public perception among British Muslims, who questioned the logic and controversial idea of promoting British values as both a signpost and evidence of resistance to "extremism." This created a layer of confusion and juxtaposition within the RAN framework that seemed to pit different approaches against each other, rather than efforts to garner areas of commonality in approach.

What is clear is that the issue of engaging the knowledge base of "formers," i.e., those who have experienced first-hand the process of radicalization and extremism, divides not only the practitioner context, but also the academic and policy contexts (Lindekilde, 2015). Based purely on the issue of trust in these individuals, the issue creates apprehension and doubt

for an agenda that is already grappling with several interwoven narratives that are at best uncomfortable, and at worst, those that lay elements of blame for some "push" factors of terrorism at the feet of nation states and foreign policy (Dawson, 2019).

Although less of this applied directly in the EU context, the legacy of 9/11 and the war on terror created much by way of layered levels of mistrust when it came to the potential role of "formers" in counterterrorism and countering violent extremism (CVE). The idea of sharing sensitive information with former extremists has been too much of a risk for many EU member states, except for the UK (a former member state). This issue is one that goes to the heart of counterterrorism discourse for more than just this reason. The idea of using "formers" is similar in rationale to the use and engagement of former gang members and drug users, to reach out and divert vulnerable individuals from potential harm.

This logic uses the idea of credibility and personal experience as key tools in engaging, building trust, and ultimately disarming extremist thinking in individuals. Within the UK's Prevent strategy, there was a developing stance about engaging "formers" to deliver one-to-one interventions for at-risk individuals through the Channel process (Hassan, 2012). As this process was designed to be a multi-agency creation with a safeguarding approach, the "former" or specialist would be in essence, the "tip of the spear" in the intervention context. This is important to note, because in the wider EU context, no such practices were commonplace within the CT arena, and this leads to natural questions about who and what was being used to deliver counter-radicalization within EU member states.

A key weakness in the global counterterrorism approach has always been one of a tangible lack of credibility and a failure to communicate effectively with the diasporas most in need of direct engagement. This weakness has continually cast a negative eye over lines of effort

and campaigns aimed at tackling radicalization and extremism. Given that there was very little initial mention of right wing extremism with the EU or RAN setup, the onus was very much on the Islamist threat. Too often this translated into some very curious understandings of the issue and causes of Islamist extremism. Within mainland Europe, Muslim diasporas were very much based on specific migration patterns. Research by Professor Ted Cantle's Community Cohesion Unit at Coventry University (post Oldham riots 2001) points to these patterns being relatively stable regarding migration patterns over the past four decades (*Community Cohesion*, 2001).

In the mainland EU context, this changes to North African, Arab, Somali, Turkish, and some other pockets of smaller groups (Kaufmann, 2017), partly as a result of regional dynamics associated with EU formation (development) and member state affiliations in the post-colonialism era (Lyons, 2014; Jurgens). The most obvious examples are the Guest Arbeiter initiative in Germany and the French government's colonial history with Algeria and subsequent migration patterns (Pew Forum Research, 2017; Kaufmann, 2017).

This is relevant because each diaspora brings certain doctrinal and Ideological nuances with it, which are important signposts for the manner in which these communities must be understood. It is also relevant because there were and are distinct differences in understanding within the EU context as to the meanings of terms like integration, assimilation, and engagement. Approaches at the policy level to the manner in which migrant communities were managed and engaged had too much of a range to ever be genuinely seen in a holistic and unified approach.

Some elements of the narratives put forward by practitioners in RAN working groups suggested that neo-orientalist ideas were still prevalent when it came to understanding Islam and Muslims. The idea of the "RAN expert" soon became synonymous with Europeans who had

Arabic language degrees or had some official job title indicating they had contacts in the suburbs of Antwerp and more, giving them "access" to at-risk groups (Foret & Markoviti, 2019).

The central issue was that credibility in this context arose from the ability to break down Islamist ideology, break down the motivational, intellectual, and social reality of the individual, and reset it through a non-violent, rational framework that offered a positive religious identity as opposed to one warped in ideological undertones. This is a crucial point for a few reasons. The first is that critics of RAN point to the documentation and rhetoric, suggesting that radicalization is something that can be addressed at an individual level, by focusing on personal factors and offering positive alternative pathways.

Such critics have not only done RAN a disservice, but also fundamentally misunderstood the hallmarks of extremist ideology. Any extremist narrative must penetrate the personal, public, and ideological space of the individual. Specialist interventions in this context are designed to engage each level differently, but must start with the personal before moving along the scale. Such efforts also accept that radical ideas are not a problem, so long as they do not create the propensity for violence. Therefore, it is essential to disprove theological and intellectually justifications for violence at the personal level before tackling an individual's social understanding and worldview.

Too many examples of good practice shared by RAN working groups offered mainstream diversionary activities as evidence of successful counter-radicalization efforts (Mattson et al., 2016). When ISIS came on the scene, with a simple and effective message that layered the three levels mentioned shortly before into a basic lifestyle proposition, the mainstream approach was left wanting (Foret & Markoviti, 2019).

The presence of global tech giants within RAN had two main effects on its operations. The first was to offer these companies a chance to

disseminate their respective efforts of corporate moral social responsibly (CMSR) to a willing and somewhat star-struck audience (Home Affairs Select Committee Report, 2016). This allowed said companies to be seen to be doing something to tackle online radicalization alongside “experts” and policy officials. The central rationale applied here was that much of the fog around radicalization and the ease with which terrorist networks could access audiences had something to do with the lack of regulation and censorship online.

The second outcome was that slowly but surely, the RAN set-up and its regular participants seemed to be moving further and further away from efforts to be genuine pioneers of representational credibility of at-risk communities and their needs, and more toward a closed shop of self-appointed gatekeepers who were as far away from the actual issues as anyone could be (Weilnbock, 2019).

## Conclusion

Without painting a somewhat quick-win or self-serving picture of RAN and its emergence, there are several areas in which RAN can develop its activity further to become a more effective actor in the global CVE space. RAN’s network capability allows for ideas to be generated, shared, and disseminated. This feature can be further enhanced by the network becoming more representative of the communities it seeks to protect.

Although efforts at including youth have occurred, more can be done to engage more alienated groups and bring their genuine and credible voices to the table. The same logic applies to the models, toolkits, and good practice guides produced by the network. These efforts must be independently assessed and given some form of empirical foundation for growth. This is where the notions of Measure of Performance (MOP) and Measure of Effect (MOE) come in. In terms of what it appears RAN was set up to do, it has performed well.

RAN’s and its reliance on DG Home for funding suggest it was created to bring civil society closer to the EU in the image of the supranational look and feel that was evident during the last ten to fifteen years of work at this level, and thereby offer at least a window for CT policy and strategy to have a dissemination route and two-way feedback loop in place. The loop offers both a window and a magnifying glass vis-à-vis efforts others are making and seem to be working. There is now an EU-wide network that is connected and speaks similar languages, albeit with the need for greater convergence on the issue of the role of religion in counter-radicalization. This can be harnessed further through bridging gaps in understanding on a practitioner and policy level. In terms of MOE, RAN can begin the process of undertaking some form of external review with an academic and empirical basis for delineating which areas of good practice can be taken into new environments to encourage innovation and collaboration at the heart of the RAN mission statement and moving CVE issues forward. The argument for a RAN-type entity at a supranational EU level is about an ability to get ahead of the curve through effective conceptualizing, research-led studies, and robust evaluations of good practices, claimed or proven.

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Prof. Christian Kaunert is Professor of International Security at Dublin City University, Ireland. He is also Professor of Policing and Security, as well as Director of the International Centre for Policing and Security at the University of South Wales. In addition, he is Jean Monnet Chair, Director of the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence, and Director of the Jean Monnet

Network on EU Counter-Terrorism ([www.eucter.net](http://www.eucter.net)). [christian.kaunert@dcu.ie](mailto:christian.kaunert@dcu.ie)

Prof Sarah Leonard is Professor of International Security at the University of South Wales and holds a Jean Monnet Chair at Dublin City University. Her main areas of expertise are EU cooperation on internal security, including counterterrorism, border controls and asylum, and securitization theory. She holds a Ph.D. in international politics from the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, an M.A. in Russian and Eurasian Studies from the University of Leeds, as well as an M.A. in European Studies and a B.A. in Politics (international relations) from the Université Catholique de Louvain (Belgium). [sarah.leonard@southwales.ac.uk](mailto:sarah.leonard@southwales.ac.uk)

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# The Water Crisis in Iran: Heightening Instability

Sarah Lerech Zilberberg

Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) – Tel Aviv University

Iran suffers from a serious water shortage, and with ongoing population growth and damage to water resources infrastructure, the condition worsens each year. In many of the remaining freshwater resources there are significant levels of salinity and pollution.

The water crisis has exacerbated Iran's domestic problems. It greatly concerns citizens, raises frustrations, leads to protests in the streets, and figures frequently in academic forums, on social media, and in traditional media. The crisis has amplified class disparities, the lack of confidence in the authorities, and the unemployment and migration of the rural population to cities, known in Iran as "water refugees." Moreover, the agricultural sector, which consumes the most water in Iran, has been less productive than expected—encouragement from the regime notwithstanding—and many farmers have stopped engaging in agriculture and moved to urban areas. However, many have not succeeded in integrating in the cities as they expected, and this in turn intensifies social tensions, crime, and unemployment. The nuclear reactors, which need large amounts of fresh water for the uranium mining industry and for cooling the reactors, and whose wastewater pollutes the soil and water sources, are also influenced by Iran's water crisis, as is the volume of electricity production in Iran. Numerous power outages occur each year, including in the main cities, affecting hospitals, infrastructure, and the operation of heavy industry and the petrochemical industries.

Despite the severity of the water crisis, the solutions Iran has pursued are inadequate. This stems partly from improper water management and from the fact that in-depth solutions require extensive policy changes and considerable capital. To emerge from the crisis, Iran must advance large-scale technological water solutions, such as desalination and wastewater treatment. This requires cooperation with countries that specialize in water solutions and a decision to prioritize the funding of these solutions, yet this is a problematic road for Iran as long as it suffers from an economic crisis, international isolation, and sanctions.

*Keywords:* Iran, water, climate crisis, regime stability, agriculture, economy, urbanization, electricity, protests, policy management

## Introduction

In 2018 the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched a website in Persian intended for Iran, presenting Israel's innovative technological solutions regarding the water crisis. In addition, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu posted a video of himself sitting in his office and drinking water. He tells the Iranian people (in English, with subtitles in Persian) about the technological solutions that Israel can provide in order to resolve the serious water crisis confronting Iran, and emphasizes: "Israel has the knowledge to prevent an environmental catastrophe in Iran, but unfortunately the regime in Tehran does not allow us to do so" (Eichner, 2018).

Senior officials in Iran, such as Isa Kalantari, who at the time was head of the Iranian Department of Environment, and Bahram Kasemi, then-spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, hastened to hold press conferences. They criticized Israel vehemently for intervening in Iran's internal affairs, and insisted that Iran has sufficient tools to address the water crisis practically and professionally and does not need external help, especially not from Israel (RFI, 2018).

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The water problem did not begin in 2018, and it has been on the public agenda in Iran for more than two decades. During the campaign prior to the February 2016 elections, hundreds of members of parliament signed an agreement calling for a national environmental plan. But despite the calls from elected officials and large demonstrations throughout Iran that were violently suppressed by the regime, the water crisis has worsened from year to year.

In addition to the accompanying domestic instability and public frustration, the water crisis has led to a worsening of natural disasters and human problems in Iran, including sinkholes, the subsidence of the land by a few centimeters each year, salinization of the soil and groundwater, damage to biological diversity, harm to agriculture and heavy industry, and tension at the borders. In a paper on the water situation at Iran's borders, Ali Shahidi and Fariba Niroomand Fard from the Department of Water Engineering at the University of Birjand claim: "[The water situation] can determine the state of peace or war in the current era" (Niroomand Fard & Shahidi, 2018).

This article surveys Iran's water management policy and the impact of the water crisis on Iran's social fabric, national security, foreign and economic relations, and regime stability, and examines how the regime addresses these challenges. On some of these topics there is extensive academic literature in English and Persian, but on others the literature is insufficient or not up to date. Given the difficulties of attaining verified data due to the lack of transparency in the information supplied by the regime and the limitations of physical distance, this article is based inter alia on data compiled and compared from Iranian news sites, blogs, and governmental and private research institutes in Iran.

## Background

In both ancient and modern times alike, water has played a critical role in maintaining human societies, and socioeconomic development is dependent to a large extent on proper access to water resources (Shalamzari & Zhang, 2018). Access to water was among the main reasons for the fall of ancient empires. Archeological climate research in Iran shows that the changing amount of precipitation had a major impact on the strengthening and weakening of various civilizations that existed within the current territory of Iran over the last 6,000 years (Fallah et al., 2017). Numerous studies attribute the civil

unrest that led to riots, such as during the so-called Arab Spring, to the water crisis and the resulting food shortage (Kelley et al., 2015; Perez & Climatewire, 2013), which were not managed properly by the authorities and increased the flight to urban areas by people seeking to earn a livelihood. Yet despite this internal migration, unemployment worsened and class disparities deepened, with the shortage of food and water exacerbating despair and frustration among Iranians. Similar explanations help in understanding the outbreak of the crisis in Yemen and the Yemen-Saudi Arabia war. It is estimated that almost a third of Yemen's residents lack access to sufficient food and water (Mohamed, 2017).

Iran is located between the continental climate zone of western Asia and the Mediterranean climate zone. It covers an area of 1.648 million square kilometers—the nineteenth largest country in the world in terms of area (Sodoudi et al., 2010). About 42.5 percent of Iran's territory is covered by deserts that are difficult if not impossible to settle and cultivate (Khosroshahi et al., 2009). The climate in central and northern Iran is defined as about 65 percent arid, about 20 percent semi-arid, about 15 percent subtropical climate, and hot-summer Mediterranean climate (CSa) on the coast of the Caspian Sea (Madani et al., 2016). The region of western Iran is part of the Fertile Crescent, which has experienced a serious water crisis in recent years, including droughts and the depletion of surface and groundwater sources (Kelley et al., 2015), alongside a sharp decline in regional vegetation cover, increased dust storms, damage to the quality and quantity of crops, migration from villages to cities, and political unrest. Many researchers predict the collapse of the Fertile Crescent in the coming century (Notaro & Kalashnikova, 2015).

In the average year, temperatures in Iran range from -20 to +50 degrees Celsius. The average amount of precipitation is almost 250 mm per year, but in most of the territory the average precipitation is 100 mm per year. This is

about a third of the global average precipitation (Gohari et al., 2017). It is estimated that in the coming decades, average temperatures in Iran will increase by 2.6 degrees Celsius and precipitation will decline by 35 percent. According to the European Commission (EC), Iran is the leading producer of greenhouse gas emissions in the Middle East and ranks seventh in the world. Iran's greenhouse gas emissions, due to the increased production of oil, gas, metals, and chemicals, increased by about 6.1 percent between 2019 and 2021, in contrast with emissions by India and Russia, which increased by 3.3 and 3.2 percent, respectively (JRC, 2022). Another reason for the serious air pollution is rapid urbanization—75.9 percent of the population now lives in cities ("Iran," 2019).

There are many reasons for the water crisis in Iran, among them:

- a. Climate change, drought, and reduced precipitation.
- b. Since 1980, the population has doubled to 89 million (Sattari, 2018).
- c. A regime-led policy of doubling the area of cultivated land in order to attain agricultural independence and food security. For example, during a 20-year period that included serious droughts, the cultivated land area grew from 7,000 sq km in 1991 to 8,800 sq km in 2011. Agriculture is deemed the sector that consumes the most water in Iran, more than the consumption of households, industry, and the defense forces combined. Despite the water shortage and soil salinization, traditional methods that are not adapted to the climate are still used (Moridi, 2017).
- d. Iran, considered one of the biggest water wasters per capita, subsidizes its citizens' consumption of water as part of its subsidy policy ("Water Companies," 2022). The average daily consumption per capita is 250 liters—twice the global average. The average daily consumption in Tehran is 400 liters per person (Madani, et al., 2016).

- e. Inefficient and corrupt management of the water sector, including a dam construction policy that has dried out streams, lakes, rivers, and swamps, and non-enforcement regarding water use.

### **Dam Construction and Harm to Water Resources**

Iran constructed dams to resolve the water crisis. Today about 647 dams are in use, and 683 dams are under construction (DW Global Media Forum, 2018). These dams, intended for the immediate provision of water to cities and suburbs that have grown at a tremendous pace and to other government projects, succeeded in reaching their goal only partially (DW Global Media Forum, 2021) and led to serious environmental crises.

Today the dams are almost empty. Hadi Beiginejad, a member of the parliamentary energy committee, warned in 2022 that the amount of water in the dams was less than 37 percent of the originally desired capacity. The Iran Water Resources Management Company reported that of the most important dams for supplying drinking water in Iran, the 11 largest dams fill to less than 20 percent of capacity, and about 63 percent of the dam reservoirs in the country are empty (“Water Crisis,” 2023).

The dams have led to numerous environmental hazards. For example, Lake Urmia, a salt lake that was the sixth largest in the world, shrank to 10 percent of its original size in 2017 after its tributaries were blocked by dams and after massive pumping from deep water wells (Rahimi & Breuste, 2021). The drying of Lake Urmia, which intensified in the last decade, has led to ecological damage, an increase in health risks, a decline in the volume of agricultural production, and the migration of residents (Feizizadeh et al., 2022). Another example is Lake Bakhtegan, which in the past was considered the lake with the richest biological diversity in Iran and provided water to the residents of Fars Province. Lake Bakhtegan dried out due to the Sivand Dam and

the Doroodzan Dam that the state built on the lake’s tributaries. As with Lake Urmia, the drying out of Lake Bakhtegan affected the supply of water for households and for agriculture, caused some wells to dry out and others to become saline, and harmed biological diversity. The salinity of agricultural land increased, the lake bottom became saline, and this saline soil is lifted up by gusts of wind and causes damage to agriculture and to the health of the local population (Tasnim, 2013). Another case is the Gotvand Dam, which was very expensive to construct. Despite the warnings of geologists and engineers, it was built on saline land next to large salt deposits. When water began to collect, the salt dissolved, increased the salinity of the Karun River that brought water into it, and caused damage to agriculture and to the domestic water sector in the region (DW Global Media Forum, 2016).

Some blame the regime for advancing the construction of the dams as a means to provide work to Revolutionary Guards engineering and contracting companies, which were established during the Iran-Iraq War. Thus the construction of the dams became more of an economic project than an ecological and humanitarian endeavor. Indeed, the issue of the dams raises many arguments throughout Iran. Isa Kalantari, the Minister of Agriculture in the Rafsanjani government and in the first government of Mohammad Khatami, and Hamid Chitchian, Minister of Energy in the government of Hassan Rouhani, presented the construction of the dams as the second reason for the water crisis in Iran after reduced precipitation (DW Global Media Forum, 2018).

### **Land Subsidence and Flooding**

The unchecked pumping of water accelerated declining groundwater levels and the depletion of the Iranian aquifer. This pumping and the salinization of the land led to subsidence and sinkholes throughout Iran, including in Tehran, and these collapse every few weeks (Hamshahri, 2021). About 70 percent of the land in Iran is

prone to collapse, including airports, railroads, roads, cities, and factories (Madani et al., 2016). The rate of land subsidence in Iran—on average about 13 cm per year—is five to seven times the global average, and this causes serious damage to infrastructure and buildings (Stone, 2023).

The problem of flooding has worsened worldwide, and Iran too suffers from flooding on a large scale. Recent years have seen more and more cases of heavy rains falling in very short amounts of time. The large-scale logging of forests and deficient urban planning, including construction methods that cover the ground and pave roads, thus preventing water from soaking into the ground, and changing the land surface likewise limit the ground's ability to absorb water fast enough, leading to flooding. Already a decade ago it was estimated that in recent years flooding affected about 11 million people in Iran (Madani, 2014), and about 130 people were killed each year (Madani et al., 2016).

The 2019 floods in Iran affected 31 provinces, with southwestern Iran hit most seriously. According to Red Cross reports, 3,800 cities and villages were damaged by the floods, 65,000 homes were destroyed, and 114,000 homes were partly damaged. Damage was also suffered by 70 hospitals and health centers, 1,200 schools, and 159 roads; 700 bridges collapsed; and there was much damage to property (Shokri et al., 2020). In the summer of 2023, floods in the Sistan and Baluchestan province, which suffers from a water shortage, caused severe damage to agriculture. The government ordered people not to visit the area of the floods, in part due to the risk of infection from the standing water (Independent in Persian, 2023a).

After the rounds of flooding, the provincial and national governments issued tenders for subsidized construction to help residents restore and rebuild their homes (Mehr, 2023d). But despite the regime's promises of compensation, it is difficult to estimate what occurs in practice. For example, after the 2018 floods, the regime announced a plan with the participation of residents to build homes, but the contractors

who received the civilians' money and the state subsidies stopped construction in the first stage and disappeared, and the state did not take action on the issue (Young Journalists Club, 2023). A similar situation emerges from the types of plans for preparing the land to cope with floods, whereas they do not move forward or are not implemented in the first place. Local officials disclaim responsibility, and the recommendations are not applied (Mehr, 2023b; Shakeri & Fadayi, 2014). Plans for preparing civilian infrastructure for future floods have not been implemented properly, to the point where the provincial attorney generals have started to intervene and to demand the advancement of solutions in a specified time period; otherwise, local officials will have to take legal responsibility for the fiasco (Mehr, 2023c).

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The head of the government crisis management organization, Mohammad-Hassan Nami, stated that the government approved a reconstruction budget that would be transferred to the population in the coming weeks. He also explained that there would be a need for "jihadist" forces (civilians and non-civilians) to help with the work in order to lower the high costs, as, he stated, "implementation of conventional methods has imposed many costs on the state." The prevention plan that was submitted to the parliament, which requires a budget of 2 billion tomans, was not approved in 2022 (IRNA, 2022).

In addition, unseasonal and excessively heavy rains break stalks of wheat, which is a central crop in Iran, wash away blossoms, and thus damage potential fruit, break trees, and flood plots beyond their capacity, causing the decay of vegetables before they become ripe, and exposing their roots and uprooting

them. When soil erodes due to the intensity of the water and dilutes the composition of the remaining soil, its quality also declines. All these phenomena, along with the damage to buildings and infrastructure in villages, hurt the livelihood of locals and farmers and constitute another catalyst encouraging internal migration and unemployment (Mossavar-Rahmani, 2019).

### **Electricity and Water**

Since 2021, advertisements throughout Iran have encouraged reduced consumption of electricity and threatened rolling blackouts to major consumers; electricity on roads and highways has been reduced or turned off entirely; and above all, there have been repeated power outages. There were power outages before 2021 too, but they have become more severe from year to year (“Electricity Shortage,” 2023). In many provinces there are power outages that last for days, and they also occur in major cities such as Tehran.

Iranian electricity is produced in various ways: nuclear power plants, power plants operated using natural gas, gasoline, and oil (Kohli, 2023; Fallahi, 2021). The nuclear power plants that produce electricity consume more water than those using other methods to produce electricity. Some use fresh water while some, such as the power plant in Bushehr, use water from the Persian Gulf that is desalinated for the plant (BBC, 2014). Since the reforms in 2010, most of the energy is planned to come from hydroelectric power generation. Hydroelectric power plants are located in the Caspian Sea basin, near the Persian Gulf, and at lakes and dams built inside Iran (“Iran’s,” 2020). Each summer, Iran, which relies in part on hydroelectric power generation at the dams that it built, watches them as they empty, due to the inability to meet the national electricity supply. Thus in practice, despite the plans of the electricity reform, in 2018, 94 percent of Iranian electricity was produced from natural gas and oil, 3.5 percent from hydroelectric power plants, and 2.3 percent from nuclear energy (BP, 2019).

In the summer of 2021 there were prolonged power outages throughout Iran. In Khuzestan province, where the water shortage is the most severe and numerous demonstrations have taken place regarding water and electricity, Iranian Supreme Leader Khamenei issued a statement: “The water shortage is not a small problem, considering the hot weather in Khuzestan. The demonstrators cannot be blamed, and their problems must be addressed.” However, there was no specific reference to the electricity shortage (Iran Primer, 2021). In the summer of 2021, the power supply situation got so bad that Iran stopped providing power to Iraq and imported power from Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan (Kullab, 2021). Nonetheless, prolonged power outages continued during those weeks.

The problem in Iran regarding electricity supply also stems from old and dilapidated infrastructure, which leads to power loss on the way to consumers. According to a report by the civilian association of the Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture of Iran (2023), as long as the country does not undertake fundamental reform, increase the use of natural gas at existing power plants as a substitute for gasoline, and develop renewable energy industries, the electricity situation will worsen from year to year, along with the harm to households and industry.

The power outages hurt hospitals, government ministries and other government buildings, industry, and the economy, including steel production—a leading industry in Iran—and the resulting losses are estimated at \$7-8 billion per year. In addition, production at petrochemical industries (“Report,” 2023), which have a significant impact on Iran’s economy, has also been affected. A study published in the CCSE showed that there is a positive correlation between Iranian economic growth and the petrochemical industries that are critical to its economy (Maitah & Bassam, 2015).

## Water and Internal Stability in Iran

The water crisis has intensified the crisis of civilian confidence in the regime. Aside from the waves of civil protest directed toward the government, the water crisis generates difficulties in the Iranian social fabric. Frustration at the ongoing shortages of water and electricity and at the inadequate government supervision have led to water conflicts among farmers and villagers trying to survive.

In early 2018, Ismail Najjar, then-head of Iran's National Disaster Management Organization and deputy Minister of Interior, warned that if the drinking water problem is not resolved, he predicts that "problems such as water wars and similar conflicts will arise." In order to address this problem, he convened committees of various experts (DW Global Media Forum, 2018). But this problem, which was not dealt with until 2018, has also not been addressed by the committees that he planned to establish.

Iran confronts civil conflicts over access to and use of water resources. These water conflicts have intensified in the last two decades, especially in places where well water has become saline. They are expressed mainly in mutual damage to water transport and blockages of waterways and water pipelines, and they sometimes become violent. In addition, there are water conflicts that are directed at the regime, such as the 2012 riots surrounding the laying of the water pipeline to Yazd, east of Isfahan, and the violent riots at Boldaji in 2016 surrounding the transfer of water for use by a steel factory (Bijani & Hayati, 2011). As described in an article by the Iranian Climate Center: "Water protests have become a permanent feature on Iran's political landscape"; this permanent feature has been evident since the great famine of 1999 ("Water Stress," n.d.).

A study conducted at the Zarrineh River basin in Kurdistan Province showed that despite the water shortage, residents lack motivation for water conservation, and there

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is strong competition over water and its extensive use among the affluent, even when unnecessary (Veisi et al., 2020). Such civilian behavior interferes with proper, effective water management. Presumably there is a positive correlation between the undisciplined hoarding by the population in these provinces and the deep lack of confidence in state institutions regarding the supply of their basic needs. The water crisis, along with water conflicts and difficulties with agriculture and livelihood, have led many villagers to migrate to the cities: despite the lack of a precise breakdown of the reasons for migration to the cities, we can learn from the nature of the migration, the reasons given by migrants, and government and citizen discussions on the issue that water-related issues are among the main reasons for the high level of urbanization in Iran (Stone, 2023). The phenomenon of mass departure of farmers despite the government policy of encouraging agriculture has become so common that they are dubbed "water refugees" (BBC, 2014). According to a UN Human Development Report, of Iran's entire population, the urban sector increased to 75.94 percent in 2019, and it is expected to increase to 85.82 percent by 2050—among the highest in the world (United Nations, 2019). In the provinces where villages have great growth potential, such as Mazandaran province (44.2 percent) and Gilan province (46.8 percent), both with subtropical climates, the level of urbanization is lower (Asghar Pilehvar, 2021).

Urbanization has exacerbated the water crisis in the major cities, including Tehran ("Reason for the Water Crisis," 2023), and caused numerous social problems in Iran. Class divisions have deepened and urban crime, unemployment, and the stress on infrastructure have increased. Nevertheless, about 21 percent of the rural

population living in the margins of the major cities and metropolises still maintain their rural culture (Asghar Pilehvar, 2021).

At the initiative of non-governmental organizations and with the support of the Center for Strategic Studies in the President's Office, periodic conferences have begun in Tehran under the title Water, Culture, and Society. Ghorbanali Saadat, the governor of West Azerbaijan province, estimated at a conference in 2014 that if the condition of Lake Urmia deteriorates further, 5-6 million people will need to emigrate from his province. Former President Hassan Rouhani also confirmed this concern and said: "If we cannot save Lake Urmia, we need to know that millions of people in Iran will need to leave their homes and their lives. And not only in West Azerbaijan [province]." Another expert said at the conference: "In the future it will not be America, Saudi Arabia, and extreme religious sects that endanger us, but rather it is water that will cause the greatest impact on the system's stability" (DW Global Media Forum, 2015).

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**The nuclear program is a water-devouring consumer. Enormous amounts of fresh water are needed for uranium mining, for which Iran has built dams, drilled wells, and diverted rivers. In addition, the liquid waste from uranium mining, poured into lakes, streams, and open areas, has a very high level of radioactive material and contaminates the groundwater and surface water.**

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Numerous demonstrations have taken place throughout Iran as a result of the water crisis. In August 2023 many from Sistan province took to the streets after being cut off from water for a prolonged period, caused partly by the Taliban's damage to the flow of the Helmand River, which flows from Afghanistan and provides Sistan province's water. The water crisis has caused serious harm to the local population, and many of the demonstrations were led by the province's mullahs and elders (LiveIranNews, 2023). These

demonstrations included cries against Raisi for not taking an interest in the provinces' needs, a demand that he and his representatives come in person to speak with them, and a demand for tax returns on the agricultural sectors that have been destroyed. The demonstrators also protested the government's lack of initiative in solving the water crisis vis-à-vis the Taliban and the salinity of groundwater and wells in the provinces. Meanwhile, large scale protests with similar demands took place in Kurdistan and other provinces due to the water crisis. These demonstrations, even the quietest among them, were violently suppressed by the regime (independentpersian, 2023).

On social media the water shortage has become another issue for criticizing the regime, and seen as proof of the regime's corruption and dysfunction. Allegations have been made that Iran provides water to its neighbors to advance narrow interests instead of providing its residents with their basic civilian needs, and that it focuses on funding militias instead of developing water solutions (Karamizand, 2023). A highly popular tweet stated, "Everyone thinks that something special will happen in the country on the anniversary of Mahsa Amini's death and the regime will fall...if this system is going to fall, it will fall because of other reasons and factors such as poverty, the water crisis, financial corruption and so on, not because of a minimal demand such as freedom regarding the hijab" (Radmand, 2023). People's Mujahedin of Iran leader Maryam Rajavi added the following on Twitter: "Cities and villages in Iran are burning hot without water. This disaster has also reached Tabriz and Mashhad. This is a disaster that is the result of anti-nationalist actions by mullahs, looting people's property, and wasting money in nuclear projects and in supplying the regime's proxies in the region. Nuclear projects have exacerbated the crisis through large-scale water consumption" (Rajavi, 2023). This claim, which connects the water crisis with the nuclear program, appears in numerous places in the public discourse.

The nuclear program is a water-devouring consumer. Enormous amounts of fresh water are needed for uranium mining, for which Iran has built dams, drilled wells, and diverted rivers. In addition, the liquid waste from uranium mining, poured into lakes, streams, and open areas, has a very high level of radioactive material and contaminates the groundwater and surface water. Moreover, most of the reactors are located in areas defined as arid or semi-arid, where citizens already suffer from a shortage of fresh water. Since 1971, the groundwater level has decreased 12 meters in the areas between Yazd and Ardakan. This is exactly in Iran where many facilities of the uranium mining and refining industries are located. In addition, the reactor cooling process requires water and heavy water, for which large amounts of fresh water are needed (BBC, 2014).

On the other hand, the regime has declared that it will solve the water shortage by means of nuclear reactors, whose cooling unit is to include a desalination unit (like at Bushehr). As Mohammad Eslami, Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) said: “Wherever we establish a nuclear power plant, we will have a desalination plant beside it.” According to him, the AEOI is also assigning the treatment of industrial wastewater to factories connected to the nuclear reactors (Mehr, 2023a). Nuclear power plants could advance the water desalination program, which would produce water while cooling the reactors themselves, but the whole process of producing uranium and fuels for the reactors requires very large amounts of fresh water and causes contamination. This will not stop, especially given Iran’s nuclear program. Presumably even if the reactors can serve as somewhat of a solution for Iran’s water crisis, they still constitute a significant problem.

### **Regime Efforts to Address the Water Crisis**

For climate-related and ecological changes, civilian conduct must shift; otherwise it is difficult to implement deep-seated changes

(Ladi et al., 2021). In order to advance solutions to Iran’s water crisis, enforcement authorities must begin to monitor the consumption of water and combat the illegal pumping of water. Along with enforcement, cooperation among the different government ministries is necessary to promote effective water solutions. However, to implement enforcement and water solutions, government ministries must be in contact with local leadership of communities in the provinces, those that are not appointed by the central government, and earn the public’s confidence, so that local leaderships will cooperate with plans and implement them among the civilian population. Citizens’ increasing frustration at the lack of proper handling of the water crisis has expanded the crisis of confidence in the regime, which could make it difficult for the regime to undertake in-depth changes.

