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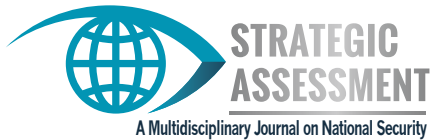


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From the Editors

This issue is being published while the Swords of Iron War is still ongoing, which makes it one of the longest wars in the history of the State of Israel. The considerable harm it has caused, its duration, and the lack of a clear end state naturally have led to the desire to better understand the processes and failures that led to its outbreak, the dynamic during it, and the various scenarios for the period after the war. The writers in this issue are taking part in the attempt to better understand these events. The topics discussed include the connection between the war and the struggle over the world order, the geopolitical aspects of the war in Gaza, and the evolution of Iran's perception of Israel. Two articles in the issue place an emphasis on the response of countries in Africa to the war in Gaza. In the internal Israeli context, articles in this issue discuss the Israeli media during the war, trends in Israeli foreign policy, and the limitations of the existing security concept, as well as the challenges inherent in relying on deterrence as an important pillar of Israel's security doctrine.

As in every issue, we believe that there is also value in shining a spotlight on issues that receive less public attention despite their great importance. In this context, one article is dedicated to the issue of supply chain disruptions and another article relates to cooperation in space. Book reviews in the issue also discuss theoretical concepts that are important in the Israeli context, such as securitization and diaspora.

We warmly welcome Dr. Raz Zimmt upon assuming the position of co-editor of *Strategic Assessment* in place of Prof. Kobi Michael. We would like to take this opportunity to thank Prof. Michael and to express our great appreciation for his five years as editor of the *Strategic Assessment*. We are greatly inspired by his uncompromising commitment to the journal, his efforts to promote the journal at every opportunity, and his belief in the importance of the existence of a publication such as *Strategic Assessment* at the Institute for National Security Studies. Prof. Michael took part in the work on several articles in this issue and is editing the *Strategic Assessment's* special issue on the topic of demography and national security that will be published in 2024, and we thank him for this as well.

This issue is dedicated to the memory of Sergeant Major Jonathan Deitch, the husband of our dear colleague Mora Deitch, who was killed by sniper fire during reserve service in Gaza. The Deitch family and many other families have paid the heaviest price for the failures that led to the October 7 attack, and only a deep understanding of these failures can, it is hoped, prevent their recurrence. We at *Strategic Assessment* also feel a deep commitment to publish studies about the attack and its consequences, and we will continue to do so in the upcoming issues.

Strategic Assessment Editorial Board



Hamas and the New Great Game

Tomer Dekel

Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

This article examines the factors that currently shape the attitude of countries around the world toward Israel in its struggle against Hamas, with a focus on energy. This mapping describes the enormous significance of energy in the contest taking place between the great powers in the background of the conflict, principally China, Russia, the US, and the NATO countries. Other constellations of alliances with a variety of players include Iran and the Shiite axis, Saudi Arabia and the Sunni axis, Turkey, and Greece. This analysis focuses on energy resources, energy corridors, and geographic “choke points”—a matter of utmost strategic significance in what is being referred to as “the New Great Game”—a cold war-style struggle for control of the Asian continent and the land passages crossing it or the sea routes surrounding it.

Keywords: Hamas, Gaza Strip, Russia, China, geopolitics of energy, Belt and Road Initiative, India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)

When elephants dance, the grass gets beaten
(Heiduk, 2022, p. 1).

Introduction

What is shaping the attitude of countries around the world toward Israel in its struggle against Hamas? In the days after October 7, 2023, Israel encountered a variety of responses in the global arena, some of which came as a great surprise, causing the collapse of conceptions and the beginning of new thinking about Israel's relations with various countries. Israel benefited from strong support from a number of Western countries, above all the US, which put its military power squarely behind Israel. In parallel, as expected, the axis of resistance countries, led by Iran, denounced Israel before it had even responded to the war crime committed against it. No less powerful dramas took place between these two polar opposites. In contrast to past

clashes, voices in some Muslim countries, among them Saudi Arabia, condemned Hamas. Great powers Russia and China chose to condemn Israel, even though they had no clear ideological affiliation whatsoever in the conflict (e.g., Einav, 2023; Feldman & Mil-Man, 2023).

Hamas is willing to embark on a dangerous conflict with Israel not because it hopes for a military victory, but rather because its main objective is to undermine Israel's status in the international theater in order to promote the organization's long-term goals (Gazit, 2014). The international theater is a critical theater of warfare for Israel, which cannot win in the struggle against Hamas without a good understanding of the war's underlying causes. This article therefore analyzes one of the most important aspects affecting the geopolitical and economic interests of a country—the geopolitics of energy—and thereby determining, to a large

extent, its position toward Israel's conflict with Hamas. By mapping the global power struggles for control over energy resources and the energy corridors, referred to as the "New Great Game" in Central Asia and the Middle East, this analysis focuses on the specific array of interests that has recently surfaced around Israel. From these interests, one can understand the role that Hamas's patrons have designed for it and one of the reasons why they have provided Hamas with large-scale aid over the years. Finally, this article elucidates the reasons why various countries have backed Hamas, even if they have not actively supported the organization economically or militarily. This support is crucial to understand, given the significant threat Hamas poses to Israel. It underscores the necessity of Israel to carefully examine the statements of these countries and identify who is standing behind them and their motives.

This article begins by reviewing the literature on the geopolitics of energy both globally and in Israel before and during the current war in Gaza. It then examines the energy alliances and conflicts between the Middle East, Russia, and the US; the attitude of China to the entire Eurasian area; and finally other countries and their attitude to the array of alliances in the framework of the "New Great Game." The sources include professional geopolitical literature, current newspaper reports, and official plans and documents of international organizations.

The Geopolitics of Energy Corridors

Energy is a crucial element in the economy of every country, whether the country imports energy and must secure a stable supply or exports energy and needs to ensure regular, safe production and high prices. Apart from coal (which cannot be used for transportation and causes severe environmental damage), the main fuels used in global economies are oil and natural gas. Recently there has been a slow expansion of the use of solar energy, with efforts underway to develop technologies

and infrastructure for its efficient use in the transportation industry through storage in batteries or conversion of solar energy to hydrogen and ammonia fuel. Oil and gas deposits and areas with abundant sunshine are not typically located near the most consumers, such as in densely populated industrialized areas with highly developed economies or rapidly developing economies like Europe, China, and India (its extensive oil reserves make the US an exception). As a result, control over the energy corridors through which oil, gas, and soon hydrogen and ammonia are transported from producers to consumers has become one of the crucial aspects in global geopolitics, with many arguing that it is the most crucial of all (Milina, 2007; Månsson, 2014; Johannesson & Clowes, 2022).

Controlling or guarding of the energy corridors determines a country's economic power, its independence during a crisis, and its geopolitical leverage over other countries that depend on these corridors for energy supply or marketing.

This is the reason maritime straits, through which most of the world's energy and trade goods flow, are constant sites of struggle. The Strait of Hormuz connects the oil and gas-rich Persian Gulf to the Indian Ocean and is a theater of constant conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia. The Strait of Malacca connects the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea and is crucial for China. The Bab al-Mandab Strait connects the Gulf of Aden in the Indian Ocean to the Red Sea, and from there, through the Suez Canal, to the Mediterranean Sea and Europe. Through these three narrow passages, a significant proportion of global trade in energy and goods passes, and they can become choke points if they are militarily blocked or threatened. Similarly, the energy pipelines passing through transit states are also prone to threats along their long routes.

Controlling or guarding of the energy corridors determines a country's economic

power, its independence during a crisis, and its geopolitical leverage over other countries that depend on these corridors for energy supply or marketing. Any power or alliance of countries, such as the European Union (EU), is bound to safeguard its control of the relevant corridors by signing bilateral agreements, fostering international energy markets and institutions, using military means and/or direct control, or indirectly through proxy countries or organizations. A major power must ensure that the routes it needs are safeguarded or devise alternative routes. It must also be able to block the routes of its enemies when necessary (Rodrigue, 2004; Milina, 2007; Masuda, 2007; Pascual & Zambetakis, 2010; Månsson, 2014; Campos & Fernandes, 2017; Hao et al., 2020).

Development of energy corridors is a complex and expensive process. In part, it requires the laying of special pipelines stretching for hundreds and thousands of kilometers, storage facilities, pumping stations, and sea passages, the construction of ports, and the digging and maintenance of canals. Once the corridor is established, its security must be maintained, and payments must be made to the transit countries. For this reason, and due to the strategic importance of buying or selling energy, establishing a corridor between countries creates a significant alliance. A corridor project is likely to resolve disputes between countries and enhance cooperation between them, but the opposite is also true—a dispute could hinder a potential infrastructure project connecting countries (Masuda, 2007; Hao et al., 2020). To illustrate the first possibility, in the 1970s, during the Cold War, the Soviet Union built gas lines to West Germany to strengthen relations between the countries and create strategic dependence (Schattenberg, 2022). Led by Russia, this process has continued in recent decades and has proven to be a great success, making Russia an “energy superpower” (Milina, 2007, p. 30). Many European countries now heavily rely on Russian gas (Campos &

Fernandes, 2017), despite the conflict in Ukraine (which will be discussed later).

The Geopolitics of Energy in Israel—A Historical Perspective

For most of its history, Israel’s energy projects have been hindered by conflict. The Negev, in the south of Israel, is a narrow strip of land that blocks one of the world’s most important land bridges that links Asia to Africa and the West, as well as the Port of Eilat on the Red Sea to ports on the Mediterranean Sea. This territorial strip has always been of great strategic importance and has been the cause of repeated conquests by Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria, Greece, Rome, the Arabs, the Ottoman Empire, and the British Empire (to name a few). Even before the State of Israel was established, David Ben-Gurion recognized the strategic importance of the Negev and put a lot of effort into settling the desert in order to convince the UN to include it in Israel’s national territory. In the War of Independence in 1948, both Ben-Gurion and Israel’s enemies saw control of the Negev as the “core of the conflict” (Asia, 1994). Israel’s successive wars have also centered around the marine-land corridor. The 1956 war, which pitted Egypt against Israel, Britain, and France, started after Egypt nationalized the Suez Canal and prevented Israeli ships from passing through. The British and French supported Israel in an (unsuccessful) attempt to regain control of the Suez Canal. In May 1967, Egypt blockaded the Straits of Tiran at the Gulf of Aqaba, preventing Israeli passage through the Suez Canal; Israel responded with war and eventually reached the Suez Canal. In the Yom Kippur War in 1973, the Egyptians regained control of the area, giving Israel passage through the Straits of Tiran and the Suez Canal only in 1977 when the peace treaty was signed between Israel and Egypt.

Only until recent decades, Israel had been reliant on energy imports from distant countries, due to the conflicts with its neighbors, even though many of them are among the world’s largest oil and natural gas producers. Israel’s

efforts to become a transit country have also been unsuccessful. The oil pipeline from Mosul in Iraq to Haifa Port, built by the British in the 1930s, was abandoned in 1948 during Israel's War of Independence, with its remnants looted and sold for scrap metal. Similarly, the Eilat–Ashkelon oil pipeline, constructed in the 1970s through an Israeli–Iranian partnership, declined in use. Iran utilized this pipeline to circumvent the Egyptian Suez Canal (and another Egyptian route, the Sumed pipeline, which connects the ports in the Gulf of Suez to the Port of Alexandria on the Mediterranean Sea). Following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, when Iran became staunchly hostile to Israel, the pipeline's usage significantly decreased, only increasing in recent years as a route for oil from Azerbaijan and several other countries. The Arab gas pipeline, connecting Egypt to Jordan and Syria from northern Sinai to Aqaba, included a substantial detour to avoid Israel.

The first breakthrough in Israel's energy isolation came with the peace treaty with Egypt. Israel purchased oil from Egypt for several years, until the late 1990s when Egyptian oil reserves dwindled, leading Egypt to announce it could no longer supply Israel with oil (Koren, 1996). Another breakthrough occurred in 2000 when gas pipelines were laid between Israel and Egypt. Israel bought gas from Egypt for several years, aiming to strengthen economic ties between the two countries and warm the cold peace between them (Bahgat, 2008). However, this gas alliance was repeatedly tested and nearly collapsed following a series of terrorist attacks on the pipeline in Sinai by global jihad organizations, which gained a foothold in Sinai after the Arab Spring events in 2011 (Even, 2012; Tuitel, 2014).

Eastern Mediterranean Alliances Before October 7, 2023

The natural gas discoveries off Israel's shores have significantly affected the relationships discussed above. Beginning in 2019, the direction of the gas flow in the pipelines

changed, as Israel started selling gas to both Egypt and Jordan, with the intent of improving its diplomatic relations with these countries. Having signed a gas supply agreement with Jordan in 2016, it is now believed that Israel provides the majority of Jordan's gas (Elmas, 2023b). Egypt, on the other hand, purchases Israeli gas to meet its growing domestic energy needs and also to liquefy it for sale to European markets at a higher price. This has become a significant industry in the Egyptian economy.

In cooperation with Egypt, Israel established the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), which forms an energy alliance between Israel, Egypt, Cyprus, Jordan, Greece, Italy, and the Palestinian Authority (Wolfrum, 2019; Mitchell, 2021b). Egypt has been exerting pressure recently to increase the flow of gas due to its aspirations of becoming a regional processing and export center, as well as its substantial reliance on this industry. In May 2023, the construction of another gas pipeline that will pass through the Nitzana Border Crossing between Egypt and Israel was announced (Elmas, 2023a). These agreements and alliances have laid the groundwork for significant infrastructure that will facilitate further agreements aimed at making Israel an energy exporter (though not a major player in the market) and a transit country for East-to-West energy corridors. Some critics argue that these energy agreements between Israel and its neighboring countries pose a threat to the Palestinian issue, as it reduces the willingness of these neighboring countries to pressure Israel on this matter (e.g., Baconi, 2017).

Israel's opponents have a vested interest in undermining its regional energy status. Iran comes into play here as a regional power that financially supports Hamas with hundreds of millions of dollars annually and supplies the majority of its weapons. This connection has been ongoing for many years, although it has had its ups and downs. Hamas can therefore be seen as an Iranian proxy, serving Iran's aggressive objectives in its conflict with Israel. Iran leads the "resistance axis" or "camp"

of proxy countries and organizations in the region, including Hezbollah in Lebanon and Syria, militias in Iraq, and the Houthis in Yemen (Shine & Catran, 2018; Seliktar & Rezaei, 2020). While Iran and Hamas share an extreme Muslim religious ideology, it is worth noting that Iran is a Shiite country supporting a Sunni organization, both of which are two ethnic-religious groups engaged in all-out warfare against one another in other parts of the Muslim world. On the other side, the moderate Sunni camp is led by Saudi Arabia and includes countries like Bahrain, the UAE, Jordan, and Egypt (Seliktar & Rezaei, 2020; Karsh, 2023; Dunning & Iqtait, 2023).

If the sea route for oil, gas, hydrogen, and other goods is threatened, using Israel as a land energy corridor from the UAE and Saudi Arabia could be a possible alternative.

Among the financial backers of Hamas, Qatar stands out as a unique player. Although it is theoretically aligned with the Sunni camp, Qatar has always avoided fully aligning and cooperating with Saudi Arabia. Instead, it has adopted a hedging strategy by engaging with players from all sides. Qatar's surprisingly friendly relations with Iran, despite being at odds with its neighbors, are particularly noteworthy. One of the main reasons for this attitude is the energy question. Both countries share South Pars, one of the largest gas fields in the world. As the second largest exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG) globally, Qatar produces significantly more from the shared field than Iran does, depleting its own reserves in the process. Concerns about potential disputes over energy production and transportation in the Persian Gulf have pushed Qatar to align itself with Iran to the best of its abilities in the geopolitical arena (Kamrava, 2017). However, Qatar's support for Hamas, combined with these actions, has resulted in its growing distance from the Sunni camp, and its affiliation is now unclear (Chaziza, 2020a).

One of the fundamental elements of the conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia is their shared threat to the movement of oil and gas tankers in the Strait of Hormuz, the gateway to the Persian Gulf, which affects oil and gas consumers worldwide. Saudi Arabia is particularly concerned about the increasing strength of proxy organizations in the Bab al-Mandab Strait, which leads to the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, as well as the presence of rogue organizations like the Islamic State cells in Sinai. These areas have experienced repeated attacks on energy infrastructure and tankers, destabilizing global energy supply and economic stability. This common interest in maintaining economic stability aligns the Saudi-led moderate Sunni camp with the US and its Western allies. These countries are committed to supporting Saudi Arabia strategically and preventing energy crises. This is especially important considering the rising global inflation, which is sensitive to energy price increases (Rodrigue, 2004; Pascual & Zambetakos, 2010; Seliktar & Rezaei, 2020).

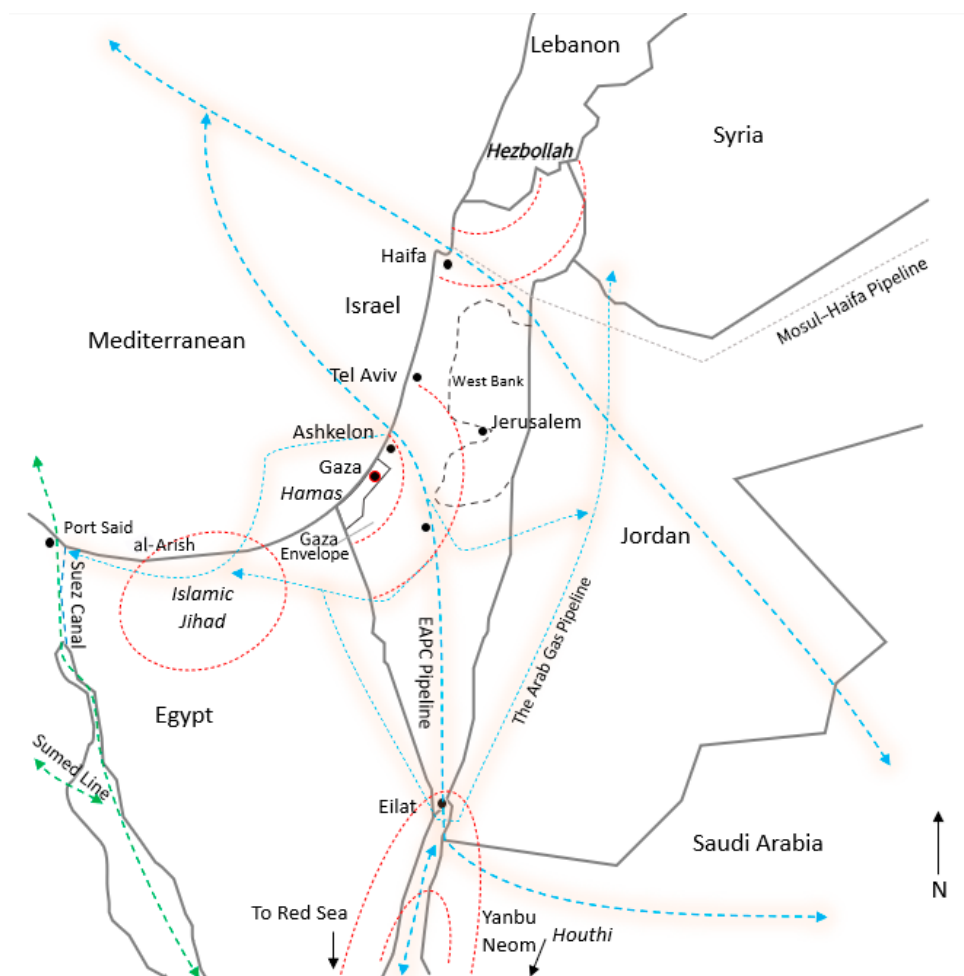
If the sea route for oil, gas, hydrogen, and other goods is threatened, using Israel as a land energy corridor from the UAE and Saudi Arabia could be a possible alternative (see Figure 1). It would involve laying pipelines through a more secure route to reach Europe via the Mediterranean Sea, which is in Saudi Arabia's interest. In contrast, Iran views this prospect as a weakening of its strategic leverage over the choke point it currently controls, posing a threat to its Saudi adversary. The process of establishing this corridor began with the signing of the Abraham Accords in 2020, through which Israel and the UAE agreed to transport oil through the Eilat-Ashkelon oil pipeline and utilize the storage facilities located alongside it. Crude oil from the Persian Gulf is intended to be shipped to Eilat or transported through pipelines to the city of Yanbu on the Red Sea coast of Saudi Arabia, then northward to Eilat, and finally to the Ashdod Port (Barkat, 2020). It is noteworthy that following the signing

of the Abraham Accords, Hamas initiated a missile attack during the 2021 round of fighting (Operation Guardian of the Walls), damaging a large oil storage tank in Ashkelon and setting it ablaze. This round of fighting also led to the closure of Israel's southern gas wells, demonstrating the capability of the Gaza Strip to threaten Israel's energy assets and the Saudi Arabian axis (Levi, 2021).

Important talks to expand the corridor that passes through the Saudi Arabian–Israeli area and extend it westward or eastward have persisted. In the months leading up to October 2023, several large-scale infrastructure projects were approved one after another:

- The first is construction of a pipeline connecting Israel's gas fields to a Cypriot liquefaction facility that will market the liquefied gas to Greece, and from there to
- Europe (Keller-Lynn, 2023). This is part of the ambitious EastMed pipeline project, the planning of which began a decade ago. It is designed to connect Israel's gas reservoirs to Greece and Europe, but its economic and technical viability has not yet been demonstrated. If implemented, the project will become the world's longest undersea pipeline (Krasna, 2023).
- The second is the EuroAsia Interconnector undersea power line, which will connect the electrical grids of Israel, Cyprus, and Greece. This project will make it possible to stabilize the supply of electricity between the countries and will enable one of those countries to take advantage of electrical surpluses generated by another (Mitchell, 2021a; Kahana, 2023).
- The third and most important is a railway line, with the potential for laying energy cables and

Figure 1: Energy Corridors in the Middle East



pipelines alongside it, connecting Europe to Jordan, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and India via the Haifa Port and Beit Shean. This will be under the umbrella of the US, which is mediating and matchmaking between the various parties along the corridor and promising its guarantee for the main requirement needed in order to connect the parts of the puzzle—a normalization agreement between Israel and Saudi Arabia (Kapoor, 2023).

- The fourth is a new gas pipeline from Israel to Egypt that will expand the latter's ability to liquefy and export gas to Europe (Elmas, 2023a; Elmas, 2023d), plus the laying of a gas pipeline between Egypt and Saudi Arabia through the Strait of Tiran, for the sale of Egyptian and Israeli gas to Saudi Arabia. Despite the fact that Saudi Arabia has huge gas reserves, it has yet to establish the export of its gas and uses a great deal of gas for internal consumption (Zaken, 2023).
- The fifth is the construction of a hydrogen pipeline that will flow to Europe from a futuristic infrastructure project from the Saudi Arabian city of Neom on the Red Sea coast, and also from planned fields in India through pipelines to be laid alongside the railway line from Saudi Arabia to the Haifa Port (Martin, 2023).

The US and the constellation that it leads have many inherent interests in Israel and Saudi Arabia, both together and separate, but one strong interest stands out above all others—the struggle against the emerging “Asian constellation.” The start of this struggle is the freeing of the EU from the Russian energy bear hug, as will be explained below.

The Bearhug

As mentioned earlier, Russia has emerged as an energy superpower in recent decades, possessing vast reserves of oil and natural gas, and has strategically utilized them to enhance its geopolitical standing. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and under Vladimir Putin's long rule, Russia has been striving to

regain its position of international influence. As part of this endeavor, Russia has renewed its interest in the Middle East. One of its goals is to establish alliances with various Muslim countries or present itself as their partner. By doing so, Russia can neutralize pressure from these countries, as a result of its conflicts with Muslim minorities in southern Russia. Russia's collaboration with Iran to support the Assad regime in Syria has solidified their budding alliance and essentially has turned Syria into a joint protectorate. Moreover, despite their cultural, religious, and ideological differences, Russia and Iran have found common ground in their opposition to the West and American hegemony (Dannreuther, 2012; Lasensky & Michlin-Shapir, 2019; Cafiero, 2020). They also share similar values with China, as described below. In this context, Russia and Iran are deepening their economic and military cooperation (Grise & Evans, 2023; Phillips & Brookes, 2023). This has become evident through the Russians' use of Iranian drones in the attack on Ukraine and, more recently, with the sale of advanced Russian Sukhoi 35 warplanes to Iran after October 7 (Bar, 2023).

The Russian aggression against Ukraine began a decade ago when Russia started annexing parts of Ukraine's territory through force, culminating in a brutal all-out offensive in 2022. Russia provided various justifications for this war, some of which were clearly fictitious. These included claims that the territory historically belonged to the Czarist Empire and that the Ukrainian regime needed “de-Nazification.” The primary reason given was that Russia aimed to push away the perceived Western threat from its borders, particularly in light of discussions regarding Ukraine's potential entry into the NATO defensive alliance.

Many have criticized the US and Western countries, blaming them for provoking the war. While it is important to consider this argument, we should also explore other explanations that may receive less attention in discussions and research. First, examining the chronology of

events clearly shows that Ukraine was initially hesitant about cooperating with NATO until 2014. It was the Russian attacks that ultimately pushed Ukraine into the arms of the West. Second, it is worth noting that Russia did not respond in the same manner when neighboring countries like Poland, Hungary, and the Baltic states joined NATO.

To better understand Russia's fundamental motive in the conflict, Johannesson and Clowes (2022) suggest examining the production and consumption aspects of the energy issue. Russia specifically targeted and annexed parts of Ukraine that happen to contain the richest gas and coal deposits. Ukraine had hoped to reduce its dependence on Russian gas and become a gas exporter to Europe, which posed a significant challenge to Russia. These territories also house heavy industries that heavily rely on Russian gas.

Moreover, it is important to recognize that 19% of the Russian gas exported to Europe passes through Ukraine, with transit costs exceeding \$1 billion in 2017. In essence, the Russian invasion aims to gain control over these deposits, maintain Russian control of gas supply to major Ukrainian consumers, and secure control over gas corridors passing through Ukraine. This strategic move allows Russia to hinder competition that would reduce Europe's reliance on Russian energy (Johannesson & Clowes, 2022).

The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine surprised the Russians with the strong support from the West. The US, concerned about the increasing aggression of its rival, not only provided arms to Ukraine but also imposed economic sanctions on Russia. President Biden needed the cooperation of the EU economies for this purpose but was hindered by Russia's energy strategy. Russia had taken steps to ensure Europe's heavy dependence on Russian gas (Schattenberg, 2022; Driedger, 2022). While most EU countries cooperated with the sanctions, some found it challenging to apply them to the gas sector, including Germany, Belgium, Spain,

France, and others. These countries continued to consume significant quantities of Russian gas (Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis, 2023).

Upon realizing the extent of the Russian threat, the EU focused on developing and implementing the REPowerEU plan to diversify its gas suppliers. They also worked vigorously on building infrastructure to connect with gas fields in North Africa, the Eastern Mediterranean, and potential gas and hydrogen pipelines from Saudi Arabia and Israel (European Commission, 2022).

Upon realizing the extent of the Russian threat, the EU focused on developing and implementing the REPowerEU plan to diversify its gas suppliers. They also worked vigorously on building infrastructure to connect with gas fields in North Africa, the Eastern Mediterranean, and potential gas and hydrogen pipelines from Saudi Arabia and Israel (European Commission, 2022). As a result of the Russian oil sanctions, European demand for new oil suppliers has increased. Russia has been offering discounted oil to East Asia to compete in a market traditionally dominated by Saudi Arabia and the UAE. These countries are now seeking alternative routes to bypass the Bab al-Mandab Strait and meet the new European demand. While the use of the Eilat-Ashkelon oil pipeline is being considered, it is likely to cause potential environmental damage to the Eilat Port (Rettig, 2023), making an oil pipeline along the railway line from Riyadh to Haifa Port a possible consideration in the future. Europe's success in establishing connections with alternative energy suppliers through Israel has become a key American interest, as it is the only way to help Europe break free from Russia's grip and exert maximum pressure on Russia.

The New Silk Road

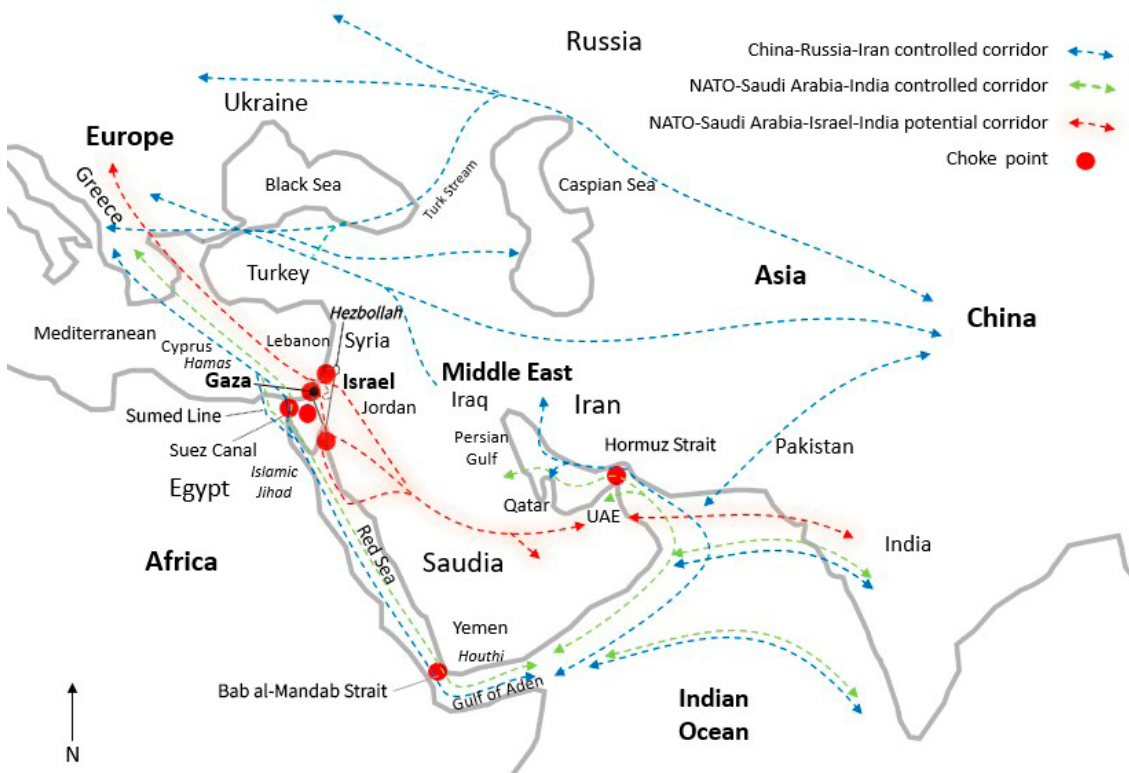
All of the events described so far have taken place in the shadow of the titanic struggle in

the global theater between the US and China (Heiduk, 2022). For a long time, Israel has seen potential in closerties with China. This aspiration was motivated by a risk-hedging strategy in which Israel searched for support, instead of relying exclusively on an alliance with the US, especially when concerns arose due to strained relations during the Obama administration (Chaziza, 2018). In addition to intensive trade, Israeli–Chinese relations have featured joint investments, academic and technological collaborations, imports of Chinese personnel, and the opening of large infrastructure tenders to Chinese companies. One of the prominent projects being carried out by Chinese firms is the construction of the Haifa Bay Port, which the US perceives as a strategic threat to its dominance in the region (Chaziza, 2018). By opening its markets and strengthening its relations with China, Israel had expected to become a station along the Belt and Road Initiative—China’s well-known infrastructure project announced in 2013, on which it has been working ever since. This initiative involves what is known as the “New Silk Road,” considered the largest infrastructure connection project in human history, connecting China to Europe through two land routes and one sea route. It entails the construction of an extensive network of transportation infrastructure, including energy supply lines from the rich reserves of Central Asia (see Figure 2). These routes will reach China and, with Chinese sponsorship and investment, also Europe. This ambitious endeavor serves multiple purposes and promotes economic development wherever it goes. However, two overarching strategic goals stand out: The land axes will reduce China’s dependence on trade and energy passing through the choke point of the Strait of Malacca and will help China consolidate its influence throughout the Eurasian continent by forging economic alliances with many countries (Hao et al., 2020; Garlick & Havlova, 2021; Soboleva & Krivokhizh, 2021; Gresh, 2023).