Some of the problems that exacerbated the water crisis stem from problems of infrastructure maintenance and enforcement. According to government estimates, about 15,000 villages are not connected to the water network (Tasnim, 2022). Villagers channel water to the villages using traditional open canals with high levels of evaporation and contamination and in trucks. In addition, because of old and unmaintained water infrastructure, the percentage of water that is lost due to leaks in the infrastructure on the way to its destination in urban regions is between 15 and 50 percent. In villages the situation is even worse (Madani et al., 2016). Furthermore, rural and urban sewage that is dumped without regulation and industrial and agricultural waste damage the soil and contaminate the water, such that in many places the existing water is subject to various levels of contamination and endangers people’s health (Ladi et al., 2021). These lapses are not addressed and proper enforcement is lacking, because issues of monitoring, pumping, and wastewater are determined mainly based on political pressure (Moridi, 2017).

Alongside the problems of maintenance and enforcement, Iran has not advanced

an ordered water policy since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. In 1966 a law was passed on monitoring the pumping and drilling of wells, regulating water, and preserving groundwater. In 1983, the law was changed to the Law on the Fair Distribution of Water; supervision was transferred to the Ministry of Energy and the Ministry of Agriculture, with the Ministry of Health responsible in practice for the distribution of water to households. The law approved the drilling of private wells in places where the groundwater is in danger only after receiving permission from the Ministry of Energy. Another article in the law permits drilling wells freely in the rest of the country. The law has six articles that focus on punishing citizens who damage waterways and pipelines for their personal or commercial benefit (Law on the Fair Distribution of Water, 1983). In practice there was insufficient enforcement regarding the drilling of wells and the diversion of water. Consequently, the drilling of wells increased even in places where approval is needed, and water conflicts increased in rural areas. In 2010 a law was passed to regulate wells. Aiming to control and regulate illegal pumping and drilling of wells, the law in fact legalized thousands of illegal wells and gave them a pumping license. Another barrier to the law's success was that the budget that was invested in installing water meters at pumping centers was discontinued, and thus monitoring of pumping quantities is not possible (Banihabib et al., 2020). In 2023, a law on the management of environmental crises was passed. The first action carried out since it was passed was to establish steering committees in each province to discuss the prevention of floods (Payamema, 2023b).

In general Iran suffers from deficient public management, which harms its ability to advance proper policy. Part of the functional problem stems from the political appointments of high-ranking and low-ranking officials. When an official, no matter how senior, does not toe the line with the regime's policy or expresses too much criticism, he is replaced by another

official. An example is Kaveh Madani, a professor and expert on the environment and water, who was Deputy Head of Iran's Department of Environment. After he expressed harsh criticism, he was accused of espionage and forced to leave Iran ("Kaveh Madani," 2016).

Because of the appointment system, many decisions are made according to political rather than professional considerations. Elected officials operate and promote solutions whose results can be seen immediately (during the elected official's term of office), rather than effective long-term solutions. This is also the case when warnings are issued by experts (Payamema, 2023a). Furthermore, when making and implementing decisions, public servants and elected officials are warned not to hurt those who are politically connected, such as certain pistachio traders, select industrialists, and more (Sattari, 2018). Even when deciding on a long-term plan, it is difficult to know if ultimately it will be implemented properly. If a contract is signed and the contractor receives payment, this does not necessarily mean that he will actually perform the work. The conduct of authorities and ministries has led to a situation where authorities' legitimacy and the level of public confidence in them is low, so it is difficult for a local authority to recruit its residents for a shared goal (Pazhuhan, 2023). As a rule, there is no inter-ministerial cooperation in government institutions, and this affects the limited power of the Department of Environment (IDOE) and the Ministry of Energy (MOE) in collaborating with governmental and non-governmental organizations. Today both civilian and governmental water management companies operate in Iran. The civilian companies complain that the state does not carry out its payment commitments, which undermines their ability to promote proper management and performance ("Water Companies," 2022). The main solutions that the regime has pursued so far are the many dams and the deep wells it has dug, intended to provide water immediately to citizens and to industry. In recent years the regime has pursued

additional limited solutions to the water crisis, and those who lead the implementation, similar to the construction of the dams, are Revolutionary Guard personnel. A project of connecting villages in Bushehr province to the water network began in 2021. The first stage saw the connection of 39 villages, followed by the connection of 3,000 villages in other provinces. The project included laying water pipelines that did not previously exist in those villages and outside of them (“Revolutionary Guards,” 2022). If water flow through the pipelines is steady and free without advancing plans to resolve the water crisis and provide education on water conservation, connecting the villages to the water network could exacerbate the water crisis in the short term, in specific provinces and in Iran in general.

There are provinces in which, in order to cope with the local water crisis, governors have called for “agricultural jihad,” meaning reducing the irrigation of fields and watering of animals, without providing sustainable solutions for farmers (IRNA, 2023). If this call is implemented as planned, it will help maintain the groundwater but will seriously hurt the various agricultural sectors, due to a lack of advanced agricultural infrastructure for water-efficient irrigation, thus harming locals’ livelihood. In recent years the governmental fund for the environment has invested in providing incentives for companies advancing sustainable technological solutions for adapted, water-efficient agriculture, but this year the fund for the environment was nationalized by the Majles for other purposes, so these incentives were discontinued (SNN, 2023).

Aside from changes to water management, the most suitable solution for Iran’s water crisis, given Iran’s two large saltwater sources—the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf—is desalination. The small desalination plants in Iran today are used mainly for the nuclear reactors. Despite the government’s declaration that beside each nuclear power plant a desalination plant would be built that would also serve the civilian population, the plan is far

from implemented and it is not clear whether the plants will provide water, and how much. The main difficulty in developing desalination facilities stems from their being expensive to develop and to operate. The other difficulty is that for these facilities, Iran needs technological collaboration with external technology companies and partnerships with countries that have this technology (Ghasemzadeh & Sharifi, 2020). Both make it difficult for Iran to attain desalination while it is at the height of an economic crisis and under sanctions and has severed diplomatic relations with countries that have desalination solutions. If Iran chooses to work toward this solution, it will need to forfeit or to suspend other plans and goals that it is currently pursuing and in which it invests considerable resources, so that it has sufficient economic or diplomatic resources for pursuing the expensive solution of desalination.

### **Water in Neighboring Countries: Water Diplomacy**

The shortage of water is a global problem that is not unique to Iran. The countries bordering Iran and those surrounding the Persian Gulf also suffer to varying extents from a water crisis. Some rivers in these countries border on Iran’s territory, and thus they affect the water supply in Iran itself (Figure 1). Moreover, due to the water shortage there are fluctuations in governmental stability in these countries, and this affects security, employment, and mutual migration. There are also countries that have successful technological water solutions, and can share them with Iran if they choose to do so (Atef et al., 2019).

An example of a water conflict on the borders is the Harirud River that originates in Afghanistan, continues to Iran, and from there to Turkmenistan. The Kajaki Dam on the Harirud River in Afghanistan was a source of conflict between Iran and Afghanistan even before the Islamic Revolution. In 1973 an agreement was signed whereby Afghanistan must provide Iran with water at a flow of 97.2 cubic meters per



**Figure 1.** Water sources shared between Iran and its neighbors, based on map of Iran's cities and main towns

Source: Wikipedia

second. However, during droughts, when the river is low, Afghanistan has difficulty providing this amount of water, and there are increased problems with the supply that it committed to Iran in the agreement. In 2000, when there was a drought, Iran turned to the UN Security Council, claiming that the Taliban was not meeting the agreement and was impairing the water flow. In such a case, according to the agreement, a joint committee is to be appointed to discuss the situation. The problem is getting worse because the river provides water to the city of Mashhad and to wetlands in Iran that are an important source for agriculture, and any change in the supply of water risks drying out the wetlands (Thomas et al., 2016). In May 2023, the Taliban stopped the agreed water flow, and the situation escalated to the point of exchanges

of fire between Iran and Afghanistan (Dages, 2023). A similar case is the Helmand River, which also originates in Afghanistan and flows into Iran. An agreement was signed in 1973, and confrontations take place when its tributaries are blocked by Afghanistan during dry periods (Teillet & Ali Shariati, 2023).

Iran also blocks waterways to neighboring countries. It violates the 1975 agreement with Iraq, which regulates the flow of tributaries that originate in Iran to the Tigris in Iraq (Voldani, 2018). In 2005, after blockages, Iran and Turkmenistan built the Doosti Dam to regulate the transfer of water between them (Thomas et al., 2016).

Aside from water conflicts with countries bordering Iran, there are countries close to Iran that have advanced solutions for desalinating

water. The percentage of water that comes from desalination plants in the Gulf countries ranges from 70 to 90 percent. Saudi Arabia is currently trying to become a desalination empire, and on September 4, 2023, Crown Prince and de facto ruler Mohammed bin Salman declared the establishment of the national water organization in Riyadh, which aims to be the center of technological knowledge and collaborations in the field of freshwater solutions (Independent in Persian, 2023b). Technological knowledge on desalination has become a diplomatic and strategic asset: diplomatic due to the ability to advance partnerships with countries that do not have abundant water, and strategic in that they are independent when it comes to water and are not dependent on a river that originates in a neighboring country. But at the same time, this asset has also become their Achilles' heel (Chibani, 2023), given assessments that in the case of an escalation, Iran would strike the desalination systems of another Gulf country, thus paralyzing it. These concerns exist even though in 2023 Iran renewed its diplomatic contacts with the Gulf countries, in particular with Saudi Arabia (Cafiero, 2023). To the extent that these diplomatic contacts deepen, and Iran succeeds in recruiting sufficient economic resources, it will be able to progress toward technological partnerships with these countries regarding water solutions.

### Impact on the Iranian Market

The climate crisis also directly affects the economy and food security. Iran, which faces international isolation, sanctions, and high inflation, faces problems with its gross national product, which has declined since 2013 (Iran GNP, n.d.). The impact of the climate crisis on Iran is of great importance in increasing Iran's dependence on external actors.

In early 2022, the head of Iran's association of flour producers announced that in that year the country must import about 20 million tons of grain, and stated that it had never been so dependent on imports (Iran International,

2022). Relative to its population size and compared to other countries, Iran imports an average amount of wheat. However, Iran invests considerable resources in having an independent wheat supply, without being dependent on imports—71 percent of the cultivated land is dedicated to growing grains based on rainfall. Recently Iran has suffered from drought and flooding, and has not met its production requirements with respect to population growth, thereby increasing its dependence on imports each year. The estimate for 2019 was that the recent droughts had caused 52 trillion rials of damage to the agricultural sector, and 3.6 billion rials of damage to water resources (Mossavar-Rahmani, 2019). Aside from the fact that wheat is an important basic food product in every country, in Iran, which subsidizes bread for its citizens, importing becomes an even greater economic burden for the regime (Iran International, 2023; Reuters, 2022). Since the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine war, the amount of wheat imported from Russia has increased, and on many occasions the wheat has been frozen at ports because of Iran's difficulties providing foreign currency for payment (Grain Brokers Australia, 2023). Presumably difficulty providing foreign currency to Russia in all areas of imports was one of the many catalysts for the joint Russian ruble (RUB) exchange rate.

An important agricultural sector that was affected is pistachios, the Iranian "green gold." The scarcity of water in pistachio-growing regions has lowered production. Hossein Rezaei, secretary general of the Iran Pistachio Association (IPA), announced that pistachio production in Iran had declined by 70,000 tons in 2022, and was only around 150,000 tons. Rezaei added that the sprouts of the current year were also destroyed because of climate change, which directly affects future production ("Iran Exports," 2022). The two main pistachio suppliers today are Iran and the United States. The major pistachio traders in Iran have close connections with the government.

Alongside agriculture and food security, heavy industry and the petrochemical industries also suffer from production problems that stem from the shortage of water and electricity, and each year they record losses as a result (Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture of Iran, 2023; “Electricity Shortage,” 2023). The petrochemical industry is Iran’s leading export industry, so any harm to it has significant economic consequences.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The water crisis in Iran is severe. The reasons for the crisis are the doubling of the population (United Nations, 2019), poor and damaging water management, droughts, and wasteful agriculture (Banihabib et al., 2020). All of these have led to a situation where water resources are quickly being depleted. The water crisis has led to serious damage from which it will take Iran decades and even centuries to recover. Some results, like subsidence, are irreversible. The forecasts for Iran’s water and climate future, if it maintains its policy, are not good, and they indicate harm to all remaining water resources in the country. As a result, Iran could suffer serious humanitarian, political, and social crises that are in many ways similar to those that exist in countries like Syria and Yemen.

Iran is entangled in conflicting objectives that make it difficult for it to pursue a policy that will save it from this bleak future. On the one hand the regime buys quiet from its citizens through subsidies that include subsidizing water for farmers and households. On the other hand, as long as this policy continues, Iranian citizens will continue to consume large amounts of water, and incentives for water conservation will fail.

Iran is trying to attain independence that will end its dependence on external actors, and thus, inter alia, it is working to advance its food security by expanding the agricultural sector. However, because it lacks a policy for promoting advanced, sustainable agriculture, the agricultural sector is draining water reserves

and hurting soil quality, affecting the volume of production in the near future, in turn undermining food security, while harming the remaining water resources to an unprecedented degree.

On the one hand Iran is working toward regional hegemony through “Shiitization,” militias, and influence over leaders of various countries. On the other hand, it is losing its internal stability and citizens’ confidence in the regime and exacerbating civil unrest, whereas due to the worsening crisis, even the subsidization policy no longer properly provides for citizens’ needs.

Although Iran faces an economic crisis and sanctions, it seems that it has no choice but to pursue technological water solutions, such as desalination and use of treated wastewater for agriculture. In order to advance such solutions, it apparently would have to forfeit and suspend other major programs that deplete its cash reserves or cause diplomatic isolation. But even these expensive solutions would not be enough. In order to overcome the serious crisis, Iran will have to create a proper water administration that enforces rules regarding water pumping without political corruption and promotes education toward water conservation, while lowering subsidies and investing in a strict policy of transitioning to sustainable, water-efficient agriculture. As long as Iran does not fundamentally change its policy, its economic, social, and political stability is in danger.

Sarah Lerech Zilberberg is a research assistant in the Iran program at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) and a member and researcher at the MECARC on Iran and national resilience. She holds a B.A. in Middle East policy analysis and Arabic and an M.A. in Middle East studies and political science, and is a Ph.D. student in the Middle East department at Ariel University under the direction of Prof. Ronen A. Cohen. The topic of her doctoral thesis is comparative research between Israel and Iran on the topics of religion, state, and the legal system.

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# The March of Folly in Israel's Public Transportation?

Yossi Daskal

University of Haifa

Public transportation, one of the basic services provided by a modern state, is of strategic-national importance and has implications for national security. Transportation impacts individual lives, the economy, society, demography, and quality of life. These aspects are relevant to decision making at the government level and include elements in decisions taken with national security considerations. At the political level decisions must be guided by the will to serve the public interest, and should facilitate, rather than block, reforms and innovations in the field. This article emphasizes that despite the importance of public transportation and its impact on the development of the economy and, in turn on national strength and national security, in Israel this field is characterized by ongoing market and administrative failures. In fact, the situation resembles a “march of folly,” in which decision makers operate contrary to national and public needs arising from demand, and contrary to normative professional considerations.

*Keywords:* public transportation, national security, market failures, administrative failures, decision making, public good, infrastructure, reform, strategy

## Introduction

Public transportation, one of the basic services provided by a modern state, includes a strategic-national component. The field of “transportation” interfaces with many other areas that are relevant for decision making at the national level, such as human life, the national economy, societal elements, distributive justice, and even international relations (Spiker, 2022). The lateral impact of advanced transportation infrastructures on other areas of life makes it a vital part of national strength, which in itself is an important part of national security, and thence the links between transportation and national security.

While national security has been variously defined by numerous scholars, common to all accepted definitions are a nation's ability to protect its citizens and the lives of its residents, and the ability to maintain internal economic and social security (Harkabi, 1990, p. 530). Assuming that human life and socioeconomic security, as well as the quality of national infrastructures, include the benefits of transportation and are common to all definitions of national security, transportation-related issues should be considered in national security decisions.

Many countries have assessed the numerous benefits to be derived from high quality public transportation and made the necessary reforms

to provide an essential public good<sup>1</sup> (Thomas & Bertolini, 2020). Global developments in the mid-twentieth century affected the need for reforms in transportation. Among these were population growth, rapid urbanization, globalization, and the availability of technology that flooded the roads with private vehicles, which notwithstanding their benefits to private convenience are dangerous to human life, causing road accidents and air pollution. All these and other phenomena have challenged countries, and in turn prompted broad reforms in transportation in order to provide the population with suitable tools for dealing with global innovations.

None of this bypassed Israel, yet by the end of the previous century, the Israeli government had barely responded to changes in the field. It was only in 1992 that the Rabin government began a process of transportation reform, which is still underway. Moreover, in the last three decades, public transportation has been characterized by continuing market and administrative failures, and State Comptrollers have written 15 audit reports on transportation. In 2019, the State Comptroller published a special report that examined public transportation over the previous decade, stating that public transportation is characterized by a total systemic failure: "The failures and defects in the field of public transportation are extremely significant...The government and its head must address this national problem and act to remove barriers" (State Comptroller, 2019, p. 8).

Consequently, the question is whether it is possible that decision making on transportation issues at the national level has become a "march of folly," as defined by historian Barbara Tuchman in her book (1986), in which she illustrates the reality of countries where decision makers shape policy that is contrary to that country's public national interest. Other questions that arise are: who are the people who created these market and government failures in Israel? Does this match the approach of Thomas Oatley, who attributes the failures

to the focus of modern political economy on the benefits and individual needs of decision makers? (Oatley, 2018). Is this a case of what Christopher Pollitt and Gert Bouckaert define as the political culture of a country in which actors, interests, and mutual political, social, and economic contacts influence and design policy and reforms? (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004). Are the barriers to reform shaped by parties with economic interests in the Israeli market, as proposed by David Weimer and Aiden Vining? In their research, they describe the democratic system as an arena in which pressure groups vie for a share of the goods, and the struggle between actors directs the decision making process, which harms public interests and reinforces personal interests (Weimer & Vining, 2011).

A survey of these theories helps to analyze the Israeli reality and provide a response to the basic research questions that arise around the shaping of transportation policy in Israel. With these questions as background, the article lays the preliminary foundation for the link between transportation and national security infrastructures as the basis for further study. This article presents the development of public transportation at the global level, and with reference to the theoretical foundation, examines the tools, parameters, and concepts linked to the failures of decision makers, with an emphasis on the development and management of the public transportation system. It then presents an analysis of transportation in Israel and closes with the reasons for the flaws in the system and suggestions as to what can and must be done to improve the situation.

### **Background: Global Influences on Public Transportation**

Over the last hundred years there have been several global processes that affected the development of public transportation. The first is population growth: in 1900 there were about 1.6 billion people on earth, and today there are around 8 billion. The second is

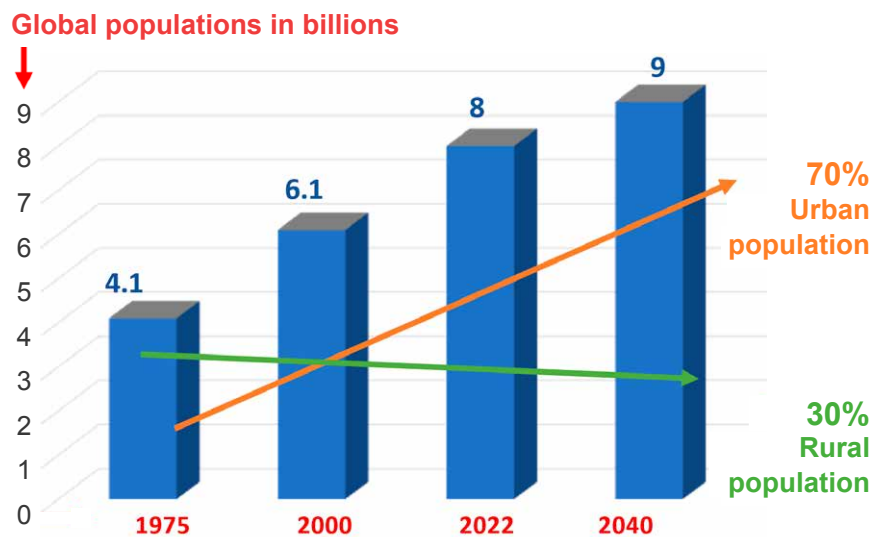
**A country’s transportation system demands extensive investment of resources in physical infrastructure, technological components, and institutional frameworks; this necessarily influences social, economic, and infrastructure issues, which in turn affect national strength and consequently national security.**

urbanization: at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, about 30 percent of the global population lived in cities, while 70 percent lived in rural areas, but since then the situation has been reversed (Figure 1). The result is that cities have become the main centers of trade, culture, education, and employment. An accompanying process is that of suburbanization, as the masses move from city centers to the suburbs, creating huge urban areas in which the need for convenient mobility is accepted as inherent and dominant, and this need has created an understanding in most countries that transportation is a public good (Finck et al., 2020). The third global process, globalization, has affected most countries since the 1970s. Neoliberal ideas, together with ideas from the new world of public administration, have been adopted in many democratic countries and influenced transportation. Globalization increased the need for transportation links between countries

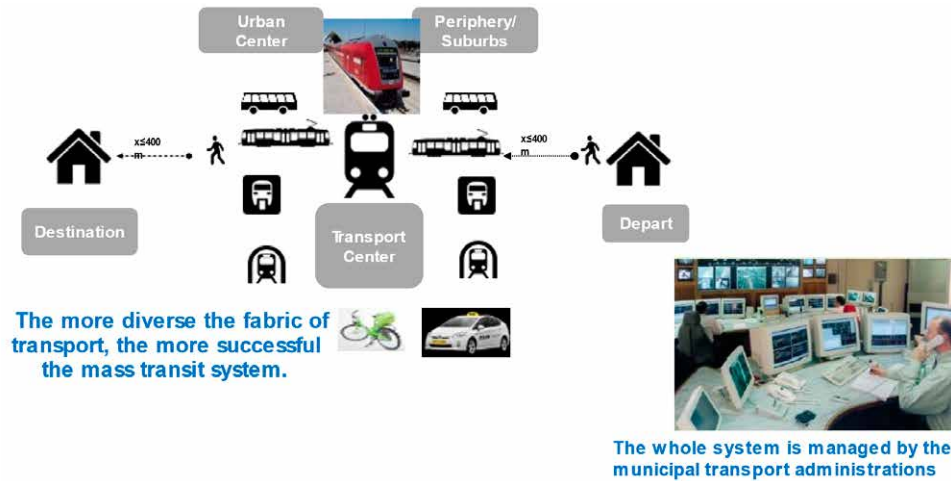
and expanded the use of private vehicles. Some countries sought to create a welfare state with distributive justice, including public transportation. In parallel, new management methods influenced public administration in the direction of reforms in the field of transportation (Drew & Ludewig, 2011; Citroën, 2017).

A country’s transportation system demands extensive investment of resources in physical infrastructure, technological components, and institutional frameworks; this necessarily influences social, economic, and infrastructure issues, which in turn affect national strength and consequently national security. Important decisions taken at the national level bear responsibility for taking a broad, inclusive view, while implementation is the province of bureaucrats. Changes and adjustment to global changes demand comprehensive reforms. Studies on the advantages of transportation stress that considerations of human life as well as economic and social factors should be axiomatic when planning transportation policy (Carmon & Fainstein, 2013; Feitelson, 2011; Guillén, 2003).

The widespread use of private vehicles in the public space is harmful (inter alia because they increase road accidents and air pollution), and the solution should be to create a situation in which public transportation is more reliable,



**Figure 1.** Growth of world population and urbanization trends  
Source: Worldometer



**Figure 2. Optimal model for reliable Door-to-Door public transportation**

Data from many sources compiled in expert reports submitted to Israeli decision makers: Ministry of Transport (2012) – Strategic Plan for Public Transport; Summary Report (2016) – Strategic Plan for Public Transport in Metropolitan Tel Aviv; State Comptrollers Office, Special Report (2019) – Crisis in Public Transport

more comfortable, faster, and cheaper than travel in private vehicles. The transportation model known as Door-to-Door (DTD) developed over the years on the basis of numerous studies (Finck et al., 2020; Thomas & Bertolini, 2020). It was submitted to the decision makers of several Israeli governments in the framework of reports from international advisors and as working papers prepared by the political echelons. Figure 2 illustrates the principle whereby an individual traveling to a specific destination uses a range of means of public transportation, operated by an urban transportation administration to reach the planned destination: the public transportation option is cheaper and more accessible than the use of a private vehicle.

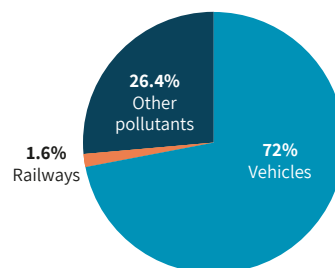
While this is not a perfect model, Berlin, Stockholm, Tokyo, and Singapore are just some of many cities that have adopted the elements of the model and built infrastructures for transportation centers, including fast inter-city trains, metro systems, light rails, and a wide range of bus services (Ovenden, 2004), and thus achieved the many benefits inherent in the use of public transportation.

**Effects of Public Transportation**

Wide use of efficient public transportation offers significant benefits on a number of levels:

**Human life:** In the last 50 years the number of private vehicles has multiplied by hundreds of percent. In 1970 there were about 50,000 private vehicles on Israel’s roads, and by 2022, 3.8 million. The extensive use of private vehicles instead of public transportation has created a poor balance sheet marked by road accidents and air pollution. According to the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), every year on average 300-400 people in Israel are killed on the roads, while some 18,000 are hospitalized with injuries, of whom 2,000 suffer life-changing injuries (CBS, n.d.).

**Air pollution:** Travel in private vehicles increases air pollution. According to the World Health Organization, 72 percent of total urban air pollution is due to private vehicles. Other causes of pollution are shown in Figure 3.



**Figure 3. Average components of air pollution in urban areas**

Source: Based on data from the World Health Organization

According to the Israeli CBS, in recent years an average of about 1,000 people die each year due to air pollution-related problems.

As road accidents and air pollution are a direct outcome of the growing numbers of private vehicles, the obvious conclusion is that wider use of public transportation will reduce these risks and thus save lives. For example, one train can carry about a thousand passengers (theoretically taking as many as a thousand cars off the road). According to data from Israel Railways and CBS, there are currently about 70 million journeys each year. From 2010 to 2023, Israel Railways carried millions of passengers and not one was killed. Moreover, Figure 3 shows the low rate of pollution caused by the railroads; in other words, wider use of public transportation helps reduce air pollution in urban areas.

**Economic impact:** Heavy traffic and the extended duration of journeys to work and elsewhere affect work productivity and lead to underachievement of potential GDP and revenues from taxation (Aviram, 2017; Maoz, 2021). Heavy traffic and traffic jams have serious economic implications. In 2018 the annual cost of congestion was defined by the Ministry of Finance as about NIS 49 billion. Treasury economists estimate that if congestion increases and there are no new conditions for public transportation, the annual cost by 2030 will be NIS 74 billion (State Comptroller, 2019, p. 545).

In addition, traffic congestion affects household expenditure with the cost of maintaining and running private vehicles. The greater the congestion, the heavier the burden on the economy. Apart from economic productivity, there is also overuse of land for roads and parking (Trajtenberg et al., 2018). Traffic congestion affects access of workers from outlying areas to their places of employment, thus damaging the efficient distribution of workers and means of stronger education in the periphery, due to problems of access by good teachers living in city centers (Ben-David, 2003).

**Demographic dispersal:** Efficient public transportation leads to demographic dispersal and changes the character of the social periphery. A related national security issue is the security significance of the concentration of populations, infrastructures, and resources within the metropolitan central area, as well as social and economic aspects, which in turn affect social and national resilience, a fundamental element in national security. All over the world, for example, rail transportation provides intercity travel at speeds of 250-350 kph. In a small country like Israel, fast travel between urban blocs would reduce the problems due to the remoteness of peripheral villages and development towns and help create a better balance between housing prices and the cost of living.

**Security benefits:** During the Second World War, residents of London found shelter in the underground Tube stations, and today in the war between Russia and Ukraine, citizens flee for refuge to underground rail tunnels. Dozens of countries that developed underground railroads have made sure to protect the tunnels against attack in war. The rail system operating in Washington, Moscow, Tokyo, Berlin, and other cities can be locked in emergencies, and it is protected against attack by nonconventional weapons (Ovenden, 2003).

Rail transportation has also been an important element of military logistics, from the Civil War in the United States, through the First and Second World Wars, to the present: in the war between Russia and Ukraine extensive use has been made of the railroads. The logistics system of the US army includes a rail unit that takes care of infrastructures for rolling stock and is able to operate railroads independently in all situations (Magbanua, 2021).

**Bilateral and multilateral connections through transportation contiguity:** For overland transportation, the strategic link is clear. For example, as soon as the walls of the Eastern bloc came down, the adjustment of railroad tracks between Eastern and Western Europe

was one of the first investments, to facilitate links between all regions (Citroën, 2017). In their attempts to broker peace in the Middle East, US representatives have offered aid for the construction of rail infrastructures (Indyk, 2009). Yet in spite of the global impact and all the benefits of public transportation, not all countries have realized an optimal situation.

### Transportation, Public Policy, and Decision Making Processes: The Theoretical Basis

To understand what influences decision makers and what factors lead to failures in the development and management of a national public transportation system, tools and concepts from public policy literature are of major benefit. These in turn can help in an assessment of Israel's problematic transportation situation and its essence as a government failure.

In academic research there are many theories that seek to explain government failures. The theory of public choice presents a comprehensive explanatory foundation for a wide spectrum of behaviors by leading actors in the public arena. The most prominent of the models proposed by this theory is the presentation of the democratic system as an arena in which pressure groups compete for distribution of resources, and struggles between the actors affect the decision making process contrary to the public good (Weimer & Vining, 2011). Shlomo Mizrahi and Assaf Midani state that the main motivation of politicians is reelection, and they therefore choose the options that in their assessment will earn them the most votes. Consequently, public policy cannot meet objective criteria of maximum efficiency, since the main actors are not interested in efficiency but in maximizing their personal gain, and this often creates a conflict of interest between the public that wants change and the professional echelons. Politicians prefer the status quo as long as the public does not demand a change. This dynamic partially explains why in many cases no public

policy is formulated until the situation becomes catastrophic (Mizrachi & Midani, 2006).

This theory is also integrated into the new paradigm on relations between state and economy, a research approach based on the claim that there is a relationship of mutual dependency between the state and the economy. The nature of this relationship and points of interface are influenced by alliances and the respective interests of politicians, professional levels, and various business sectors (Shalev, 2004). According to this theory, the conduct of the main actors is explained by the concept of regulatory capture, which refers to situations in which the regulator is a willing captive of the interests of supervisory private elements and therefore does not act properly to implement the public interests for which it is legally responsible (Figure 4). Captive regulation systematically promotes narrow interests at the expense of the public interest (Yadin, 2020; Carpenter & Moss, 2014). Regulation was created to protect supervisory bodies against competition and to ensure they fulfill their duties. In many cases, the supervised body consists of interest groups. The interest groups do not usually have absolute control of regulation, and therefore the regulators in properly run countries have a significant degree of discretion to promote the public interest.

The causes of regulatory capture can be direct and varied: bribery, threats, political appointments, election finance, gaps in information, and social proximity. The outcomes vary accordingly. Captive regulation can be

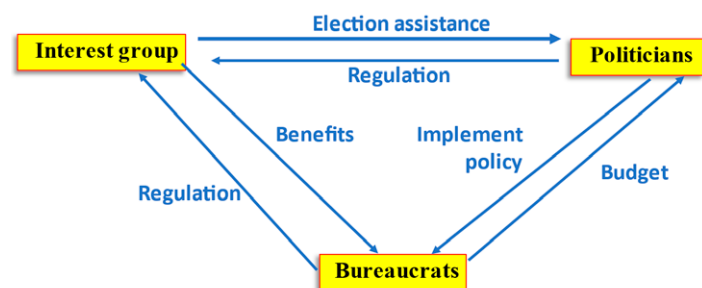


Figure 4. Model of regulatory capture

extensive, but in most cases it is partial and limited (Baldwin et al., 2012).

Figure 4 shows the possibilities for influencing decision makers by virtue of their intention to be satisfied with personal benefit versus the public interest. In addition, the status of interest groups will be determined by their ability to provide the required benefits.

A thorough study of the Israeli market reveals a difficulty arising mainly from the indirect channels of regulatory capture. In particular, regulatory effectiveness is challenged by two specific features of the Israeli economy: a high degree of centralization of the private sector, and a society preoccupied with issues of peace and security (Navot & Cohen, 2015). These two singular features, economic centralization and the dominance of security concerns, affect not only economic indicators but also the ability to exert political influence and shape the agenda of narrow interest groups. The dominance of security concerns has diverted wide sections of the public from the debate on regulation, so that narrow interest groups dominate the field in the game of political influence (Rolnik & Shapiro, 2018; Navot, 2012).

A survey of the methodology for studying centralization of the economy considers factors that focus on the bargaining ability of a centralized body and its influence on policymakers. Bargaining power and extra influence can be created by possession of an essential infrastructure, which reinforces pressure when any disruption of this infrastructure will be bad for the decision makers. However, there may also be connections that reinforce the power of a centralized entity over policymakers. Such connections lie in the regulatory capture interface, which includes the fixed and ongoing relations between the centralized entity and the decision makers, politicians, and bureaucrats (Rina & Meir Heth Center, 2019).