It is now evident that Israel’s efforts to participate in the Belt and Road Initiative are not as successful as those of the larger countries in Central Asia. China has singled out Iran and Russia as more important countries due to their geographic location, the energy they have promised to supply to China (especially given the Western sanctions on trade with these two countries), and their general willingness to align with China in opposition to American hegemony (Lavi et al., 2015; Yenciun, 2021; Gresh, 2023). Qatar, one of the main suppliers of natural gas to China (which recently became the world’s largest gas consumer), has also been identified as a strategic target. Within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, China–Qatar relations have developed through investments, infrastructure projects, and military cooperation. Qatar views this as an essential risk mitigation strategy amid the crisis in its relations with its Persian Gulf neighbors and the Sunni camp (Chaziza, 2020a).

China had also identified other countries in the Persian Gulf, including Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, as targets for investment. Initially, these countries agreed to this as a way to hedge against risk because the US, their defense ally, showed signs of strain following its failure in Iraq and its decreasing involvement in the Middle East (Chaziza, 2020b; Afterman, 2021; Liao, 2023). As part of this warming of relations, China attempted to mediate between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The West’s alarm over China’s increasing presence in the region came rather late, and now the US is pressuring Saudi Arabia to end its rapprochement with China and align with America instead (Liao, 2023).

To highlight the benefits of choosing the West, the US has launched a competing project to the Belt and Road Initiative called the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor. This corridor includes sea routes, railways, and pipelines for gas, oil, and hydrogen. It began with the Abraham Accords and has expanded to include intercontinental communication cable projects, such as Google’s Blue-Raman

Figure 2: Energy Corridors in Asia and Europe

cable, which will pass through Israel instead of Egypt's extensive communication network (Ziv, 2020). The project will culminate with the anticipated normalization agreements between Israel and Saudi Arabia, which will involve the construction of railways, gas pipelines, hydrogen pipelines, and oil pipelines. These projects were announced in the months preceding the Hamas attack, including in September shortly before the attack (Martin, 2023).

The New Great Game

The geopolitical significance of the Asian region on the global stage is increasing. According to Campos and Fernandes (2017), "currently, Central Asia, as part of the Heartland, has been going through the so-called 'New Big Game,' characterized by rivalry and competition between the United States, the United Kingdom, and other NATO countries, against Russia, China, and other States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on the other," a competition that

In the current game taking place in a vast region stretching from China to Eastern Europe, including Central and Southern Asia and the Middle East, the responses of countries in the international arena to the Hamas attack and the war in the Gaza Strip largely reflect their interest in energy geopolitics.

will allow the victor to control the pipelines, energy routes, and supply contracts (p. 26). The term "New Big Game" or "New Great Game" originated from the struggle between the Russian Empire and the British Empire for control over Central Asia in the 19th century (Chen & Fazila, 2018).

In the current game taking place in a vast region stretching from China to Eastern Europe, including Central and Southern Asia and the Middle East, the responses of countries in the international arena to the Hamas attack and the war in the Gaza Strip largely reflect their interest in energy geopolitics. It was predictable

that Muslim countries in the Iranian Shiite camp would have a hostile attitude, but Russia and China's condemnation of Israel surprised many (Einav, 2023; Qi, 2023). A key factor to consider is the existence of a complex alliance among these countries, which can be referred to as "the Asian constellation." They have identified common interests in joint infrastructure projects, military cooperation, and, most importantly, the need to maintain control over energy corridors. This includes controlling their own energy corridors while posing a threat to the corridors of rival countries. For instance, instead of aligning with other countries in the Sunni camp, Qatar—a major supporter of Hamas—is increasingly forming partnerships with Iran and China due to shared economic interests, particularly in the energy sector (Kamrava, 2017; Chaziza, 2020a).

The same theoretical explanation reveals why the Sunni camp, led by Saudi Arabia, is maintaining a restrained stance toward Israel. Although the Arab public has a strong emotional hostility toward Israel, at the same time, if Saudi Arabia were to turn its back on Israel, it would lose out on an important infrastructure project. Additionally, it could lose support from the US, including the potential to develop a nuclear program and to continue to receive defense protection. Moreover, Saudi Arabia would face an increasing threat from its Iranian enemies. This explanation also helps us understand why President Biden strongly supports Israel. By establishing Israel as an energy corridor under American sponsorship, Biden's efforts to counter Russia and China's influence in Asia will receive a significant boost. This corridor is a key supplementary endeavor to the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" that the US has been promoting recently. The strategy aims to create a coalition in southern Asia, from the Philippines to India and the Horn of Africa, in order to counter China's growing power in Central and Northern Asia (Heiduk, 2022).

The US, together with its partner Saudi Arabia, must address multiple challenges at various choke points. This includes dealing with

the active corridor in the Red Sea, attacks by the Houthis in the Bab al-Mandab Strait, threats from Hamas to the infrastructure area between Eilat and Ashkelon, and the Hezbollah threat to the planned route between Saudi Arabia and Haifa. These challenges are further fueled by political threats orchestrated by organizations that incite global public opinion against Israel. This incitement hampers the normalization process with Saudi Arabia, which is crucial for the construction of alternative infrastructure in these areas. This issue is of great importance to the US, as the presence of China in economic and military projects in the Middle East region poses significant challenges. For example, China has constructed a military base in Djibouti overlooking the Bab al-Mandab Strait (Orion, 2016), which further complicates the task of safeguarding shipping in the Red Sea. These challenges cast a shadow over the ability of the US to provide protection and stability in the region between the Pacific Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea, which ultimately threatens its position as the dominant power—a grave strategic threat.

In addition, Turkey's repeated distancing from Israel, despite tensions in its relations with Iran, takes on new significance when considering the presence of important pipelines within its territory. These pipelines serve as an alternative route for both Israel to the south and Ukraine to the north. As part of the Belt and Road Initiative, gas is being transported from Central Asia to Greece and Italy through the existing TANAP and TAP pipelines (Hao et al., 2020; Gersh, 2023). Furthermore, the planned expansion of the TurkStream pipeline from Russia to Turkey is expected to allow Russia to bypass sanctions on their gas, ultimately delivering it to Europe via Turkey (Ellis, 2017; Chyong et al., 2023). Turkey places significant strategic importance on its position as a hub for gas transportation from East to West, particularly for the purpose of exerting pressure on the EU (Elmas, 2023c). Consequently, Turkey is in fierce competition with Greece to become the leading transit

country in the region and is deeply concerned about the growing influence of its rival. Turkey is particularly unsettled by Greece's participation in the EMGF and the energy projects that connect Israel with the Hellenic countries, Cyprus and Greece, effectively bypassing Turkey (Celikpala, 2021; Krasna, 2023).

In the months leading up to the Hamas attack, Turkey tried to persuade Israel to partner with Greece and transport its gas to Europe through Turkey (Elmas, 2023c). However, after the attack, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan openly sided with Hamas and even threatened Israel, effectively ending any potential energy cooperation between Turkey and Israel. Some interpreted Erdoğan's actions as a strategic error driven by ideology and internal political interests (Markind, 2023). However, it is also possible that Erdoğan's actions were a gesture aligning with the Asian constellation and distancing Turkey from American influence. If this is the case, it sheds new light on Turkey's involvement in the Middle East over the past two decades. Turkey has a long-standing history of supporting Hamas and opposing Israel's policies toward Gaza, as evidenced by its organizing the Mavi Marmara flotilla and hosting Hamas members in its territory. Additionally, Turkey provides monetary assistance in the Negev area through various charity and aid organizations in support of the Bedouin struggle against the Israeli government over unrecognized villages (Bigman, 2013; Dekel et al., 2019). By extending Turkish sponsorship to both the Gaza Strip and the Negev, Turkey enhances its ability to pose a threat to the entire land bridge. It is important to note that the supply of oil to Israel from Central Asia passes through Turkey. Despite the hostile rhetoric, Turkish gas shipments to Israel were not halted following the Hamas attack (bne IntelliNews, 2023). Nevertheless, this additional choke point serves as a means for Turkey to exert pressure on Israel.

Egypt's ambivalent stance toward the conflict in Gaza also becomes clear. Egypt has a dislike for Israel and is dissatisfied with the

development of energy and communication routes that will compete with Egypt's control over the Suez Canal and the Sumed pipeline, which are crucial elements in Egypt's struggling economy. At the same time, Egypt is a member of the Saudi Arabian–Sunni alliance and receives protection and support from the US. Due to increasing Iranian threats along the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, Egypt feels compelled to maintain this military protection. Additionally, there are various Islamic jihad organizations gaining strength in Sinai, which pose a threat to the gas projects passing through the area. Cooperation with Israel in combating these organizations, which even includes Israeli attacks within Egyptian territory, holds great importance (Ynet, 2018). Furthermore, Egypt's economic and energy ties with Israel have become increasingly significant over time. As Egypt has transitioned from being a natural gas exporter to an importer, it has become crucially dependent on Israeli gas (Krasna, 2023). This dependence serves as a counterweight. Despite ideological differences between Egypt and Hamas, this factor likely discourages Egypt from providing strong support to the latter. Jordan also expresses strong criticism toward Israel, particularly due to its large Palestinian population. However, Jordan's reliance on Israeli gas in recent years limits its ability to take concrete measures to express this disapproval. This is partly because the new Chinese-built power station in Jordan, which is based on shale oil, supplies energy at a much higher price compared to Israeli gas (Elmas, 2023b).

Finally, let us examine the perspectives of different European countries on the conflict and how they align with their energy-political interests. Ukraine's support for Israel is clear and understandable. This is due to the realization that Russia, Ukraine's adversary, is aligned with countries hostile to Israel, even though this hostility is not openly declared, unlike the tension between Israel and Iran. Germany, too, has multiple political and ideological reasons for supporting Israel. It is worth noting that

Germany faces a significant threat from Russia and is actively seeking a gas solution through the IMEC corridor, as mentioned earlier. Greece shares similar motivations for its support of Israel (Tzogopoulos, 2023). In recent years, Greece has been viewed as a crucial strategic partner for American investment in the region, serving as an alternative to Turkey. Turkey's distancing from the West, coupled with its threatening rhetoric toward Greece, has led to a growing rift between Turkey and both Greece and the US. As a response, the US is positioning Greece as an energy transportation hub and a NATO military control point for the entire Eastern Mediterranean, as well as a gateway to Bulgaria and the rest of Eastern Europe. Consequently, both Greece and the US prioritize

Belgium and Spain, both significant purchasers of Russian gas, are unwilling to cooperate with American sanctions against Russia.

the development of infrastructure connecting Greece with Cyprus and Israel (Ellis, 2017).

In contrast, some European countries are pursuing different policies toward Israel, ranging from neutrality to condemnation. While this cannot be directly attributed to the energy question, energy can be seen as a factor that enables them to take such a stance. Several countries, particularly those governed by leftist political parties, have a clear political interest in criticizing Israel due to their principled stand on the Palestinian issue. Additionally, they may aim to appease the Muslim immigrant communities within their countries. This political alliance, often referred to as “the red-green alliance” (Karagiannis & McCauley, 2013), allows these countries to express their criticism more openly. It is essential to consider that countries with less reliance on the US or those that believe they are less dependent on it have more freedom to express their views. In light of this, it is worth noting that Belgium and Spain, both significant purchasers of

Russian gas, are unwilling to cooperate with American sanctions against Russia. They also continue to expand their gas supply from North African countries. This could partially explain why the leaders of these countries were able to visit the Gaza Strip border as a symbolic gesture during a prisoner exchange in the war, expressing solidarity with the Palestinians (Yosef, 2023). As mentioned earlier, it seems that the energy interest does not solely determine the stance of European countries toward Israel. However, when there is no significant energy or geopolitical dependence on the camp that supports Israel, political leaders are likely to exploit this situation for their own needs.

Conclusion

To return to the question we initially posed—what is shaping the global attitude toward Israel in its struggle against Hamas—we can now offer a substantial answer amid the complex considerations of each country. The “New Great Game” borders took form on October 7, 2023, specifically along the Gaza Strip, signifying the emergence of a second Cold War centered on Central Asia, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East. This multifaceted conflict is gradually escalating, with hot fronts developing in Ukraine, Israel, Yemen, and involving Saudi Arabia and Iran. It is important to note that while the powers involved did not directly intervene in the October 7 attack, their shared interests—backed by trillions of dollars and control of strategic assets—significantly influence the countries' attitudes toward Hamas.

We must strive to decipher the rhetoric of world leaders, as support for Hamas—whether economic, military, technological, or political—is driven by their concrete material interests, and this motivation will persist in the future. Hamas would not have obtained its tunnels, weapons, intelligence capabilities, electronic warfare, and global media campaign without assistance. These resources were provided to Hamas as part of an agreement, where Hamas fulfills its mission in exchange. Consequently, Hamas has become

a “choke point” for intercontinental energy corridors. This is evident in their attempts to damage infrastructure, such as the 2021 attack on the fuel tank in Ashkelon, as well as their ability to hinder alliances and agreements for energy transportation through Israeli territory. While these efforts have not yet succeeded, as the agreements with Saudi Arabia may still be implemented in the future, preventing the development of energy infrastructure holds strategic importance for numerous global players, whether they initially supported Hamas or are now benefiting from its actions.

Contrary to theories such as “the clash of civilizations,” this is not a conflict between great cultures at war with each other, such as Islam versus the West. Nor is it a conflict between values or political philosophies, such as democratic countries versus dictatorships. The constellations connecting countries or axes of countries and organizations encompass a mixture of all these factors. On one side, there is a “Western constellation” that combines the democratic West with autocratic Muslim countries in the Sunni camp, as well as India and Israel. On the other side, there is an “Asian constellation” led by China and consisting of Russia, Shiite Muslim countries, Sunni countries such as Qatar and organizations such as Hamas, as well as Western countries or political parties on the left side of the political spectrum. While ideology and culture play important roles in motivating various players to act, we must not overlook the significant economic and geopolitical factors that underlie these actions. This includes the extensive infrastructure of alliances centered around resources and control, as well as military and commercial partnerships, particularly in the realm of energy resources and energy corridors.

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The Disruption of Global and National Supply Chains—Aspects and Insights

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The purpose of this paper is to shed light on the strength and significance of global maritime trade in general, and Israeli maritime trade in particular. Furthermore, it seeks to analyze the various disruptions that have affected maritime trade in recent years, including exceptional events such as climate phenomena, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Swords of Iron war, whose ramifications are only beginning to emerge. In particular, this paper discusses the current disruptions in supply chains due to the Iranian and Houthi attacks on shipping routes in the Red Sea. These disruptions indicate numerous weak points in the stability and operation of global supply chains, which are crucial for the national economies and security of numerous countries, particularly Israel.

Over the past three years, the world has experienced a series of extreme events that have significantly affected various aspects of life, especially the global economy. This paper examines these events and their repercussions on global geo-logistics—the distribution of supply chains according to level and type. Additionally, it includes a description and analysis of Israeli foreign trade, specifically highlighting the import processes and the types of cargo that have been affected by the disruptions during the period in question. Israel's grain imports, which are vital for the country both in normal circumstances as well as during emergencies, are used as a case study. Furthermore, the paper also surveys the operational conditions, including challenges faced in the ports of origin of the various cargoes and recent challenges within this market.

Keywords: supply chains, maritime trade, choke points, climate crisis, COVID-19, Swords of Iron, Houthis, Israel

Introduction: Global and National Maritime Trade, Scope, and Potential for Disruption

About 85% of global trade (by weight) is currently transported by sea, some 14% by

land, and less than 1% by air. The weight of the sea freight is about 12 billion tons, in which 4.7 billion tons consist of energy in various forms, including coal for steel manufacture; 4.4 billion tons are mainly iron ores, other bulk cargoes,

and chemicals; about 2 billion tons are goods in containers, and about 0.9 billion tons are general cargoes (Clarksons, 2023).

Israel's foreign trade in 2022 (in terms of weight and volume) totaled about 84 million tons, of which 83.5 tons consisted of goods transported by sea (99.6% of Israel's total foreign trade, in a variety specified below).¹ Regarding maritime trade, Israel is entirely dependent on the import of raw materials, most consumer goods, and, to a large extent, its energy cargoes (such as coal, crude and refined oil, and refined petroleum gas). The discovery and production of natural gas in Israel and the beginning of its use to generate electricity and for industry have significantly reduced dependence on energy imports. Most of the supply chains on which Israel relies for its imports are long from a geographical perspective and based on maritime transportation, as a result of Israel's complicated relations with its neighbors and the almost insurmountable problems of operating with them via land bridges, except for relatively small quantities of cargoes in transit, largely through the Jordan River terminal.² Therefore, it is important to understand that Israel's existence as an "island state"—(particularly in economic terms) due to its geopolitical situation and geographical location—depends on foreign trade, largely by sea.

A maritime blockade or the use of military force by a sovereign country or a terrorist organization to disrupt supply chains to and from Israel's ports would have a direct impact on the country's ability to function. That is due to its geographical and economic position as an "island state."

The Israeli economy is known for its high percentage of international trade in relation to its GDP (over 50%). In terms of weight and volume, the majority of this trade is seaborne. Approximately 99.6% of Israel's foreign trade, by weight and 65% by value is transported via maritime routes. Therefore, the openness and

security of Israel's ports and shipping routes—Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC)—are of vital importance for its trade, both in routine times and during emergencies.

Given the importance of supply chains for the global economy in general, and Israel's economy (and national resilience) in particular, this paper seeks to analyze the primary factors for their disruptions during the years 2020–2023, which represent a unique period in the history of modern logistics. We argue that these disruptions were akin to "black swan events," which are entirely unpredictable but must be considered as essential parts of risk assessment and prudent planning. This is especially crucial in light of increasingly frequent climate events, which pose a constant threat and have a direct impact on Israel's ability to prepare for emergencies, given its complete reliance on stable and dependable supply chains. The paper concludes by highlighting the valuable insights gained from these disruptions to the Israeli economy.

In addition to climate problems—which many consider to be the greatest threat to the planet, as participants expressed at the 2022 World Economic Forum in Davos (World Economic Forum, 2022)—and other significant natural events such as pandemics (the COVID-19 pandemic, whose impact is discussed later), Israel's maritime trade is, of course, also exposed to political and security threats and disruptions. A maritime blockade or the use of military force by a sovereign country or a terrorist organization to disrupt supply chains to and from Israel's ports would have a direct impact on the country's ability to function. That is due to its geographical and economic position as an "island state." A recent example illustrating the use and significance of a maritime blockade can be seen in the conduct and outcome of the maritime blockade imposed by Russia on Ukraine at the start of the war between them in February 2022 (Wedemeier & Wolf, 2022).

Another form of economic warfare that involves restrictions on maritime trade is

the imposition of sanctions on a particular country, limiting its imports and exports and thereby affecting manufacturers and companies engaged in logistics (by sea, air, and land)—whether owned by governments or by private citizens. The sanctions currently imposed on Russia, Iran, and North Korea serve as an example (Al-Attar, 2023).

Disruptions to international trade and supply chains can also occur as a result of events such as maritime accidents. For instance, two years ago, the Suez Canal was blocked for several days following a maritime accident. A detailed report attributed the accident to human error combined with anomalous weather conditions (Chambers, 2023).

It follows that deliberate actions by states or organizations, economic processes, natural phenomena such as abnormal climate conditions, maritime accidents, or a combination of these factors could cause serious damage to Israel's supply chains. In any case, prolonged disruption would have disastrous consequences for the Israeli economy, as well as for the country's national resilience and security. This is due to the potential damage to logistic systems in general, which would have a fatal impact on the inventory levels needed to operate civil and security systems and the replenishment of those inventories.

Maintaining sufficient inventory levels could seemingly save the need to identify import solutions in emergencies and enables a certain solution within a limited time frame for disruptions in the supply chains. However, it can be understood that the maintenance of inventories, however large they may be, is not a full substitute for the continued existence of foreign trade during an emergency, especially over time. The risks involved in maintaining high levels of inventories, include preservation measures considering the shelf life and durability of the goods over time, large and expensive storage facilities for the required quantities, and the strategic risk and appeal of damaging such stock concentrations during war.

Furthermore, in addition to the challenges of defining and building emergency inventories, it is important to note that there are approximately ten million people in Israel. The storage of emergency inventories of multiple goods for such a population, especially for extended periods, has not yet been discussed and fully decided at the national level. This is due to the wide range of goods and products that are considered essential today, beyond the basic goods that currently define emergency stocks. Additionally, the import of consumer goods, despite the applicable supervision and regulations, is predominantly controlled by numerous private importers. This becomes problematic when it comes to national essential inputs. While a country's considerations are primarily strategic rather than economic, the private sector generally assesses its activity in economic terms. Therefore, organizing the subject of inventories for emergencies in Israel's consumer markets is not fully feasible without state intervention, which would have significant economic consequences.

Outsourcing and the relocation of manufacturing from the West to Eastern and Southern Asian countries (as well as other developing regions) have proliferated, significantly broadening the range of goods whose manufacturing (and even the required knowledge) has shifted away from the West to other areas, particularly Asia.

The expansion, lengthening, and complexity of supply chains in global trade is not a new phenomenon. Outsourcing in the western world has expanded into all sectors, including services, in line with the rising standards of living or as a result thereof. Commercial organizations have embraced the slogans of the lean enterprise, minimal inventories, logistic manipulations in storage systems and distribution methods and other changes that all serve one purpose—stretching and streamlining supply chains to their maximum capacity (Kajjumba et al.,

2020). The guiding principle is that the most successful one—the survivor and the winner—is the one who knows how to reduce costs and optimize supply chains by making them the most flexible, fast, and cheap. Outsourcing and the relocation of manufacturing from the West to Eastern and Southern Asian countries (as well as other developing regions) have proliferated, significantly broadening the range of goods whose manufacturing (and even the required knowledge) has shifted away from the West to other areas, particularly Asia.

This trend has intensified in recent years, based on:

- Global standardization of a growing range of products, as a result of regulations or choices made by manufacturers;
- Advancements in communication technologies and their improved reliability, facilitating quick and efficient data and knowledge transfer;
- Numerous international and bilateral trade agreements, including those established within political or regional blocs. These agreements actually defined the product specifications and manufacturing methods;
- The most striking element in terms of reliability, accuracy, and capacity is the upgrade and enhancement of maritime transportation capabilities.

Maritime trade routes have been improved in various ways, such as by the widening and enhancement of the Panama Canal and the Suez Canal, as well as by the increase in the dimensions of the ships in accordance with the growth of trades. These upgrades have been made possible by shipping companies and ship owners who lease their vessels. Their efforts have significantly developed and improved the capacity and performance of ships, with a focus on efficiency and profitability.

The COVID-19 Pandemic—An Upheaval but Also the Source of Many Lessons

The COVID-19 pandemic that fully erupted in early 2020, when it seemed that supply chains

had been stretched to their limits, led to an extreme situation. Coping with COVID-19 began with significant lockdowns at various levels and left its immediate marks on disruptions to the point of severing many supply chains (Ivanov & Dolgui, 2020).

China implemented an aggressive strategy to prevent and eliminate the spread of COVID-19, known as Zero Covid. It imposed strict lockdown measures, primarily in China's main trading and port cities. However, to this day, the Chinese labor market and manufacturing sector have not fully returned to their pre-January 2020 performance levels (Wu et al., 2023). This policy affected all Chinese logistics industries and services. Gradually, a shortage of means of transportation began to appear due to manpower pressures as a result of the long and strict lockdowns. The lack of manpower and restrictions on movement slowed down the operations in China's main ports, leading to long queues of ships waiting to be processed. This caused "traffic jams" in the movement of goods, slowing down even to the point of stopping the emptying of import containers and the transfer of the empty containers for filling and export, as well as other disruptions to the continued flow of trade that characterized Chinese exports.

The COVID-19 pandemic in the West resulted in heavy pressures on demand and an unprecedented lack of empty containers for Asian cargoes. Additionally, it created a shortage of cargo space on ships, thus decreasing the available capacity for transportation—due to ships waiting for operations in ports and reducing the weekly capacity on various trade routes (Berger, 2022). As a result, the demand for maritime transportation and capacity increased worldwide, for which the shipping industry was not prepared, causing an unprecedented surge in maritime freight rates.

The pandemic expansion to the West also led to reactions that further intensified the abnormal pressures on the global supply chains, with some chains even being halted. There was

a significant increase in demand for medical products, particularly protective products, disinfectants, sanitizers, medical automation, and medicines originating in Asia, which had been outsourced in the past.

Furthermore, the lockdown measures in the West brought about noteworthy changes in consumer product markets. While demand for services fell due to the strict lockdowns, there was a dramatic rise in the demand for consumer products, especially those used at home, as people spent more time at home. The shift to remote work also resulted in increased purchases of home office products. Most of these purchases were made online—particularly during lockdowns—placing unprecedented pressures on supply chains. This created a particular emphasis on the “last mile,” the last link in the chain before delivery to the end user, which is generally the weakest link in the chain (Macioszek, 2018).

Demand for products also increased due to the economic actions taken by many western governments, aiming to maintain the public’s standard of living and to prevent economic collapse through cash grants. This resulted in abnormal demand for goods from Asia (including China, where manufacturing and export activity gradually resumed), coupled with the spread of lockdowns in the West and a severe shortage of skilled labor resulting in significant disruption to logistic processes in the West.

“Traffic Jams” in Maritime Trade and Damage to Supply Chains

The damage to logistics processes included a phenomenon of congestion at seaports due to ships waiting in the ports’ piers and their entrances. This congestion occurred in a market that had become accustomed to rapid and efficient port operations, which had been adjusted to adequate inventory levels for the swiftness and efficiency of pre-pandemic logistics according to the “just in time” concept.

These dynamics created delays that broke every known record, particularly in the ports of

the west coast of the United States (Anguiano, 2021). Later, the slowdown increased to the point of not releasing import containers that remained full for very long periods (many businesses stopped their activities at one time or another during the lockdowns and, as a result, abandoned or rejected the containerized cargo that came for them from Asia)

This slowdown created considerable shortages of various products and fueled a vicious circle of stockpiling for fear of shortages. This shortage was caused by those serious disruptions to the supply chains, disruptions that only increased the fear, the desire, and the need to stockpile essential inventories, both from private parties as well as from organizations and governments.

Disruptions to manufacturing processes were another factor leading to shortages, as well as the economic burden of maintaining larger reserves and additional storage facilities. These events, combined with a shortage of empty containers, caused maritime transportation costs to skyrocket by up to 1,000% compared to pre-pandemic prices. Consequently, inflationary pressures intensified in western countries, adding to the economic slowdown already underway prior to the pandemic, with nominal (but also real) increases in the prices of goods, products, and consequently, services.

Moreover, the pandemic further strained relations between China and the West, particularly the United States. This has a significant impact on supply chains, especially in the realm of advanced technology hardware and software products, as well as other goods and raw materials.

Political and Security Events as Disruptive Factors

Political tensions between China and other countries led to changes in transportation routes and patterns for raw materials, such as iron ores, other ores, grains, and other products. Additionally, shifts in custom duties policy between China and the West diminished the

economic value of producing and exporting these materials to the West. For example, China had imposed an embargo on coal, which had been imported from Australia (Cave, 2020), leading to changes in the import routes of Indonesian coal. The embargo was only lifted at the beginning of 2024, as Chinese–Australian relations improved (He, 2023).

In this context it is important to note that any significant changes in transportation or geographical routes have direct implications for the shipping market and can trigger a chain reaction in other markets worldwide. For example, China’s switching of coal imports from Australia to Indonesia, which completely altered the ton/mile ratio based on the proximity of the origin to the destination and also the ship size in this service, resulted in a surplus of one type of ship and a shortage of another, with consequences for other global bulk markets.

Another significant event that immediately affected the global supply chains was the outbreak of the Russia–Ukraine war in early 2022 just as the world was beginning to recover from COVID-19. For centuries, Black Sea ports and their agricultural hinterland had served as a crucial source of grains for the people along the Mediterranean coast. The Russian blockade on the Ukrainian ports disrupted and occasionally broke the supply chains from these ports, stretching between the Danube and Dnieper rivers, as well as between the ports of the Azov Sea and the Black Sea itself. This blockade posed a major problem for many countries that relied on Black Sea grains, as they were forced to seek substitutes from more distant and expensive sources.

Additionally, a significant portion of exports was halted due to sanctions imposed on Russian government companies or companies associated with the authorities, which not only affected production but also maritime transportation (International Trade Administration, 2022). The exports of various petrochemical and chemical products from the Black Sea, including essential items such as urea for transportation

and fertilizers for agriculture (primarily sourced from Russia and Ukraine) were disrupted and even halted due to American sanctions. Despite certain easements of sanctions relating to the Russian export of food products and fertilizers for agriculture (Office of Foreign Assets Control, 2022), global markets were severely disrupted, causing real shortages and unprecedented price increases for these products, especially fertilizers, whose vital importance for feeding the world’s population is clear beyond any doubt. Moreover, even countries in Eastern Europe without a direct border on the Black Sea, such as Hungary, which exports loads of grain through the Romanian port of Constanta or other ports along the Danube River, temporarily stopped exporting grains, due to concerns for their own national reserves, further intensifying the sense of shortages among grain importers worldwide (Komives, 2022; Hungary Today, 2022).