Worldwide influences on decision makers: Several scholars agree with the claim that globalization and neo-liberal ideas as well as

the theory of “new public management” (NPM) have been assimilated in Israel and created the foundation for changes and reforms in public administration (Ben-Bassat, 2001; Shalev, 2004). Globalization has spread since the last third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and can be seen in the expansion of international collaboration, the transfer of information between countries, and the ever-increasing technological accessibility of information. All these have shaped policy that is influenced by ideas taken from other countries (Friedman, 2005).

Other studies show that globalization has been adopted as an official policy by Israel, thus shaping a new style of policy—from collectivism to liberalism. There was no move from government centralization to the transfer of additional powers to public administration, but decentralization was in the direction of transfer to the private business sector, in other words, a move from public centralization to private centralization, since decisions made by the government derive from an outlook that serves wealthy interest groups (Ram, 2006; Mitchell & Munger, 1991).

Globalization led to the free movement of knowledge, as seen for example in various professional reports (including those on transportation) from international bodies, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, as well as the OECD and the UN. Reports of this kind are generally treated in academic research as reflecting the features of globalization that affect policy (Levi-Faur & Vigoda-Gadot, 2004). In their book, Pollitt & Bouckaert (2004) analyze the impact of decisions to make reforms in 15 different countries and identify a further influencing factor—the global economy—that has a dominant effect on policy shapers. They also stress the influences of political culture. Many studies show that reforms take place when several phenomena occur, together or separately: economic crisis, political crisis, global competition that opens a window of opportunity, or global socio-demographic change (Campbell, 2004).

Effects of political culture: In recent years, references to political culture have been marked by the new institutionalism theory, which assumes that institutions play an important and autonomous role in influencing political outcomes (Hacker, 2004; Person, 1996). Referring to different definitions of institutions, state, office holders, and more, the guiding principle is that government bodies and independent institutions influence society and are influenced by it, both formally and informally. This has a considerable impact on actor involvement, public policy shaping, government stability, reciprocal relationships, and the decision making process (Hazan, 1999; March & Olsen, 1984; North, 1990).

The theory on the role of institutions is not a uniform body of knowledge but a range of approaches that have developed over the last three decades. Here the focus is on two approaches that are relevant to the impact of the implementation of transportation reforms. The rational approach stresses the micro level, adopts a functional view of institutions, and highlights their role as a mechanism for creating or maintaining equilibrium. It assumes that the political and other actors involved in decision making processes act out of rational considerations in order to derive the maximum benefit for their personal interest. According to this approach, the importance of institutions lies in their ability to shape the conduct of the actors. It assumes that institutions operate according to laws that lay the foundation for connections between the actors and stress the centrality of the individual in the process of change (Hall & Taylor, 1996; Weimer, 2005; Streeck & Thelen, 2005).

In the sociological approach the basic assumption is that the institutional arrangements and customs accepted in the organizations of modern society are the result of cultural and social influences. The institutions that emerge are not built only on rational considerations of maximizing self-interest and effectiveness. Researchers in the

field focus on understanding the culture and norms in public political organization, and the arrangements that became established due to social and cultural influences. Followers of this approach argue that institutional change and reforms occur because they reinforce the social legitimacy of the organization or its members (Hall & Taylor, 1996).

Engaging in reforms is important and significant due to the need to adapt public systems and infrastructures to internal and external changes. Any reform is a kind of threat that intensifies fears of change and arouses opposition from people and institutions, for whom the status quo represents convenience and political power because of their control of resources and the influence derived from their status and intention to maintain their status.

### **Transportation Reforms Worldwide**

In view of the global effects on the need for transportation since the end of the 1970s, many countries have introduced extensive reforms. The most prominent change took place in England, where comprehensive reforms became a model for imitation elsewhere. After Margaret Thatcher came to power in 1979, the economic steps led by her government were support for liberalism and a free market economy, and the result was wide-ranging privatization of government corporations.

Privatization included two very significant elements in the world of transportation. One was a curb on the dominance of the unions and greater representation of the private sector. The second was the principle that was dubbed "the golden share," which left the state with a veto over decisions in some privatized companies (Harris, 2020; Evans, 2013). In the early 1980s, the Thatcher government fully privatized all the government's public transportation companies. With buses, the success was partial, and the government managed to improve its control with subsidy payments. In rail transportation, privatization was a complete failure (Larkin & Larkin, 1988). Thanks to globalization and

collaboration in European countries, the lessons from England were translated into more effective reforms in most of the European market.

What were the main changes of the 1980s? For buses, governments adopted the free market principle, and instead of public government corporations, most countries allowed private companies to enter the transportation market by defining operating regions, renouncing central management, and facilitating the establishment of metropolitan transportation administrations. The achievements were competition between companies, lower prices, improved service, and better control of subsidy payments (Thomas & Bertolini, 2020).

For rail transportation, the lesson learned from England was mainly to avoid the complete privatization of government companies, which in Europe were mostly monopolies, and move to tenders for concessions—BOT (Build, Operate, Transfer) and PPP (Public Private Partnership). For the public administration, this meant collaboration with the private sector, granting the right to execute an infrastructure project and operate it for a limited period (similar to the “golden share” component), after which it returned to the public administration. For example, in constructing an urban metro system, the company that wins the tender builds the system, operates it for about twenty years, and then returns it to the government. Indeed, most of the reforms currently underway include removing the monopoly of a government company and moving to privatization by means of tenders for concessions and establishment of metropolitan transportation administrations (Citroën, 2017; Drew & Ludewig, 2011; Thomas & Bertolini, 2020).

### ***Measuring the Success of Reforms***

Since transportation in Israel suffers from government and market failures, an attempt was made to locate markets and countries that demonstrated success factors. Two studies were chosen with a number of elements that contributed to the success of changes and

reforms in countries with features similar to Israel. The first was the study by Pollitt & Bouckaert that looks at changes in public administration in Western countries. The authors focus on the political system, the impact of socioeconomic forces, the administrative system, and the decision making process. In their research analysis, they emphasize the elements that led to successful reforms (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004).

In the second study, by Jeremy Drew and Johannes Ludewig, the emphasis is on reforms in transportation. They look at countries over a period of twenty years and create a professional database that indicates reforms in the field of urban public transportation, cargo trains, and intercity passenger trains (Drew & Ludewig, 2011).

Analysis of data from these two studies reveals an overlap in elements that contributed to improvements in public transportation and administration. Both reflect the impact of globalization and neo-liberalism as accelerators of reform. Analysis of the reforms highlights the link between reforms in public administration and success in the field of transportation. The common factors in the success of reforms are reduced bureaucracy, decentralized powers, privatization, review, and performance assessment. The studies describe successes in several countries; three countries will serve as representative examples (Table 1).

England—crisis in the 1970s, high inflation: From 1979 to 1990 the Thatcher government introduced a long series of reforms and significant institutional changes in public administration. The 2008 crisis struck England again and led to a whole range of reforms in the public sector, particularly the civil service, management, and the reduction of bureaucracy. All government offices underwent changes, mainly decentralization and the expansion of review systems, and the result was considerable improvement to operations (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004, pp. 313-321).

Public transportation in England has been rejuvenated in the last thirty years. A decade of reforms created a situation in which by 2003 the rail infrastructure had doubled in size, the number of passengers increased by 80 percent, and there was a rise in the number of people employed by the transportation industry. The principal reforms included broad privatization and delegation of powers from a national administration to local city administrations. The result was a considerable reduction in government costs and growth in state revenues from the export of transportation goods. Regulation also underwent changes, from a situation where the public administration was the only regulator, to a gradual move toward private regulation and decentralization of powers (Drew & Ludewig, 2011, pp. 89-99).

Italy is generally ranked low on all aspects of government efficiency, with a high level of instability and lack of governance. The civil service has four layers: state, region, province,

and municipality. Nevertheless, from the early 2000s numerous national reforms were introduced that have changed the face of public administration: reduction of costs, less political involvement in public administration, reliable management skills, innovative tools for manpower management, and performance review (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004, pp. 285-290). The reforms in transportation have changed the Italian railway, which was a monopoly. Reducing bureaucracy saw the number of employees fall from 220,000 to 87,000, and privatization processes occurred. Improved efficiency can be seen in the laying of a thousand kilometers of new tracks, operation of advanced fast trains, new mass transit systems in large cities, less use of private vehicles, and the move to efficient public transportation (Drew & Ludewig, 2011, pp. 103-110).

Sweden is a modern, egalitarian country with an open economy, although it accumulated a budget deficit that caused an economic crisis

**Table 1.** Transportation reforms, comparative review

<b>Pollitt &amp; Bouckaert: Success factors in public administration</b>	<b>Privatization</b>	<b>Decentralization</b>	<b>Reduction of bureaucracy</b>	<b>Performance assessment</b>	<b>Drew &amp; Ludewig on rail transportation-features of success</b>
<b>England</b>	Tenders for concessions Widespread	Municipal administrations Transfer of powers	One umbrella administration per project Comprehensive government mechanism	Private professional regulation Reinforcing review with private regulation	Significant increase in revenues, growth in passenger numbers, better service
<b>Italy</b>	Somewhat successful	Transfer of powers to regions	To some extent	Powers for government review	Comprehensive development of infrastructures, greater use, expansion of metro and mass transit, fast trains
<b>Sweden</b>	Done	Partial, now extended	Greater efficiency	National Review Office	Expansion of infrastructures, developed urban transportation, increased passenger numbers

at the end of the 1990s. At that time, new ideas about management reached Sweden, and the political system was open to implementing several reforms. Decentralization of powers to the regions and municipalities contributed to the modernization of budgeting systems, performance review and assessment systems were set up, and the National Audit Office was established as an important element of public administration. The direct results were reductions in bureaucracy and government expenditure (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004, pp. 305-312).

Until 1988 the railway was run as a government monopoly. Global influences led to changes in approaches and transportation policy, manifested by decentralization and the move to metropolitan transportation administration. Privatization opened the market to competition, leading to a huge increase in public transportation infrastructures, growth of 70 percent in passengers, and increased employment in the transportation industry, while municipal administrations developed mass transit systems for the large cities (Drew & Ludewig, 2011, pp. 115-124).

## Public Transportation in Israel

### *Historical Overview*

In the four decades following the establishment of the State of Israel, the issue of public transportation made little progress. Two bus company monopolies, Egged and Dan, were formed, while in rail transportation, the country made use of the infrastructure and equipment left behind by the British. The state lost control over subsidy payments to the bus monopolies, which operated with no proper oversight and regular price rises, although the service was lacking. Railroad service was limited and was used mainly for tourism purposes by young people rather than as public transportation (Braidburg, 2002; Daskal, 2023). Analysis by political science and public administration researchers found that Israel's deficient infrastructures were a function of the state

budget's overwhelming allocations to existential and security problems (Dror, 1992).

There is no dispute that the "stabilization plan" passed by the unity government in 1985 was highly successful in handling the economic crisis. It became the basis for extensive reforms in the economy and government ministries and corporation authorities, and enabled the transition to a free market economy (Ben-Bassat, 2001; Shefer, 2004; Maman & Rosenhek, 2007). Implementation of the stabilization plan created conditions that facilitated freeing transportation issues from many years of stagnation. Although global processes such as population growth, urbanization, globalization, and increasing use of private vehicles had not bypassed Israel, it was only in 1992 with the Rabin government that a process of transportation reform began, marked by a sharp change of approach. The first phase began when the Prime Minister identified the Histadrut labor federation as the interest group that was obstructing transportation development—in the eyes of the Histadrut, transportation reforms would harm the cooperatives, so it was in their interest to maintain the status quo and avoid competition. For its part, the railroad workers' union wanted to retain its power and therefore, with Histadrut support, preferred not to change the existing framework.

Rabin understood that implementing reforms required the removal of barriers, and he began dismantling some centers of Histadrut power (Gabbai, 2019). He appointed Histadrut Secretary Israel Keisar as his Minister of Transportation, which removed the main pressure group of the time, and thus opened the way to implementing different policies. Reforms that shaped new public policy in transportation were also adopted by subsequent governments. From the start, the direction was clear and in line with the measures that were successfully implemented in other countries. Among these:

- a. **Privatization:** The government passed resolutions to open the bus market to other companies (Prime Minister's Office, 1997).

Later resolutions dealt with the involvement of the private sector in developing mass transit systems in urban blocs (Prime Minister's Office, 2002).

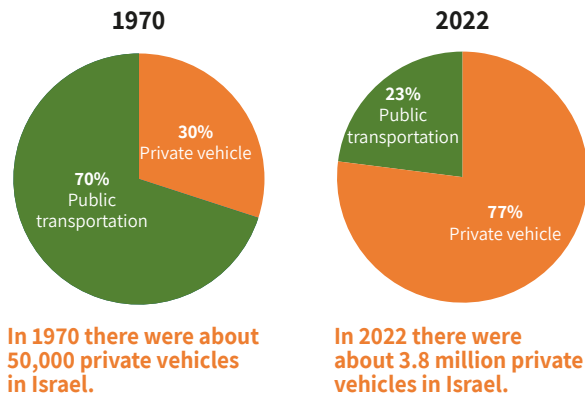
- b. Decentralization: It was decided to set up metropolitan transportation administrations (Prime Minister's Office, 3988).
- c. Reduced bureaucracy: Resolutions were passed to set up NTA (Metropolitan Mass Transfer System Ltd.) as the umbrella company responsible for mass transit in the central region and remove the Tel Aviv metropolitan administration. Similar resolutions were passed in Haifa and Jerusalem.
- d. Performance review and regulation: In this context nothing changed, and remains in the hands of the professionals in public administration.

As reforms developed, Ministry of Transportation budgets began to grow; the public also showed great interest in this public good and voted with their feet. The improvements in bus service led to increased usage; new infrastructures and modern railroad cars caused passenger journeys to rise from a few million to over 70 million journeys annually; and the light rail began to operate in Jerusalem. But with all this, there is still a wide gap between the correct decisions made by various governments and the actual processes of shaping and implementing policy.

**Current State of Public Transportation**

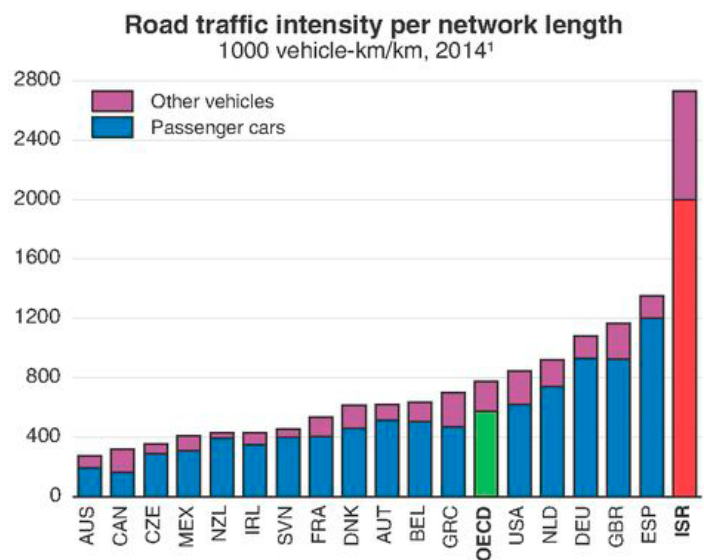
in 2023, some thirty years after reforms began, there is no mass transit system in any of the large urban blocs. Companies report a shortage of 5,000 bus drivers (Zagrizek, 2022). Most intercity rail journeys are overcrowded, there is a shortage of railroad cars, and the infrastructure does not reach the outer periphery (Amsterdamsky, 2023). Figure 5 reflects the situation of public transportation in Israel.

These figures suggest that most citizens are dissatisfied with the quality of the product provided by the government, very far from



**Figure 5. Use of private vehicles compared to public transportation**

Source: CBS



1. Or latest available year.  
 2. Percentage share of respondents that were satisfied or very satisfied.  
 Source: OECD (2015), Environment at a Glance 2015: OECD Indicators, Figure 2.11; CBS, 2015 Social Survey Table Generator, <http://surveys.cbs.gov.il/survey/surveyE.htm>.

**Figure 6. Congestion on Israel's roads**

Source: Ministry of Transportation and Ministry of Finance data, 2020

the DTD model. They found a substitute, and gradually through alternative politics<sup>2</sup> chose private vehicles instead of inconvenient and inefficient public transportation. The use of private vehicles is also encouraged by benefits that interest groups offer companies and individuals (such as leasing, easy loans). Moreover, when the government bans public transportation on the Sabbath, families feel compelled to buy cars in order to meet friends and family on the weekend. The public is apathetic about the problems of public

transportation, and there are no protests on the subject.

A factor that reflects public attitudes and is recognized as a widespread and important influence in a democratic society is the third sector. As of 2012, the number of third sector organizations registered with the Registrar of Associations in Israel amounted to 49,916 (Cohen & Mizrahi, 2017, p. 147), of which the number of associations working for more efficient public transportation is still in single digits, and their impact is therefore very slight.

Another result of the huge increase in private vehicles is expressed in a report published by the OECD in 2015 dealing with congestion on the roads in OECD countries. The key was the number of kilometers of road per 1000 vehicles. Figure 6 shows that Israel's roads are three times more congested than the OECD average. Since this survey was conducted in 2015, the situation has deteriorated, as every year the Israeli public purchases some 300,000 new cars, while the speed of developing new infrastructures cannot provide a proper response to this rate of increase (Aviram, 2017). The lack of infrastructure and congestion on the roads are the main causes of loss of life in road accidents and of air pollution. However, if

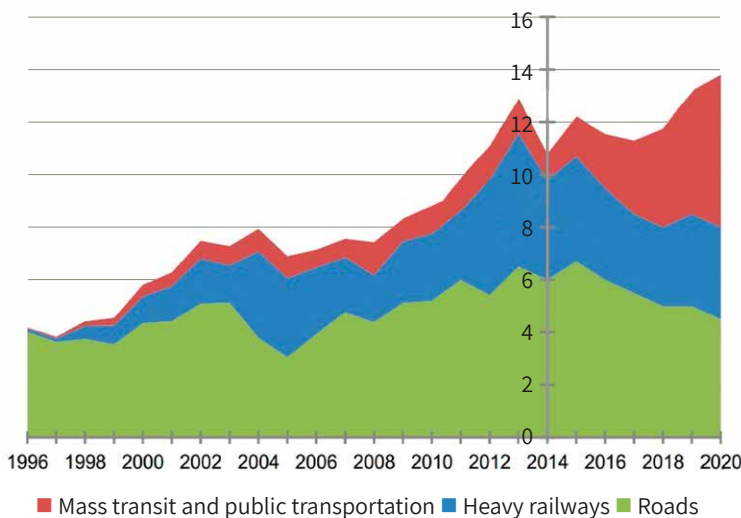
the country was serious about dealing with this congestion, it would encourage the use of public transportation and allocate suitable budgets. Yet as Figure 7 indicates, over the years, greater budgets have been allocated to build roads than those allocated to public transportation.

In other words, the preference has been to build roads, which are used mainly by private vehicles, while public transportation is of secondary priority. Until 2018, the budget for public transportation was NIS 5 billion and NIS 6 billion for road development. It was only in 2020 that public transportation received a higher budget than roads. This means that over the years, government budgets have provided significant resources for the benefit of private vehicles.

In an attempt to understand the gap between normative, professional, and correct decisions and the failures revealed by the empirical data, Daniel Maman and Zeev Rosenhek contend that global influences on Israeli actors such as reports from the World Bank, the IMF, and the OECD force decision makers to make reforms to bring Israel into line with other properly run countries (Maman & Rosenhek, 2008). Once decisions are made, however, regulatory capture, or if we expand the scope according to the theory of public choice, the personal interests of politicians and bureaucrats, lead to a policy of retaining the status quo and do not promote public interests.

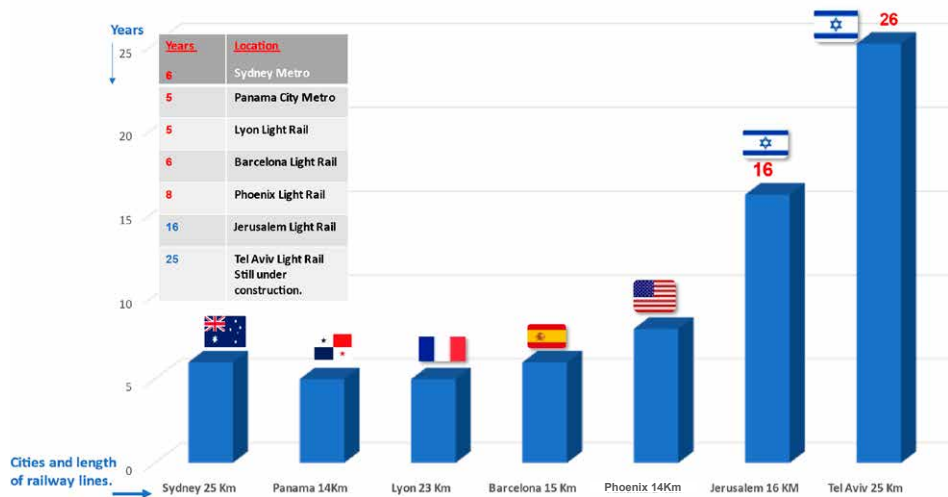
Interest groups worked hard to reach the status quo. The development of efficient and convenient public transportation affects the import of private vehicles, insurance companies, taxi owners, and leasing companies. The groups therefore provided benefits for politicians and employed numerous bureaucrats who left public service and obtained senior positions in companies forming interest groups (Zelekha, 2008).

In 2019 state revenues from taxes on private vehicles, license fees, excise duty on fuel, and usage equivalency amounted to NIS 41 billion (Ministry of Finance, 2019). This figure puts



**Figure 7. Investments in transportation infrastructures (NIS billions)**

Source: Ministry of Transportation and Ministry of Finance data, 2020.



**Figure 8.** International mass transit systems

Source: Data reported in the press and from [www.railwaygazette.com](http://www.railwaygazette.com)

the Ministry of Finance at the head of the interest groups opposed to elements that could limit this income, while the Budgets Division also encouraged the continuation of the status quo and did not rush to implement the reforms. The call at the central committee of the Likud and the announcement “we want jobs” reflected the socio-political culture that was part of the considerations of senior officials in the party (Vardi, 2002). Over the years ministers of transportation have found the Ministry a convenient launching pad for political appointments.

The assessment that it is possible to be appointed to an important position in the management of a national project without suitable training led to a substantial waste of public money. The lack of professionalism was reflected in the delays in completing important reforms in transportation, as shown by Figure 8.

One of the measures of success included in government decisions is the improvement in performance reviews. The most striking example of a lack of proper review is the Red Line of the Tel Aviv Light Rail. The tender was issued in 2001 and four large professional international companies submitted bids that included a schedule for completion of the work within five years, for a government budget of NIS 7

billion. Today, 28 years after the establishment of NTA, government costs up to the operation of the line in August 2023 total some NIS 20 billion (Daskal, 2022). In Jerusalem, although the Light Rail began to operate successfully in 2011, it was only after a tender concluded in 2021 that a company was selected to construct an additional line (Master Plan Team for Jerusalem Transportation, n.d.).

There is no doubt that these examples validate the claim that over the past decades interest groups are the winners, and the status quo serves them rather than the wider public. Bus services in Israel are regulated by the government. The Ministry of Transportation preferred to settle subsidies with a limited number of bus companies, and thus Egged and Dan emerged as monopolies. The government tried to deal with the problem in the absence of detailed information about passenger numbers, real costs, and demand. This weakened the government's bargaining power and in fact, it lost the ability to restrain rising costs. Lack of competition meant a considerable decline in standards. The market was only opened in 1997 when other bus companies were given licenses to operate in specific areas (Braidberg, 2002).

Even after so many years, Egged and Dan are still the largest companies in the privatized

Table 2. The “pendulum of reforms” effect on transportation in Israel

Event	First decision on change/ reform	Cancellation of the first decision	Revival of the first change decision
NTA – first light rail line – Red Line	2001 – establish NTA, tender for concession	2010 – winner nationalized, project transferred to NTA, government company	2019 – return to new tender for the following lines
Electrification of the railway	2005 – tender for work	2007 – tender canceled	2015 – new electrification tender
Tel Aviv-Jerusalem rail line	1998 – closure of old line, plan for new line	2001 – old line was renovated and reopened	2006 – work starts on the new line (Line A1)
Haifa mass transit system	2001 – light rail plan	2011 – tender for mass capacity buses	2019 – light rail tender, new Haifa-Nazareth line
Jerusalem light rail – Red Line	2001 – tender for 27-year operating concession	2018 – the state buys back the concession	2020 – concession is given to a new winning company
1973 – Government decision on Tel Aviv metro 1996 – feasibility study for the metro	Budget constraints – light rail instead of metro	Continued construction of light rail	2018 – return to the metro option in Greater Tel Aviv; decision not yet final

Source: Websites of the Ministry of Transportation, NTA, Israel Railways, Yeffe Nof, Transportation Master Plan

market, and the government has no control over subsidies. If Egged, which lacks over 1,000 drivers, can distribute a dividend of NIS 500 million in 2023 (Hazani, 2023), the clear conclusion is that there is no public administrative control of the subsidies that were intended to meet the basic needs of the general public.

Both the sociological approach, based on the new institutionalism theory, and Pollitt & Bouckaert stress that political culture has a significant influence on decision makers. In Israel, this influence is prominent and is reflected in decisions on public transportation.

The influence of the political culture in Israel is usually most obvious after the formation of a new government. In nearly all cases, when a minister is appointed, his/her first step is to appoint senior staff, which are often political appointments. Later, in public statements, some of the reforms that were advanced—often reforms initiated by ministers belonging to the same party—are canceled. This was recently

done by the Minister of Education (Ilan, 2023). A similar process occurred with the current Minister of Transportation and the metro plans.

Transportation infrastructure projects usually last several years. Since the establishment of the state there have been 32 ministers of transportation, in other words, the average term in office is less than two years, while 12 ministers served for less than a year. Nevertheless, many ministers, with a lack of professionalism and based on personal interests, have canceled or rejected reforms introduced by their predecessors. This lack of governance has created a “pendulum of reforms.” Table 2 gives examples of just a few of the events created by ministers over the years.

Not one of these examples shows any professional or budgetary reason for changing or canceling the reform that was outlined from the start by the professional echelon. Clearly, these processes extend the duration of implementation, increase costs, and are a direct cause of government failure. Academic

definitions of government failure also point to a lack of governance, over-centralization, and short-term planning. In fact, as an economic term that is also used in the analysis of public policy, it refers to the failure to achieve efficiency in a public good that the population needs (Weimer & Vining, 2011; Hirschman, 1982).

## Transportation and Links to National Security

Based on the experience of other countries, more efficient design of public transportation in Israel could help provide a response to two foreseeable problems in the field of national security:

- a. Protection of the civilian front: Due to rocket and missile attacks on Israel and intelligence about future nonconventional attacks, protection of the civilian front is a vital part of the security system. In an article on national resilience (2012), Maj. Gen. (res.) Eyal Eisenberg, former head of the Home Front Command, wrote that a third of the Israeli population lacks standard protection, particularly in the large urban areas. Metro stations in urban blocs could reduce this gap, as is the case in many cities worldwide. The first government resolution on constructing a metro system in Israel was passed in April 1973. The current Minister of Transportation is still delaying the Metro Act (Cohen, 2023).
- b. Troop movements by rail: In summarizing Operation Guardian of the Walls in Gaza (May 2021), which was accompanied by violent incidents in cities within Israel with mixed Jewish and Arab populations, security figures expressed concern over two logistical matters. One is the lack of drivers for tank carriers and buses to transport troops, when drivers from the Arab sector fail to report for their work in transportation companies. The second is the difficulty of driving along certain routes (e.g., Wadi Ara) because of demonstrations. This was extensively covered by the media (Yehoshua, 2021).

Rail transportation is a central building block of military logistics worldwide, as with the United States Army. If Israel had a more developed railroad infrastructure, the lessons of Guardian of the Walls would not have included logistical problems. One steam engine driver can take a whole armored battalion with all components, without the need for dozens of armored truck drivers and without causing traffic jams, which would overcome the problem of blocked roads. It is easier to supervise railroad tracks than roads, so it would be easier to locate attempts to damage the infrastructure.

Thus, public transportation infrastructures can help to save lives, improve the economy and social welfare, close social gaps, and contribute to Israel's security in general. Israeli public transportation is in dire need of improvements in order to cancel out market and government failures, caused by the harmful influences of the political culture and regulatory capture, in which interest groups play a not insignificant part. Significantly, there are countries that have succeeded in shaping and implementing changes and reforms, even the DTD model, using metrics that helped achieve success in wide-reaching reforms of public transportation. However, the question that remains is whether decision makers and politicians in Israel in previous decades chose to act contrary to the public interest with respect to the infrastructure for public transportation, and thus created a "march of folly" that in turn affects critical components of national security.

## The March of Folly in Israeli Public Transportation

In her book *The March of Folly* (1986), Barbara Tuchman examined a long list of historical events and defined three conditions that turn policy into folly:

- a. The negative results of a decision must be clearly visible in real time and not in retrospect.
- b. There must be an alternative course of action that could have been adopted.

- c. The policy is the policy of a group, not a sole ruler.

It is possible to test these parameters against public transportation in Israel. Regarding the first condition: Since the decisions regarding reforms in public transportation were taken, the Knesset has received 15 reports from the State Comptroller and dozens of reports from experts, while the Knesset has issued 12 reports in preparation for debates on transportation. In all these documents the emphasis is on the urgent need for efficient public transportation, the growing damage caused by private vehicles, and the benefits of public transportation.

Regarding the second condition, a potential alternative course of action: In every proposal for reform there was an alternative, which still exists. The average annual loss of life on the roads is known to the decision makers. While the balance in Israel has hardly changed, European countries have found alternatives and successfully reduced road accidents. A European target was set for 2023 to reduce the number of dead and injured by 50 percent. The Or Yarok (Green Light) organization found that Israel was in 29th place among 32 countries for the reduction of road accidents from 2001-2020 (Or Yarok, 2021).

The government transferred responsibility for fighting road accidents to the National Road Safety Authority. In 2005 the Authority's budget was NIS 550 million, and in 2021, NIS 73 million. Assaf Zagrzek wrote: "The slaughter on the roads never stops, but the state is drying up the National Road Safety Authority" (Zagrzek, 2021). In addition, although the rapid increase in the number of private vehicles bears the lion's share of responsibility, in 2010 then-Minister of Transportation Israel Katz referred proudly to the establishment of a committee to reduce the cost of purchasing new cars; its recommendations were accepted by the Knesset and came into force. This is contrary to global trends and the views of experts, who stress that policy should work in the direction of reducing private vehicle use (Huberman,

2010). Transportation Minister Miri Regev has issued a populist declaration that limits public transportation lanes and allows private vehicles to use them (Sadeh, 2023).

However, there are other alternatives, among them:

- a. Delegation of powers: Apart from the basic aim of increasing the number of companies and employees in professional offices, Israeli politicians and bureaucrats have been engaged in maintaining their centralized powers and opposing decentralization. However, decentralization is an alternative way to success. Dozens of countries that have set up municipal transportation administrations have experienced significant improvements in efficiency and quality. Decentralization is a principal component in the success of institutional changes and reforms in other countries. The government and the Knesset are aware of this, as shown in the special report prepared on this subject for discussion in committees, ending with a clear recommendation for municipal administrations (Ronen, 2009). In view of this and some media pressure, a government resolution was passed (Prime Minister's Office, 2011) to set up municipal transportation administrations.

For politicians, decentralization means granting some political autonomy to the cities, which in their assessment weakens their senior position, and they have therefore completely ignored government resolutions and State Comptroller reports. This was highly noticeable with then-Minister Katz, who saw NTA as a political asset, and during his ten years in office maintained centralization, ignored government resolutions and harsh reports from the State Comptroller, and stopped the establishment of transportation administrations in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem (State Comptroller, 2019). Even now there are no municipal transportation administrations in Israel.

The negative outcomes are highly evident, yet there is clearly an alternative.

- b. Performance review and measurement: The story of the Tel Aviv Light Rail's Red Line reflects how politicians relate to regulation and performance review. In brief, according to the NTA website, the decision to establish the NTA was passed in 1996, in order to conduct a survey for setting up a mass transit system in the country's center. In 1998 a partial budget of NIS 2 billion was approved, instead of the planned budget of NIS 7 billion. In 2001 a tender was issued, but the winner was only decided in 2007. In 2008, during the global financial crisis, the winner met with financial difficulties. The alternative way all over the world was to recognize the crisis as force majeure, thus making it easier to bridge the gaps. In Israel, the tender winner was nationalized and the concession was transferred to NTA, a government corporation. So instead of commercial operation of the line starting in 2012, it only began operations in August 2023. Meanwhile, the original budget of NIS 7 billion is now close to NIS 20 billion (Daskal, 2022).

Public sector performance measurement has existed since the start of modern public administration. It is intended to increase the responsibility and transparency of government actions, and elected politicians and professional grade managers can realize the "symbolic benefits" of creating the impression of a well-functioning government (Moynihan, 2008). The former director of the Companies Authority Ori Yogev describes in his book his review of the financial conduct of government companies and wrote: "NTA was one of the worst companies we managed, with conduct that reflected the emotional nature of the actions of his chairman and chief executives. They made threats, spread slander, and did everything to avoid reviews, mainly through the use of the media and failing to cooperate... Their conduct was backed by the Minister of Transportation, and all attempts to

suggest a change or practical alternatives for improvements and proper budget management were met with personal attacks on the critic" (Yogev, 2018, p. 180).

In spite of budget irregularities, no chief executive or board member of NTA was removed from his position on that account, and the board of directors was not dissolved due to management failure. Shlomo Mizrachi wrote that the approach to management, processes of defining policy, and assimilation between the two constitutes an interaction that leads to a policy of performance management—a concept that is bi-directional. On the one hand, there are ways in which policymakers can use performance to enrich management mechanisms. On the other hand, there are ways in which policy theories and methods can help to identify potential defects, and ways to plan and implement more effective performance management as a result (Mizrachi, 2017).

In the world of research and in business management practice, there are dozens of methods for planning and measuring performance. The data show that the public administration did not use any of the methods of review and regulation—not in Tel Aviv, not in Jerusalem, not in the bus sector. Thus, in spite of correct decisions for reforms and changes, politicians, bureaucrats, and interest groups managed to keep the status quo, and acted contrary to the national public interest in a way that also damages national security.

Regarding, the third condition, the issue of a group policy: In democratic Israel, changes, reforms, and policy design are done by ministers with the backing of government resolutions and the Knesset, so the basic condition for the march of folly are met.

The negative outcomes are familiar to decision makers, the available alternatives are known, and all this is happening in a democratic regime with the approval of the government and the Knesset. The public conduct shown by the handling of changes and reforms reflects an inefficient political culture, which mainly

serves individual interests instead of the public interest. All this and more contribute to a moral distortion in Israeli society, leading to the conclusion that the current situation is the result of a march of folly in the field of public transportation in Israel.

### Conclusion and Recommendations

A country's transportation affects human lives, environmental quality, the economy, national infrastructures, society, and security. Therefore, the public transportation system has implications for elements of national strength (economic and technological strength, social resilience, population dispersal, industrial and technological centers of gravity, military logistics, protection, and more). Since national strength is the ultimate resource to ensure national security, transportation clearly has an impact on security in the widest sense. A government that has a security-political cabinet should also set up a transportation cabinet to deal with the market and government failures

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**Since national strength is the ultimate resource to ensure national security, transportation clearly has an impact on security in the widest sense. A government that has a security-political cabinet should also set up a transportation cabinet to deal with the market and government failures in this field.**

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in this field, with thorough reference to the interfaces between transportation and national infrastructures, and the elements of national strength and their impact on national security.

If every meeting of the security cabinet included the subject of transportation, or separate meetings were arranged for the transportation cabinet, there would be an upgrade of the subject and the understanding of politicians, professional levels, the media, and the public, so that it would be possible

to bring together the resources necessary to overcome the market and government failings that currently impair national resilience.

Transportation is a complex field and requires a multi-disciplinary approach. The government must make decisions based on evidence (evidence-based policy) and make use of international knowledge and experience, which is now highly available.

The media, the third sector, and the general public must change their approach and serve as a factor that influences decisions on transportation policy, as well as demanding that the political system consider the national public interest and pass laws that promote public transportation.

The decisions of transportation engineers and experienced professionals who rose through the ranks of public transportation administration have direct influence on lives. Therefore, if the security and health systems would not consider appointing a general or a hospital department manager as an external political appointment, so too there is a need for a mechanism or law or procedure whereby qualified transportation engineers must not be replaced by unqualified political appointees.

The gatekeepers and elected officials must adopt legitimate ways of reducing the negative effects of the political culture in Israel and work to change it, while restraining interest groups, stopping extensive political appointments, and preventing the pendulum of changes and reforms. They must address immediately the implementation of reforms that were already decided on the matter of buses and mass transit systems, and of the government decision on establishing municipal transportation administrations. They must also restore without delay the budget of the National Road Safety Authority. All this is essential to reinforce elements of Israel's national strength in order to improve its national security.

Yossi Daskal is a doctoral student in Public Administration at Haifa University. He currently acts as a private consultant on transportation matters and is a member of several boards of directors. He is a founder of the Bombardier transportation company in Israel and managed it for two decades. [daskalyo@gmail.com](mailto:daskalyo@gmail.com)

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- Resolution 4329 of 26.10.2005: Authorizing NTA Ltd. to act on behalf of the state. <https://tinyurl.com/muwv9957>
- Resolution 1421 of 24.2.2010: Netivei Israel: Transportation plan to develop the Negev and Galilee, 5770-2010. <https://tinyurl.com/2a2wzm3n>
- Resolution 2569 of 12.12.2010: Usage of Tel Aviv Light Railway budgets. <https://tinyurl.com/225fz6vj>
- Resolution 3987 of 18.12.2011: Setting up mass transit systems. <https://tinyurl.com/4k7mh4mv>
- Resolution 1575 of 17.4.2014: Principles of the outline agreement between the Government and Israel Railways Ltd. <https://tinyurl.com/4k7mh4mv>
- Resolution 1838 of 11.8.2016: Multi-year investment program for the development of metropolitan public transportation. <https://tinyurl.com/34fw72zr>
- Resolution 1865 of 11.8.2016: Raising of bonds by Israel Railways Ltd. <https://tinyurl.com/mrwetsud>
- Resolution 3012 of 3.9.2017: Master plan for infrastructure development in Israel. <https://tinyurl.com/835wn5sk>
- Resolution 2558 of 24.3.2017: Transfer of Netivei Ayalon Ltd. to full state ownership. <https://tinyurl.com/4eanz5cx>
- Resolution 3426 of 11.1.2018: Setting up metropolitan transportation authorities. <https://tinyurl.com/4zw2dueh>
- Resolution 421 of 7.10.2020: Transfer of transportation projects from Yeffe Nof Ltd. to government corporations. <https://tinyurl.com/3un53bna>

## Appendix 2: Websites used for this paper

- UN research papers: <https://www.un.org/en/our-work/documents>
- Bank of Israel Research Division: [www.boi.org.il](http://www.boi.org.il) [in Hebrew].
- World Bank reports: <https://www.worldbank.org>
- Knesset Collected Laws: <https://main.knesset.gov.il/Activity/Legislation/Laws/> [in Hebrew].
- Railway Gazette International: [www.railwaygazette.com](http://www.railwaygazette.com)
- UITP: International Association of Public Transportation: [www.uitp.org](http://www.uitp.org)
- OECD research papers: <https://www.oecd.org/regional/>
- Israel Ministry of Transportation: [www.gov.il/he/departments/ministry\\_of\\_transportation\\_and\\_road\\_safety](http://www.gov.il/he/departments/ministry_of_transportation_and_road_safety) [in Hebrew].
- NTA: [www.nta.co.il](http://www.nta.co.il) [in Hebrew].
- Israel Railways: [www.rail.co.il](http://www.rail.co.il) [in Hebrew].
- Government Corporations Authority: [www.gov.il/he/departments/gca](http://www.gov.il/he/departments/gca) [in Hebrew].

## Further Reading

### Appendix 1. Government resolutions on the subject of transportation [in Hebrew]

- Resolution 2308 of 30.7.2002: Making Israel Railways a limited company. <https://tinyurl.com/5ah29x82>
- Resolution 2561 of 15.9.2004: Regulating the public transportation and railway industry. <https://tinyurl.com/bdfymzkt>
- Resolution 4329 of 26.10.2005: Authorizing NTA Ltd. to act on behalf of the state. <https://tinyurl.com/muwv9957>
- Resolution 1421 of 24.2.2010: Netivei Israel: Transportation plan to develop the Negev and Galilee, 5770-2010. <https://tinyurl.com/2a2wzm3n>
- Resolution 2569 of 12.12.2010: Usage of Tel Aviv Light Railway budgets. <https://tinyurl.com/225fz6vj>

## Notes

- 1 A public good is a product or service that justifies government funding and serves more than one entity—person or society—that benefits from it, and sometimes serves as a response to a social need (Leach, 2004, p. 5).
- 2 “Alternative politics” refers to the use by individuals and groups of informal institutions for the supply of public goods or government services.



# Putting the Revolutionary Guard on the EU List of Terrorist Organizations

Anat Shapira

Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) – Tel Aviv University

A singular convergence of circumstances increases the possibility that the United Kingdom and the European Union might consider designating the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps as a terrorist organization. Such a step would have considerable symbolic significance and practical implications for Iran's ability to carry out terrorist attacks in Europe and the UK, as well as for the ability of the EU and the UK to prevent such attacks. However, such a step also carries potential risks, chiefly, a harsh Iranian response that harms European and British interests. Israel should exploit the strategic opportunity that has emerged and encourage the EU and the UK to change their policy toward Iranian terrorism, while emphasizing the advantages inherent in such a step and presenting ways of coping with the associated risks.

*Keywords:* Iran, European Union, United Kingdom, Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Quds Force, terrorist organizations

## Introduction

The past year has seen increasing calls in Europe and the United Kingdom to designate the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) as a terrorist organization. This trend stems from a singular convergence of circumstances and events across the world, including Iran's [increasing involvement](#) in terrorist activities on European soil, as well as in [the UK](#). In addition, the organization is involved in encouraging [Islamic radicalization and domestic terrorism](#) in Europe. Among other reasons that could prompt a change in Europe's approach toward Iran are the Woman, Life, Freedom protests in Iran and the violent way that the Iranian authorities, using the Revolutionary Guard, suppressed them, as well as Iran's involvement and support of Russia in the Russia-Ukraine war, contrary

to European interests. Iran's longstanding support for Hamas and the charges of its involvement (to varying degrees, according to different reports) in Hamas's murderous attack on southern Israel on October 7, 2023 have also contributed to this trend. All these developments have created a certain change in the European approach toward Iran, and as a result, an increased willingness by the European Union and the UK to consider the possibility of placing the IRGC on the list of terrorist organizations.

As part of this increased willingness, in January 2023 the European Parliament voted overwhelmingly in favor of a decision calling on the EU to place the IRGC on the list of terrorist organizations. However, at a meeting in Brussels a few days after the vote, EU foreign ministers

chose to add specific names to the list of people sanctioned, [instead of adding the IRGC](#) to the list of terrorist organizations. Likewise, in January 2023, the British House of Commons voted unanimously in favor of a decision calling on the British government [to include the IRGC on the list of terrorist organizations](#). Even though this decision is not legally binding, it reflects the sentiment of UK citizens through their parliamentary representatives. Moreover, both the British Home Secretary and the British Defence Secretary expressed support for placing the IRGC on the list. In contrast, [it seems that the British Foreign Office opposes this step](#), both due to the fact that this is expected to negatively affect Iran-UK relations and due to its view that the current sanctions imposed on the IRGC are sufficient. In July 2023, the British Foreign Secretary announced that the UK would not designate the IRGC as a terrorist organization, and instead, [the criteria for imposing sanctions](#) on supporters of the organization and on companies that maintain relations with it were expanded.

Thus, there is potential for change in British and European policy toward the IRGC, although there are still many difficulties on the road to its realization. This article begins by presenting the Revolutionary Guard's involvement in terrorism. It then surveys the main ramifications expected from putting the IRGC on the list of terrorist organizations and the benefit inherent in this step for the fight against terrorism and prevention of terrorist activity. Next, it presents the main arguments and political considerations against this step. The article concludes with recommendations for Israel in the situation that has emerged.

## The Revolutionary Guard's Involvement in Terrorism

The Revolutionary Guard was [established in 1980 by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini](#) a short time after his arrival in Iran and the establishment of the Islamic Republic. Several objectives were defined for the organization, led by protection

of the revolution's ideology; maintenance of internal security in Iran; and prevention of a coup. In addition, the organization was intended to be a counterweight to the standing army, although it was tasked with operating in coordination and cooperation with it. It was also [entrusted with exporting the Iranian revolution to the world](#). In this sense, the organization serves as a protector of the revolution, and it sees its actions as aiming to fulfill this strategic objective while using a broad range of means, one of them being terrorism.

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**During the four decades since its establishment, and especially due to its important role in the Iran-Iraq War, the IRGC expanded in terms of both manpower and weapons, and today it is the main military organization in the country; it receives priority in resources and is responsible for all sensitive projects.**

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During the four decades since its establishment, and especially due to its important role in the Iran-Iraq War, the organization expanded in terms of both manpower and weapons, and today it is the main military organization in the country; it receives priority in resources and is responsible for all sensitive projects. The organization has many branches, including a navy, air force, and intelligence, as well as the Quds Force, which is the Iranian armed force for external affairs and what in practice maintains relations with armed organizations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, Gaza, and elsewhere. It provides them with training, weapons, money, and military advice. In addition, the organization is responsible for the Basij, a volunteer paramilitary organization that assists with law enforcement and with handling emergency situations, provides social services, and more. As a result, and in addition to its impact in the international and regional arenas, the Revolutionary Guard is [a central actor inside Iran, with much influence on political and](#)

cultural life, as well as considerable involvement and influence in the Iranian economy.

Even though terrorism is not the Revolutionary Guard's only or primary area of activity, the organization's involvement in terrorist activity is widespread. The organization operates against a wide variety of targets, including on European and British soil, in particular through the Quds Force. One main target is Iranian expatriates and those perceived as opponents of the regime. Inter alia, the organization is responsible for kidnappings, assassinations, and threats against Iranian activists and dual nationals. This policy has existed since the organization's beginning, and actions include the assassination of three Kurdish opponents of the regime and their translator at the Mykonos restaurant in Berlin in 1992, and the assassination of an Iranian opponent of the regime in Cyprus in 1989. Examples of such activities in recent years include the 2023 execution of British journalist Alireza Akbari, who was lured by the Revolutionary Guard to return to Iran and executed there under the accusation of espionage, and the 2021 and 2022 attempts to kidnap and assassinate the Iranian-American journalist Masih Alinejad. Another example lies in the reported November 2022 attempts to harm the Iranian opposition media channel Iran International; all these join a long series of other actions. These attempts to harm Iranian opposition figures have gathered momentum recently, partly against the backdrop of the internal tension in Iran and concerns of destabilization.

Another type of terrorist activity that the organization is involved in is "classic" terrorism perpetrated against those defined as enemies of the regime. In recent years, for example, the organization has been involved in terrorist attacks, especially in attempted attacks against Israel on several continents and in many countries, such as Cyprus, Turkey, India, Colombia, and more. Along with the attacks against Israel, there are also reports of IRGC

actions against American interests, such as the information the United States revealed regarding the organization's intentions of assassinating former National Security Advisor John Bolton, former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, and US Special Representative for Iran Brian Hook, who are now protected by the state due to these threats. The organization is also involved in acts of terrorism against Arab countries, as could be seen, for example, in the Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia in June 1996; the Iranian attempt to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to the United States in October 2011; the attack that the organization carried out in Sitra, Bahrain in 2015; and a long list of other incidents.

Alongside these two main channels of activity, the organization is involved in acts of maritime terrorism. In recent years there have been reports of Iranian actions against Israeli ships or ships connected to Israel, such as the attacks on the *Lori* and the *Helios Ray*, as well as the attack on the Zodiac shipping company's oil tanker, which was attacked by IRGC vessels and suicide drones.

In addition to the organization's direct involvement in terrorist activity, it supports a long list of terrorist organizations economically and operationally, including Hezbollah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Hamas, Kata'ib Hezbollah in Iraq, al-Ashtar Brigades in Bahrain, the Houthi rebels in Yemen, and additional terrorist organizations in Syria, the Persian Gulf, and the Sahel region. The organization also provides weapons to terrorist organizations, for example, drones to the Polisario in southern Algeria, and it provides assistance and undermines stability in regions such as Tigray and South Sudan. After Hamas's October 7 attack, there were reports in the international media that IRGC officers had collaborated with the organization since August 2023 in planning the attack. Even those who doubt direct Iranian involvement in planning the onslaught agree that Iran's longstanding support for Hamas, which includes armament, training, and economic support,

helped the organization perpetrate the attack. This joins the involvement in the fighting in the days and weeks after the attack by other Shiite organizations supported by Iran, such as the launching of cruise missiles by the Houthis in Yemen or attacks by Shiite militias in Iraq and Syria against American bases, which were carried out with Iranian direction.

The primary perpetrator of the IRGC terrorist activity is the Quds Force, which was established in the 1990s to create a systematic organizational framework for exporting the revolution outside of Iran, and in practice became Iran's main clandestine armed force operating outside of its borders. Quds Force is responsible for most of the terrorist attacks carried out throughout Europe (and worldwide), as well as for the connection with foreign terrorist organizations, but other parts of the IRGC are also involved in terrorist activity. These include the IRGC's intelligence organization, which was responsible for the attempted attack that was thwarted in Cyprus in June 2023. The IRGC navy is likewise involved in terrorist activity, although this is not its main area of activity, as is the IRGC cyber unit.

From the Iranian perspective, these activities are warranted by the need to rebuff threats to the Iranian regime and its stability, distance the campaign from Iran's borders, and so on. This is especially true of activity against Israeli and Jewish targets, which is perceived as a response to Israel's activities against Iran and as defending against it. Nevertheless, the tactics that Iran uses—and in particular given that these actions are usually aimed at non-combatants, such as tourists and businesspeople, rather than against military figures or those involved in military programs such as the nuclear program—makes them acts of terrorism, and this is therefore a reason to consider designation of the IRGC as a terrorist organization.

## The Ramifications of Including the IRGC on the List of Terrorist Organizations

Putting an organization on the list of terrorist organizations means **imposing restrictions and sanctions on the organization**, and restricting the ability of companies and other elements in those countries to maintain relations with the organization. Beyond the practical aspects of putting an organization on the list of terrorist organizations, this step has considerable symbolic significance, due to the inherent message in the negative labeling of organizations on the list, and is a reflection of the country seeing the organization as illegitimate. Aside from the United States' inclusion of the IRGC on its list of terrorist organizations and Canada's inclusion of Quds Force on the corresponding list in Canada, there is no precedent for such a step, in which a military body of a sovereign state is declared a terrorist organization. The unprecedented nature of this step heightens its symbolic impact.

Indeed, the symbolic implications of putting the IRGC on the list of terrorist organizations should not be taken lightly. This is a message to the Iranian authorities that Europe will not tolerate continued Iranian involvement in terrorism inside the UK and the EU, and that it blames Iran explicitly for this involvement. Since one of the motivations for terrorism, in particular while sometimes using foreign agents, stems from the possibility of denying state responsibility for these actions—and it is evident that Iran is operating at the current time as if it has nothing to lose from its continued involvement in and initiation of terrorism on European soil—this message is of great importance. This step also carries a message for Europe's allies, including the United States, Israel, and Gulf countries that suffer from Iranian terrorism, that not only does Europe take Iranian involvement in terrorism seriously, but it is also willing to take drastic steps in face of this involvement. Finally, there is a message here for other countries that support terrorism,

which emphasizes that state involvement in terrorism will not prevent inclusion on the list of terrorist organizations and will not serve as a cover for terrorism.

At the same time, putting the IRGC on the list of terrorist organizations in the European Union and the UK would be expected to have limited practical ramifications, as extensive economic sanctions are already imposed on the IRGC for various reasons. Perhaps a certain deterrent effect could emerge due to the comprehensive nature of the measure, which would discourage major companies and banks from doing business with bodies connected to the IRGC, but given that such an effect already exists because of the sanctions, the expected impact would be very minor. Thus, it would be unlikely for there to be extensive economic consequences of putting it on the list.

Nonetheless, there could be other practical consequences, primarily along two lines. First, in both the EU and the UK, the very fact of putting the organization on the list would make membership in the organization, support for it, and aid to its activities a criminal offense. While including the IRGC on the list of terrorist organizations in the United States has not led to the filing of charges based on this clause so far, and similarly it is unlikely that this would occur in Europe and the UK, the theoretical possibility of such prosecution could reduce support for the organization among local communities, at least overtly. Second, as a result of this criminalization, placing a body on the list of terrorist organizations enables the police and judicial bodies to adopt enhanced measures with respect to criminal issues—which could help thwart terrorist attacks in earlier, preparatory stages—and grants security forces powers that they previously could not use in this respect. Given the IRGC's increased activity in Europe in general and in the UK in particular, this possibility could have practical ramifications for the fight against terrorism.

## Considerations Against Adding the IRGC to the List of Terrorist Organizations

The most important consideration against adding the IRGC to the list concerns Iran's potential response. Iran could take a wide variety of steps that range from actions with military implications for the EU and the UK, such as designating European military bases in countries neighboring Iran as terrorist bases and hostile targets, to increased military actions against European targets, attacks on European citizens inside Iranian territory, and declarative steps. Following recent developments in the European Parliament and the UK, [threats were indeed made by Iranian officials](#) regarding such measures. In addition, there is the danger of harming European countries' ability to use political means vis-à-vis Iran, which would undermine their ability to serve as mediators between Iran and the West.

Given Iran's brazenness and its existing willingness to carry out acts of terrorism in Europe (directed mainly against Jewish and Israeli targets and Iranian opposition targets), and because of its willingness to use [European citizens arrested in Iran as bargaining chips](#), these concerns must not be taken lightly. Iran has a clear interest in maintaining good relations with the UK and the EU, in particular given the difficulties in its relations with the United States, so most of the overt steps that it would take would likely be of a more rhetorical and less practical nature, such as [declaring the US Central Command \(CENTCOM\) a terrorist organization](#) following the US decision to include the IRGC on the list of terrorist organizations. However, as these interests existed in recent years and did not prevent Iran from trying to carry out attacks against opposition targets and Jewish and Israeli targets in Europe and the UK, in the covert sphere Iran could strive to carry out more aggressive actions, such as the Iranian attempts to assassinate American officials. Consequently, there is concern that in response to adding the IRGC to the list of

terrorist organizations, Iran would increase its activity throughout Europe and maybe even expand it to activity against European targets, instead of limiting it to actions against Jewish and Israeli targets and opposition targets.

Europe's recourse to political measures vis-à-vis Iran is also important to the Iranian regime, which ultimately is not interested in escalation in its relations with the West, in particular while it is already coping with domestic difficulties and its internal stability is challenged. However, precisely because of these very difficulties and challenges, the Iranian regime needs a common enemy around which to unite the nation, and a European decision to put the IRGC on the list of terrorist organizations would provide it with such an opportunity.

Furthermore, terrorism is a relatively marginal portion of the organization's extensive activity. Ultimately the IRGC is in fact an official organ of the Iranian state and its main role is in the military sphere, along with political-economic issues in Iran, not terrorist activity. In this sense, some would argue that putting the IRGC on the list of terrorist organizations could undermine the distinction that exists between a terrorist organization and the actions of a state military force.

The weight of this argument depends on the way one interprets the significance of inclusion on the list of terrorist organizations. If inclusion means that the entire organization is a terrorist organization, then there is no doubt that many parts of the IRGC are not involved in terrorist activity, and even if their activities are problematic for other reasons, such as involvement in state subversion, political suppression, the operation of military-strategic systems, or involvement in crime and relations with criminal organizations, these activities cannot be defined as terrorism. On the other hand, if we see inclusion as a step indicating that the organization is involved in terrorist activity, even if this is not its sole purpose, then there is much evidence that there are

parts of the IRGC, especially the Quds Force, that are undeniably involved in terrorism. Indeed, organizations that engage in terrorist activity while also engaging in political and economic activity have been included on the list of terrorist organizations. Hamas, for example, which functions as the body that rules the Gaza Strip and undoubtedly has social, political, and economic functions alongside its involvement in terrorism, is recognized by both the [United States](#) and the [EU](#) as a terrorist organization. Hezbollah, which in addition to its activity as a terrorist organization also functions as an economic, social, educational, and political body in Lebanon, [was put on the list of terrorist organizations](#) by the United States, the UK, and many countries in the EU (including Germany, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, and Estonia), though not by the EU itself. Nevertheless, a non-state organization such as Hamas or Hezbollah is not the same as a central military organization of a state such as the IRGC, whose main missions do not involve terrorism, and thus the analogy is partial. One possible solution to this issue lies in the possibility of defining only the Quds Force as a terrorist organization and adding it to the list of terrorist organizations, as did Canada, for example. This step has not yet been taken by the UK and the EU, and it could be a suitable compromise that reflects both the Quds Force's considerable involvement in terrorism and the fact that this involvement does not represent the nature of the Revolutionary Guard.

Furthermore, it appears that it is Iran that is to blame for undermining the distinction between the (legitimate) actions of a state military force and terrorist activity, as it chooses to integrate both types of activity as part of its strategy for furthering its objectives. In this sense, labeling the IRGC a terrorist organization would send a clear message that a state body that purports to enjoy legitimacy for its actions to further the interests of the state that it belongs to must refrain from including terrorism in its toolbox.

Another argument against the IRGC designation notes that IRGC recruits are conscripted, so placing the IRGC on the list of terrorist organizations, and thereby imposing sanctions on the organization's members, [would significantly harm](#) people who did not choose this and is thus illegitimate. However, [some argue](#) that this argument is based on a mistaken understanding of the IRGC's recruitment process, in which most recruits choose to be there. Since 2010, more than 70 percent of IRGC recruits are active members of the Basij, and even if their enlistment in the Basij did not necessarily stem from ideological motivations but rather from motivations related to personal gain, it is still voluntary even if understandable, and therefore it can be said that for these recruits there is a dimension of choice in enlistment in the IRGC. The remaining 30 percent belong to two groups: one group comprises people with a Master's degree or doctorate, who complete their mandatory service by applying for bureaucratic positions in government ministries and various agencies, and have the possibility of requesting where to perform their service. Those who choose to perform their service in the IRGC can easily be identified via documents and documentation. The second category of IRGC recruits includes people who did not choose to be there, but they constitute at most one fifth of recruits. While it would be difficult to filter out this category and require a special level of investigation, this can be done on an individual basis. Finally, even if there is certain harm to "innocents" who did not choose to join the IRGC, this is not a reason in itself to refrain from placing the organization on the list of terrorist organizations, and this harm should be weighed against the benefit that placing the organization on the list would provide. The greater this benefit, the balance between it and harming some innocent Iranian citizens' ability to leave Iran and as a result to suffer personal sanctions is clearer. Putting the IRGC on the list has both symbolic and practical implications for the fight against terrorism and

preventing terrorist attacks. The more Iran's audacity in operating on European and British soil increases, the broader the implications of these consequences in balancing the benefits and harms.

Another argument against putting the IRGC on the list of terrorist organizations focuses on the consequences of this step for other military organizations. For example, a British organization warned that the UK putting the Revolutionary Guard on the list would undermine the British definition of terrorism and apply the law to the military forces of UK allies. A report that reached [The Independent](#) states that putting a state organization on the list of terrorist organizations such that the terrorism law would apply to it would be a deviation from the UK's consistent policy for decades and cast doubt on the definition of terrorism, which so far has proven practical and effective. Because in the wording of the British legislation there is no reference to the motivations or legitimacy of terrorism, it would be difficult to distinguish between the IRGC and legitimate state organizations. It is important to emphasize that this warning should also be heard in Israel, as such a decision could have [implications for the activity of military and intelligence bodies in Israel](#), which could find themselves accused of terrorist activity if the definition of the IRGC as a terrorist organization is accepted.

Even though it is impossible to completely dispel the concern expressed in this argument, [legal and formulaic solutions](#) can help distinguish the IRGC from legitimate state organizations. While the organization is an Iranian state military body, it does not behave as required of conventional militaries committed to the Geneva Conventions and international law, but is more similar in its behavior to non-state actors and extreme organizations that intentionally harm civilians and do not relate to the welfare of civilians—which is contrary to the laws of war. Therefore, it is easy to distinguish between it and legitimate state organizations. This might

require certain changes in the wording of the British law, but it appears that these changes are for the best, if this would enable distinguishing between terrorist organizations and legitimate state organizations more easily.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Recent global events and developments have reopened the argument in the EU and the UK on including the IRGC, or at least the Quds Force, on the list of terrorist organizations. It is evident that some elements in both the EU and the UK are frustrated at the brazen Iranian operations on their territory against opponents of the regime and against Jews and Israelis, and at Iranian support for Russia in its war in Ukraine, which seriously harms European interests.

A change in European and British policy suits Israel's interests. Recently Iran has enjoyed excessive confidence in promoting terrorism worldwide and in attempting to strike Jewish and Israeli targets. This confidence is the product of a variety of developments that have led Iran to presume that the international community will not take serious action against terrorist attacks, and therefore it can afford to continue to carry out attacks as long as it is not forced to pay a price. If the EU and the UK were to take an explicit stance on Iran's terrorism policy, this could change Iran's cost-benefit calculation and deter it, at least to a certain extent, from continuing to carry out these attacks. Furthermore, even if this step does not lead to deterring Iran, adding the IRGC to the list of terrorist organizations can have practical implications for the ability to prevent terrorist attacks on European and British soil. Consequently, Israel should strike while the iron is hot and try to maximize the circumstances and encourage Europe to change its policy.

However, policy generally involves two layers—the legal layer and the political layer. While most of the legal difficulties related to putting the IRGC on the list of terrorist organizations can be resolved and do not constitute a decisive argument against this step,

the political issue is undoubtedly a weighty one, especially the concern of the Iranian response. This concern leads many in Europe to argue that the relatively minor benefit of including the IRGC on the list of terrorist organizations does not justify the considerable risk inherent in the Iranian response.

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In response, it is important to emphasize to European officials that the practical consequences of this step, and thus its effectiveness, can be expanded by fully realizing the potential of designating the IRGC and maximizing the possibility of criminalizing membership in and support for the organization. In addition, the symbolic significance of this step should not be dismissed. Iran is currently acting out of a sense of immunity and permits itself to promote terrorism on European and UK soil. Continued silence in response to this activity and ignoring the increasing Iranian brazenness toward Europe, reflected in its policy toward the Russia-Ukraine war and the worsening of the IRGC's conduct toward the Iranian public, could lead to an increase in Iranian terrorism in Europe and increased aid to Russia. Hamas's attack on southern Israel, which was carried out with at least the support and assistance of Iran, if not with Iranian direction, is a clear warning sign regarding the dangers of Iranian international terrorism. Therefore, it should be underscored that a change in European policy is needed that will make it clear to Iran that there is a price to pay for its current conduct, and this price must be high enough to upset the Iranian regime's cost-benefit calculations.

Putting the Revolutionary Guard on the list of terrorist organizations could be the needed

change, but given the limited benefit of this step, and the understandable European concerns about the Iranian response to this step, it is worth presenting the Europeans with other possibilities. One possibility is taking a more limited step, such as adding only the Quds Force to the list of terrorist organizations. This step has fewer advantages both on the practical level and on the symbolic level, precisely due to its curtailed applicability. However, such a step is easier to justify, as terrorism is indeed a main and central component of Quds Force activity. Additionally, and more importantly, it is not expected to lead to as serious an Iranian response as would adding the entire Revolutionary Guard to the list of terrorist

organizations, because unlike the organization, which has considerable influence on decision making processes in Iran and is seen as a body that represents the Iranian regime, the Quds Force is a much more limited body, and it is unlikely that harming it would lead the regime to rock the boat.

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Anat Shapira is a Neubauer Research Associate at the Terrorism and Low Intensity Conflict Program at the Institute for National Security Studies, and a doctoral candidate in the Philosophy Department at Tel Aviv University. [anatgelber@gmail.com](mailto:anatgelber@gmail.com)



# The “New” Saudi Arabia: Hedging and Detente in Saudi Foreign Policy

Yoel Guzansky and Ilan Zalayat

Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) – Tel Aviv University

The diplomatic moves that Saudi Arabia has pursued since 2020 are a complete reversal of its policies since 2015, when Mohammed bin Salman began his meteoric rise. Bin Salman is laying the groundwork for his ascent to the throne and is interested in gathering the Arab world around him and playing a more significant role on the global stage. He strives to lead an independent Saudi line through strategic hedging and a return to the kingdom’s traditional tools of influence—financing and brokerage—while abandoning failed efforts to change the regional situation using force. This Saudi strategy, accompanied by the kingdom’s own sense of its value, reflects internal, regional, and global logic that has a distinct impact on Israeli interests, including in the war in Gaza.

*Keywords:* Saudi Arabia, strategic hedging, detente, normalization, Iran, United States, Israel

## Bin Salman and Regional Detente

In May 2017, just before Mohammed bin Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud was declared Crown Prince and acting leader of Saudi Arabia, it appeared that winds of war were blowing from Riyadh. Bin Salman [announced](#) that Saudi Arabia was Iran’s principal target and said, “We know that the aim of the Iranian regime is to reach the focal point of Muslims (Mecca) and we will not wait until the fight is inside Saudi Arabia and we will work so that the battle is on their side, inside Iran, not in Saudi Arabia.” Some months later, bin Salman even [called](#) Iran’s Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei “a new Hitler,” and promised he would not be allowed to do to the region what Hitler did to Europe. Yet five years later, in [a March 2022 interview](#), his words reflected a completely different strategy toward Iran: “They are neighbors. Neighbors forever. We cannot get rid of them, and they

get rid of us,” adding, “It’s better for both of us to work it out and to look for ways in which we can co-exist.”

This new outlook underlies the agreement between Saudi Arabia and Iran on the resumption of diplomatic relations, brokered by China and signed in March 2023, and it reflects a conceptual change in Riyadh’s foreign policy—a change that goes far beyond the Iranian issue. Whereas in the first three years of his de facto leadership many of bin Salman’s actions could be characterized as “rash and foolhardy” (notably, the failed war in Yemen, the strange “kidnapping” of former Lebanese Prime Minister Sa’ad al-Hariri, the Gulf boycott of Qatar, and the widely reported killing of regime opponent Jamal Khashoggi), the Crown Prince is gradually adopting a more restrained approach, focusing on the kingdom’s internal issues. He has realized that in addition

to the primary objective he inherited from his predecessors—blocking Iran and its so-called regional “Shiite crescent”—Saudi Arabia must adapt to new challenges: the Middle East’s lower position on the United States list of priorities; the need to reinforce governance, cohesion, and prosperity at home, in order to prepare for the transfer of the crown; and preparations for the post-oil era.