The disruption of port activity on the Black Sea also caused a shortage of products from the iron and steel industries in that region. While this contributed to some increase in the production and export of mainly Chinese steel, it also caused fears among steel buyers, especially those who relied on Black Sea-manufactured products. As a result, they began increasing their orders and reserves from alternative sources to safeguard against future shortages.

The export of goods from Russian and Ukrainian ports on the Black Sea stopped almost completely. What was not disrupted due to damage to the production sources was disrupted by the Russian blockade on the ports of Ukraine—which used the blockade and mainly agriculture exports as a means of pressuring the West—and interrupted the supply chain (Kumar, 2023). In addition, the American economic boycott on Russian products, logistic services, and organizations (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2022) severely damaged the Russian economy (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2023).

The damage to manufacturing and exports is extremely problematic for Ukraine, as it heavily

relies on the export of essential goods, such as agricultural produce, to countries outside the Black Sea region, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa. These countries depend on grain imports, which have become more expensive due to the disruption in supply chains. For example, Egypt's Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly claimed that despite government subsidies, the cost of making Egyptian pita bread had increased from 65 piastres before the war in Ukraine to 90 piastres in 2023, causing public unrest that threatened the stability of the Egyptian government (Barel, 2023). In an attempt to support Ukrainian grain exports and ensure food security in developing countries, the UN sponsored the Black Sea Grain Initiative (BSGI), which included representatives of Turkey, Ukraine, Russia, and the UN (United Nations, n.d.). Although this initiative operated for about a year until mid-2023, it came to an end when Russia withdrew its participation. However, the corridor continues to provide active defense for the Ukrainian navy and transports various cargoes beyond the original agreements in the BSGI (Ukraine Business News, 2024).

The analysis of the cases described above highlights the numerous challenges associated with maintaining the supply chain. These problems were obscured within the logistic processes from the beginning and throughout their evolution, resulting in their current complex nature. The significance and potential impact of the restrictions and defects that caused disruptions could only be comprehended once they actually occurred, by examining how they manifested and developed.

Disruptions due to Climate Conditions

A significant factor contributing to disruptions in supply chain operations is climate change, including global warming and other natural disasters. Global warming naturally leads to other extreme natural events, such as flooding, landslides, forest fires, volcanic eruptions, heatwaves, and hurricanes. While it is not yet

possible to directly link geological events to climate change, the impact of earthquakes and their damage, including tsunamis, large volcanic eruptions and their consequences for air travel and the global atmosphere cannot be ignored.

Other climate-related phenomena affecting global and regional supply chains and maritime traffic are the complete or partial blockage of vital shipping routes. For example, Europe has experienced lower rainfall levels and drier air, leading to a significant decrease in the water levels of its main rivers, such as the Po and the Rhine. These rivers, particularly the Rhine, have served as the main transportation arteries of Europe since ancient times, forming a network that spans the entire continent with connecting canals. The decline in river levels severely restricts or even halts the passage of commercial ships (Handley, 2023). Although this effect is largely seasonal and can be rectified by a few days of heavy rain, as occurred on the Rhine in August 2023 (Hogan, 2023), it still causes serious disruption to supply chains within Europe. Replacing these waterway routes with regular overland transport (trains, trucks) is extremely challenging due to the large volumes of goods that need to be transported.

One of the most challenging issues is the implementation of restrictions on crossing the Panama Canal. While this occurs annually during the dry season, in 2023 the restrictions were more severe due to an extended dry season. As a result, the number of ships allowed to cross the canal each day was reduced to slow down the transit speed and conserve water that is pumped into the ocean by the canal mechanism. Additionally, the depth of the water has decreased, limiting the hull depth of the ships that pass through (Panama Canal Authority, 2023). To clarify the operational aspect of the problem, it should be noted that modern container ships, such as the NeoPanamax,³ must reduce their cargo by approximately 30,000 tons (equivalent to about 3,000 TEU)⁴ to comply with the new restrictions when crossing the Panama Canal. Apart from the

economic damage, which represents a 15%–20% reduction in the ship's potential capacity, the supply chain is significantly disrupted as more ships are needed to transport the same volume of cargo, assuming they are even available. These disruptions to the Panama Canal are expected to increase in the coming years due to anticipated climate changes caused by El Niño (World Meteorological Organization, 2023).⁵

Threats and Attacks on Trade in the Red Sea

On November 19, 2023, after a series of declarations and warnings, Houthi militants seized control of the vehicle carrier *Galaxy Leader*, believed to be owned by an Israeli businessman operating from the Isle of Man. The hijacked ship was then taken to the Yemeni port of Hodeida, under Houthi control, and has since remained anchored there, with no signs of its release. In addition, there have been numerous attempts to attack commercial ships in the Gulf of Aden in the southern Red Sea, near the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, using drones carrying explosives or ground-to-sea missiles launched from northwest Yemen. While some ships sustained damage, no casualties were reported.

Initially, fears were directed toward shipping lines linked to Israel or vessels with full or partial Israeli ownership. As a result, the Zim company decided to reroute its shipping line from Asia to Israel and Turkey for a route around Africa, circumventing the Red Sea and its threats. Other shipping lines followed suit, including those importing vehicles to Israel.

These events have raised concerns among shipping companies, particularly those operating container ships, due to the threats posed by the Houthis and their Iranian patrons. Initially, fears were directed toward shipping lines linked to Israel or vessels with full or partial Israeli ownership. As a result, the Zim company decided to reroute its shipping line from Asia

to Israel and Turkey for a route around Africa, circumventing the Red Sea and its threats. Other shipping lines followed suit, including those importing vehicles to Israel (primarily for unloading in Eilat), as well as Israeli-owned ships leased to foreign shipping companies with routes unrelated to Israel.

On December 3, three vessels were attacked in the southern Red Sea. While one of the vessels was owned by an Israeli citizen and carried a cargo of grain from the United States to China, the other two had no connection to Israel in terms of their operators or cargo. These attacks demonstrated that all ships passing through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait were at risk, regardless of their association with Israel or Israeli citizens. Consequently, more ships chose to follow Zim's route and sail around Africa to avoid the Red Sea and the Suez Canal when traveling to the Mediterranean, Europe, and even the East Coast of the United States. This trend has continued as the Houthis have intensified their attacks on ships.

To understand the economic implications of these events, it is necessary to consider the added financial burden for shipping companies that choose the longer route to the eastern Mediterranean, which includes ports in Israel, Turkey, the Black Sea, Greece, and the Adriatic. The route around Africa is approximately 8,000 nautical miles longer. Traveling at a typical average slow speed of 16 knots to conserve fuel costs and reduce carbon emissions, results in an extra 21 days in each direction, especially when sailing westward at a faster pace. For a ship with a capacity of 5,000 TEU (which is the most expensive to operate on this route and much larger than the average ship), this leads to an additional charter hire of around \$650,000, container costs of \$250,000, and fuel costs of approximately a million dollars. After deducting the Suez Canal crossing fee of about \$250,000, the additional costs total approximately \$1.65 million dollars in each direction. This corresponds to an extra \$350 per TEU or \$700 per 40-foot container in each

direction. In practical terms, this increase in cost translates to an extra \$0.66 per every textile item in the container, and over \$2 for each electrical device or item with a volume of 0.1 m³ (such as a television screen).

This additional cost erodes the remainder of the contribution of the freight fees to the shipping companies—a contribution that at the level of demand for sea transport and the freight rates that prevailed on the eve of the Red Sea events hardly covered (if at all) the fixed costs of the average ship. This fact was reflected often in the losses of the shipping companies in almost every shipping service in the world (RTTNews.com, 2024). This erosion in freight rates can be attributed to various factors, including a surplus supply of new ships, a slowdown in the transportation market, and a decreasing demand for maritime transportation. Consequently, commercial ships that sailed between Asia and the Mediterranean operated at an average load factor of 80%–85%, due to the combination of reduced demand and surplus supply. Although the shipping companies tried to raise rates, these attempts were largely unsuccessful due to the aforementioned reasons and the market behavior. Consequently, shipping companies have been unable to recoup their costs, leading to mounting losses. Obviously, if the shipping companies could match their rates to the changes and their additional fixed costs, no shipping company would have incurred losses.

This freight rate behaving model explains why shipping companies were unable to raise their rates above market levels, resulting in only a modest price increase. In this context it is important to note that the cost of war insurance for ships visiting ports in Israel can range from \$50 to \$100 per container, adding an additional 20 cents to the cost of importing a television screen, or 0.01 cents to the price of an imported shirt. It is also worth mentioning that during the years 2021–2022, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the cost of shipping a container from Asia to Israel in the spot market rose to \$20,000. By

2023, this price gradually dropped to around \$1,600 for a 40-foot container. However, these rate reductions were not reflected in lower prices for imported goods, and the cost of living showed no significant changes. Therefore, aside from exchange rate fluctuations and shifts in demand, it can be concluded that transportation fees have minimal impact on the prices paid by the consumers.

This situation and the challenge of dealing with Houthi terror are highly volatile. The scale and intensity of the attacks are rapidly escalating, extending beyond Israel. It is currently impossible to predict how the major shipping companies will react. Naturally, they will not agree to accept long-term losses due to a local conflict between Israel and Hamas. The market is already preparing for price increases, at least to cover the additional costs. It is hoped that this matter, which needs to be treated as an international incident, will be resolved as quickly as possible to prevent shipping companies with a significant share of the Israeli market from refusing to provide service (as has already occurred with some companies holding a smaller market share).

Aside from the current increases in transportation costs across all shipping lines worldwide (after experiencing a significant decline last year), it is important to acknowledge that the additional sailing days pose challenges for importers in the West. These challenges primarily revolve around inventory management, which is carefully planned on a strict weekly timetable and specific delivery days following the ship's arrival at the port. Irregularities in schedules make it difficult to determine inventory levels, resulting in extra costs and in some cases, compromising the shelf life of the final product. Consequently, this also affects the interest to be paid on credit during the import process, adding to the overall burden, particularly for larger importers.

The extended sailing time of four to six weeks, as calculated above, makes it extremely challenging to maintain regular (weekly)

schedules. Prior to the Houthi attacks, there were approximately 50 idle ships suitable for trade between Asia and the West. Assuming that each shipping line requires an additional four to six ships to sustain the level of weekly port visits, this situation disrupts schedules and increases the gaps between visits. While this may decrease the number of annual sailings for each line, the reduced supply of sailings improves the performance of ships that currently face low demand-to-volume ratios. These ships currently operate at 75%–85% capacity on sailings from Asia.

The Main Causes of Supply Chain Disruptions

There are several causes of disruption in supply chains, but we will focus on the five main ones:

1. *The production sources of certain goods present challenges in terms of availability*

In addition to political problems and tensions between countries, production or trade slowdowns or stoppages, there is also a shortage of skilled workers to sustain production. While the initial shortage could be attributed to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in the Chinese market, the current shortages are primarily caused by geopolitical events such as the Russia–Ukraine war and its consequences. These events have disrupted or halted numerous sources of production and the distribution of goods.

Regarding the ability to manufacture, especially in the food industry, the issue of climate should be seriously addressed. The ongoing effects of climate change, including global warming, flooding, desertification, and seasonal, temporary, and cyclical demand fluctuations, significantly affect the ability to produce food. Climate phenomena like El Niño and La Niña, which primarily affect the southern and central parts of the Pacific Ocean have a substantial impact on global weather patterns,

consequently affecting crops and sources of nutrition worldwide.

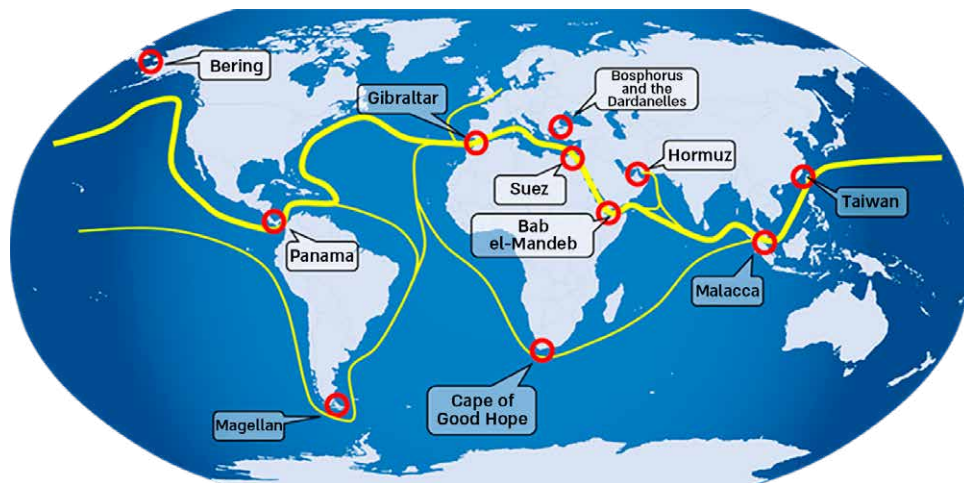
2. *Overreliance on maritime transport and secondary logistics (such as land transport and logistic centers)*

The processes of outsourcing, globalization, and the quest for cost-effective production and export sources have led to an unprecedented dependence on maritime transport and its associated logistic services. In addition to the significant increase in transport costs as a result of the pandemic, there are various barriers, such as the availability of vessels, international restrictions (such as the Arab boycott, trade restrictions between Turkey and Cyprus), and other factors that limit the efficiency of maritime transport. The centralized nature of the industry is also worth mentioning as approximately ten corporations dominate about 85% of the international container ship market (Alpha liner, 2023).

3. *Technological changes in the maritime transport industry (particularly the significant increase in ship size)*

Competition in the maritime transport industry and the need for shipping companies to reduce their fixed costs have led to a kind of competition among shipping companies. Within two decades container ships have tripled in size, with the largest ones carrying over 24,000 TEU. These massive vessels have a length exceeding 400 meters, a width over 60 meters, and a hull depth of at least 16 meters.

There are two main problems associated with this increase in size. One is the need to continuously adapt port infrastructures to accommodate the larger dimensions and meet the demands for rapid ship processing. This requires significant investment with uncertain returns over many years. In addition, there are complex environmental conflicts related to expanding and upgrading ports. Each country faces its own constraints and must maintain its

Figure 1: Global Sea Transportation Routes and Their Choke Points

Source: Open Source, routes and labels added by Yigal Maor

direct link with global markets, regardless of other countries' actions.

The other problem is the vulnerability of these infrastructures and ships to accidents, which directly correlates with their operational and economic consequences. For example, in early 2021, the ship *Ever Given* became stuck in the Suez Canal, blocking cargo ships for about a week. The incident had a dramatic global impact, leading to the diversion of ships around Africa and changes in ship operations. The estimated economic damage was in the billions of dollars and legal proceedings are still ongoing (Yee & Glanz, 2021). Other disasters include the fire on the *Maersk Honan* in early 2018, which resulted in losses and damage to hundreds of containers, and the *One Apus*, which lost hundreds of containers in an extreme storm at the end of 2020 (van Marle, 2020). In both cases, the economic damage is estimated in the hundreds of millions of dollars or more.

4. *The significance of climate change for supply chains, particularly maritime*

The impact of climate change on maritime transport is still relatively lower compared to the other areas discussed above. However, the increasing importance of this sector should not be disregarded. Current evidence shows that the effects of climate change on maritime

transport are mainly seen in falling water levels, particularly on inland waterways, such as lakes, rivers, and canals. For example, droughts and low rainfall in Europe have caused water levels to drop, hindering ship passages. Additionally, the decreasing water level of Gatun Lake in the center of the Panama Canal (Skinner, 2023) has started to noticeably affect traffic flow through the canal. This is immensely important since this traffic plays a crucial role in global supply chains. Furthermore, the shipping industry, including the International Maritime Organization (IMO), has already issued warnings about severe weather conditions and their implications for the reliability and resilience of supply chains at a conference on the consequences of climate change for global shipping (World Meteorological Organization & International Maritime Organization, 2019).