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**At present, Saudi Arabia prefers diplomacy over armed conflict so that it can focus on socioeconomic modernization and attract vital investment, and for that purpose it needs stability.**

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At present, Saudi Arabia prefers diplomacy over armed conflict so that it can focus on socioeconomic modernization and attract vital investment, and for that purpose it needs stability. Bin Salman has not abandoned his inclination to embark with determination and even some impulsiveness on would-be regional exploits, dragging other countries with him, only now it is not toward wars and boycotts, but to regional reconciliation arrangements that until recently appeared unimaginable. The kingdom, together with the United Arab Emirates, has ended a decade of direct and indirect fighting on various fronts following the regional upheaval of the so-called Arab Spring, out of the belief that the immediate threats to the Royal House arising from that upheaval have subsided and at this stage can be contained. The regional moves led by the Crown Prince do not signify reconciliation but detente, i.e., an easing of more superficial tensions with no resolution of the deeper problems, which may well erupt in the future. At present, there is a desire to sweep them under the rug for several reasons:

- At the domestic level: The kingdom is interested in curbing conflicts, some of which it itself fomented, and achieving a situation of zero problems in its foreign relations so that it can turn its attention to internal matters.

Since it is currently enjoying relatively high oil prices, it is focusing on national projects, some of a megalomaniac nature, aiming for the economic diversity required by Vision 2030. The political level and the individual level are one and the same in this case, as bin Salman is a type of centralizing ruler the kingdom has not experienced since the days of its founder, ibn Saud.

- At the regional level: Saudi Arabia seeks closer relations with Iran, perhaps heeding the advice to “keep your enemies close,” understanding Tehran’s superior power, and recognizing that the attempt to block its nuclear ambitions by diplomatic means has run its course. It is noteworthy that shortly after the Israeli-Gaza War erupted in October 2023, bin Salman held a first-ever phone call with Iran’s President Ebrahim Raisi (who also participated in a joint Arab League and OIC summit in Saudi Arabia on the war), and presumably seeks to distance the kingdom as much as possible from the regional crisis.
- At the global level: The dwindling American attention to the security problems of Saudi Arabia, its traditional ally, has led Riyadh to understand that it cannot allow itself to continue pursuing the political and military escapades of the previous decade and improvement of its strategic situation also depends on this.

### **Perceptions of the Changing Role of the United States**

It is impossible to understand Saudi Arabia’s new regional posture, particularly the renewal of relations with Iran, without taking into account the regional adjustment to the gradual shift toward a multi-polar global system, with a number of powers competing for global hegemony. The Western barrier isolating bin Salman was breached even before the war in Ukraine in early 2022 and was finally shattered when the war demonstrated Saudi Arabia’s weight in the global energy economy, thus intensifying the courtship of bin Salman. Bin

Salman’s decision to reject the United States request to increase oil production due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in July 2022 (even after a visit by President Joe Biden that marked the end of the rift over Jamal Khashoggi’s murder in 2018) reflected a change of strategic policy in the kingdom. In a search for a different balance of relations, Riyadh now examines its position on each and every issue, giving priority to its own interests.

Even if Riyadh hopes for the return of Donald Trump in the 2024 presidential elections, the new Saudi policy toward the United States does not depend on the president or the administration but, rather, on the assumption that the strength of the United States has declined and that it is no longer committed to the defense of the kingdom. The watershed was the serious Iranian attack in September 2019 on Aramco facilities in eastern Saudi Arabia with drones and cruise missiles. This attack, which temporarily [disrupted](#) about half the kingdom’s oil production capacity, was a wake-up call for Riyadh over its vulnerability in the face of Iran, particularly regarding what Riyadh sees as its “abandonment” by the United States, which did not provide military assistance. All this sharpened Saudi understanding of the need to diversify its sources of support at the global level and hedge its risks at the regional level with respect to Iran, its main rival.

Where the United States exits, China steps in: as a superpower without significant sources of energy of its own, China depends on oil imported from Saudi Arabia and has already overtaken the US as Riyadh’s biggest trading partner. Bin Salman knows that during the long years of monarchy that awaits him, the US is likely to lose the lead in other ways in favor of Beijing, and he wants to get the most out of the Chinese presence in the Middle East and position Saudi Arabia as China’s preferred regional partner. Beijing’s sponsorship of the Saudi-Iranian reconciliation agreement in March 2023 (even if its real role in the process was relatively marginal) gave China its first

significant diplomatic foothold in the region. Therefore, it was likely one of the factors that pushed the United States to engage in the normalization talks with Riyadh later that year, negotiating for the first time returns as a defense pact and nuclear program.

Diversification of its sources of support is vital for Riyadh, in spite of the risks and the costs, to avoid finding itself on the losing side in a multipolar system. Sitting on the fence during the war in Ukraine was a prominent but not sole example of its long term policy as an independent actor maneuvering between the powers. In the same way, in 2022, Riyadh played the role of broker in the prisoner exchanges between Russia and Ukraine and also helped to release the American basketball player Brittney Griner from Russian imprisonment. By its determined refusal to stand fully with the West on the war in Ukraine, Saudi Arabia is winking to the Arab world and the whole Global South, which are alienated from the West and not enthusiastic about supporting its coalition against Moscow; at the same time, however, the kingdom is careful to clarify at every opportunity that it is not in Putin’s pocket. This can be seen, inter alia, in the invitation to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to the Arab League Summit hosted by Saudi Arabia in May 2023 and to the summit conference on the subject of the war in Ukraine that it hosted in August 2023.

The Saudi “disengagement” from US hegemony comes while Riyadh remains deeply dependent on the United States for its security needs. The Saudi Royal House understands that neither China nor Russia is able or interested in replacing the US as a security supplier for Saudi Arabia in the foreseeable future. With this in mind, Saudi moves toward China represent an attempt to create leverage to pressure the US to maintain its interests and assets in the region. At the same time that bin Salman is openly demonstrating his “independence,” he seeks to obtain advanced weapons and security guarantees as well as collaboration on the

subject of civilian nuclear energy. In September 2023, he openly announced in an interview that Saudi Arabia is ready to normalize ties with Israel if its security demands will be fulfilled.

## Regional Diplomacy

Another feature of the emerging Saudi foreign policy, which can also be seen in light of the changes in the global balance of power, is assumption of a position representing a regional diplomatic force. The Saudi Crown Prince and acting ruler no longer conceals his ambition to lead the Arab world; he looks around him with a sense of superiority and at times contempt for the countries that formerly led the Arab world, such as Egypt, which are now experiencing prolonged conflicts and even state failure.

Bin Salman wants to exploit the fact that his kingdom is the world's largest exporter of oil and home of Islam's holiest sites. This gives it enormous influence over a billion and a half Muslims and the global economy and enables it to shape a new system of relations, not only at the global level but also with the countries of the region. The regional center of gravity has moved—and with growing momentum since the Arab Spring in 2011—to the Gulf states, not only in economic and political terms but also gradually in sports, science, and culture. This places bin Salman in serious political and economic competition with Saudi Arabia's neighbors in the Gulf.

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So it is no accident that among the countries that participated in the regional boycott of Qatar, Saudi Arabia is leading the process of reconciliation with Doha and was the first to renew diplomatic relations. Moreover, since it is

not clear to what extent Riyadh achieved its far-reaching demands at the start of the boycott, it is keen to reshape the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and regain its position as its dominant and most active force, compared to the United Arab Emirates, which was more hesitant over the process (and only recently, two and a half years after the reconciliation agreement was signed at the al-'Ula Summit, renewed relations with Qatar), and sees itself as competing with Saudi Arabia in the field of economics as well as politics.

Similarly, Saudi Arabia, which at the start of the civil war in Syria in 2011 was the most resolute Arab opponent of the regime of President Bashar al-Assad, not only renewed diplomatic relations with Damascus in April 2023, under Russian sponsorship, but also enthusiastically led the move to readmit Syria into the Arab League, confirming the normalization of Assad in the region. The reconciliation with Iran helped bring Saudi-Syrian normalization closer, but the closer ties with Assad can also be seen as another step in the Saudi efforts to play a central role in the Middle East's "era of agreements." Moreover, it reflects how Riyadh's approach of diversifying reliance on the powers influences its regional policy. Saudi Arabia evinced blatant disregard of US opposition to the normalization of Assad and was willing to discuss economic cooperation with the Syrian tyrant in breach of the US sanctions. In effect, Saudi Arabia's longstanding policy of seeking its protection in the shadow of the United States, which was conditional on opposing US rivals in the region, is giving way to a more delicate balance between the regional actors, some of them in the camp that opposes the United States. Regarding Syria, the move carries a simple message: if the US is not prepared to take action and propose an alternative to the Assad regime, then Saudi Arabia will do as it sees fit in the service of its own interests.

At first glance, Saudi Arabia's diplomatic moves in recent years look like surrender and a retreat from its political ambitions in favor of

a focus on internal challenges. But to a large extent, this diplomatic activity also reflects Saudi confidence in its own immunity, in view of changes in the regional architecture at the start of the current decade. A range of Saudi moves involving regional actors are positioning the country as an assertive and leading force in the Middle East.

- Yemen: The surprising success of the ceasefire in the war between the Houthi rebels in Yemen and the coalition led by Saudi Arabia, which has lasted since April 2022 and stopped Houthi fire into Saudi territory completely, can be attributed inter alia to bin Salman’s diplomatic flexibility. After it failed to quash the Houthis militarily, Riyadh understood that it must recognize that it will remain a fighting force beyond its southern border and that it cannot continue realizing Vision 2030 when its strategic facilities are exposed to repeated attacks from Yemen. The kingdom, therefore, turned to negotiations with the Houthis, brokered by Oman, in which it de facto recognized the Shiite movement’s control of large parts of Yemen, including the port city of al-Hudaydah on the Red Sea coast, in the hope of weakening Houthi ties with Iran, which had grown closer after the start of the Saudi campaign in Yemen in 2015. Nevertheless, the Houthi drones and missile fire toward Israel in retaliation for its operation in Gaza in October 2023, some of which were intercepted above and by Saudi Arabia, proved that Iran retained the Houthis in their regional axis and were able to utilize them also out of context in the Yemen War. A deadly border fight between the Saudis and the Yemeni militia in parallel signifies the risk posed to the ceasefire, whose survival could be a decisive factor in the success of the Saudi-Iranian reconciliation agreement.
- Syria: Saudi determination to normalize relations with the Assad regime, notwithstanding reservations in the Arab world, is linked to Riyadh’s desire to **block** the spread of Captagon—a cheap stimulant

drug flooding the Gulf states that became the focus of Syrian production and distribution after the war. Moreover, Saudi Arabia has its eye on the extensive economic opportunities offered by Syrian reconstruction, in view of the current economic restrictions on Assad’s two patrons—Russia, which is bogged down in war, and Iran, which is under sanctions—that had hoped to sweep up these profits for themselves. There is a chance that the Saudi-Iranian rivalry will move to the economic arena in Syria. Perhaps more than anything, the Saudis are not prepared to leave these potential profits for the UAE, which preceded them in resuming relations with Damascus.

- Hamas: In April and June 2023, the Hamas leadership visited Saudi Arabia with a pilgrimage to the holy sites of Islam, indicating an approaching thaw in relations that **were tense** in recent years, including the arrest of dozens of Hamas activists in the kingdom. This thaw, which included the release of Hamas prisoners, shows a decline in Saudi fears not only of Iran, which is close to Hamas, but also of the threat posed by the Muslim Brotherhood and the regional movements identified with it, such as Hamas. Saudi antagonism to the political Islam stream represented by the Muslim Brotherhood was the main engine driving Riyadh’s foreign policy in the previous decade, and more than anything, the resumption of relations with Qatar in 2021 symbolized its abatement. At the same time, the muted Saudi reaction to Israel’s war against Hamas in 2023, which aimed to obliterate the organization’s rule in Gaza, together with harshly condemning its attack on Israel via the Saudi-controlled media, attests to Riyadh’s wish to see Hamas out of power.
- Turkey: Also successful was the detente led by bin Salman with Turkey, following tense (although not officially severed) Saudi-Turkish relations in recent years, linked to the identification of President Erdogan and his ruling party with the Muslim Brotherhood,

and in view of the fact that Ankara sent a lifeline to Qatar during the Gulf boycott. The Gulf reconciliation with Qatar in 2021, the decline in Saudi fears of the regional force of the Muslim Brotherhood, and Turkey's financial distress contributed to the end of the tension and culminated in a meeting between bin Salman and Erdogan in Ankara in January 2022. That meeting led to an official deal in which the Turkish court decided to shelve the Khashoggi murder trial on Turkish soil and leave the legal decision to Saudi Arabia, and in return, Riyadh began to grant Turkey economic aid.

- **Egypt:** Egypt's stability depends to a great extent on the generosity of Gulf state leaders, who now wish to make it clear to Cairo who sets the tone in the region. Saudi Arabia displayed a significant commitment to aid the regime of President Abdel Fatah el-Sisi after he deposed the rule of the Muslim Brotherhood in 2013, and in the subsequent decade, invested billions of dollars in maintaining its stability in the face of Egypt's economic distress. The assistance was rooted in the concern that the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt would encourage its allies and the forces of political Islam in the Gulf and the region as a whole. The proximity of the giant futuristic city Neom and tourist ventures planned by Saudi Arabia for the Red Sea coast was intended to help Egypt by creating many jobs for the unemployed population. Therefore, the announcement by Saudi Finance Minister Mohammed al-Jadaan that from now on, the continuation of Saudi financial aid to Arab countries will be conditional on certain economic reforms is partly due to dissatisfaction with el-Sisi's financial management and the desire to seize leadership positions in the Arab space, apparently at Egypt's expense.
- **Sudan:** The resumption of internal fighting in Sudan in April 2023 gave Saudi Arabia an opportunity to prove its regional diplomatic influence. Thanks to the ties formed in recent

years with the two hawkish forces in Sudan (in competition with the UAE for influence in this arena), the Saudis took it upon themselves to host and lead the efforts to broker peace in Sudan, alongside the United States as a secondary partner. Saudi Arabia has a direct interest in stability in Sudan, in view of its proximity to the African state (particularly for the Red Sea Project, the jewel in the crown of the burgeoning Saudi tourism industry, embodying great hopes).

- **Israel:** The Saudis froze the normalization process with Israel shortly after the Gaza War erupted in October 2023, yet the United States has sent a clear signal that Riyadh is ready to pick it up when the crisis is over. A month before that war, bin Salman expressed optimism about nearing a peace agreement with Israel. He already crossed the Rubicon in March 2022, when announcing that Israel is "a potential ally, not an enemy." Although Riyadh officially clings to the formulation of the Arab Peace Initiative, which conditions the normalization on a settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, it appears that significant benefits from the United States will be possible under certain conditions even without a full political settlement of the conflict. In September 2023 bin Salman reduced the demand from Israel to an ambiguous "improvement of the Palestinian life." Yet bin Salman will still have to show the Saudis, and the entire Arab and Muslim world, some concrete reward from Israel in the Palestinian context. Moreover, the war in Gaza, which has restored the Palestinian issue to center stage, only strengthens this need and is likely to increase the Palestinian factor in the deal, demanded by both Riyadh and Washington.

### Possible Challenges

While the Saudi Crown Prince is forging ahead with a new foreign policy for the kingdom, many challenges remain. Internally, there are still those who are not satisfied with bin Salman's

rule and can challenge him, either due to his openness or because he has jailed, banished, or disinherited members of the royal family and the veteran oligarchy that stood in his way.

In the regional arena, bin Salaman has begun healing wounds and putting out fires, some of which were largely of his own making. His desire to lead the Arab world will confront opposition from leaders of countries that were formerly more prominent in the Arab world, such as Egypt, but also and perhaps principally from his partners-competitors in the Arabian Gulf.

In the global arena, there is unresolved baggage with the United States. Not only on the subject of human rights is Riyadh not prepared to accept dictates from the US, but in his refusal to increase oil production, bin Salman also demonstrated his confidence that he can flout Washington without being penalized. However, this was a calculated gamble, and President Biden’s [decision](#) not to “punish” bin Salman in this case will not necessarily be repeated in the future. With a different administration or in different circumstances, the response to Riyadh’s growing independence could be more severe.

## Significance for Israel

Saudi Arabia wishes to return to its position as a leader of the region, gathering the Arab world around it and using its traditional tools of influence—financing and brokerage—while abandoning failed attempts to change the regional situation by means of force. Israel must think about how it can adapt to these developments, which create new dynamics and balances of power in the region and a situation of zero conflicts in foreign policy. It appears that the new Saudi strategy, to the outside at least, no longer sees the Middle East as a zero sum game. This is a central piece in a changing regional puzzle in which most actors, Arabs and others, seek closeness to their rivals while hedging the risks. Therefore, in certain conditions, Israel can also find a place in the new order, since in the eyes of Riyadh, there

is nothing to prevent it from maintaining ties with both Iran and Israel simultaneously if the circumstances suit it.

On the one hand, the “tactical” rapprochement of Gulf states with Iran could lead to stronger pressure on its part and a demand to refrain from warmer relations with Israel. Iran has publicly expressed its opposition to the Abraham Accords and is trying to drive a wedge between its Arab neighbors and Israel. Now that Iran is gaining greater political leverage over the Gulf states, it could adversely affect the public dimension of their relations with Israel. The settlement with the Houthis in Yemen could also cause Riyadh to feel more confident, and thus have less need for aid from Israel. On the other hand, the Gulf states are hedging their risks and seeking to maintain proper relations with all sides as a way of maximizing their interests and keeping their options open. It would not be reasonable for them to upset their quiet security relations with Israel since Iran was and remains the main threat to them, and in this context, Israel is perceived as an asset.

Thus the regional detente led by Saudi Arabia, which will probably be extended to other regions, does not only herald bad news. Overall, it should not put an end to Israeli-Saudi normalization. In fact, if Iran is interested in maintaining improved relations with its neighbors, this could also curb its options for actions such as sending its proxies to attack them. The return of Syria to the fold of Arab countries could also, in the long run, harm Iran’s status in Syria, certainly in commercial and economic terms.

Mohammed bin Salman is currently in the second stage of his rule. The first stage was characterized by his meteoric rise and by his various internal and external moves, some of which damaged the kingdom’s status. Now he wishes to put all that behind him and continue the revolution he initiated with the intention of engineering a new Saudi Arabia, more concentrated in government terms, more open in social and religious terms, and more

a country seeking to wean itself off reliance on oil. Has he learned from his mistakes? It is not clear. Moreover, Saudi interests remain as before, but bin Salman has started to adopt new methods—more diplomacy and economics, less force—to promote his regional objectives, largely because of the changing circumstances and, above all, the changing role of the United States in the region.

Israel has no deep familiarity with the internal processes in the kingdom, and it certainly cannot influence them. However, it has some influence in Washington, which it has used in the past to soften some of the criticism of bin Salman. The future king of Saudi Arabia has presented it with challenges, including the demands with negative potential to acquire advanced arms and establish a nuclear program, but also opportunities, first and foremost the possibility of a more pragmatic view of ties with Israel and normalization, in conditions and circumstances that suit him and his kingdom.

Dr. Yoel Guzansky is a senior researcher at INSS, where he heads the Regional Arena research program and the Gulf program. He is also a non-resident scholar at the Middle East Institute in Washington. He served on the National Security Council in the Prime Minister's Office as head of the Iran and Gulf desks, and advised various ministries, including the Ministry of Intelligence and the Ministry of Strategic Affairs. He specializes in the politics and security of the Arab Gulf states and strategic issues, above all nuclear proliferation. He was a visiting fellow at Stanford University and won the Fulbright Prize. [yoelg@inss.org.il](mailto:yoelg@inss.org.il)

Ilan Zalayat is a Neubauer researcher in the Gulf program at INSS, and a doctoral student in history at Tel Aviv University and a research fellow at the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies. His field of research is politics, society, and Islam in the modern Gulf states. Before joining INSS, he worked in the field of geopolitical consulting to various entities in Israel and elsewhere, including security organizations and commercial companies. He holds a B.A. in the history of the Middle East and political science from Tel Aviv University, and an M.A. in administration from Reichman University, majoring in security and counterterrorism. [ilanz@inss.org.il](mailto:ilanz@inss.org.il)



# The Water Crisis in Syria: Should Israel Intervene?

Eden Kaduri and Inbar Noy-Freifeld

Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) – Tel Aviv University

The water crisis in Syria, caused by the Euphrates River drying up, drought, and the civil war's impact on water infrastructure, is part of the unprecedented humanitarian crisis in the country. In the short term, the humanitarian crisis, including the water crisis, offers Iran fertile ground for penetrating the Syrian state and consolidating its regional influence. In the long term, a worsening water crisis increases the likelihood of security escalation, which will spur millions of climate migrants to knock on Israel's door. This article proposes viewing the water crisis in Syria in the context of Israel's civilian involvement in the region and a means for increasing its regional influence. Aid toward resolving the Syrian water crisis, be it with assistance from Israeli companies, direct water provision, or funding for water, will earn Israel points in the eyes of its new partners in the Middle East and international organizations, and create Israeli influence that may serve at least as a partial counterweight to Iranian influence in Syria. This would improve Israel's regional status and help it build a foundation for possible future improved Israel-Syria relations.

*Keywords:* climate and national security, Syria, water crisis, climate diplomacy, humanitarian aid

## Introduction

The water crisis in Syria was one of the factors that led to the outbreak of local protests in 2011, and today it exacerbates the already severe humanitarian crisis in the country. It was caused by the drying up of the Euphrates River, by drought, and by the effects of the civil war, which led to the destruction of some 50 percent of the country's water infrastructure. If these elements are not addressed effectively, the severe water shortage in the country portends future ills for Syria, including worsening famine, disease, and a severe energy shortage. These would likely lead to the entrenchment in Syria

of parties hostile to Israel, led by Iran. In the future, they may also lead to renewed fighting and to a wave of climate migration from Syria.

Israeli interests in Syria are led by security interests: preventing conditions in which a war could erupt in the north and the "radical axis" would enjoy a strategic advantage. This involves distancing Iran from Israel's northern border, damaging the strength of axis members, and disrupting Syrian-assisted arms buildup. Political interests include enhancing Israel's value for regional and global actors. Today Israeli policy for fulfilling these interests is reflected in the Campaign Between Wars (CBW),

but there are limits to what this campaign in its current format can achieve, and [in fact it sometimes harms](#) Israeli interests. The [INSS Strategic Analysis for Israel 2023](#) recommends increasing Israeli civilian involvement in Syria and expanding local and regional collaboration as a complementary effort to CBW. This paper proposes viewing the water crisis in Syria as a potential component of Israel's civilian involvement and a means for enhancing its regional influence. It focuses on the effects of the water crisis on Syria while examining potential implications for Israel, and analyzes Israel's options regarding possible aid to Syria.

### The Water Crisis in Syria

The Middle East is among the regions in the world most vulnerable to the climate crisis, which will dry up many local water sources and have a dramatic effect on food production capabilities. Water shortages are already a serious problem in the area, and in 2021, [11 Middle East states were among the top 17 states](#) with the most severe water shortages in the world. Alongside other states such as Jordan, Syria is one of the states most vulnerable to water shortages. The ongoing water crisis without a solution on the horizon is likely to have serious implications for the region's national security.

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**Syria is far from reconstruction. Economic and humanitarian indicators for the country continue to decline, and the state does not have the economic or operational ability to rebuild its infrastructure, including its water infrastructure.**

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Drought and improper water resource management were [among the causes](#) of the protests that led to the outbreak of the civil war in Syria in 2011. Climate change trends, along with other fundamental problems, caused a dramatic reduction in national wheat production and an ongoing water crisis, which led to a steep rise in food prices in the years

prior to the war. The civil war has mostly abated, but its destructive impact on Syria's society and economy continues to be felt, compounded by climate trends and natural disasters, including the February 2023 earthquake, that have worsened the humanitarian crisis. After more than 12 years of war, there is an unprecedented humanitarian emergency in Syria, characterized by millions of displaced persons and refugees, extensive destruction of civilian infrastructure, poverty, food insecurity, and water shortage.

Syria is far from reconstruction. Economic and humanitarian indicators for the country continue to decline, and the state does not have the economic or operational ability to rebuild its infrastructure, including its water infrastructure. Only 50 percent of water drainage infrastructure and sanitation systems function properly across the country, due to attacks, power shortages, or bombings. As a result, there has been a [40 percent reduction](#) in potable water over the last decade. Another cause of the severe water crisis is drought, which has caused the drying up of the Euphrates River, where the water level has [reached a low point](#) not seen since the 1950s. Temperatures in northern Syria are an average 1 °C higher than in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and average rainfall has decreased by 18 mm per month. According to the Iraqi Ministry of Water Resources, if these trends continue the Euphrates is [in danger of drying up completely](#) by the year 2040. Turkey's use of water from the Euphrates as a weapon against Syria exacerbates the distress. Over the last few decades, Turkey, which controls some 90 percent of the Euphrates' water flow, built dams that allow it to control water flow and dry out northern Syria as a source of political leverage. These dams reduced the water flow in the Euphrates by half.

The Euphrates is the primary water source for agriculture, personal consumption, and energy production in northern and eastern Syria, and thus its drying up has dramatic consequences for the local population. The three dams in the Syrian portion of the

Euphrates supply some 70 percent of the energy consumed in Syria. At present only four out of eight turbines produce electricity at the Tabqa Dam, the largest dam in Syria, because of the river drying up. Consequently, electricity production capacity has declined significantly, and most parts of the country have power only a few hours a day.

The water crisis has also caused dramatic damage to agriculture and the food sector. Wheat production in Syria has decreased every year due to the water shortage, with production of one million tons in 2021, down from 2.8 million tons in 2020, which represented about one-quarter of wheat production prior to the war. Syria thus became dependent on wheat imports, and this in turn increased the level of hunger in the country. Some 12.4 million people, 60 percent of the total population of Syria, suffer severe food insecurity, despite increased humanitarian aid. Food insecurity also led to renewed protests in various regions of Syria in January 2023, with the message: “When nations are hungry they demand accounts from their rulers.”

The water crisis has forced the population to pursue unsafe alternatives, such as illegal wells, development of a private water sale industry, and water from polluted rivers. This has created fertile ground for the outbreak of diseases, especially cholera, which developed due to pollution in the Euphrates. This pollution is becoming more concentrated as the river dries out. Cholera is almost unknown in modern countries with proper sanitation and a functioning water system, but that is not the case for many Middle East countries. Indeed, the cholera outbreak in the north is part of a wider epidemic across the Middle East. It began in Afghanistan in June 2023, spread to Pakistan, Iran, and Iraq, and moved from there to Syria and Lebanon. One cause of the massive contamination between countries is the Euphrates River, as its outflow connects them: as the river dries out, the proportion of bacteria rises. The epidemic was first identified

in northern Syria in the Aleppo region, which is still one of the major epicenters of the outbreak. In August 2022 some 80,000 suspected cases of cholera were identified, and some 100 deaths were attributed to it—a fatality rate of 0.13 percent. Around half of the deaths were of children and infants.

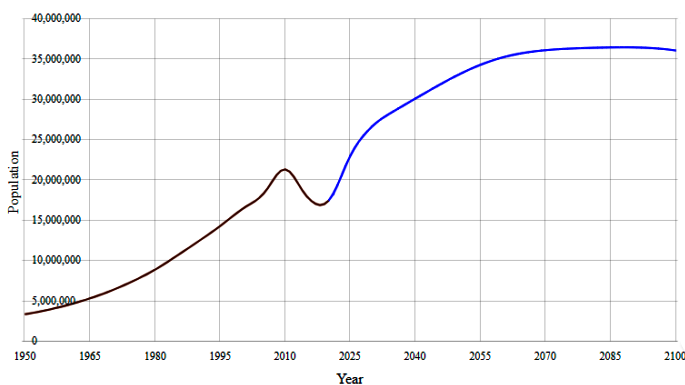
The water crisis in Syria is exploited by Iran to increase its influence on Israel’s northern border. In 2019 a Memorandum of Understanding between Syria and Iran was signed, in which Iran committed to renovate Syria’s water and sewage infrastructure. In 2022 Iran established water desalination facilities in the al-Hasaka province in northern Syria, in order to overcome water stoppages caused by Turkish dams. The Iranian Minister of Energy repeated recently that Iran is committed to assist Syria with the reconstruction of its water and electricity infrastructure. Published reports state that Iran will use Iranian companies to assist in building water canals, irrigation, and drainage systems to reconstruct Syrian infrastructure. This assistance is another layer in Iran’s civil entrenchment in Syria, which includes deep Iranian intervention in the Syrian state via penetration of civilian fields such as culture, education, and the construction of national infrastructure. This civil entrenchment is intended to further military consolidation. In this case, Iranian water diplomacy serves as a means of influence on Damascus, with Tehran exploiting the crisis to foster Syria’s long-term dependence on Iran.

Syria is ranked 25 among 33 states that will almost certainly experience an extreme water shortage in the year 2040. Without an appropriate water policy and without development of a water infrastructure that will allow it to address current trends, especially the drying up of the Euphrates River, drought, and the war’s impact on infrastructure, an extreme water shortage will have serious consequences for the Syrian state, including worsening famine, the spread of infectious disease, and a severe energy shortage.

## Implications for Israel

Last year Israel had its first experience of a health “threat” resulting from the Syrian water crisis, when cholera bacteria in the Euphrates reached Israel via streams that cross between the two countries and in November 2022 were detected in the Yarmouk River. Israel’s Ministry of Health stated that this was not a threat to Israel, thanks to the country’s advanced sanitation systems. But it appears that the cholera epidemic in Syria is not close to eradication, and its leaking into Israel in the river water is an important reminder of the geographic dimension of the Arab-Israeli conflict. If so, how will the water crisis in Syria affect Israel, if at all, and what will be the implication of “ignoring” the severe distress on Israel’s northern border?

From a national security perspective, instability in Syria over the past 12 years has led to various threats to Israel: enhanced Iranian influence in Syria due to its economic dependence on Iran, and the rise of terrorist organizations in Syria, especially ISIS. These joined the fear of a major wave of refugees from Syria, which did not occur, and arms that spilled over into Israel’s north.



**Figure 1. Demographic trends in Syria**

Source: Statistics Times

**A shortage of potable water in most of the big cities and urban settlements in Syria is likely to lead to major riots, alongside mass migration from rural settlements, especially those in the periphery, to the big cities.**

The Syrian civil war has been decided, but a report by the Israel Climate Change Information Center predicts additional future security escalation in Syria, which may be broader in scope and have a more significant impact on Israel than what was experienced over the past decade, as a result of an aggravated water crisis and demographic trends. Syria’s population is expected to grow by 60 percent by 2050, numbering a projected 33 million people (Figure 1).

A shortage of potable water in most of the big cities and urban settlements in Syria is likely to lead to major riots, alongside mass migration from rural settlements, especially those in the periphery, to the big cities. Millions will likely seek to emigrate to Turkey and Lebanon, and there stand to be serious, widespread attempts to enter Israel. This scenario joins the regional spread of diseases such as cholera. Israel managed to restrain the wave of Syrian refugees and prevent their entry into Israel so far, by diverting them toward Jordan and reinforcing troops on the northern border, but the future geopolitical situation, as described in the Climate Change report, may be worse, due to worsening climate trends, and may make it difficult for Israel to defend its borders. Furthermore, the intensifying crisis may lead to a resource war in the Middle East, and given that Israel is stable in terms of its water resources, it is likely to be one of the most attractive targets for climate refugees, including from other countries, especially Jordan.

## Israeli Water Diplomacy

According to OECD statistics, Israel invests in international development in the fields of agriculture, water, and health, primarily in Jordan, the West Bank and Gaza, India, and Ukraine. This investment is principally via bilateral channels in the form of grants funded by Israel. Likewise, Israel has direct cooperation in the water field with a number of Middle East states, whereby the parties agreed to transfer water in various ways. In addition,

in the framework of [the peace agreement with Jordan](#) signed in 1994, Israel agreed to supply Jordan with an annual 50 million cubic meters of water, primarily from the Sea of Galilee. Over the years the quantity of water Israel provides to Jordan has increased, most recently reaching 100 million cubic meters, and further increases based on desalinated water are being considered. Relations based on cooperation on water are one of the primary motivations for the Israel-Jordan peace agreement, and they contributed over the years to the creation of diplomatic ties between the countries (although this has not trickled down to a warm peace between the populations). Cooperation programs between Israel and Jordan were enhanced by a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) signed in late 2022, also known as the Green Blue Deal (water for energy). Under this agreement, Israel, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates agreed to advance projects with Emirati funding and mediation to establish solar fields in Jordan that will provide solar energy to Israel, which will in turn supply Jordan with water from new desalination plants that it will construct. Although it is not currently clear whether the project will materialize, it is still an important development in Israeli water diplomacy.