5. *Spaces and regions of strategic importance*

When examining strategic points of failure in maritime supply chains, it is essential to consider maritime straits as one of the most significant factors. A strait is a narrow sea passage that connects two seas, oceans, or other bodies of water, typically located between two land masses. Important straits, also known as choke points, have immense geographical,

Table 1: List of the World's Main Choke Points

Name of passage (strait)	Annual no. of ships	Potential to increase volume	Passage restrictions	Potential disruptions
Hormuz	50,000	Limited	Navigational difficulties	Political instability in the Arabian Gulf
Bab el-Mandeb	22,000	No known problem	Navigational difficulties and security	Piracy and terror
Suez Canal	18,000	Limited by planning	Ship size	Political instability in Egypt, terror
Bosphorus & The Dardanelles	40,000 each	Limited (in size and number)	Ship size	Sailing safety, local restrictions
Gibraltar	300,000	No known problem	No known problems	None known
Taiwan	180,000	No known problem	Policy	Tensions with China (PRC)
Malacca	60,000	Limited (in size and number)	Ship size	Piracy
Cape of Good Hope		No known problem	No known problem	Weather
Panama	14,000	Limited (in size and number)	Traffic size and volume	Low water level, maritime accidents
Magellan		Limited (in size)	Weather	Weather
Bering		No known problem	Weather	Weather

Important straits, also known as choke points, have immense geographical, commercial, and political importance due to the convergence of interests. They are not only geographically narrow but also strategically vulnerable to blockades caused by natural or man-made military events.

commercial, and political importance due to the convergence of interests (see Figure 1). They are not only geographically narrow but also strategically vulnerable to blockades caused by natural or man-made military events. The significance of these choke points has increased with the rise in the volume of maritime traffic in recent years, accompanied by larger ship sizes and longer shipping routes, as a result of globalization and expanded commercial ties.

In any analysis of maritime supply chains, it is crucial to identify and study these choke

points, as they are often located near territorial conflicts, acts of maritime terrorism, piracy, smuggling (including weapons), and other hostile activities that pose risks to civilian shipping. Due to their restricted dimensions (depth and width), traffic load, and other factors that influence the traffic volume, these choke points present challenges for ships (see Table 1). Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) and trade in these choke points can be easily disrupted or blocked. The growth in traffic, combined with larger ship sizes that lead to operational difficulties and risks, increases the likelihood of blockages caused by various factors, creating a significant impact. Areas surrounding choke points can sometimes face threats or restricted access; however, longer routes that bypass these points are often impractical, due to additional costs and longer transit times, significantly disrupting the supply chains.

Sea Routes and Choke Points

The most important choke points for maritime transportation (not in order of importance) are as follows:

- **The Strait of Malacca** along the southwest coast of Asia and the Indian Ocean.
- **The Strait of Hormuz** between the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean.
- **The Suez Canal**, which links the Mediterranean and the Red Sea.
- **The Bab el-Mandeb Strait**, which connects the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden to the Red Sea and the Suez Canal.
- **The Panama Canal**, which joins the Atlantic Ocean and the Pacific Ocean.
- **The Bosphorus and the Dardanelles Straits**, linking the Mediterranean through the Sea of Marmara to the Black Sea.
- **The Strait of Magellan**, connecting the southern part of the Pacific Ocean and the Atlantic Ocean.
- **The Strait of Gibraltar**, linking the Mediterranean and the Atlantic Ocean.
- **The Bering Strait**, in the northern Pacific, linking Alaska and Russia, with the Arctic Ocean (affecting future shipping routes in the Arctic Circle) (TEC Container, 2021).
- **Taiwan**
- Cape of Good Hope

National Aspects of Supply Chains and Disruptions in their Activity

To discuss the impact of supply chains and disruptions on Israel, it is important to consider the strategic significance of the Mediterranean Sea, the Red Sea, and the Arabian Sea. These bodies of water play a crucial role in terms of geostrategic, economic, and military importance, as they connect various seas and basins through strategic choke points. The Mediterranean Sea, in particular, serves as the primary sea route for east-to-west and north-to-south trade, transporting raw materials, fuel products (including liquefied natural gas and liquefied petroleum gas), crude oil and refined products, and various types of coal between

the producing and consuming countries. It is also the only route through which Black Sea countries, particularly Russia, can engage in international maritime trade year-round. The Mediterranean Sea is a busy shipping route, accounting for approximately one-third of international maritime trade (about 220,000 ships per year), including 20% of global energy traffic and 25% of container trade. However, it is also a politically unstable region, with terrorist groups operating to achieve regional and global ambitions. This region also faces a serious problem of refugees fleeing from the eastern Mediterranean and Africa toward Europe. In addition to the Mediterranean region, the Arabian Sea, which is part of the Indian Ocean, is an important trade route, mainly for energy cargoes.

More than half of the world's armed conflicts currently occur in the Indian Ocean region. As early as 2012, nearly 120 warships from 20 national fleets were present in this area, to safeguard their countries' national interests. While the first decade of the 21st century witnessed an increase in maritime piracy in the Arabian Sea region, in recent years, there has been a surge in violence, the sophistication of weapons, and the willingness to attack shipping routes by both countries and terrorist organizations around the Arabian Sea. Iran and its proxies, the Houthis, have seized control of ships, laid mines along shipping routes, and launched attacks on vessels using small boats and drones (Horev, 2021).

Understanding the main disruptions in the supply chains can help assess the risks and unique challenges that Israel faces in its foreign trade. The use of maritime transport through Israel's ports is critical for its foreign trade due to its significance and scale. According to data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) and the Israel Ports Authority, maritime trade through Israel's ports accounted for 99.6% of the country's total foreign trade in terms of weight and volume by the end of 2021. During that period, Israel's total foreign trade, including

Table 2: Cargoes in Israeli Ports in 2022 (Quantities and Shares in Percentages)

Type of cargo	Total trade		Imports				Exports			
	Total in millions of tons	% of total trade	Total imports in millions of tons	Import share of cargo type in %	% of total imports	% of total trade	Total exports in millions of tons	Export share of cargo type in %	% of total exports	% of total trade
General	6	7%	5.5	92%	9%	5%	0.5	8%	3%	1%
Dry & wet bulk	21.5	26%	12	56%	20%	8%	9.5	44%	51%	11%
Bulk seeds & products	5.5	7%	5.5	100%	9%	7%	0	0%	0%	0%
Containers	27.5	33%	19	69%	31%	23%	8.5	31%	46%	10%
Total, excluding energy	60.5	72%	42		69%	42%	18.5		82%	22%
Energy (coal & fuels)	23	28%	19	83%	31%	35%	4	17%	18%	5%
Total	83.5		61			73%	22.5			27%

Source: Israel Ports Authority, 2022

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energy (coal and fuels), reached approximately 81.5 million tons. In 2022, maritime trade increased to 83.5 million tons, with energy products accounting for 23 million tons, and the remaining 60.5 million tons distributed as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 shows that imports constitute 92% of all general cargo activity, which includes metals, forest products (wood and paper), bulk products in sacks, project cargoes (large machinery, dismantled factories) and vehicles. For wet and dry bulk cargoes, import and export quantities are nearly equal, at 56% and 44%, respectively. However, the nature

of the cargo differs significantly. Imports include bulk chemicals and cement, while exports primarily consist of Dead Sea and Negev products (potash, phosphates). Grains and fodder products are imported, including grains for human consumption, fodder and seed (such as canola and sunflower products), glutes (protein from seeds for animal fodder), corn seeds, and soybeans.

Container activity is different because it is reported by weight, with import by weight accounting for 69% of all container activity, and exports for 31%. However, the correct analysis (although it does not significantly change the split between imports and exports) should be based on TEU. Analysis in these units represents the actual ratio between imports and exports, revealing that imports account for 76% of the total container activity, compared to only 24% for exports (see Table 3).

The data in Table 2 and Table 3 indicate several important points regarding Israel's foreign trade activity. First, container activity

Table 3: Analysis of Container Activity in Israeli Ports in 2021 (in TEU)

Type of activity	Imports (unloading) in TEU	Imports as share of this activity in %	Exports (loading) in TEU	Exports as share of this activity in %	Total	Share of total activity in %
Full containers	1,388,000	76%	437,000	24%	1,825,000	58%
Empty containers	24,000	3%	933,000	97%	957,000	31%
Total, excluding transshipment*	1,412,000	51%	1,370,000	49%	2,782,000	89%
Transshipment	175,000	50%	175,000	50%	350,000	11%
Total activity	1,587,000	51%	1,545,000	49%	3,132,000	

Source: Data from the Israel Ports Authority

* Transshipment refers to the unloading of a container from a ship in a port and then reloading it onto another ship to be taken to its final destination.

is the dominant type of traffic in Israel's ports (excluding energy-related activity), representing 33% of the total weight of goods transported. This category includes consumer goods and a significant portion of raw materials. Importantly, the import component is prominent, accounting for 76% of full container activity. This is evident from the number of empty containers that are returned for balancing,⁶ particularly in the direction of Asia.

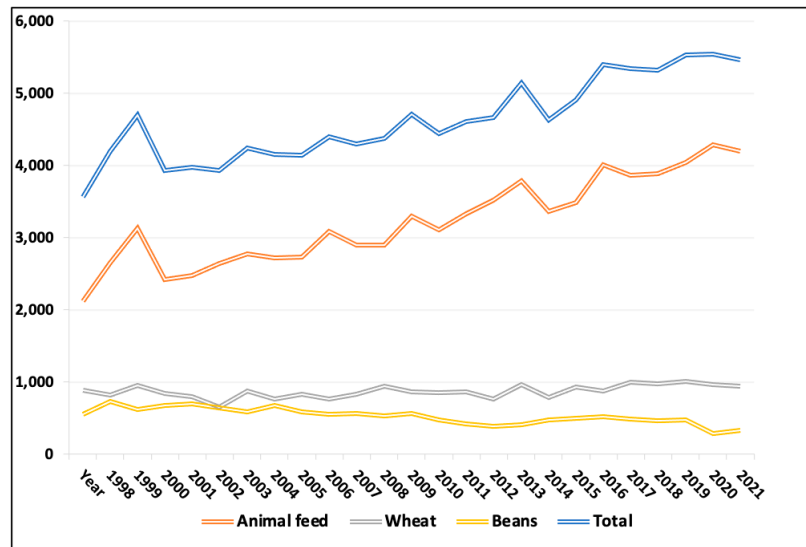
Second, general cargo activity primarily involves the transportation of raw materials and goods, such as metals, forest products and vehicles, which cannot easily be transported in containers due to their volume and weight. It should be noted that general cargo container activity leans heavily toward imports, similar to energy cargoes. This can be attributed to Israel's complete reliance on importing most general goods and energy, as there is no local production capacity. The increased use of liquefied natural gas in industry and electricity generation, as well as the expansion of electric vehicles for private and public transportation is expected to significantly affect Israel's energy import figures.

Third, while the figures in Table 2 indicate an equal division in bulk cargo activity between imports and exports, it is important to emphasize that these two activities are vastly different. Imports consist of minerals and chemicals that are crucial for the Israeli economy and industry, while exports primarily include fertilizers and chemicals from the Dead Sea Works and the Negev.

These points, in conjunction with the imports–exports ratio presented in Table 2 and Table 3 underscore the fundamental nature of the activities in Israel's ports, both in normal times and during emergencies. They also highlight the critical importance of avoiding any disruptions, including container activity, which serves as the primary means of transporting consumer goods in the Israeli market.

The significant container activity in Israel, which is twice the global average at approximately 15%, and its importance to the Israeli economy were among the reasons for the development and upgrade of the container ports in Ashdod and Haifa, as well as the establishment of the new South Port and the

Figure 2: Import of Grains & Cereal Products to Israel, showing Trends by Type of Cargo, 1998–2022 (thousands of tons)



Source: Website of Zenziper Ltd.

It is important to note that the available agricultural land in Israel, used for various crops, can only meet a small portion of the country’s needs. Therefore, there is significant reliance on the import of grains and fodder to Israel, totaling about 5.5 million tons in 2022. Over 20% of these imports are seed products, which serves as protein sources for animals.

Haifa Bay Port. The four corporations, including two port companies, involved in this activity will address the country’s critical container activity for at least two or three decades, aiming to prevent any logistic bottlenecks caused by insufficient port infrastructure. At the same time, the import of grain to Israel presents a problem, as the current infrastructures in Haifa and Ashdod are reaching their minimum capacity for unloading these cargoes. In response, construction has recently begun on additional infrastructure at the Haifa port shipyard, with future plans to expand the grain unloading facilities.

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country’s needs. Therefore, there is significant reliance on the import of grains and fodder to Israel, totaling about 5.5 million tons in 2022. Over 20% of these imports are seed products, which serves as protein sources for animals. This highlights the crucial need for the current level of imports. Additionally, more than 75% of the grain and fodder imports are intended for animal feed, underscoring the importance of suitable infrastructure for this type of activity, which directly affects the consumption of meat and other animal products in Israel.

The import of grains, as discussed below, presents a challenging case, due to the complexity of its infrastructure and the difficulties in obtaining cargoes as a result of external factors beyond the control of the importers or the state. Israel mainly relies on the grain silos in Haifa (Millennium Silos, formerly Dagon Silos) for imports of grains and seed products. However, these silos, which have been in operation for 70 years, are expected to be phased out according to city plans to develop Haifa’s sea front, and alternative storage options are being constructed as part of this plan (City Plan A/3/13).

The silos in Ashdod partially support the operations of the Haifa silos and have become more efficient since the construction of a seed conveyor belt from the dockside to the storage silos in 2022. However, the capacity of the Ashdod silos and their storage space are insufficient to fully replace the Haifa silos should they break down or cease operations. Additional silos and unloading infrastructure are currently being constructed in the Israel Shipyards port, with further plans for construction on the eastern dock of the Haifa Port Company grounds.

Currently, the two unloading facilities in Haifa and Ashdod can handle up to six million tons (nominal) of seed cargoes annually, depending on the volume, storage duration, and proper operation of the unloading infrastructure. It is possible to increase this volume by upgrading the unloading facilities and adjusting the silo storage capacity or conditions. However, emergency measures to expand the capacity of the existing silos will not be necessary in the next few years due to the ongoing construction of new infrastructure.

Figure 2 indicates that the imports of grains, seed products, and beans (mainly soybeans) into Israel are approaching the processing and storage capacity of the existing infrastructure. It is important to note that due to the physical structure of the facilities, all seed products are unloaded using grabs instead of automatic unloading equipment of the silos. These products are also not stored in the silos and should therefore be excluded from the total quantity of seed cargoes unloaded and stored in the silos.

It is important to understand that a significant fault in one of these infrastructures, such as the Millennium Silos in Haifa and Ashdod Silos, can seriously disrupt the grain supply chain in Israel, potentially even making imports impossible. When calculating the grain imports, it is crucial to consider the estimate of risks and the time required to overcome obstacles. It is also important to segment import sources of imports and analyze the consequences of

changes in the supply chain length and the time to reach Israel. It can be assumed that any substitute source would be further away than current sources. For example, bringing wheat from Argentina instead of Ukraine would add about three weeks to transportation time.