There is also cooperation around water with the Palestinians based on the Oslo Accords, which stipulate that Israel is responsible for [supplying water](#) and managing the Palestinian Authority's water sources. An Israeli-Palestinian committee was established to authorize water drilling, manage sewage infrastructure, and set water prices. Israel undertook to reserve water from its sources to sell to the PA based on need, in part from Israeli desalination plants. This cooperation with the PA has been criticized extensively over the years, with the primary charge that [Israel exploits the water shortage in the West Bank](#) as a means of control. This matter sharpens the importance of creating equal, mutual partnerships to leverage these projects as water diplomacy that will

influence the relations between Israel and the PA. Currently, however, cooperation on water issues with both Jordan and the PA contributes to regional stability, because it improves the water situation of Israel's neighbors and creates common interests that allow cooperation.

Another way to fulfill the potential of Israeli water diplomacy is through technology exports. At the [UN Water Conference](#) in March 2023 the Arab League states declared their commitment to find sustainable solutions to the regional water shortage. As part of that effort, they seek technological solutions to the crisis, and are willing to invest resources in such solutions. This is an opportunity for Israel, [which is known worldwide as a leader in water tech](#), with an ecosystem of no fewer than 180 Israeli companies in the field. Today Israel has business ties in water tech with several regional states, including Arab states, thanks to opportunities created by the Abraham Accords. Thus, for example, [Israel cooperates with Morocco](#), which faces a severe water shortage, while promoting projects and joint knowledge development for technological solutions to the crisis. The UAE is an important state with which Israel aspires to advance its commercial cooperation in general, and its cooperation on water in particular. For its part, the UAE sees Israeli technology as an [important layer in coping with the water crisis](#) in the Middle East, and has business ties with companies in this field. One of the outstanding examples of the potential in Israel-UAE cooperation and its possible mediating role is the Green Blue Deal.

### **Possible Aid to Syria**

Israel and Syria have thus far discussed the water issue only in the context of Syrian territorial claims in the Sea of Galilee region, in the context of [peace talks in 2008](#). According to reports, Israel's unwillingness to grant Syria access to the Sea of Galilee was one of the reasons the talks blew up. There has thus not been a direct channel between Israel and Syria in the context of the water crisis, except for

private humanitarian initiatives such as the venture by the Israeli firm Watergen, which installed technology that allows the production of water from humid air in the city of a-Raqqa in northern Syria. This technology provides clean water for some 500 Syrians living in displaced persons camps as humanitarian aid, without any involvement by the State of Israel. The company's CEO declared that [the aim](#) was "to build peace and a common future around Israeli technology."

The day is still far off when Israel and Syria will hold direct talks that could enable cooperation, as evidenced [by the Syrian refusal to accept humanitarian aid from Israel](#) after the earthquake there in February 2023. However, Syria's recent readmission into the Arab League constitutes an opportunity for Israel. Israel's ties with Arab states, and the Assad regime's return to the embrace of the Arab world, can serve as a medium for transmitting indirect aid, or alternatively, Israel could use its new allies as go-betweens, while leveraging its geopolitical interests and enhancing its political status.

The UAE, as the country leading the normalization process with the Assad regime, emphasizes the importance of Syria's reconstruction and is willing, according to assessments, to invest significant resources toward this end. In that context, [Syria's participation in the COP28 Summit](#) in Dubai in November 2023, in which the issue of international and regional aid for coping with the water crisis in Syria was likely discussed, is an opportunity to promote an initial dialogue regarding Israeli involvement via the UAE.

In the context of wide-ranging and long-term solutions, the 2008 peace talks formulated a proposal for a pipeline that would carry water from the Sea of Galilee to southern Syria. Desalination plants on Syria's Mediterranean coastline based on Israel technology could also be built, potentially with external funding and mediation, similar to the Green Blue Deal. Israeli involvement in direct water transmission, as with the cooperation mechanisms Israel has

with the PA and Jordan, could be implemented with Syria's assent. A regional framework could be sketched out, led by the UAE, that includes additional issues, and therefore would widen the political achievement beyond the specific project—the regional framework could include transferring water to Syria via Jordan and expanding the Green Blue Deal, by bringing Syria into the agreement framework. Incorporating Israeli technologies in solutions for Syria opens a broader spectrum of simple solutions, including those that only involve knowledge transmission. In that vein, Israel's involvement that remains covert would presumably reduce Syrian resistance.

One way or another, Israel could perhaps demand return for its assistance, such as distancing the Iranians from Syria or ceasing Syrian assistance in arming Hezbollah. This would resemble moves made vis-à-vis the Syrian regime recently: [reported](#) demands from Assad to reduce the presence of Iranian troops and restrain them, in exchange for his return to the Arab League. Israel can raise such demands via Arab states who have diplomatic relations with Syria, while formulating a framework of unofficial understandings between the parties. Perhaps such a framework of understandings would build the foundation on which Israel-Syria ties could gradually develop further in the future.

There are also potential economic gains from exports of Israeli technologies with proven capabilities, which may lead to greater international interest in such technologies. As for the US sanctions that may influence companies' ability to work in the region, [the decision to remove sanctions from northern Syria](#)—the area held by the Kurds, in order to allow foreign investments in agriculture, communications and health, and education services—constitutes a precedent of US willingness to make exemptions from sanctions for aid relating to the water crisis.

Furthermore, Israel can increase its involvement in humanitarian aid to Syria in

general and in solutions to the water crisis in particular via international organizations, with an emphasis on the United Nations. In September 2021, the UN presented a plan for responding to the impact of the water crisis in northern Syria (Critical Response and Funding Requirements—Response to the Water Crisis in Syria) at a cost of \$200 million, in order to assist some 3.4 million citizens. In spite of the importance that the OECD attributes to aid to developing countries, Israel is among the OECD countries that [invest the lowest proportion of their GDP](#) in international development—0.08 percent of GDP in 2021, in contrast with the OECD average of 0.33 percent. Increased Israeli involvement in international development programs in Syria, whether via aid funding or via sharing of Israeli technology and expertise, will strengthen Israel's status and its asset value in the eyes of its allies, as well as its influence over international development programs.

Thus, aid might be direct, based on cooperation in which Israel supplies water directly to Syria, or translate into assistance in establishing desalination plants in western Syria, or other technological assistance. This could occur in a regional framework that also includes Jordan. Indirect aid could include Israeli technologies, or even the relevant technological expertise, without the appearance of direct involvement, or funding via international organizations. All this can be done with the leading role and the funding of Arab states, especially the UAE.

### Should Israel Assist Syria?

In 2023 Israel perceives Syria as a secondary threat. Its political status in the region is improving, but it still has limited influence. It thus appears that for the issue of Israeli water diplomacy, the urgency and value of assisting other states is greater than the urgency of aid to Syria. There is also the question of how effective water diplomacy is likely to be in solidifying relations between countries, particularly in a complex case such as that of Israel and Syria.

Aid to Syria is no more essential to Israeli national interests than aid to other countries in the region, but the possibility of water diplomacy with a hostile state incurs positive potential, in light of momentum that may be relevant for such a move. Attempts to reach a political agreement with Syria failed in the past, in part given disagreements over water resources. Today, after the resolution of the civil war and during the current regional detente, which also enabled the return of the Assad regime to the embrace of the Arab world, the door to cooperation may reopen.

The water issue may enable cooperation on a vital interest of the Assad regime, which is imperative for the country's reconstruction and relates to a civilian issue that is not perceived as political in the narrow meaning of the term. Regarding the implications of such cooperation between the countries, emphasizing Israel's asset value for Syria and creating a certain degree of dependence on Israel may in the future lead to additional forms of cooperation and open the door to political discourse. The US will oppose moves that recognize the legitimacy of the Assad regime, but its consent ([behind the scenes and in response to demands](#)) to the regime rejoining the Arab League, as well as its exemption of northern Syria from sanctions for humanitarian reasons, strengthen the assessment that it will agree to moves that improve both the humanitarian situation in Syria and its strategic situation in the region, given the creation of a configuration that would allow demands to be made of the Assad regime in exchange for aid.

### Conclusion

Israel's Campaign Between Wars in Syria has limited effectiveness in dealing with Israel's complex long-term challenges, as they are not only military or security-related in their essence. In Syria an unprecedented humanitarian crisis is underway, and the water crisis is a major element. In the short and medium terms, this and additional factors provide fertile ground

for Iran to penetrate the Syrian state, in order to further consolidate its regional influence. In the long term, the deterioration of the water crisis will increase the risk of a security escalation in the form of a resource war, and potentially lead to millions of climate refugees knocking on Israel's door.

The water crisis presents an especially complex challenge for Syria and those that seek its reconstruction, especially the UAE and Jordan, with whom Israel has diplomatic ties. Syria's return to the embrace of the Arab world offers Israel an opportunity to aid in solving the water crisis there, whether directly or indirectly. Assistance in solving the water crisis in Syria via Israeli companies, direct water supply, or funding will earn Israel points in the eyes of its new allies in the Middle East and in the eyes of international organizations, and create Israeli influence that may constitute something of a counterweight to Iranian influence in Syria. This would also help create infrastructure that could one day develop into improved relations between Israel and Syria.

**Eden Kaduri** is a former research assistant to the Managing Director of INSS and the Northern Arena Program Coordinator. She holds a B.A. cum laude in Political Science and International Relations, and is an M.A. student in Security and Diplomacy Studies at Tel Aviv University. Eden is also a graduate of the LEAD organization that develops young leadership and is active in the EcoPeace organization, which promotes environmental peace in the Middle East. She worked as a research assistant at Prima—Israeli Solutions, a movement that aims to advance cohesion in Israeli society. [edenk@inss.org.il](mailto:edenk@inss.org.il)

**Inbar Noy-Freifeld** is a Neubauer researcher associate in the geopolitical power research program at INSS, and focuses on technology and foreign policy. Her doctoral dissertation, in progress at the Department of International Relations at the Hebrew University, examines the social construction of peace and the representation of peace in political discourse and texts. She is a fellow in the Telem graduate program at the Leonard Davis Institute. She holds a B.A. and an M.A. from the Hebrew University. [inbarn@inss.org.il](mailto:inbarn@inss.org.il)



# Artificial Intelligence in the Service of Israel's Public Diplomacy

Ophir Barel

Tel Aviv University

The appearance of ChatGPT has stimulated lively discussions worldwide on its significant benefits and drawbacks. Israel's public diplomacy efforts can incorporate use of artificial intelligence, including ChatGPT, to improve processes of planning and execution of activities to strengthen Israel's image in the world. Such improvement could be manifested on three levels: on the strategic level, with redefinition of international alliances in view of global demographic changes, which has political implications; on the intermediate level, i.e., improving processes of bureaucratic planning and coordination between the many entities that comprise the public diplomacy efforts, by streamlining the processes of allocating resources and creating transparency; and on the tactical level, by improving the response to anti-Israel influence campaigns on social media through the rapid production of targeted responses.

*Keywords:* ChatGPT, public diplomacy, hasbara, artificial intelligence (AI), disinformation, Israel

## Introduction

The presentation of the ChatGPT chatbot by OpenAI Ltd. in November 2022 aroused huge interest worldwide because of the application's advanced capabilities with the potential to improve the quality of life (for example, by increasing the precision of medical diagnoses) or, conversely, to be used for malign purposes (for example, to conduct more effective phishing attacks with greater ease). The development also has considerable potential significance in the field of international relations, and particularly public diplomacy, since it underscores the ever-increasing relevance of cyberspace for relations between countries, peoples, and individuals—a trend evident for the past two decades. The use of artificial intelligence (AI) to produce deepfake video clips, for example, during the

war in Ukraine, could affect public perceptions of events in the war or the overall situation.

Since its establishment, the State of Israel has faced the ongoing challenge of managing its image in the eyes of the world, and over the years has invested considerable efforts and resources in public diplomacy. Nevertheless, many among the Israeli public sense its performance in the perception management field to be sorely lacking, since there are many anti-Israel organizations throughout the world that try to undermine its legitimacy as an independent state.

The use of AI for public diplomacy involves both opportunities and risks. Technological advances on the one hand, together with Israeli society's concern for its public image, create an opportunity for public diplomacy to

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**Technological advances on the one hand, together with Israeli society's concern for its public image, create an opportunity for public diplomacy to promote the use of AI as a means of improving its performance.**

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promote the use of AI as a means of improving its performance. Improvement could be manifested on three levels. On the strategic level, the use of AI can enable Israel to gain a better insight into possible future global changes that could change the balance of world power and affect how Jerusalem might manage its foreign relations, particularly with the great powers. On the intermediate level, AI could provide a response to the existing bureaucratic maze of the public diplomacy system, which often prevents Israeli influence campaigns from operating effectively. On the tactical level, AI enables the elements engaged in providing information to respond in a faster, better way to attempts by social media anti-Israel influencing campaigns at disinformation and delegitimization, including with actions that are themselves based on artificial intelligence. The article ends with a number of recommendations that could start the process of AI's absorption into the campaign.

### **The Strategic Level: Deepened Understanding of Demographic Changes and their Political Significance**

Traditional diplomacy is based principally on the activities of official state representatives, but the internet and social media have given non-governmental elements, business organizations, and social groups much more scope to shape international relations. For that reason, social and demographic changes within populations may have a more significant impact than before on the objectives of public diplomacy, joining the classic considerations

of the balance of power between states and their national interests.

Demographic changes in a country can be reflected by a growing or shrinking population (for example, the populations of China and Europe, both currently considered economic powers, are expected to drop by the year 2100), or by a change in local population composition (migrants comprise an increasingly large proportion of the populations of Europe and the United States). Changes in population size can have a direct effect on the components of a country's hard power (for example, more or fewer people of working age), while changes in population composition can lead to policy changes due to changes in voting patterns that result in elected governments with different approaches to foreign affairs.

Demographic changes have special significance for the public diplomacy efforts of small countries such as Israel. These countries apply **two main means** of maintaining their power in the international arena: persuading large powers to work on their behalf to help them realize their national interests; and creating a coalition of several small states to promote common interests. Official and unofficial entities hoping to achieve such objectives **must** on the one hand establish and maintain close ties with official decision makers, and on the other hand, enlist the support of physical and online communities.

Naturally, demographic changes oblige these entities to become more familiar with the nature and effect of the changes. While diplomatic personnel in Israel have **identified** the need to prepare **for global demographic changes**, this does not appear to have encouraged changes in the definition of target audiences. This can be seen first and foremost in the United States, where Israeli public diplomacy **prefers** to address groups traditionally identified as pro-Israel (Evangelicals and Jews) rather than young African Americans and American Hispanics. And in any case, the situation is complex. Studies

from recent years show that in addition to the high proportion of African Americans and Hispanics **who hold antisemitic views**, there is also considerable **support** and **sympathy** for Israel and the Jews. At the demographic level, however, while the proportion of Evangelicals in the US population **fell** between 2007 and 2021, the Hispanic population is the **fastest growing community** in the country. Nevertheless, if there are any plans to **address** the Hispanic community, the activities are generally localized or abandoned due to lack of resources.

At the strategic level, it is possible to use ChatGPT to produce a range of demographic forecasts and in-depth analyses of their political significance. In the study of climate change, for example, ChatGPT **is identified** as a means for promoting understanding of the nature of changes and improving the accuracy of climate forecasts, using data from many different sources. Similarly, it is possible to use ChatGPT to create highly accurate scenarios to describe the political consequences of predicted demographic changes. The creation of such scenarios requires participants to demonstrate skills of planning and execution, and these skills are already recognized as a possible tool **for diplomats in training**.

It is also possible to use ChatGPT to gain deeper knowledge of the foundational ideologies and values of selected target communities. In the US, for example, the views of non-white populations **differ** from those of the white population, which has been a more familiar audience for Israel over the years. Failure to recognize these differences could lead to **erroneous perceptions** about the various communities when planning and executing Israeli information campaigns, thereby damaging their effect.

Deeper understanding of target communities can be achieved by using ChatGPT for sentiment analysis and stance detection. Sentiment analysis is the use of AI-based language processing techniques to mine and analyze texts in order to identify and quantify the emotional

conditions they express. **Stance detection** is considered a more advanced capability, since it requires characterization not only of the emotions expressed in a text but also of the writer's position on a specific topic. Therefore stance detection **is deemed** a vital tool for the analysis of public opinion on social networks, particularly on political and social issues. In 2023 studies were published that compared the performance of ChatGPT in these tasks with other language models, showing that ChatGPT **is capable** of more accurate sentiment analysis. As for stance detection, ChatGPT **is considered** the best model currently available, which could even change the research paradigm in this field.

At the strategic level, therefore, it can be argued that the use of artificial intelligence could enable every country to predict demographic changes, prepare for their political consequences more accurately, and define optimal principles for spreading information and taking political action. These benefits are particularly important for small countries like Israel: because of their dependence on the great powers to realize their interests, they are strongly affected by changes in the global balance of power, in which demographic changes play a central role. At the same time, understanding the political importance of changes could affect decisions by small countries over whether to work toward new alliances with other countries, or to shift the nature of existing international coalitions of which they are members. **In Europe**, for example, the populations of countries such as Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, and Poland—which in recent years were a **preferred political target** for Israel—are likely to decline, while the populations of countries such as **Sweden** and **Ireland**, which in recent decades experienced diplomatic crises with Israel, are expected to continue growing. This could encourage Israel to aim for stronger links with demographically growing countries, at the expense of or at least alongside promotion of the alliances with Eastern Europe.

## The Intermediate Level: Improved Processes for Planning and Execution in Public Diplomacy

Optimum understanding of international strategic changes and policies formulated to support public diplomacy, as good as they may be, cannot help a state's performance on the global stage if the people responsible for execution encounter bureaucratic difficulties at a practical level.

The extensive efforts that Israel invests in public diplomacy include the use of new technologies: the Foreign Ministry is promoting a wider use of a range of digital capabilities, for example by including intensive training in the field of digital diplomacy in its training course—making it **one of the most influential Foreign Ministries in the digital realm**.

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Nevertheless, Israel's ability to achieve success in this field suffers from bureaucratic challenges. Israeli public diplomacy is a multi-pronged system comprising numerous government entities, which over the years have acquired powers **at the expense of the Foreign Ministry**. Although the National Public Diplomacy Directorate **was established** to coordinate Israel's public diplomacy activity, it is **hard pressed** to fulfill its mandate, and **in effect** there is no central management basis for the activity that can define its strategic objectives. There are also planning problems when government ministries work with external organizations. One example was a venture called Building Permit set up to reinforce the dissemination of pro-Israel information in US academic institutions, under the **direction** of the Foreign Ministry and an external association, with no examination of its achievements, and in

spite of an internal assessment that its benefits did not justify its high cost.

The use of ChatGPT could help Israel improve the processes of planning, implementation, and real-time update of influence campaigns derived from its strategic planning. This could be done, **for example**, by providing recommendations on the optimum division of tasks among the project team and presenting assessments regarding changes that must be taken into account (such as possible delays in project completion). ChatGPT can also be used to **collect and summarize data** from multiple sources, particularly on matters relating to improved project management, such as the various methodologies available. And finally, ChatGPT can be used to set up a central communications platform for everyone involved in public diplomacy. Such a platform could not only limit cases of misunderstandings, based on one participant receiving partial information, but also **create transparency** in decision making processes, and thereby strengthen the trust of the public and participants in public diplomacy functioning.

## The Tactical Level: Improved Ways to Counter Anti-Israel Influence Campaigns

In addition to the possible benefits at the strategic and intermediate levels, there are also ramifications of using artificial intelligence for specific influence campaigns: although it can intensify the threat of false information being disseminated on the internet, it can also provide enhanced solutions for dealing with the problem.

AI can upgrade the creation and distribution of false content on social media in two important ways. First, it can extend the reach of false information publicized, by increasing the quantity of content posted and by increasing the number of hostile elements able to do so. While the spread of false information without the use of AI is usually based on publishing the content on several platforms simultaneously—a repetitive process **that can** create burnout and

cognitive overload for creators, ChatGPT enables malign elements to create **multiple versions** of content for publication on multiple platforms. At the same time, ChatGPT developments can enable malign elements to **significantly extend** the scope of potential topics for false content.

Moreover, it is possible to increase the scope of elements engaged in spreading false information, because the adoption of AI tools reduces the cost of advanced means for creating and distributing the material. Without AI, **the cost of implementing** a large-scale influence campaign on social media is estimated in the tens of millions of dollars, making it beyond the reach of many malign developers. With AI, the cost of creating high quality **fake pictures and audio** or the cost of **cross-platform testing** to test the reaction of social media users to an influence campaign is far less. Even before ChatGPT appeared, **it was known that** anti-Israel elements had the ability to join together to spread their messages widely, becoming very prominent on the web. Lowering the costs of advanced influence campaigns could therefore widen the quantitative gap in their favor and reinforce their social media presence, to the detriment of elements working for Israel's benefit.

Second, the use of AI allows hostile parties to **improve** their disinformation content, making it more **convincing** to target audiences. In particular, **ChatGPT-4 output** is considered even more convincing and detailed than version 3.5. But the improved quality of the false content not only raises the chances of influencing selected target audiences, but **makes it harder** to locate and remove. ChatGPT can also be used to **plant disinformation** about historical events, by forging and distorting historical documents. This ability has special significance for Israel, which uses memories of the Holocaust and the historic right of the Jewish people to its country as central messages in its public diplomacy.

The significance of these developments is that a wider range of hostile elements can spread greater quantities of better quality

false information on social media, particularly relating to the central messages of Israeli public diplomacy, with less chance of discovery by the social networks, enforcement agencies, and users.

Tackling the distribution of ChatGPT-based disinformation has become a widespread global activity in recent years, focused on AI-based influence campaigns. Among the variety of initiatives and tools used in this field it is possible to identify three possible channels of activity, by means of which public diplomacy can recruit ChatGPT to provide a better response to disinformation campaigns, including those based on artificial intelligence.

The first channel is the development of technological means for identifying ChatGPT-based content, such as GPTZero: an AI-based tool that uses the ChatGPT model to identify whether a particular text has been written by a person or by AI. While GPTZero **does** achieve high rates of success in characterizing long texts, it has difficulty analyzing short texts such as tweets on X (Twitter).

The second channel is the use of ChatGPT **for the fast creation and spread** of public diplomacy content: posts on social media, press releases, and even official speeches. The Foreign Ministry first used artificial intelligence for public diplomacy purposes in January 2023, when **it was assisted** by a platform developed by Israeli start-up D-ID to produce short videos in eight languages, including Persian, Chinese, and Arabic.

In some cases, the quality of messages generated by ChatGPT **is very similar** to that of messages produced by human lobbyists. In fact, there is concern that the process of using ChatGPT to generate content could be done without proper attention to the formulation of the product. In the world of diplomacy, in which every nuance has political significance, **the selection of inaccurate terminology** could lead to gaps in expectations and in communication between countries, even to a diplomatic crisis. At the same time, inattention to text composition

could mean that certain content is perceived by its target audience as too clichéd or inauthentic. In the case of Israel, use of ChatGPT could lead Israeli elements to assimilate terms that appear neutral but in fact serve the purposes of anti-Israel entities. An example is the adoption of the word “movement” by the BDS organization, which gives it the image of a legitimate social activity in the eyes of foreign audiences. The more such terms appear in ChatGPT-generated content, the more Israeli public diplomacy may unconsciously promote anti-Israel narratives.

This issue is linked to a broader problem—the problem of inherent bias in large language models. These models, including ChatGPT, are trained to analyze large quantities of texts and use them to generate new material. In the training process, developers feed the models with huge amounts of data from a variety of sources, such as books and internet sites. Sometimes the resulting content generated by the models reflects offensive or unfounded views based on gender, race, or social group, so that the use of AI leads to biased decisions that perpetuate prejudices. In the field of foreign policy, ChatGPT could bring together messages that are offensive to certain target audiences, which would of course damage Israel’s image. It is therefore advisable to use ChatGPT to generate rapid drafts of messages with the final polish done by human beings.

The third channel of activity is the use of ChatGPT for fact-checking of content for publication in the media. Like the two previous channels, here too the findings on the performance of ChatGPT are mixed: while in most cases ChatGPT is able to correctly classify statements as true or false, its performance is not consistent, so that a specific claim that is checked twice or expressed in two different ways could be rated differently. Accordingly, fact checking organizations claim the main advantage of using AI in their work is the ability to identify more claims that require checking. This need has become more pressing not only because the use of AI can increase the reach of

disinformation, but also because the resources available to fact-checkers are considerably less than the resources of the producers of disinformation. Fast refutation of lies with facts can help Israel to limit their spread, and thus minimize the possible damage to Israel’s image caused by various events.

A noteworthy Israeli technological development on this subject is SAVEE, which enables users to respond to Holocaust denial content on social media using generative AI to compose the response. Fact-checking initiatives like this can produce not only rapid reactions to anti-Israel and antisemitic messages, but also give any interested individual the power to check claims from malign elements, without special training. This will considerably increase the fact-checking potential of the public diplomacy system on social media—a need that was identified as essential following Operation Guardian of the Walls (May 2021).

For defined influence tasks, public diplomacy professionals can derive particular benefit from using ChatGPT for fast and effective reaction to specific events (such as a military operation). Speed is a vital component when refuting false information on social media, and the rapid production of public diplomacy messages together with optimum allocation of the necessary auxiliary tasks helps to ensure it is achieved. It is also possible to recruit ordinary citizens quickly who are not usually part of the public diplomacy system, using ventures similar to SAVEE. The improved speed of response thanks to all these components will ultimately help in tackling the problem of the quantitative gap in favor of anti-Israel elements.

## Policy Recommendations

The strategic and practical benefits of artificial intelligence can serve anti-Israel elements just as they can support Israel. Government and public diplomacy people are therefore recommended to act quickly to assimilate the use of AI in the public diplomacy system, taking account of the challenges involved. The

following four courses of action could be part of an initial plan:

- a. Government support for the development of enhancements to ChatGPT capabilities: Existing ChatGPT capabilities can improve performance in tasks focused on influence, but there are important potential risks. The public sector is therefore advised to implement schemes that will encourage technology companies to seek effective and innovative responses to the problems. This could be done via hackathons (intensive entrepreneurial events where participants develop technological solutions for challenges defined by the hosts), such as the one [organized](#) by the Canadian government in 2023. The publication of government public appeals for research in the field of AI, [such as](#) one from August 2022, could also contribute to this solution. Future appeals should focus on research into the particular advantages and drawbacks of ChatGPT that are relevant to public diplomacy. This research could lead to the development of numerous enhancements, thanks to the [large number](#) of Israeli start-ups in the field of generative AI.
- b. Definition of guiding principles for controlled use of ChatGPT: Because of existing problems of imprecision and bias in AI, government ministries should define principles to ensure full utilization of the potential benefits, while limiting the occurrence and impact of problems. For example, it is possible to stipulate that any chatbots used must meet the criteria included in the European Union AI Act, currently in the [process of ratification](#) by EU institutions. According to this law, companies developing chatbots, such as OpenAI and Google, must comply with a series of strict regulatory [requirements](#), such as ensuring the ability of human operators to override how they work before they are marketed commercially.
- c. Response to the bureaucratic challenges of inter-organizational use of AI: Public diplomacy involves numerous elements, mainly in the public sector. An [existing study](#) shows that the adoption of AI for inter-departmental collaborations in the public sector is likely to encounter problems relating to the necessity of data sharing (for example, due to differences in privacy policies). Such problems may be more pronounced when government ministries work with non-governmental organizations, due to gaps in the governing procedures and laws pertaining to the various parties sharing data. It is therefore recommended that AI be used to meet these challenges, for example through accurate definition of the problems to be resolved, in order to improve understanding of the types of information to be shared between organizations.
- d. Trial assimilation of ChatGPT in the regular work of the public diplomacy system: After defining the criteria for using AI in a government framework and overcoming the coordination challenges, it will be possible to use ChatGPT for limited experimental projects designed to improve distinct aspects of public diplomacy work. For example, it is possible to analyze the views of defined target audiences in a specific country over a limited period and examine the quality of AI performance. At the same time, it is possible to integrate the use of AI-based scenarios as part of Foreign Ministry training and compare the performance of trainees who experience them with that of trainees who have not worked with these scenarios.

Ophir Barel is a researcher at the Yuval Ne'eman Workshop for Science, Technology and Security at Tel Aviv University. His research focuses on the analysis of influence campaigns on social networks. [Ophir.barel@gmail.com](mailto:Ophir.barel@gmail.com)



# The Roots of the “Preconception” before the Yom Kippur War: The Speech by Defense Minister Dayan to Senior Members of the Security Establishment, July 17, 1973

Zaki Shalom

Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) – Tel Aviv University

## Introduction

On July 17, 1973, less than three months before the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War, Defense Minister Moshe Dayan delivered a speech to senior members of the security establishment at the Habima Theater in Tel Aviv. He defined the speech as “a summary of our security situation and general thoughts about the future,” or in other words, “where do we stand on the political-security issue” (Speech by Defense Minister, 1973, p. 1). Fifty years after the Yom Kippur War, this broad speech can be seen as an effort by a senior minister in the government to explain, and perhaps also to justify, the government’s policy at that time. It is also possible that his remarks were influenced by the forthcoming elections, scheduled for October 1973.

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**The clear conclusion presented by the speech is that the ideological basis of the “preconception” that led to the assessment of the “low likelihood” of the outbreak of war was far broader than the military aspect.**

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Over the years the issue of the “preconception” in the Yom Kippur War has been widely discussed. The usual tendency was to stress its military dimension. The Egyptian

leadership, it was claimed, was well aware of Israel’s military superiority and was afraid of a crushing defeat in the case of hostilities. Therefore, the likelihood of a belligerent initiative by Egypt was perceived as limited: “The governing assumption that convinced key Israeli military figures [was that] Egypt, unable to engage in the necessary deep penetration bombing of Israel, would not start a war it could not win,” writes David Makovsky (2023). According to the head of Military Intelligence, Eli Zeira, at the government meeting on April 24, 1973, Egypt was well aware of its inferior military status. Therefore, “in our estimation, the likelihood that Egypt will open fire in May is very small” (Government Meeting, 1973, p. 3).<sup>1</sup>

Significantly, notwithstanding Dayan’s position as Minister of Defense, the military aspect was not the focus of his remarks. In fact, he laid out the broader concept that characterized strategic thinking and was widely accepted by the political leadership of the time. He touched on international, historical, social, and even psychological aspects that were characteristic of Arab society in those days. To be sure, Dayan did not present a formal thesis to prove that the chances of war were slight. As if in an ordinary conversation, he presented his position and his assessment of the situation

in the Arab world, namely, its weakness in the balance of power against Israel, and this is partly why his words are so significant. Most important, the clear conclusion presented by the speech is that the ideological basis of the “preconception” that led to the assessment of the “low likelihood” of the outbreak of war was far broader than the military aspect, and included the following main elements: the political situation within the Arab states, Arab society, superpower relations, and of course, Israel’s military strength. This article looks at the principal arguments used to establish this assessment. Most of them are expressed explicitly in Dayan’s speech, while others are implicit.

### **The Superpowers Reject the War Option**

Moshe Dayan began his speech by referring to the relations between the two superpowers, the Soviet Union and the United States, and the ramifications this would have for the Middle East. He focused mainly on the summit meeting between US President Richard Nixon and Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev in San Clemente, California, on June 23, 1973. In Dayan’s opinion, the meeting was characterized by a constructive approach on both sides, which focused on the efforts to find what was common to them rather than what divided them. The trend was to engage less in ideological aspects and differences of opinion, and more on attempts to find compromises that would be acceptable to both and thus avoid belligerent conflicts between them. Both powers, Dayan argued, exhibited an “approach reflecting that [in spite of the differences between them] they did not want war” (Speech by Defense Minister, 1973, p. 1). This was also the impression of German Chancellor Willy Brandt, who subsequently met with Prime Minister Golda Meir (Historic Visit, n.d.).

This approach, according to Dayan, was very comfortable for Israel. Under the existing circumstances, Israel certainly had no interest

in fighting a war with Arab states. It was content with the status quo and wished to maintain it as long as possible. Ambassador Rabin gave a brief account of the favorable situation in the Middle East in the period that preceded the Yom Kippur War. Shortly after he returned from Israel in early February 1973, he told Kissinger: “Everything in the Middle East is fine” (Memorandum of Conversation, 1973a).

War at such a time, any war, even one that would end in victory, “would arouse sleeping dogs” and lead the powers to take steps to change the status quo. Agreement between the powers that the differences would be resolved by peaceful means only was a strategic asset for Israel. It could rule out the war option that Arab states frequently threatened to use if their demands for the terms of any settlement were not met. This mindset, it should be stressed, did not demand any concessions of Israel.

Documents at hand indeed show that the principal subject at the Nixon-Brezhnev summit was the issue of a settlement in the Middle East. At the start of the meeting, President Nixon told his counterpart that both powers must reach understandings that would enable them to exert pressure on the states close to them in the region to reach a settlement. The President stressed that the Arab-Israeli conflict was a matter of highest urgency. The United States would pressure Israel and the Soviet Union would pressure the Arab states to implement the understandings achieved by the powers. In response, Brezhnev made it very clear that “we must put this warlike situation to an end,” and that he was “categorically opposed to the resumption of the war.” This statement reflected the fact that the Soviet Union strongly supported Egypt’s fundamental position at the time, which sought only an end to belligerency instead of a peace settlement, as Israel demanded (Memorandum for the President’s Files, 1973).

Dayan avoided discussion of the underlying question: how significantly might the Soviet Union influence Egypt’s position. At an IDF General Staff meeting on April 16, 1973, one

of the participants, most likely the head on intelligence, gave a cautious assessment of the Soviet Union's influence on Egypt: "The Russians are against war. They will certainly make this clear to Egypt." However, he was not convinced that the Egyptians would be influenced by this position: "If the Egyptians decide to fight, they will do so even if the Russians tell them 'no'... Political reliance on the Soviet Union and the political expectations pinned to it have also declined since July [1972, the month in which the Russian military advisors were expelled from Egypt]." He also estimated that the Soviet Union could give Egypt advice, but it appeared that Israel could not rely on the Soviet Union as the ultimate restraint with an active role to play in preventing Egypt from starting a war (General Staff Discussion, 1973).

Notwithstanding these reports, the dominant assessment in Israel seems to have been that the Soviet Union could, and would, restrain belligerent tendencies in Egypt. At the government meeting on April 24, 1973, Intelligence chief Zeira stated unequivocally that "we know clearly that the Soviet Union is not interested in war in this region. On the contrary, it keeps explaining to the Arabs that war today would be a disaster, since such a war would not end in success. The general impression one gets from his long survey is the Egyptians are not in a position to ignore the Soviet interests at that period of time. As for the United States, it too is not interested in war, among other reasons because a war today would again present the US as part of the Israel-US camp against the Arabs" (Government Meeting, 1973, pp. 4-5).

A similar assessment was presented by Zeira at the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee in May 1973. His assessments were apparently based on the assumption that Egypt's almost complete dependence on the Soviet Union would make it very hard for it to adopt an independent policy opposed to that of the Russians: "At the time that Egypt's President Nasser died... a new phenomenon began to take shape in the international community: an effort

to bring an end to the cold war, reflected mainly by intensive dialogue between the United States and the Soviet Union. It should be recalled that Egyptian policy until 1970-71 was based on the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. Consequently, since the age of dialogue [between the powers] began in 1971, the foundation of Egyptian policy for twenty years has, to a large extent, disappeared. And today, in 1972-73, the problem facing Egypt is how to invent, how to create a new policy [though they can no longer rely on the rift between the great powers]. That is the basis of their problem in foreign policy" (Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, 1973c, p. 2).

A similar view was expressed by Prime Minister Golda Meir to King Hussein at their meeting in May 1973: "The Soviet Union" she said to the King, "is moving in the direction of a peaceful settlement, and it will exert its influence in this direction on its allies in the region" (Memorandum from Harold H. Saunders, 1973). Previously, at the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee meeting on February 25, 1973, Meir said: "From information reaching us, we can summarize and state almost with certainty that the Russians are not encouraging the Egyptians to go to war. They are not taking on the task of saying 'no' [don't start a war]... but neither are they saying 'yes' [go to war]" (Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, 1973a, p. 7).

Returning to Dayan's speech to the security personnel: his words imply that the main reason for this policy is the recognition by the great powers that an atmosphere of war has no benefit for them. It certainly does not contribute to the realization of their desires to focus on solving their own socioeconomic problems. Their concern, apparently, is that the Arab-Israeli conflict will spill over into hostilities of a warlike nature between the powers and thus halt, or at least delay, the trend toward rapprochement. According to Dayan, "They have a whole series of issues, of problems... such as the economic problem, raising the standard of living in the

Soviet Union, the need for additional markets and improvement of the United States trade balance...They also have domestic problems... and these [lead them to work on reducing] the risk of war, on disarmament, or at least weapons restrictions.” In Dayan’s opinion, the statements that were given after the Nixon-Brezhnev meeting may lead to the conclusion that overall “the Arabs are justly disappointed, and we are rightly satisfied” (Speech by Defense Minister, 1973, p. 1).

Matters concerning Israel, Dayan stated, were addressed according to a so-called “constructive approach.” The powers understood that “there is an unsolved problem here, [and that] there are differences of opinion between the Soviet Union and the United States [about the way to solve them]. But these differences, they believe, should by no means, lead them to a war. And as with many other topics, here too there is a need for [cooperative] handling from both sides...They will continue to engage in the subject [in the effort to achieve a settlement] but without saber rattling, and if possible not [by] increasing the tension, not in this part [of the Middle East] and not in the whole world” (Speech by Defense Minister, 1973, p. 2).

The Foreign Ministry had a similar assessment of the situation; it stated that on June 26, 1973, Nixon and Brezhnev and their spokespersons had expressed open satisfaction with the outcomes of the Washington summit. They clearly implied that the understandings between them would have concrete effects on the efforts to achieve a settlement in the region. The leaders clarified that they were aware of the differences between them, but were determined to continue the process of rapprochement in the framework of detente, insisting that “this is an irreversible policy.” They also clarified that the summit led to a closer personal link between them and the meetings lasted up to 44 hours, including seven hours of meetings between the two leaders alone. It was agreed that President Nixon would be invited to visit the Soviet Union during 1974, while Brezhnev

would be invited to the United States in 1975 (Foreign Ministry, 1973).

However, ultimately even Dayan understood that “the atmosphere of peace,” dialogue, and rapprochement could not completely ensure that war would not erupt in the Middle East. President Nixon’s statement that the issue of the Middle East was of the highest priority was not, as we shall see below, translated into United States readiness to pressure Israel to moderate its position on the matter of a settlement. Even Brezhnev’s “words of reconciliation” were not entirely honest, and were accompanied by conditions that the Israeli government was not prepared to accept. Dayan was therefore right to slightly lower the audience’s expectations of the meeting. He stated that in practical terms “we can say that [the Nixon-Brezhnev meeting] did not pour oil on the bonfire of war.” Dealing with the Middle East issue would continue, but it would be similar to the handling “of any economic-commercial issue...with meetings, discussions, and pressure, in an attempt to win over public opinion. Not with shooting” (Speech by Defense Minister, 1973, p. 2).

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The Israeli assessment of the situation chose to downplay Egypt’s determination to design a policy that suited its own interests, and to implement it even at the cost of conflict with the Soviet Union. The significance and consequences of the severe criticism of the Soviet Union expressed in Egypt for its policy to engage in dialogue with the United States were to a large degree pushed aside. At a Non-Aligned Movement conference (September 1973), Sadat warned the great powers against thinking that they could reach agreement between themselves without considering the interests and positions of the “smaller” states: “If the

discourse now taking place is around agreement between the large blocs and about removing the danger of a global nuclear war,” said Sadat, “then it is clear that this understanding cannot be realized against the wishes of the non-aligned states or in spite of them. In fact, it will only be realized in harmony with their wishes and their efforts...The international agreement will not constitute a real peace and will not endure unless it grants all peoples political justice, economic justice, and social justice” (Sadat’s speech, 1973b, pp. 3-4).

Egyptian spokespersons stressed, with a barely disguised critical tone, that the Soviet Union had agreed to important concessions at the Arabs’ expense:

- a. It undertook to reject the Arabs’ military option before they received anything in return.
- b. It did not manage to halt, or at least limit, the massive US military support for Israel.
- c. It agreed to avoid mentioning Security Council Resolution 242, which as the Egyptians saw it, required Israel to withdraw from the territories captured in the Six Day War.
- d. There was no mention of the Soviet Union’s willingness to allow Russian Jews to emigrate to Israel, although it was well aware that this strengthened Israel.
- e. The bottom line is that the Israeli leadership was aware of Egyptian criticisms of Soviet moves, but estimated that Egypt’s dependence on the Soviet Union was too great for Cairo to deviate far from the Soviet line (Foreign Ministry, 1973).

In a conversation with Prime Minister Meir on March 1, 1973, President Nixon made it clear to her that his dialogue with the Eastern bloc took the approach of “respect him and suspect him.” He cautioned her against the naive approach toward detente shown by “your friends,” some of the European leaders, whom he called “hopeless idealists.” “They see us meeting with the leaders of the Soviet Union and Communist China and think that

the world has already changed,” said Nixon. “They are naive people who think that because of our dialogue with the Communists, we can reduce our security expenditure. We don’t think like that. We understand that contact with the Communists is essential to our interests. For example, thanks to it we have managed to end the Vietnam war. But we are realists.” (Memorandum of Conversation, 1973b).<sup>2</sup>

The Prime Minister was forced to fall into line with the President. She said to him that she had told her “socialist friends in Europe,” and particularly German Chancellor Willy Brandt, that it was good he was seeking dialogue with the East (the Communist bloc) “but don’t be deceived by this policy.” This response did not satisfy the President. He was full of bitterness at the positions of European leaders during the Vietnam War: “Please tell your socialist friends in Europe,” he said to the Prime Minister, “that the new leadership developing in Europe has a naive approach regarding the weakening of the defensive power of the United States...They [the Russians] are realists, and we have to be realists as well” (Prime Minister’s conversation with the US President, 1973, p. 1).

The impression is that the Prime Minister was uncomfortable with the pressure applied on her by the President to identify with his position unequivocally with respect to the influential European socialist leaders who sympathized with Israel. She tried to bring the meeting to a conclusion: according to the minutes of the meeting, “She always says to her friends that when the Russians speak about coexistence they intend it to be coexistence according to their format...We all like idealists but not when they live in the clouds” (Prime Minister’s conversation, 1973, p. 2). The President was satisfied with this clarification and dropped the subject.

### United States Support for Israel

One of Israel’s biggest sources of strength is its relationship with the United States. The close relations and the broad agreements between

the two states naturally strengthened Israel's deterrent image in the eyes of the Arab world, and particularly Egypt. Cloudy relations marked by numerous disagreements and controversies between Israel and the United States would most likely harm Israel's image of strength. In his speech, Dayan appropriately devotes considerable space to this issue, given the active involvement of the United States in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Dayan stated that the United States had a critical interest in improving relations with the Arab world in general, and with Egypt in particular. In this context, he mentioned: considerations of “oil and money”; the desire to recruit Arab support for the US in international bodies, mainly the United Nations; and the fear of actions by Arab terror organizations against US interests worldwide. In his opinion, these and other considerations could lead the United States to look for “ways to create such a position with respect to the Arab states that would not be completely alienating. I don't think it would mean they would sell us out for their Arab interests, but it might lead to the rise of tension between us and them from time to time” (Speech by Defense Minister, 1973, p. 3).

Contrary to the attitude of the United States toward Israel and in spite of detente, the Soviet Union adopted a policy of full support for the Arab states. It gave full backing to the positions displayed by the Arab world in the Arab-Israeli conflict and supplied them with large quantities of weapons. There were widespread concerns in Israel that given the US desire to improve relations with the Soviet Union and the Arab world, and in view of its efforts to promote a peace agreement, the United States would adopt positions that were uncomfortable for Israel. Dayan said that Israel must consider the possibility that the superpowers would reach agreement over an imposed solution. Until now, however, the meetings between the heads of the great powers “did not end with some kind of coercion; [they didn't say]: ‘do this, do so and so on the Golan, do so and so in the

West Bank, do so and so with the refugees, and do this with Egypt.’ Eventually, the approach that supported an imposed settlement was not adopted by the great powers. Instead we got a different approach that says that there are problems, and they must be solved” (Speech by Defense Minister, 1973, p. 4).

Thus, the conclusion implied in Dayan's speech is that the decision regarding the relationship between Israel and the Arab states rested to a large extent with the US administration. Back in April 1968 he stated that in military and economic terms Israel could continue under the existing status quo for an unlimited period. But in the end, he believed that the key to either changing the situation or leaving it unchanged was held by the United States. He believed that if the US accepted, directly or indirectly, Israel's position that the status quo could continue as long as there was no peace between Israel and the Arabs, then this situation could carry on for many years (Telegram from the Embassy, 1973).

It is hard to understand what led Dayan to attribute such far-reaching ability to the United States, where it could force Israel to adopt positions contrary to its vital interests. Toward the end of the Yom Kippur War, in the severe disagreement with the administration regarding the Third Army, Dayan likewise displayed a submissive stance toward the US, based mainly on Israel's dependence upon the United States for the supply of arms it needed to continue the war: “If in the afternoon the government of Israel fires the shells it receives from the United States in the morning—the Americans can compel us to implement their demands... My assessment is that they will pressure us on this matter, and perhaps we will not be able to resist... The moment is coming [when we will understand] that the Americans are stronger than we are... They don't say they will break off relations with us, but they say: manage without us, because you don't want to give the Third Army food and water” (Meeting of Dayan, 1973). According to another source, on October 22,

1973, Dayan reported to the Prime Minister that Kissinger whispered in his ear that “if we started a war we would get nothing from the United States, not even a nail” (Yom Kippur War, 2023).

Moshe Dayan served in senior roles under several Prime Ministers: David Ben-Gurion, Moshe Sharett (as Chief of Staff), Levi Eshkol, and Golda Meir (as a minister). He saw how the Israeli leadership operated according to US dictates and contrary to its own wishes (e.g., the retreat from Sinai after the Sinai Campaign), when it looked as if Israeli stubbornness might lead to a confrontation with the superpowers. At the same time, he saw many more cases where, contrary to the position of the United States on issues that it deemed vital, Israel refused to follow the administration’s dictates, for example: the declaration of the state; the move of the Knesset and ministry offices to Jerusalem; implementation of the retaliatory operations policy; the Sinai Campaign; activity on the nuclear option, IDF marches in Jerusalem; scuttling of the Rogers initiative. He could have assumed that Israel’s status in 1973 was much stronger than before the Six Day War, and that would allow it to stand up against unwelcome US policy initiatives.

Furthermore, the situation regarding Israel-United States relations, as reflected in Dayan’s speech, is very far from the situation that is clearly reflected in the many and varied available primary sources. These sources seem to indicate the existence of a deep, broad, and covert web of strategic understandings between Israel and the United States in the year prior to the Yom Kippur War including, in my estimation, the following main principles:

- a. The willingness, in practice, of the Nixon administration to support the continuation of the status quo created after the Six Day War, as long as there was no change in Egypt’s position.
- b. Agreement that there would be a form of political activity to give the international community the impression of a desire to

promote a settlement. It was clarified that the activity would not reach a practical stage.

- c. The United States undertook to supply Israel with the weapon systems it needed for its defense, without making the purchases conditional on Israel’s political positions.
- d. The United States would do what it could to prevent any damage to Israel’s status in the international arena.
- e. It is possible that the framework also included an undertaking by Israel to refrain from a preemptive strike on Egypt.<sup>3</sup>

It is not clear if this discrepancy derives from the fact that Dayan, like many other ministers in the government, was excluded from the relevant information on this issue, which was held mainly by the Prime Minister and her advisors. Another possibility is that Dayan chose not to reveal the information in a broad forum of Defense Ministry employees.

## The Depressed Condition of the Arab World

*The split in the Arab world:* Dayan believed that the Arab world at that time was at one of the lowest points in its history, due to two causes: poor leadership and the deep rifts between Arab states. It is very possible that these two causes are linked: without high-quality leadership whom the masses trust and follow, there is a growing tendency for division. Dayan believed that the process of the deterioration of the Arab world began with the bloody events in Jordan in September 1970, dubbed “Black September,” in which King Hussein responded with extreme cruelty to the Palestinian terrorist organizations that threatened to topple his regime (Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, 1970a).

“At the beginning of the conflict in Jordan between [King] Hussein and the terrorists,” said the Defense Minister, “there was nobody who could say to the terrorists and to Hussein—stop [the fighting]... Later this fighting led to a severe rift between Egypt and Jordan as a result of the murder of Wasfi Tal [Prime Minister of Jordan, on November 28, 1971]. The Syrians tried to

enter [invade] Jordan. Today, in July 1973, the eastern front that was supposed to unite Syria, Iraq, and Jordan no longer exists. The terrorist organizations are...in conflict with Jordan. ‘The united triangle’ of Qaddafi [ruler of Libya], Egypt, and Syria is also not running smoothly” (Speech by Defense Minister, 1973, pp. 4-5).

*The ceasefire agreement:* In Israel-Egypt relations, the most important event during that period of time was the ceasefire agreement of August 1970, which led to the end of the War of Attrition along the Suez Canal. In an assessment of the situation on May 18, 1973 to the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, the head of Military Intelligence, Zeira, spoke of “Israel’s victory in the War of Attrition, a political and military victory” (Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, 1973c, p. 2). There was indeed justification for presenting the ceasefire at the canal as an expression of Israel’s victory. Israel’s basic position—that it would not retreat from the ceasefire lines without a change in its relations with Egypt—was effectively accepted. Egypt was forced to agree to the ceasefire without Israel committing to any withdrawal from the canal line.

But that was only a partial, and perhaps even over-simplified, presentation of the state of Israel-Egypt relations at that time. Israel came out of the War of Attrition injured and battered. The war exposed important weaknesses in its national resilience. It revealed the fact that Israel’s impressive victory in the Six Day War failed to create a solid dimension of deterrence against Egypt. Shooting at the canal began, at Egypt’s initiative, soon after the Six Day War. On October 23, 1967, only a few months after the war, Egypt risked starting another war when it sank the Israeli Navy’s destroyer *Eilat*, with about 50 IDF soldiers on board (Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, 1967).

However, the biggest challenge to Israel’s deterrent capability came with the signing of the ceasefire in August 1970. Even before the ink on the agreement was dry, Egypt decided to move surface-to-air missiles close to the canal. This

ran explicitly counter to the ceasefire agreement in which the sides agreed to a standstill in their positions at the canal. At a meeting with a British diplomat, Egyptian Foreign Minister Riyad linked the movement of the missiles to the change of regime in Egypt following Nasser’s death. His argument was that moving the missiles was an army initiative, and the new regime led by Sadat could not clash with the army on this issue. Riyad claimed that under the circumstances, returning the missiles to their previous position would lead to a “revolt” by the Egyptian army. Whatever the case, the bottom line is that Egypt blatantly violated the ceasefire agreement, with the clear knowledge that this could lead to renewed fighting on the canal. Ultimately the missiles remained in their new location with no military response from Israel. Clearly these events reflected the weakness of Israel’s deterrent capability.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, the War of Attrition led the IDF to build a very expensive line of fortification along the canal. This obliged the IDF to change its longstanding modes of warfare—from fast, mobile fighting with maximum concentration of forces at the decisive point to static and passive fighting. This gave the Egyptian army many advantages over the IDF due to its structure and the firepower at its disposal. The war along the canal claimed many casualties and damage to IDF equipment. It clearly demonstrated the weaknesses of the IDF, and particularly its difficulty of dealing with anti-aircraft defense systems that were deployed along the canal with the assistance of Russian experts.

Furthermore, the war created wide cracks in Israeli society and its trust in the political and military leadership. The unwavering internal support for Israeli governments on matters of national security was based on the claim that Israel was a peace-loving country and would do everything it could to bring peace. This long enduring belief suffered a serious blow after this war. Large portions of Israeli society, particularly on the left, claimed that the government led by Golda Meir had “fallen in

love” with the occupied territories and wished to continue ruling them. They maintained that the government’s declarations of its readiness for territorial concessions in return for peace were just for show.

Other groups, supporters of the Meir government and people from the right, rejected these claims. Israel’s insistence on the continuation of its deployment along the lines created by the Six Day War was justified, they believed, both ethically and for security reasons: at a later discussion, following the Yom Kippur War, Knesset Member Yigal Horowitz said, “There were people who told us there was no value to territories in modern warfare. However, this war showed us that fighting over square kilometers could be extremely uncompromising and bloody. This war proved the essential value of strategic depth, which led the IDF to refrain from a preemptive strike. To me it seems logical that we did not start a preventive war” (Special Knesset Session, 1973).

*Egypt’s leaders:* Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser died in September 1970. Nasser was an admired leader in the Arab world as a whole and Egypt in particular, although in Dayan’s view, this admiration was not justified. The period of his rule was marked by numerous failures, including: the Six Day War, the War of Attrition, the effort to set up a federation with Syria, and more (Speech by Defense Minister, 1973). The conclusion implied by Dayan is that it was unreasonable for any government system in Egypt to ignore these ongoing failures. In Dayan’s view these failures would most likely deter future Egyptian leaders from further military adventures.

Later Dayan referred to the link between the quality of leaders in the Arab world and the poor conditions within the Arab society: “The nature and quality of the people [leading the Arab world] is certainly significant from a strategic point of view. Sadat has not filled Nasser’s place; he is a very weak leader. He certainly lacks the authority needed to be considered the leader

of the Arab world (Speech by Defense Minister, 1973, p. 5).

In his reference to Sadat’s feeble character, Dayan was almost certainly influenced by the widespread perception in the Intelligence community regarding the Egyptian President’s weakness. “Sadat’s status at that time was problematic,” writes Prof. Shimon Shamir. “His image was poor. He reached the presidency not as a result of his strong position. On the contrary. It was because the ‘power centers’ within Egypt believed that due to his weakness the real power would still rest with them, and they would be able to get rid of him easily whenever they wanted. When Sadat was crowned president, in the eyes of many Egyptians he seemed to be pathetic and derided. There were endless jokes about him... This negative image was widely held in Egypt, in the Arab world and beyond, and in Israel as well” (Shamir, 2013, p. 26).

At a meeting of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee on October 8, 1970, the head of Intelligence Aharon Yariv described Sadat as “a colorless person, a weak person, and there are many jokes about him.” Against this background, Yariv stated firmly: “I think it would be justified to say that the death of Nasser is a benefit for us. Because Nasser was after all an expression of strength and symbolized Arab nationalism... [He] expressed the feeling in Arab hearts that the Arab people were a strong element in the world. There is no doubt that his death weakens Egypt, and Egypt is our enemy. His death also weakens the Arab world” (Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, 1970b, pp. 2-3).

A similar opinion of Sadat’s weakness was expressed by Zeira a few months before the war: “Egypt has internal problems that it is unable to solve. At the same time, the Egyptians also have external problems that cannot be solved at present. In the past Nasser managed to whitewash [the hard feelings of many Egyptian citizens in view of the poor state] of Egyptian morale by proclaiming his ostensible victories within the international community.

He managed to give Egypt the sense that in spite of its unresolved domestic problems...at least it was an important country in the world. (Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, 1973c, pp. 2-3).

In a memorandum written for President Nixon in October 1970, National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger stressed that Sadat was part of the first group of “free officers” headed by Naguib and Nasser who led the revolution in Egypt in the early 1950s. In December 1969 Nasser appointed him Vice President. His appointment as President had a dimension of legitimacy and continuity, which was essential to ensure Egypt’s political stability after Nasser’s death. Sadat lacked the charisma, authority, and reverence that characterized Nasser’s rule. He brought with him long years of loyalty to Nasser and acceptance by pro-Soviet circles and by the more moderate elements in Egyptian leadership. Presumably he was accepted by military circles, although he was not considered an authentic army person (Memorandum for the President, 1970).

On January 20, 1971, the Intelligence Branch gave a graphologist a sample of Anwar Sadat’s handwriting for an opinion of his personality. The graphologist wrote: “He has good intelligence, although fairly primitive...He has an open mind. He is not a spiritual person... he plays his cards as best he can. He has no political consistency or ideological philosophy. He is consistently practical...Intellectually, he lacks the necessary flexibility and adaptability; he functions mechanically...In spite of his stubbornness, he does not stick to his goals...He is quite rational, thinks carefully before taking action” (Character Analysis, 1971).

*The state of Arab society:* The general public in Egypt was also included in this picture of the “depressed” Arab world. Dayan’s speech gave a clear message: the Egyptian public was tired, frustrated, and perhaps desperate. “The Egyptians,” he said, although on what basis is not clear, “are tired because so many [people in the leadership] have spoken, so many have

been preoccupied [with the issues], so many have promised, and nothing happened.” [For that reason the Egyptian people] became apathetic [and] behind all there’s no actual activity, dynamism, or energy” (Speech by Defense Minister, 1973, p. 5).

Dayan went even further. In his opinion, this picture of apathy and helplessness robbed the Egyptians of the desire to invest efforts in changing the situation, whether by war or in any other way. They were fixed in their positions, and they had no real wish to change things: “This means,” said Dayan, “that the helplessness in Arab states [leads them] to barricade themselves behind intransigent formulas, because there is no effort to make war, to organize and do things...There is no intellectual effort to find a way out, to move things, to bang their head against the wall, [at least] in terms of thinking if not in terms of action.” Ultimately, in Dayan’s view, this mood of apathy and helplessness found expression in the fixed political positions of the Arab world: “Part of that almost fatalistic approach,” said Dayan, “can also be seen in the political approach of the Arabs (Speech by Defense Minister, 1973, pp. 5-6).

These remarks reflect the fact that Dayan was apparently influenced by various academic studies of the severe division and helplessness characterizing Arab society that were prominent during those years. Maj. Gen. (res.) Yehoshafat Harkabi, who turned to academic research after retiring from the IDF, was known as a highly influential academic figure during that period. He claimed, for instance, that the exile of Arabs from the Land of Israel in 1948 occurred “because of the disintegration of Arab society... Arab society is atomized. Each family takes care of itself” (Ginossar & Shalom, 1995).

In an interview a few weeks after the Six Day War, Harkabi presented various statements about Arab society that, with the perspective of time, appear patently without foundation: Harkabi said that “war is a social action. The ability of a nation to fight depends, to a large degree, on the ability of its citizens to

work together. The Egyptian nation is not an organism, but lots of individuals, operating as individuals, according to their personal interests, and not as a group, according to collectivist ideas. Therefore they are unable to fight an effective war ...Nasser...was unable to mix the Egyptians into a nation” (Pundak, 1967).

“In Arab society,” said Harkabi, although it is not clear on what basis, “there is hardly any unity. Each individual works for himself, and feels alienated from the others...The Egyptians...are only capable of limited camaraderie.” Against this background, Harkabi cast the limited fighting ability of the Egyptian soldier: “In the IDF every soldier knows that [if he is wounded] his comrades will not leave him on the battlefield. The Egyptian soldier believes that his fellow soldiers will abandon him. The result is that an IDF unit responds to fire by uniting. The Egyptian unit responds by crumbling...Even if every Egyptian soldier was talented, the Egyptian army would remain ineffective. War demands group action” (Pundak, 1967).

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In a speech before the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee on February 18, 1969, Maj. Gen. Harkabi specified the sources of weakness in the Arab world that in his estimation led to the Arab defeat in the Six Day War: (a) the isolation and inability of the Arab individual to make a collective effort, i.e., the inability of Arab society to make a collective effort because of individual isolation. (b) The numerous lies in Arab society. No society can boast that it speaks only the truth, says Harkabi, but the number of lies in Arab societies by far exceeds the number in other societies. (c) In Arab societies moral corruption sets in from the start (Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, 1969).

In Harkabi’s opinion, the Six Day War did not lead the Arab world to learn from its mistakes. On the contrary, there are signs that the process of disintegration has accelerated—at the social level and the national level. They are only halfway down the slope. There is an atmosphere of “spiritual depression” in the Arab world. “The gods have sunk.” Harkabi’s summary relates naturally to the enormous gaps between “us” and “them”: “Our society is full of vitality and resourcefulness, and facing a society that has doubts about itself...The gap between us and them is growing wider... They are unable to close this gap because of their hatred of the West...It is hard for them to digest Western culture” (Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, 1969, pp. 4-5).

Defense Minister Dayan’s conclusion was unambiguous. This situation does not rule out the possibility of exchanges of fire and battles along the canal as in the War of Attrition. However, it makes the possibility of total war very unlikely. And this is what Dayan said only three months before the eruption of the Yom Kippur on October 6, 1973: “We can’t say that the Arabs won’t open fire. On the contrary, we can say that in fact because [the situation is so dire] some Egyptian military units might open fire on the canal. But a planned, total war of Arab states on all their fronts, that is something that is not on the horizon in the near future...If it does happen [a war will break out], I’ll make another speech and explain why it happened. But that doesn’t seem likely” (Speech by Defense Minister, 1973, p. 5).

These assessments ignored or at the very least attached little importance to explicit remarks by many people in Egypt in 1973, including President Sadat, about the approaching war with Israel. In a speech at Alexandria University on July 26, 1973, Sadat said that the defeat [in the Six Day War] was temporary, and in spite of the defeat, they should not surrender. The Arabs had known eighty years of Crusader conquest and ultimately were victorious. The current struggle will continue for several generations,

maybe for 25-30 years. Egypt is growing stronger politically, economically, and militarily. “Our will now rests on real force, and we only have to use it in the appropriate circumstances and at the time of our choice...They expect us to give up...but we never will!...We will never give up our wish, however long it takes” (Sadat’s speech, 1973a, p. 97).

Dayan later developed a fairly interesting thesis. This too was presented as a statement that was beyond doubt, although it is not clear what it was based on: “For the Arabs in general, for the Arab leaders as individuals, as people, for the Arab leadership—it is much easier and more comfortable to be in a state of war with us [the existing situation] than to reach some kind of settlement with us...Generally when there is war, and it ends [the parties] want to reach some peaceful relations. [There are] some who are prepared to pay more for peace and others who are prepared to pay less. Eliminating the situation of war and reaching a situation of peace, that’s a desirable thing that [many people] strive for within the international community. I don’t think that’s the case with the Arabs” (Speech by Defense Minister, 1973, p. 6).

At the meeting of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, Dayan continued to develop this thesis: “The Arab world is not yet ready to see an Israeli ambassador in Cairo, and is not yet ready to see Israeli tourists in Cairo, in Beirut, or in other places. Even if they [the Israelis] do everything [agree to significant concessions]. The first thing [that is needed in order to promote a political settlement with the Arab world] is to prepare the hearts [in Arab society, to come to terms with the existence of normal relations between the Arab world and Israel]. [At this stage] it is not yet possible to reach such a formal situation of open relations between Israel and Arab states” (Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, 1973b).

Dayan’s explanation for the Arab preference for continuing the state of war rather than reaching a peaceful settlement is quite amazing. As Dayan put it, the Arabs live according to a

clear, unambiguous narrative, which says that the Zionist movement invaded their country and stole their land from them. They cannot accept this reality. Assuming that Israel will not agree to change the status quo, they choose to maintain the state of war and avoid contact with Israel, to avoid the dilemma of changing the status quo. If there is a peace agreement, according to Dayan the Arab leaders will be in disagreement on complex and difficult issues, such as the Palestinian issue: would Egypt insist that no peace treaty be signed with Israel before the Palestinian problem is resolved? Or the borders issue: would Egypt insist on a full withdrawal to the June 5, 1967 lines? This would require difficult decisions (Speech by Defense Minister, 1973, p. 6).

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The Intelligence assessment of May 1973 showed a similar picture of rigid thinking, apathy, and passivity that was in effect leading the Arab world to prefer the status quo over any material change. In Zeira’s opinion this type of thinking suited the interests of Israel and the powers: “I think that the four partners in the region—Egypt, Israel, the Soviet Union, and the United States—are not interested in changing the current situation. Egypt is weak, and therefore not interested in meaningful negotiations, because it would start [participating] from an inferior position. So to sum up, in my opinion, in spite of all the disadvantages, the situation today is the most comfortable for it. It’s the least bad” (Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, 1973c, p. 7).

### **Balance of Military Power**

Just before the end of his speech to security establishment employees, Dayan turned to the

decisive issue of shaping the balance of power between Israel and its enemies—the balance of military forces. Dayan stated unambiguously: “At present we have an advantage [over our enemies].” He said that this advantage is not expressed in quantitative terms. On the contrary, in this area the enemy has an advantage of about three to one. However, the quality of our army and the lines where we are now give us an advantage. “If they start a war—they will be beaten and defeated” (Speech by Defense Minister, 1973, pp. 9-10).

However, focusing on the northern front, Dayan clarified that before being defeated, Syria could shell towns in the north and cause Israel heavy damage: “Until we finish conquering Syria,” he said, “they can fire 500 shells at Kiryat Shmona and Tiberias, causing a lot of damage and loss of life... In the end we will win.” In terms of equipment, Dayan said that “until the end of the 1970s we are in a good position. We will take steps to ensure that after that, in the 1980s, we’ll still have an advantage” (Speech by Defense Minister 1973, pp. 9-10). In fact, as we know, this statement did not stand the test of time. In the early days of the Yom Kippur War Israel already needed immediate supplies of arms from the United States.

Dayan expressed satisfaction with the quality of the IDF recruits. There was a time, he said, when we were concerned about the younger generation; now the situation is better. “With all due respect and my admiration for all the older generals,” said Dayan, “and really some of them are due all praise...but the younger generation are no less talented than they.” Dayan did not ignore the severe criticism sounded at various stages of the War of Attrition, of the security policy and the inflexible political attitudes that many felt made it harder to achieve a peace settlement with Egypt. Dayan did not attach much importance to this in connection with the motivation of soldiers. “Even if there are occasional expressions of criticism, even if there are different world views, perhaps also

on matters of security, it appears that this is not [expressed] in the military ability [of the IDF soldiers], in their approach, and their dedication” (Speech by Defense Minister, 1973, p. 10).

Apart from that, Dayan stressed that the IDF’s strength was focused on the Air Force and the Armored Corps. These forces are based, he said, “on limited, elite groups of people.” In these groups, the spirit of volunteering is stronger than in the past. Many of the pilots come from agricultural settlements, kibbutzim, and moshavim. The population of these places represents no more than 7 percent of the whole population, but their proportion among Air Force pilots is very high. “This public,” said Dayan, “provides the nucleus of this strength in our Air Force” (Speech by Defense Minister, 1973, p. 10).

And finally, another important component of Israel’s strength, according to Dayan, lay in the ceasefire lines since the Six Day War, and the means made available for the IDF to defend its borders, which had cost a great deal of money. “And if battles take place—they don’t immediately affect the home front...it gives us confidence knowing that if they do open fire, they will lose the war. And they are more or less aware of this...It’s good that there is no war. But if there is a war, then we are prepared for it” (Speech by Defense Minister, 1973, pp. 11-12). A few months later it became clear that these words were not grounded in reality.