It is also essential to remember that most import cargoes to Israel are in private hands, supervised and regulated by the private sector. This poses a problem concerning essential inputs for the country; as the private sector prioritizes economic terms rather than national feasibility. Therefore, careful calculations should be made regarding the optimal reserve level, considering risks and the potential use of alternative sources, even if they are not cost-effective for routine activity. All logistic factors should be assessed in their complexity, especially in a global transportation market where the state lacks control over the availability of means, such as ships, to ensure the country's supply chain.

Conclusion

The unprecedented challenges faced by global supply chains are primarily driven by political events, such as those in the Red Sea, together with climate events, such as the current “drying up” of the Panama Canal. These events have created a unique and destabilizing situation that serves as a painful reminder of the price paid for globalization. While globalization has undoubtedly improved the average standard of living worldwide, it has also made supply chains extremely sensitive to factors that can disrupt them.

Over the last three years, various factors have converged that highlight the vulnerability of globalization, including the COVID-19 pandemic, political events in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, and intensifying climate changes due to global warming. While these warning signs may not necessarily signal a fundamental shift in globalization since the 1980s, they do emphasize the need for countries to prioritize

the resilience of their supply chains, especially for essential goods and products.

One potential solution to address the vulnerability of extensive global supply chains is to shorten them. Countries could consider sourcing supplies and goods closer to their own shores, exploring substitutes for certain products, and even reintroducing domestic production of consumer goods. After relying heavily on overseas resources for many years, a move toward shorter supply chains could help mitigate risks.

In this context, Israel's position is particularly sensitive. Over the past few decades, the country has increasingly outsourced the production of a wide range of goods, resulting in an economy heavily reliant on cheap and easily obtainable products from around the world. Unfortunately, this has come at the expense of Israeli agriculture, which was once renowned and respected. Instead of nurturing domestic agricultural practices, Israel has prioritized quick imports from neighboring countries and more distant sources. Both political and natural events have unequivocally demonstrated the dangers of this dependency.

Ensuring the country's economic and nutritional security hinges on bolstering Israel's industry and agriculture as much as possible, reducing its reliance on outside factors. While complete self-sufficiency is unattainable for a country of Israel's size and resources, there is undoubtedly a need to maintain adequate reserve stocks, encourage domestic industries through reshoring and support and cultivate the agricultural sector. Implementing these measures would make a significant difference to Israel's economic and nutritional security.

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Notes

- 1 Data is from the Yearbook of the Israel Ports Authority for 2022 and CBS data for that year.
- 2 About the River Jordan terminal on the IAA website, see <http://tinyurl.com/48876eyp>
- 3 NeoPanamax is the largest ship permitted to transit the Panama Canal (due to the limitation of the new raising and lowering system), measuring 370m in length, 51m in width, and 15.24m in hull-depth (which varies based on restrictions).
- 4 TEU refers to the Twenty-Foot Equivalent Unit, which is a measurement of cargo capacity in units of 20-foot containers.
- 5 About this phenomenon, see [What are El Niño and La Niña?](#) on the NOAA website.
- 6 Balancing refers to the process of returning empty containers to the port of origin when there is a surplus of exports.



From Ideological Animosity to Strategic Rivalry: The Evolution of Iran's Perception of Israel

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The war in the Gaza Strip has provided Iran with its first significant opportunity to challenge Israel on multiple fronts. Iran's involvement in the multi-front campaign has reignited discussions about the roots of the conflict between Iran and Israel and the best strategy for addressing the Iranian threat. Ideological hostility toward Israel has been a fundamental element in the Iranian regime's worldview since 1979. At the same time, the place of Israel in Iranian security doctrine has evolved over the years. Given the escalating friction between the two countries, Iran now perceives Israel as a threat to its national security. From Iran's perspective, the ongoing Israeli campaign underscores the necessity of enhancing its response to the increasing pressure exerted by Israel. The Israeli-Iranian conflict, originating in Iran's ideological antipathy toward the Jewish state, has transformed into a multi-front struggle between Israel and the pro-Iranian axis effectively wielded by Tehran to advance its strategic goals. While Israel was not the sole or even the primary influence in the development of Iran's strategic doctrines, over the years, it has become a catalyst and motivating factor for their utilization against Israel.

Introduction

The war in the Gaza Strip has reignited discussions about the ongoing conflict between Iran and Israel within the regional context. At the time of this writing, Iran has refrained from direct involvement in the war, and Hezbollah has not been engaged in a full-scale conflict against Israel. Such involvement could prove costly for the Lebanese organization and, possibly, for Iran itself. However, Iran's explicit engagement in the multi-front campaign since the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023, is evident. The war in Gaza has provided Iran with a significant opportunity to implement its “unification of

the arenas” doctrine. This involves activating its network of proxy organizations it has sponsored in various arenas over recent decades (Vazirian, 2023). As Itamar Rabinovich asserts, the war in Gaza should be viewed in a broader context, primarily driven by Iran's efforts to challenge Israel on multiple fronts (Rabinovich, 2023).

Iran, a key player in the Middle East, has experienced an increase in importance and influence in the past decade. Its attainment of nuclear threshold status; possession of sophisticated weapons systems, including long-range missiles and drones; consolidation of its regional status; and ongoing support for

terrorist organizations, including Hezbollah and the Palestinian Islamic organizations, pose a strategic threat to Israel's national security. This threat fuels extensive discussions on the best strategy for Israel against Iran. Various proposals have been suggested in recent years. Major General (res.) Eyal Zamir has recommended adopting "a systematic approach" and "the long-term campaign-like approach" by forming a regional coalition against the Iranian axis that will "show a high degree of cooperation and demonstrate joint, synchronized efforts on a regional scale." His recommended strategy includes weakening the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC); strategic isolation of the Iranian proxy organizations; systematic pressure to weaken the Iranian regime; expansion of the "campaign between wars" into a regional campaign aimed at weakening Iran; and leading a campaign in the ideological-cultural sphere, designed to enhance anti-Iranian sentiment among the Arab public (Zamir, 2022). Colonel T. and Colonel R. propose that Israel should achieve superiority in the strategic competition against Iran. They argue Israel should preserve, and even augment, its military superiority over Iran and the "Iranian axis" as a whole, be prepared for a multi-front regional conflict, and maintain a continuous capability to attack the Iranian nuclear sites. In addition, Israel should prevent Iran from further establishing itself along its borders and destabilizing additional countries in the region and should utilize a wide variety of tools to weaken the Iranian regime in the long term "so that it will change its behavior and accept Israel as a nation like all others" (Colonel T. and Colonel R., 2023).

Itay Haiminis has proposed a different strategy, focusing on arrangements and communication with Iran to reduce the risk of miscalculation and war. Such a strategy may also facilitate the creation of mechanisms for dialogue on other issues, such as Iran's regional policy and its missile program, within the framework of a new security regime between the two countries. However, he has also emphasized

the need to present a credible threat to Iran and its allies, while developing independent Israeli operational military capabilities as a means of prodding Iran to consent to direct dialogue with Israel. He believes that this can be accomplished through the establishment of "frontline siege bases," meaning areas near Iran's borders from which the IDF can threaten and operate against targets inside Iran, thereby relocating the conflict between the parties to Iranian territory (Haiminis, 2023). Meir Litvak has emphasized the need to adopt realistic goals against Iran, even if not optimal, using a combination of restraint, as well as rational and calm diplomacy. He has suggested that military action should be restricted to essential spheres. This attitude recognizes the Iranian threat but does not take an inflexible ideological line that ignores the context and constraints in the international order in the irrational hope of an immediate Iranian collapse (Litvak, 2023).

While there is no doubt that Iran poses a threat to countries in the Middle East, especially Israel, it is worthwhile to reexamine the fundamental assumption that the centrality of Israel in Iran's policy and security doctrine is predestined by the Islamic Republic's DNA and cannot be changed.

The purpose of this article is not to delve further into the discussion of what strategy Israel should adopt against Iran but rather **to examine Israel's position in Iran's strategic doctrine.** While there is no doubt that Iran poses a threat to countries in the Middle East, especially Israel, it is worthwhile to reexamine the fundamental assumption that the centrality of Israel in Iran's policy and security doctrine is predestined by the Islamic Republic's DNA and cannot be changed. Even those who believe, like myself, that religious and ideological enmity toward Israel and the Jews, as well as the rejection of Israel's existence, are a key element in the Iranian regime's worldview cannot ignore the fact that Israel's role in the Iranian security

doctrine has evolved over the years. I argue that Israel is playing a crucial role in driving this change.

Since its 1979 revolution, Iran has consistently pursued an anti-Israel policy. However, in the past two decades, particularly given the regional upheaval in the Middle East, there has been a discernible increase in Iran's efforts to intensify its activities adjacent to Israel's borders, and even within Israel itself. These efforts aim to place Israel under siege and undermine its security. In addition to Iran's ideological hostility toward Israel, the strategic conflict between the two countries has escalated in recent years due to progress in the Iranian nuclear program, the campaign between wars in Syria, Israel's heightened countermeasures against Iran, and frequent statements by Israeli politicians advocating military action against the Islamic Republic. Iran now perceives Israel not only as an illegitimate entity that must be wiped off the map but also as a growing menace to its national security. This shift prompts discussion regarding the extent to which Israel's centrality in the Iranian strategic doctrine is a permanent aspect dictated by a revolutionary worldview or reflects an Iranian response to geostrategic changes in the Middle East, particularly in response to Israeli policy.

If this is indeed a changeable and reversible process, influenced by Israel's activity, then the current vectors affecting Iranian strategy toward Israel are likely to change again in the future, potentially reducing the direct conflict between the countries and perhaps also easing some of the tensions between them. Such a discussion cannot be confined to an examination of Iran's strengths and weaknesses; it must also encompass the development of Israel's role in Iran's fundamental strategic doctrines. This discussion is now more critical than ever before because the war in Gaza provides Israel with an opportunity to reassess long-standing conceptions, including those related to Iran, and to establish up-to-date strategic goals based

on the political and security situation that will emerge at the end of the current conflict.

Iran's Ideological Hostility to Israel

Over the years, the combination of internal constraints and the changing regional and international circumstances has compelled Iran's leaders to adopt a dual policy. They have aimed to remain faithful to their revolutionary ideals while embracing a policy that serves Iran's national interest through cost-benefit considerations and a pragmatic approach to achieving strategic goals. Faced with the dilemma between ideological commitment and utilitarian considerations, Iran has often given preference to the latter, believing that this will not compromise its long-term ideological commitment. For instance, in the territorial dispute between Armenia, its Christian neighbor, and Azerbaijan, a Shiite Muslim nation, over the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave, Iran sided with Armenia. This decision was driven by Iran's concern that a strong, prosperous, and secular Azerbaijan might fuel separatist tendencies among the sizable Azeri minority in Iran. Similarly, despite Russia's ruthless suppression of the Chechen rebellion in the 1990s, Iran supported Russia's territorial integrity rather than endorsing independence for the Chechen Muslims, due to the strategic and economic importance of Iran's relations with Russia.

In 1991, Iran provided only minimal aid to the Shiite rebellion in Iraq, despite its severe repression and the resulting damage to the holiest sites for Shiites. This decision stemmed from Iran's desire to avoid another military conflict with Iraq (Litvak, 2017). In more remote regions, especially in cases that did not jeopardize Iran's national interest, Iran exhibited more steadfast support for movements ideologically aligned with it. This loyalty to its revolutionary doctrine was evident in its ties with Sudan, radical movements in Algeria, Hezbollah, Islamic Jihad, and Hamas, although Iranian policy was also non-uniform

and inconsistent in these cases (Menashri, 1999). The ability to navigate between the revolutionary vision and state interests and to emphasize either of them according to changing needs has been considered a source of strength for Iran's leadership. It has enabled Iranian leaders to maintain more room for maneuvering, adjust their policy to varying circumstances, and provide complex solutions for dealing with an equally complex reality.

The primary issue on which Iran's revolutionary policy has remained uncompromising and consistent, despite the changes in Iranian foreign policy and the prioritization of national interests over ideology, is hostility toward Israel. This profound enmity continues to be a crucial element of the Iranian regime's doctrine and a consensus among all factions in the Iranian political system (Litvak, 2004). The revolutionary ideology unequivocally rejects Israel's existence, epitomized by the slogan, "Israel must be wiped off the map." Moreover, due to Iran's claim to be the leader of the Muslim world and a vital force in the Middle East, coupled with its determination to showcase the success of the Islamic revolution to the Iranian public, Muslim societies, and the entire world, it perceives itself as duty-bound to consistently raise the flag of hostility toward Israel. This involves condemning countries willing to negotiate peace with Israel and supporting Islamist countries and movements fighting against it. Iran's antagonism toward Israel encompasses a fundamental hostility to the Jewish state, disdain for the Shah and everything he represented, and hatred for Western imperialism and capitalism, which Israel is believed to embody. Iran categorically denies Israel's right to exist, irrespective of the question of its borders or any policies it may adopt. According to the ideological doctrine of the Iranian revolutionaries, Judaism is considered a religion, not a nationality, and, as such, the Jews do not deserve a country of their own and certainly not at the expense of the legitimate right of the Palestinian people,

especially not in the heart of the holy lands of Islam (Menashri, 1999).

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Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979, Iranian officials have consistently reiterated the need to destroy Israel. Every state leader in Iran and the official media unanimously declares that Israel is a cancerous growth that should be removed. Khamenei has stated that the only way to solve the Middle East crisis is to destroy the "Zionist regime," which he considers the root of the region's crisis (Litvak, 2008). Under the pressure of necessity, Iran has retreated from dogmatic principles no less fundamental than hostility to Israel. However, the regime does not regard its ideological antipathy toward Israel as contradicting the state's pragmatic interests in any way. Iran perceives no adequate reason to deviate from its policy, as it has not had to pay any serious economic or political price for its anti-Israel policy; in fact, it has gained significant political profit from it. It can also be said that, to a great extent, the Iranian regime uses its hostility toward Israel as a fig leaf to justify its compromises and ideological flexibility in other areas. Moreover, its antagonism toward Israel serves as a means of attaining influence and prestige in the Arab world, supporting Iran's claim to leadership of the entire Islamic world (Litvak, 2008).

Hatred for Israel has also been prominent during the war in Gaza. Statements by Iranian leaders and commentary in the Iranian press have unequivocally denied Israel's right to exist. Israel is depicted as an illegitimate entity born out of sin as a result of a Western plot to weaken the Muslim world and consolidate Western imperialist rule in the Middle East. Hamas's

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attack on October 7 has been presented as further evidence of Israel's weakening along the way to its final collapse. Furthermore, Israeli attacks on Gaza have been characterized as "the real Holocaust," and—as part of an ongoing Iranian effort to deny Israel any grounds for legitimacy—have been equated to Nazi war crimes. Iranian officials have repeatedly advocated the Islamic Republic's proposal for a solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict—a referendum among the "original inhabitants" of Palestine. This proposal excludes most of the Jewish residents of Israel, who arrived in Palestine after "the beginning of the Zionist invasion" in the late 19th century (Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2023).

Hostility to Israel still constitutes an ideological basis for the Islamic Republic and guides its policy on Israel, even in the third decade of the 21st century. The importance of the Iranian ideology concerning Israel cannot be denied, nor can it be dismissed as inconsequential talk. Hamas's murderous attack on Israel has demonstrated that the sources of hostility to Israel cannot be solely attributed to Israeli policy and occupation; the deep-seated cultural and ideological hostility to Israel, shared by Iran, is also a significant factor. Israel cannot overlook the centrality of this enmity in the Iranian regime's worldview, especially considering Iran's ongoing efforts to support terrorist organizations and advance its nuclear military option.