## Conclusion

Two important points should be highlighted in this paper. The first concerns the “preconception” that led the decision makers in Israel during the period prior to the Yom Kippur War to conclude that the likelihood of war was very low. The main anchor of this concept was the assessment that as long as there was no dramatic change in the balance of military power between the two states, including regarding airpower, Egypt would not dare to embark on a war against Israel.

Moshe Dayan’s speech shows that there were many other layers that contributed to the concept, apart from the military aspect:

- a. The closer relations between the United States and the Soviet Union, and the consensus over the policy of detente in the international system, built around agreement that disputes between states must be resolved by negotiations and not by military means
- b. The Nixon administration’s support for Israel, both politically and militarily
- c. The weakness of the Arab world and the deep rifts between Arab states
- d. The weakness of Arab societies, which makes it hard for them to deal with the strength exhibited by Israel
- e. The lack of authority and the weakness of President Sadat
- f. Finally, the military balance of power which is clearly in Israel’s favor and ensures absolute defeat for Egypt if they start a war.

On October 6, 1973, around 2:00 in the afternoon, the Yom Kippur War broke out. In one stroke it destroyed the concept that was so deeply rooted in the hearts and minds of Israeli decision makers, which led them to adhere fanatically to the belief that the possibility of Egypt initiating a war against Israel was very unlikely. In the early hours of October 6, 1973 it was already clear to the decision makers in Israel that war would break out that day. The assessment was that war would start “in the evening.” In fact, as we know, it began a few hours earlier.

At the end of the war and following the deep distress that ensued, the Israel public demanded to know how the Israel had suffered such terrible political and military failures, which in the view of many had posed an existential risk to the Jewish state. Under heavy public pressure, the government set up a national commission of inquiry headed by Supreme Court Justice Shimon Agranat. The Agranat Commission pondered the issue for many long months. They heard testimony from large numbers of

people, and eventually submitted a report that surveyed the chain of events leading to the war, pointed to those “guilty of the failure” and wrote recommendations that were intended to prevent the future recurrence of such failures.

And now, with shocking coincidence, fifty years later, on October 7, 2023, the State of Israel found itself in a similar situation. Hamas initiated an action of war, again on a Jewish holiday, including seizing communities in the south, murdering civilians and soldiers, and taking hostages. Within a short time, Hezbollah joined in the campaign, if not with the same intensity, followed by the Houthis in Yemen. Once again, a preconception that was deeply rooted among Israeli decision makers was shattered. Again Israel was taken completely by surprise, and again forced to deal with harsh threats on more than one front. It appears, therefore, that there is no single piece of advice, insight, or formula that can ensure that the leadership will not adopt erroneous concepts that will also collapse when put to the test and once again threaten the existence of the State of Israel.

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Prof. Zaki Shalom is a senior researcher at INSS and a professor emeritus at Ben Gurion University. He has published numerous papers on various historical and contemporary aspects of Israel’s security policy, the Arab-Israeli conflict, superpower involvement in the Middle East, Israel’s fight against Islamic terror, and Israel’s nuclear option. Prof. Shalom holds a doctorate from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. Prominent among his books: *Between Dimona and Washington: The Struggle over the Development of Israel’s Nuclear Option, 1960-1968* (2004), and *Fire in His Bones: David Ben-Gurion and his Struggle for the Country’s Image, 1963-1967* (2004); in 2007, Prof. Shalom won the prize in memory of Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion for this book. [zakis@inss.org.il](mailto:zakis@inss.org.il)

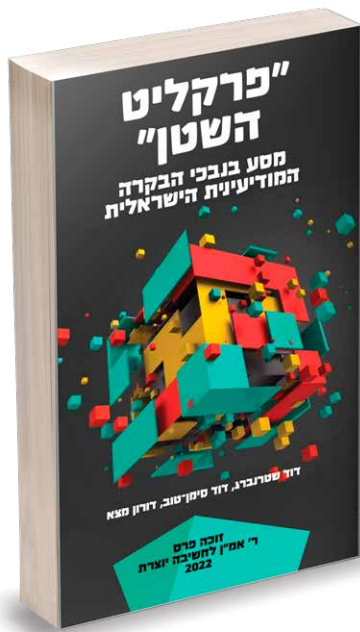
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## Notes

- 1 For the components of the concept, see also: Tsoref, H. (Ed.). (2016). *Golda Meir—The fourth Prime Minister: Selected documents and introductions to her life, 1898-1978*. State Archives, pp. 506-508. <https://tinyurl.com/5n7nxsx> [in Hebrew].
- 2 On Golda Meir's meetings with President Nixon see also: Vanetik, B., & Shalom, Z. (2012). The same lady in another guise: The meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir and United States President Richard Nixon, March 1, 1973. *Cathedra*, 146, 143-172. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23408809> [in Hebrew].

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- 3 In this context, researcher Yigal Kipnis (2022) writes: “In return for American foot-dragging [on the issue of the political process] Israel was required to refrain from a preemptive strike and from escalating the tension, if Egypt created it by large-scale reserve callup. The avoidance by Golda Meir and Moshe Dayan of a preemptive strike and summoning the reserves in the days prior to the war, an action which many mourned and were astonished by afterwards, was an expression of this secret commitment.” See *1973: The road to war*. Kinneret Zmora Dvir, pp. 14-15 [in Hebrew].
- 4 Tsoref, H., & Boimfeld, M. (2022). “*The day will come when the archives are opened*”: *Golda Meir and the Yom Kippur War*. Carmel, pp. 47-49 [in Hebrew].



## Intelligence Supervision: Difficult, Intricate, and Indispensable

**Kobi Michael**

Institute for National Security Studies (INSS)  
– Tel Aviv University

### *“The Devil’s Advocate”: A Journey Through the Depths of Israeli Intelligence Supervision*

by David Sternberg, David Siman-Tov, and Doron Matza

Institute for the Research of the Methodology of Intelligence and Maarachot, 2023

133 pages [in Hebrew]

The authors of the book, which examines the supervision body in the IDF Military Intelligence Directorate (known as “Aman”) through a detailed and documented genealogical review, have produced a compact, informed, comprehensive, and above all, important and singular product and contributed to a subject that has not been discussed much outside the intelligence community. Their access to internal Aman documents, some of which are

still classified and therefore do not appear in the book, adds a touch of interest and originality to the work and helps to consolidate insights and arguments.

The book, comprising six chapters, leads readers on a journey through the intricacies of the supervision world. In the first chapter, the authors present the concept and the institution of supervision in Aman and the historical background to its development. In the second chapter, they describe the incarnations of the organizational structural and methodological supervision over five decades, from the day of its establishment to the present. The third chapter presents the world of supervision through their personal experience, in retrospect and from a sober contemporary perspective of four senior officials who headed the supervision department at Aman or held a senior position there. Each focuses on a central issue that he dealt with during his service there. The four cases presented in this chapter, expanding the outlook and illustrating the methodological and essential dilemmas of the supervision world, are: the unilateral withdrawal of the IDF from Lebanon in May 2000, with an emphasis on the very decision and its implications; the surprise appearance of a C-802 cruise missile in the hands of Hezbollah in the Second Lebanon War; the discovery of the nuclear reactor in Syria; and the surprise of the Arab Spring. In the fourth chapter of the book, the authors look at regions outside Israel and seek to illuminate the issue of intelligence supervision in the United States, Great Britain, and the Netherlands. The fifth chapter refers to the less successful attempt to make supervision an institution of the entire intelligence community, focusing on the limited attempts at supervision in the Mossad and the Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet), and dealing with several attempts to operate a joint supervision institution. In the sixth chapter, the authors focus on the current and future challenges of supervision in the age of information. The book concludes with

an epilogue summarizing the importance of supervision despite its limitations, and the challenges that lie before it.

The writers' skills and professional experience in the worlds of intelligence content are impressively reflected in the quality, clarity, and focus of the writing. All these contribute to a book that is a must-read, be it for people from the world of intelligence or those just interested in the field. The introduction by the head of Aman to the book and the decision to honor the authors with his 2022 award for creative thinking indicate the importance of the book to Aman, and in my opinion, to the entire intelligence community.

The book is interwoven with well-honed sayings chosen by the authors in an intelligent and interesting way, which serves the purpose of engaging the readers and emphasizing important and central messages. For example, they open the introductory chapter by quoting the immortal saying of General George Patton: "If everyone is thinking alike, then somebody isn't thinking" (p. 8). I don't know if this saying was or became the motto of the supervision department at Aman, but it deserves to be on a poster hung in every office and meeting room in the department, and it should also be taught to every intelligence officer, and certainly to senior officers and decision makers at the political and military levels.

In the introductory chapter, the authors probe the foundations of critical thinking in the Jewish tradition and in Greek culture. From there, their historical journey continues through the Renaissance period to the worlds of contemporary management, business, and organizational psychology (pp. 9-10). In their view, the term "supervision" is fundamentally problematic due to its etymological relationship in Hebrew to the word "criticism"—they insist that it should not reflect the idea of the "devil's advocate" or "*ifcha mistabra*" (the dissenting or opposite view). The term "red team" is more appropriate in their eyes (p. 11) even though in the end, in their understanding, all these

concepts converge into one common purpose: "refining intelligence thought and quality" (p. 11). The Israeli body for supervision, which was established following the traumatic intelligence failure of the Yom Kippur War, is defined by the authors as "a sign and example throughout the world of the uniqueness of the Israeli intelligence establishment in thinking differently and in a pioneering perspective" (p. 11). The authors conclude the introductory chapter by presenting a number of research questions that they seek to answer, and emphasize the important motto in their eyes: "Without an institution of supervision, there is no culture of supervision" (p. 12).

The authors are careful to distinguish between supervision as a technique and supervision as an essential component of organizational culture. They seek to establish the distinction by answering three questions, which should be asked by the supervising entity and the heads of organizations: "The first is related to the nature of the analysis: engaging in details, or the big picture? The second is, what is the starting point [differentiating between four different approaches—pp. 17-18] of the supervision arguments in relation to the research position or the object of the supervision? The third, what and how much should be made public, and how should it be made public so that supervision is properly implemented?" (p. 15).

Particularly interesting and constructive is the comparative analysis made by the authors between the four approaches or starting positions: "devil's advocate," the shadow approach, alternative thinking, and peer review. The analysis is summarized in an enlightening table that compares the different approaches, with reference to four criteria: comparison to the leading argument, the product, direction, and dominant feature (p. 19). Despite the differences between the approaches, it is necessary in all of them to disconnect from an existing situation and an existing intelligence assessment. In addition, although it is a trivial matter, the

authors recognize the difficulty of applying any of the approaches “in the very ability to distill and attack the research argument...[because] most of the time, the research arguments are not written clearly enough (regarding the firmness of the statement) or focused enough (several arguments mixed together)” (p. 19).

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**Another important dilemma that the researchers refer to addresses the tension between the need to engage in a variety of topics and the focus on defined and limited areas of knowledge or issues.**

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The third question about what, how much, and how to make public presents the fundamental dilemmas of supervision very clearly. The founding idea of supervision is “to shock, upset, shake, and destabilize.” These are mechanisms designed to sow doubt and interest, and they take a toll on the supervision’s ability to function over time. This is mainly due to the consequences of the method of operation on reciprocal relations, and to some extent, also on personal relations between members of the supervision department and the research division. Likewise, the supervisor’s ability to remain relevant “along the research avenue (discussions at the level of branches, arenas, and division heads) may be compromised, hence his ability to react in real time and be relevant to ongoing events.” The professional quality of the supervision diagnoses is also challenged, because it is not always the case that “all the details are taken into account, or because supervision does not have sufficient familiarity with things that were said and done” (p. 20). The authors find an answer to these limitations, even if partial, in the dialogue between the supervision and the intelligence researchers. According to their approach, “the significant advantage of this method is that it creates, for the researchers, a mediating mechanism of the nature of the criticism, which negates their sense that the criticism is aimed at them personally, and emphasizes that its purpose is

to assist them in the act of evaluation, and that they are part of a non-adversarial process” (p. 21). The authors recommend finding the golden path between the confrontational approach and discourse.

Another important dilemma that the researchers refer to addresses the tension between the need to engage in a variety of topics and the focus on defined and limited areas of knowledge or issues. Here too, the researchers emphasize the necessity of a balanced approach, which will prevent the supervisor from being perceived by intelligence researchers as troublesome and not thorough or professional enough, or one who is limited to a circumscribed field of knowledge.

In the last part of the chapter, the authors refer to the question of supervision’s involvement in areas that go beyond the assessment of the intelligence itself. They return to this issue in the chapters on supervision in other countries, referring to the role of supervision regarding the training of intelligence investigators and regarding the supervision’s reference to the intelligence work processes and organizational and structural aspects of the intelligence community.

The second chapter, in which the authors describe what they term the genealogy of the supervision department over the course of five decades, is interwoven with primary source documents that they have accessed and not only give a flavor of historical authenticity but also an interesting and authoritative point of view, which greatly contributes to the chapter and the book as a whole. The authors identify four main periods spanning five decades and present each period in terms of the success of the supervision, its contribution, the system of interrelationships with the research division on the one hand and with the head of the Aman on the other hand, and the changes in its organizational structure. In describing the characteristics of the periods, the authors succeed in raising a series of methodological, organizational, and essential dilemmas of the

supervision work, and they outline the process of supervision development characterized by ups and downs, achievements and failures, and organizational changes that reflect, inter alia, the attitude and importance that Aman chiefs attributed to supervision, until the decision by then-head of Aman Tamir Hayman to make it a civilian body. They conclude the chapter by emphasizing the personal dimension, which is related to the identity of the head of the supervision department and the triangle of relations between the head of the Aman and head of the supervision department and head of the research division (p. 56).

The third chapter, which deals with the issue of the success of supervision through the ages, the range of its functions, methodology, and modus operandi, and all while referring to the three questions raised in the introductory chapter, is a particularly interesting chapter. Its uniqueness lies in the personal angle of four narrators, who relate to the questions and dilemmas at the heart of the book through the prism of their personal experience in four significant and formative events from an intelligence-research point of view. The chapter enlivens the book and the topic and embellishes it not only anecdotally but in a very matter of fact, substantial, deep, and informed fashion.

The fourth chapter provides the reader with an “overseas view” of the development of supervision in three countries. The choice to include the United States and the United Kingdom is easy to understand, because these are two intelligence powers. Less clear is the choice in the test case of the Netherlands, which is not a prominent or particularly important country when it comes to the world of intelligence. A more interesting example would have been Germany, France, or Italy, as long as those intelligence communities have supervision bodies. In any case, this is an interesting and thought-provoking chapter, which reviews the historical developments that led to the establishment of supervision bodies and outlines their character and the

characteristics of their operation (both in aspects related to intelligence research and in aspects related to the supervision of intelligence work processes and the organizational structure of the intelligence community in those countries). This expands the basis and infrastructure for advanced comparative research, alongside a broader and richer perspective with reference to the Israeli case.

The fifth chapter examines the weakness of supervision, its failure in the Shin Bet and the Mossad, and the failure of the unimpressive attempt to establish a community-wide supervision body. In this chapter, the authors also expand on the role of supervision with reference to non-intelligence issues that relate to the IDF itself or the “blue team” and the expectations that some IDF commanders and others had for a more expansive approach to supervision. At the end of the day this converged and narrowed down to its original purpose—supervision over the products of intelligence research and the work processes and the organizational structure at Aman.

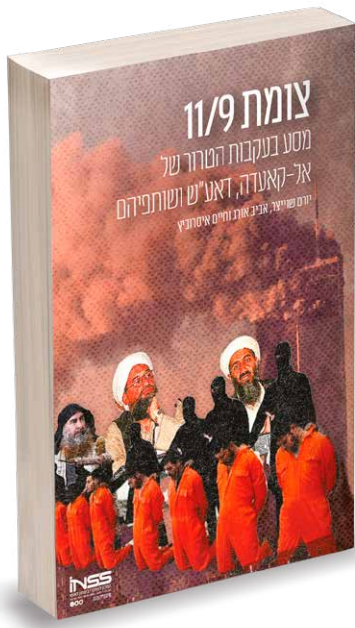
The sixth chapter is a forward-looking chapter. The starting point is the contemporary period and the challenge of dealing with big data and a flood of information, along with a series of perceptual biases related to the technological world (“the algorithm as a black box,” p. 115) which is advanced and updated, and the way information produced by technological means in general. In this chapter, the authors present the characteristics of the challenges of the current period and of the future, and emphasize the changes in the working environment of the intelligence offices and the necessity of the supervision to adapt itself to the changes. The authors identify the main difficulty in “the age of information [which] intensifies the challenging asymmetry in size (in resources) between the supervision department and the intelligence enterprise... [which deepens the] gaps that already exist in the ability to go over the material, as well as in thematic specialization. On top of that, there

is an increasing gap in the technological skill of the supervision personnel...[and all these alongside] the trend of placing increasing trust in quantification and automation” (p. 112).

In the epilogue, the authors wish to summarize their assessment of the supervision institution based on the findings, the discussion of the research questions, and a look overseas. The main message in my eyes is their conclusion regarding the nature of the supervision’s failure or success, which “lies not in the nature of its assessment against the test of reality, but in the fact that it encourages competition over the interpretation. Competition is a mechanism that incentivizes research to excel, sharpen and progress, and clarify to itself and its consumers the mask of assumptions and difficulties upon which it rests” (p. 123). The essence of the supervision is paradoxical in the eyes of the authors, when on the one hand it derives its status and legitimacy from the system, and on the other hand, its subversive action challenges the system and is based on

the idea of pushing an alternative conceptual option to the conceptual option of the system. The authors have much confidence in the head of Aman and his attitude to supervision, and find a high positive correlation between the degree of trust the head of Aman has in the head of the supervision department and the effectiveness of the supervision (p. 124). The fact that the supervision institution has survived five decades, despite structural changes along with changes in the limits of its activity and responsibility, indicates the authors’ assessment of the stability of the institution and its necessity. The authors’ conclusions are reasoned, substantiated, and summarize an important book, which deserves to be read and studied in the intelligence community and beyond.

Prof. Kobi Michael is a senior research fellow at INSS and editor of *Strategic Assessment*.  
[kobim@inss.org.il](mailto:kobim@inss.org.il)



## A Journey into the Origins and Future of Salafi-Jihadist Terrorism

Yossi Kuperwasser

Institute for the Research of the Methodology of Intelligence and Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs

### *Junction 9/11: A Journey into the Terrorism Worlds of al-Qaeda, ISIS, and their Affiliates*

by Yoram Schweitzer, Aviv Oreg, and Hayim Iserovich

Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), 2023

314 pages [in Hebrew]

*Junction 9/11* seeks to deal in a comprehensive, multidimensional fashion with the many questions that trouble any observer of the fascinating phenomenon of the rise of the Salafi-jihadist organizations that have become one of the primary shapers of modern history. In doing so, it touches on the relations between Islam and the West, and on the seeming decline in strength of Salafi-jihadist organizations over the

past few years. The authors, who have worked in this field for many years, including during their military service (Schweitzer and Oreg were responsible for studying this issue in the research division of the Intelligence Directorate), share their vast knowledge with readers. Most of the information is not new and many of the events are well-known, but reading the book is nevertheless enjoyable and informative.

The book comprises two main sections. The first section includes three chapters: the opening chapter presents the ideology of Salafi-jihadism, which underlies al-Qaeda and ISIS, along with other organizations around the world. The second and third chapters describe significant milestones in the organizational, ideological, and operational development of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State from the 1980s until today. The second section includes two chapters: the fourth chapter deals with issues that cut across the different organizations, including psychological warfare by Salafi-jihadist organizations, the singular practice of suicide bombings, and global jihadist attitudes toward Israel. The fifth and final chapter deals with the question of the future of Salafi-jihadism, and this is indeed the most important question. It touches on the nature of the weakened threat posed by Salafi-jihadist organizations to the West and to the Middle East. Will this weakening continue, and were the events that preceded it an impressive but short-term outbreak—a passing fad? Or is the current decline in activity a short hiatus, after which terrorism will once again substantially threaten “infidels” in the West and the Middle East? The book grapples with this question toward the end; its expert authors refrain from offering a conclusive and unequivocal answer. In their analysis, substantial knowledge regarding the past and present can lead to either possibility, and therefore does not essentially help to predict the future.

On the one hand, global jihadist organizations have suffered serious blows over recent years.

especially the loss of leaders who were killed or arrested (bin Laden, al-Zarqawi, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, al-Zawahiri, Khalid Sheikh Mohammed, and many more) and loss of control of extensive territory, which has thus harmed their capabilities and their attractiveness to young people in Western countries. The damage to jihadist organizations is also reflected in their reduced level of activity in the West. Additional reasons include improved capabilities by Western security and intelligence agencies to cope with the challenge; focus by jihadist organizations on fighting with other forces in their region, so that they are not involved in promoting terrorism within Western states; and the Taliban's commitment at this stage to the Doha Agreement that forbids al-Qaeda from acting against Western targets from Afghan territory. On the other hand, the distress that led many Muslims to follow the extremist interpretation of Islam and the impressive strength displayed by Salafi-jihadist organizations still commands attention, and in the future may translate into acts of violence. This might take place in organized fashion, or in the manner of "death by a thousand cuts," as conceived by Abu Musab al-Suri, which was adopted by al-Qaeda and ISIS; in other words, by terrorists who act based on the inspiration of those organizations without being directly affiliated with them.

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The book presents the many tensions and dilemmas faced by the Salafi-jihadist organizations in advance of their decisions to carry out showcase attacks against Western targets, and also led frequently to splits within the movement into subsidiary organizations

(primarily based on ideological disputes, but sometimes due to political and interpersonal power struggles). One of the major disputes regards the additional aims of the jihadist organizations beyond the struggle against a foreign presence on Islamic soil (such as Afghanistan and Iraq): the debate centers on whether to focus on acting in Islamic countries against ostensible Muslim governments and their supporters who allow Western ideas to penetrate, or alternatively, to focus on jihad against the West in the West. Other major debates: whether to fight the Shiites or to refrain from doing so; whether or not to publicize and glorify cruelty toward infidel victims; and whether the conditions were ripe for establishing a caliphate.

One of the most fascinating disputes described in the book was the one that preceded the decision to carry out the 9/11 attacks. On the one hand was the desire to attack the symbols of US power and control; on the other hand was the concern that the US response would harm the viability of Taliban rule in Afghanistan and deny al-Qaeda its primary base. All these debates took a completely rational form based on cost-benefit analyses, with the guiding principle being which policy would best advance the aims of Salafi-jihadism and be most consistent with its radical worldview.

An especially interesting issue for Israeli readers is that of the threat posed to Israel by radical Salafi-jihadist terror organizations. The discussion of this subject is appropriately in-depth. The takeaway is that while the actual performance of organized Salafi-jihadist terrorism against Israel was lower than the degree of their anti-Jewish and anti-Israeli rhetoric, the actions taken (some of which succeeded while others failed) and the increasing prevalence of attacks inspired by Salafi-jihadism by terrorists not acting within an organized framework, compel Israel to continue to closely monitor terrorist bodies that adhere to this ideology and support the global effort to suppress them.

In this context the book describes Israel's important contribution to the global and regional campaign against extremist Islamic terrorism, particularly in the field of intelligence. The impression given by this chapter is that global jihadist organizations see the struggle against Israel and the Jews as part of the campaign against the West, but believe that the primary role in this context must be played by Palestinian organizations, which they view as not acting with sufficient determination and daring (including Hamas). While al-Qaeda therefore concluded that it could not neglect this aim and that it must act to some extent against the Jews and Israel itself or via its proxies (for example, with attacks in Mombasa and Djerba), the Islamic State and its branches emphasized this issue even less, even if they did not completely neglect it (shooting at Eilat, attacks in Brussels, and inside Israel in 2022).

Either way, it is clear that the Palestinian Islamist public has not been drawn in significant numbers toward these movements, and their presence in the Palestinian space has been limited, because the Islamist struggle against the immediate enemy, Israel, was led by local bodies, i.e., Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad. The number of Palestinians and Israeli Arabs who joined al-Qaeda remained low, and most were active in other arenas of jihad and not in Israel. The few who dared do so in the West Bank or the Gaza Strip were targeted and chased by the PA and Hamas. Very few of the Palestinians involved in Salafi-jihadism left their imprint on history; the most prominent was Abdallah Azzam, the ideologue who established the services bureau which was a foundation for al-Qaeda. According to the book, al-Zarqawi, who led the terrorism campaign against the Americans in Iraq, was of Jordanian-Palestinian origin, but most sources present him as a Jordanian from the Bani Hassan tribes.

The book covers many other fascinating topics, including the organizational and ideological development process of the Salafi-

jihadist organizations; the effective use by al-Qaeda and especially the Islamic State of the internet and social networks for recruiting agents and supporters; the transition of radical Islamic activity centers to new hubs, with an emphasis on Africa and Asia, while focusing on local enemies; their thus-far failed efforts to obtain unconventional weapons, and the efforts by the West, led by US President Obama, to prevent them from doing so.

This noteworthy book is important for making the information available to the Israeli public, but it is not free of shortcomings. First, it has no index. Such a wide-ranging work should allow readers to return easily to a detail or a person of interest. The appendices with a timeline of the development of Salafi-jihadism and key persons mitigate this drawback somewhat, but do not resolve it. Second, there are a few editing problems and repetitions, and more maps, pictures, and diagrams would be valuable additions; those that are included are not always translated or explained. Third, in the description of ideological sources, a broader picture could have been included, and the use of Qur'an verses by radical Islam was not described sufficiently. The limited number of Arabic sources in the extensive bibliography also stands out. The description of the methodology of the showcase attacks could have been more detailed.

None of the criticism above, however, eclipses the importance of this book's contribution to understanding Salafi-jihadism, or the enjoyment of reading it.

Brig. Gen. (res.) Yossi Kuperwasser served in a variety of positions in Military Intelligence and was the head of the research division in the years 2001-2006. He was also the Director General of the Ministry of Strategic Affairs. Today he is the head of the Institute for the Research of the Methodology of Intelligence at the Israel Intelligence Heritage and Commemoration Center, and a senior researcher at the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. [ykup@walla.com](mailto:ykup@walla.com)



## Innovations in Teaching Conflict Management and Resolution in Israel

Chen Kertcher

Ariel University

### *Conflict Resolution in the International Arena*

by Amira Schiff

Lamda – Open University, 2023  
425 pages [in Hebrew]

*Conflict Resolution in the International Arena* is the result of many years of hard work by its author, who is one of the leading experts in the field in Israel. Unfortunately, despite

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**When considering the enormity of Schiff's achievement and the contribution her book will make, it is important to understand that the American school in higher education is based on textbooks, which provide students with the theoretical and empirical fundamentals to approach a specific subject.**

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the development of varied courses on conflict management and resolution and the importance of a subject that is taught on many campuses in Israel, until now there has no comprehensive book in Hebrew on conflict management and resolution. Students and others who wanted to expand their knowledge of the field were forced do so without a systematic theory textbook in Hebrew. Publishing houses believed it was not economically worthwhile for them to translate into Hebrew the seminal works taught in educational institutions across Israel. In addition, and for understandable reasons, the vast majority of the literature published in Hebrew deals primarily with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and many research institutions add their differing viewpoints on the conflict (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2010).<sup>1</sup> Veteran researchers in the field are aware of literature that has been published on these issues over the years, such as international intervention (Kertcher, 2015) or international law (Ben-Naftali & Shany, 2006). However, this handful of books examines only specific angles of the subject matter. The new textbook by Dr. Amira Schiff, who is the head of Bar Ilan University's conflict resolution program, seeks to correct this anomaly and provide readers with the theoretical tools to understand the phenomenon.

When considering the enormity of Schiff's achievement and the contribution her book will make, it is important to understand that the American school in higher education is based on textbooks, which provide students with the theoretical and empirical fundamentals to approach a specific subject. Writing a textbook is quite different from authoring a research study. Over the past few decades, a variety of textbooks and approaches have been published to teach the subject of conflict resolution and management. *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice*, for example, edited by Deutsch, Coleman, and Marcus, contains more than 50 chapters

examining the subject of conflicts, primarily from the perspective of social psychology (Deutsch et al., 2014). A different approach, offered by Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall, describes the field of conflict management and resolution by categorizing every stage of the conflict—from pre-conflict to the aftermath—alongside thematic elements, such as ethics and gender (Ramsbotham et al., 2016). A third approach appears in the textbook edited by Bercovitch, Kremenjuk, and Zartman, in which there are dozens of chapters, divided according to research methodology, conflict causes, and conflict resolution elements (Bercovitch et al., 2008). There is no one perfect method, and there is always room for the literature to be updated.

Amira Schiff's new textbook is different from the abovementioned works. It is divided into six thematic chapters, each of which introduces not only the basic approaches but also refers to the most recent publications by leading researchers in the field. For students and researchers hoping to broaden their expertise in the discipline, this book is a good foundation for ways to engage in a theoretical discussion. In other words, the main goals of the book are accessibility and putting the emphasis on acquaintance with the theoretical approaches in the field.

The first chapter explains the issue of conflict in international relations, while differentiating between realistic and liberal assumptions, the differences between managing and resolving a conflict, and the typologies of conflict. The subchapter dealing with the history of the field is especially important for understanding its evolution and depth, highlighting a field that is interdisciplinary and draws upon history, international relations, political science, and social psychology.

The second chapter deals with conflict management. The chapter explains a variety of strategies, such as sanctions, agreements, and the use of both soft and hard power. The discussion about coercive diplomacy and examples such as the Cuban missile crisis and the sanctions against Iran help clarify the

potential uses of various strategic tools. All these approaches are founded on interest-based rational approaches or on social psychology.

The third chapter, which comprises around one third of the book, deals with one of the key issues in the field—negotiations. At the heart of the chapter are the paradigms of bargaining and problem-solving, which are the cornerstones of all negotiation tactics and which can be used in situations far beyond the resolution of ethno-national and international conflicts. This chapter is especially recommended for people engaged in the study of mediation or involved in international peacekeeping. At times we find that even expert mediators in the international arena work more by intuition and less in an orderly and methodical fashion. Understanding frameworks, tools, and operational methods that have proven themselves in the past can be of great help.

The fourth chapter examines international intervention in conflicts. The chapter covers two main strategies: coercive diplomacy and humanitarian intervention. Unfortunately, and presumably because there is just so much material to cover, readers are not exposed to the broad typology of field interventions—such as observers, buffer forces, state-building, nation-building, enforcement troops, and international policing. Since international organizations like the United Nations, the African Union, and NATO have launched dozens of such operations since the late 1990s, it would have been worthwhile to mention them, at least in an appendix.

The fifth chapter, which examines the discipline of intercultural negotiation, helps to highlight the importance of culture in negotiations. The cultural discussion assumes that communication between sides from diverse cultures will be more complicated since the intercultural factor is a disruptive element.

The sixth chapter deals with the discipline of political psychology. Unlike the rational school of negotiations, this discipline assumes that alongside concrete issues such as a conflict over a geopolitical issue, there are also conflicts

over sensitivities and basic needs that must be addressed. This chapter deals with approaches to issues such as identity, honor, and justice, which should also lead to reconciliation.

Since this book was published by the Open University, there are some editing decisions that apparently stemmed from the pedagogical priorities and teaching methods of the institution. The length of the third chapter, for example, is around 120 pages. In contrast, the fourth and fifth chapters are around 80 pages in total. The chapter order is also surprising; there is a direct connection between the third chapter and the fifth and sixth chapters, which cover approaches that expand the paradigm of conflict resolution.

The advantages of structuring the chapters to suit educators, researchers, and students, or to suit people who simply have an interest in the field, lie in the didactic method. Each chapter contains clear explanations, alongside a glossary of terms and concise case studies. The book is replete with contemporary examples from across the globe and from our region; it can provide fertile ground for expanding the discussion. The section in the fifth chapter dealing with humanitarian intervention provides an excellent example of how case studies are successfully developed against reality. Schiff dedicates five pages to comparing between the motivation for intervening in Libya, as opposed to the refusal to do so in Syria (pp. 301-306). A profound analysis of this helps to understand the key elements of the book, and anyone using the book for teaching purposes would be well advised to augment the theory and concepts presented by examining case studies systematically. In the section on humanitarian aid to Syria, for example, the book addresses all the levels of negotiations, the problem of development, and changes in domestic, regional, and international conditions in the conflict—as well, of course, as the differences between the rational and cultural approaches and the social psychology approach.

In conclusion, this book is an important breakthrough in teaching conflict management and resolution in Hebrew. Schiff's masterpiece will help all the educational programs in the field in the coming decades. Moreover, hopefully it will also help sharpen and improve the educated use of key concepts by the Israeli public, professionals and laypeople alike. When it comes to my courses, I have already added this book to my syllabus.

Dr. Chen Kertcher is a lecturer in the Department of Middle Eastern Studies and Political Science at Ariel University. His primary areas of research are the study of peace operations, the influence of media and diplomatic discourse on the diffusion of international norms, and the theory of conflict management, with a special interest in the Middle East. His most recent studies have been published in leading journals, including the *Journal of International Human Rights*, *International Politics*, *Critical Studies on Terrorism*, and *Ethnopolitics*. [kertcherc@gmail.com](mailto:kertcherc@gmail.com)

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## Notes

- 1 Similarly, see the reference books published by the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), the Truman Institute, and the Tami Steinmetz Center for Peace Research.

## 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 in Hebrew and English by the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) at Tel Aviv University. *Strategic Assessment*, accredited by the Planning and Budgeting Committee of the Council for Higher Education in Israel, 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.

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**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.

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**Book Reviews**—book reviews of 800-1500 words (up to 2000 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.

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Editors, *Strategic Assessment*