At the same time, understanding this ideological doctrine is insufficient for comprehending Iran's policy on Israel. If

Iran's policy were solely determined by revolutionary ideals, it would have joined the war in Gaza, or at least engaged Hezbollah in an all-out confrontation with Israel from the very beginning, especially when a historic opportunity to accomplish the revolutionary vision of eliminating Israel seemed imminent. The fact that Iran did not take such actions is evidence of its rational and pragmatic approach, rather than an expression of moderation on its part. Although the revolutionary vision of destroying Israel has never been abandoned, Iranian policy is increasingly focused on strategic goals set by its leadership, based on varying security needs and changing interests in three principal spheres: the regional environment, the nuclear program, and the internal arena.

The Regional Environment

For years, Iran has perceived itself as a nation in a highly troublesome environment, surrounded by failed or weak countries, terrorist groups, and foreign interventions. Its primary aim is to ensure that these elements do not pose a threat to its borders, territorial integrity, unity, sovereignty, and national security (Tabatabai, 2020). Historical experience has significantly shaped Iran's security considerations. Extended periods of independence and regional dominance have instilled in the Iranians a strong sense of their value and regional influence. In parallel, the interference of the great powers in Iran's affairs, the occupation of parts of its territory, and violations of its sovereignty have left its rulers feeling vulnerable, alienated, and suspicious of external entities. From a historical standpoint, Iran's most recent trauma, etched into its national memory, is the war with Iraq, during which Iran found itself strategically isolated. Iraq initiated the war against the new Islamic regime and employed weapons of mass destruction, including chemical warfare, against targets in Iran. Despite this, the majority of the world's countries, including most Arab states, supported Iraq, and some even hindered Iran from acquiring arms for

self-defense, contributing to its failure in the war. These experiences have strongly motivated the Iranians to do everything in their power to prevent the recurrence of this trauma (Kam, 2004).

The dissolution of the Soviet Union eliminated one of Iran's major threats. Iraq, too, has substantially diminished its military capability since the Gulf Wars, particularly following the 2003 American invasion. However, the United States has assumed the role of being a significant threat to Iran, surpassing the former Russian and Soviet threat. Having taken control over Afghanistan and Iraq, which are Iran's eastern and western neighbors, the US maintains allies and partners in the region, deploys substantial military forces near Iran, and demonstrates its readiness to use military force when deemed necessary. The Iranian regime perceives the US as actively seeking to overthrow it while it has the capability to impose severe economic pressure on Iran, a tactic it is currently employing. Additionally, Iran generally lacks substantial state-level allies that can assist in deterring its enemies. Furthermore, Iran is inferior to its main rivals in conventional arms, particularly in air power (Kam, 2021).

Given these challenges, several scholars have linked Iran's effort to expand its regional influence to the growing security anxieties it has experienced in the past two decades. Ali Akbar has identified three main developments underlying Iran's mounting apprehension: the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, the 2011 civil war in Syria, and the rise of the Islamic State in 2014 (Akbar, 2021). Ahmadian and Mohseni have also suggested analyzing Iran's policy based on its perception of the threat. These scholars have attributed the ties between Iran and Syria to a shared perception of a common threat, arising from a sense of regional isolation and a desire to deter external threats, particularly from the US, Israel, and Iraq under the rule of the Baathist regime. The 2003 American invasion of Iraq and the sustained American military presence on the borders of Iran and Syria laid the foundation

for the "axis of resistance," designed to ensure the survival of both countries against shared threats. The necessity to strengthen this axis further intensified following the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011 (Ahmadian & Mohseni, 2019).

The developments in Syria and Iraq over the past two decades had a definite impact on Iranian national security. The civil war in Syria was perceived as a major threat, seen as an attempt by the West, led by the US and its allies, to bring about a regime change in Syria. Since the outbreak of the rebellion in March 2011, Iran sided with the Assad regime, its most crucial strategic ally, fearing that its fall and replacement by a Sunni regime, or worse, a regime controlled by radical Salafi organizations linked to al-Qaeda, would constitute a strategic defeat for Iran. The primary Iranian concern was that the collapse of the Syrian regime would encourage the US to strive for a similar change in Iran. Additionally, Iran viewed Syria as a means of fulfilling its security needs, particularly the ability to support Hezbollah in Lebanon—a significant asset that gave Iran the ability to deter Israel. Starting in 2014, the rise of the Islamic State and the threats it posed to Iran added another grave worry for the decision-makers in Tehran. Seeking to stabilize Iraq as a satellite country under Shiite control, Iran found itself facing the possibility of an extremist anti-Shiite Sunni-Salafi state on its western border. The Islamic State's successes in conquering large sections of Iraq and eastern Syria in June 2014 posed a significant threat to Iran, compelling it to deliver military equipment to Iraq through the Revolutionary Guards to combat the Islamic State and prevent it from reaching Iraq's western border with Iran.

While developments in the Middle East posed considerable challenges to Iran's national security, the Islamic Republic has demonstrated its ability to leverage them for strategic benefit. Over the past two decades, Iran has actively sought to expand its regional influence across various spheres and enhance its military

capabilities. This cannot be solely attributed to a defensive strategy in response to perceived threats. Iran strategically used the US invasion of Iraq and the Arab Spring in the Middle East to advance its long-standing ambitions and interests in the Arab world, predating the Islamic revolution. The aim was to secure a regional bloc under its leadership, comprising Syria, Lebanese Hezbollah, Shiite militias in Iraq, Hamas, and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. This development reflects the doctrine that has taken root among Iranian political and military leadership in the past two decades, emphasizing the growing importance of expanding Iran's activity and influence beyond its political and geographic borders to enhance its ability to address external threats. In the past decade, Iran has embraced a strategy of "forward defense" or "offensive defense" to neutralize threats at the earliest possible stage. This strategy can be described as defense through proactive measures, halting threats to Iran's national security by engaging its enemies as far as possible from its borders (Vazarian & Shariati, 2021; Azizi, 2021).

The establishment of the "axis of resistance" has enhanced Iran's capacity to expand its strategic depth in the Fertile Crescent. Strategically isolated during its eight-year war with Iraq, Iran determined that self-defense required expanding its influence, bolstering groups loyal to Iran and aligned with its anti-Zionist and anti-American ideology, establishing military bases with "resistance" groups, and forming alliances with friendly countries.

The growing sense of being under siege has heightened concerns among decision-makers in Iran that the regional conflicts led by the West might serve as a launching point for an attack on Iran itself. From their perspective, Iran is encircled by enemies, and due to its relative military weakness, regional conflicts must not be allowed to spill over into its territory. To address these escalating challenges, Iran

has aimed to establish a defense network beyond its borders to keep threats at a safe distance (Akbarzadeh et al., 2023). Iran's armed forces deputy chief of staff, Massoud Jayazeri, explained the necessity of the "forward defense" doctrine by stating that Iran's enemies, led by the US, had adopted a military strategy focused on subjecting the Islamic Republic to a siege. Therefore, he argued, it was Iran's duty to break out of this siege wherever it existed. He claimed that one method used by the Americans and the "enemies of the revolution" was to intensify their presence in the countries bordering Iran. He emphasized that if the Iranians did not engage in combat outside their borders, they would have to face the enemy within those borders. Iran, he contended, could not afford to wait for the enemy to arrive before taking action but must intercept them along the way (Tabnak, 2016).

In a publication from Imam Hossein University, associated with the Revolutionary Guards, Rouhollah Ghaderi Kangavari presented "offensive defense" as a method to safeguard Iran's national security. He asserted that whenever Iran faced threats to its national security within its official state borders, its independence, national sovereignty, and territorial integrity were violated. Due to its unique geostrategic situation, Iran purportedly requires a robust, independent presence in the region and even beyond to effectively address external threats. Kangavari argued that Iran cannot confine its deterrent capability solely to its geographic borders (Kangavari, 2018).

The "forward defense" doctrine is directly intertwined with the "strategic depth" doctrine, another essential element in Iranian strategy. This concept is considered a means for Iran to compensate for its limited conventional military capabilities. While not a new doctrine, its significance has grown in the past decade amid regional upheavals. The establishment of the "axis of resistance" has enhanced Iran's capacity to expand its strategic depth in the Fertile Crescent. Strategically isolated during its eight-year war with Iraq, Iran determined that

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The achievement of strategic depth was conceived to empower Iran to extend its battlefield against its enemies beyond its borders and establish defense lines far from its territory. This strategy aimed to reduce Iran’s strategic isolation, thwart potential attacks from Israel and the US, and provide a second-strike capability in case of an attack (Bagheri et al., 2021). Iran’s Supreme Leader Khamenei himself emphasized the necessity of expanding Iran’s strategic depth as a crucial element of the Iranian defense doctrine. In January 2017, during a meeting with the families of soldiers killed in the military campaign in Syria and Iraq, Khamenei asserted that if the Islamic State had not been stopped outside Iran’s borders, it would have been necessary to halt it within Tehran, Fars, Khorasan, and Isfahan (Akbar, 2021). A similar sentiment was echoed by Iran’s Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian in a speech upon his return from a visit to Lebanon in mid-October 2023. He stated that if Iran did not defend Gaza today, it would inevitably have to defend its own cities in the future. He added that Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah had told him that if immediate action against Israel was not taken, fighting against IDF forces in Beirut would become a reality tomorrow (Islamic Republic News Agency, 2023).

The evolution of Iran’s strategic doctrines extends beyond its animosity toward Israel, originating from a broader perception of threats to its critical national interests and its ambitions for regional hegemony. This approach involves seizing opportunities to consolidate its influence. Moreover, while the Islamic Republic has been fundamentally hostile toward Israel since the Iranian revolution, the reciprocal threat perception between the two countries only evolved in the second decade of the Islamic

Republic. In the 1980s, Iran focused on the belief that the grand victory of liberating Jerusalem could only occur after the smaller victory of defeating Saddam Hussein. At that time, the Iranian leadership believed that “the road to Jerusalem passes through Karbala,” prioritizing the conflict with Iraq as its greatest concern (Shams, 1998). The escalation of the direct conflict with Israel reinforced Iran’s view of Israel as a significant security threat, necessitating Iran to respond with strategies and capabilities that it has developed over the years, including the creation of proxy militias and the acquisition of advanced weapon systems.

Despite the growing affinity between Iran, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the Palestinian terrorist organizations in the 1980s and 1990s, Israel’s strategy, up until 2005, continued to view the Arab world as crucial in dealing with Iran. Israeli decision-makers saw a direct connection between the diplomatic process with the Palestinian Authority and Syria and the ability to contain Iran’s regional ambitions. The IDF focused on the West Bank between 2000 to 2004, the disengagement from the Gaza Strip in 2005, and the war in Lebanon, with potential deployment for a conflict with Syria following the attack on the Deir ez-Zor nuclear reactor in 2006–2007. Periodic rounds of warfare occurred in the Gaza Strip throughout this entire period (Haiminis, 2023).

The regional upheaval in 2011 set Israel and Iran on a slow-motion collision course. Syria’s civil war in 2011 transformed it into a battleground between the two countries, especially after Iran intensified its efforts to establish a long-term military foothold in Syria. The nuclear agreement signed in 2015 allowed Israel to focus on the northern theater in the “campaign between wars.” In the initial two years of this campaign (2013–2014), Israeli strikes were relatively infrequent, primarily targeting the transfer of advanced weaponry to Hezbollah. From 2014 to 2015, the campaign shifted its focus to Hezbollah’s precision missile project, triggered by Iran’s attempts to deliver

complete precision missiles to Hezbollah via Syrian territory. Following the failure of these Iranian efforts, Iran and Hezbollah opted to relocate the missile production to Lebanon. Toward the end of Gadi Eisenkot's term as IDF Chief of Staff, assessments in Israel suggested that the campaign between wars was evolving from a fight against the adversary's capabilities—game-changing weapons in the hands of Hezbollah or Iranian proxy forces in Syria—into a campaign against Iran itself, by directly targeting the Revolutionary Guards and its Quds Force (Shelah & Valensi, 2023).

The attacks attributed to Israel began to be accompanied by statements by Israeli leaders openly admitting Israel's responsibility. For instance, Minister of Regional Cooperation Tzachi Hanegbi stated on July 21, 2019, "For two years now, Israel has been the only country in the world killing Iranians" (Kan 11, 2019). In addition, the campaign between wars extended beyond ground and aerial operations. Starting in 2019, Israel initiated a campaign to thwart Iran's attempt to fund Hezbollah through a fuel-smuggling system from Iran to Syria by sea, transferring weapons through maritime routes, and circumventing American sanctions against its oil industry. According to Western media reports, Israel had targeted at least 10 ships transporting Iranian oil and weapons in the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. In response, Iran retaliated by attacking Israeli-owned ships (Elster, 2021).

The frequency of attacks in the campaign between wars has increased over the years, raising expectations for altering the situation through kinetic action, including adjustments to Iran's strategic measures. The concept of the campaign between wars, as a method to achieve broader strategic objectives, has altered Iran's perception of events and its subsequent actions. IDF Military Intelligence Directorate Commander Major General Aharon Haliva acknowledged that, "The State of Israel, due to a range of measures not solely connected to the campaign between wars, has moved

from the back rows to the front row in friction with Iran," and that the attacks on Iranian soil attributed to Israel have shifted Iran's focus, making Israel its primary adversary (Shelah & Valensi, 2023, p. 51).

Iran's perception of the growing Israeli threat has contributed to Tehran's assessment that Israel is trying to encircle it by expanding its presence near Iranian borders, including in the Persian Gulf, Iraqi Kurdistan, and the Caucasus. Iran is particularly attentive to Israel's improved relations with its Central Asian neighbors, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. Recent events in the Caucasus, such as Azerbaijan's victory over Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh War (September 2023), have heightened Iran's concerns about the increasing influence of Israel and Turkey in the region. Tensions between Tehran and Baku have escalated, fueled by strengthened strategic ties between Israel and Azerbaijan, with Israel emerging as a significant arms supplier to Azerbaijan (Lindenstrauss, 2022). Iran interprets Israel's greater involvement in neighboring countries, especially Azerbaijan and the Kurdish territories in northern Iraq, as a sign of aggressive intentions, seeking to undermine Iran's regional influence and compromise its interests and national security. Iran contends that the impact of Israel's proximity goes beyond military and security aspects, extending to potential threats to Iranian political and economic interests (Kazemi et al., 2017; Navekash & Abaspour, 2015). Consequently, Iran has intensified its determination to establish a presence near Israel's borders, leveraging a network of proxies for this purpose.

After the conclusion of the civil war in Syria, Iran aimed to strengthen both its military and civilian foothold in the country. This involved the deployment of its proxies, including local Syrian groups, Syrian army units influenced by Iran, and Hezbollah, in proximity to the Israeli border. Iran expanded its objectives beyond merely supporting the Assad regime; it now sought to amass substantial military capabilities

in Syria, encompassing missiles, rockets, drones, air defense systems, and advanced weaponry. These assets could potentially be deployed in future escalations against Israel. Concurrently supporting the Syrian regime, Iran worked to establish terrorist infrastructure on the Golan Heights. In recent years, local groups have taken root in the Golan Heights due to the security vacuum resulting from the Syrian regime's loss of control. Key actors involved in organizing terrorism against Israel included Hezbollah members, local Druze, and members of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad organization. The terrorist infrastructure on the Golan Heights was not necessarily intended for immediate use against Israel; rather, it was positioned to serve as a basis for Iran's proxies in this critical area and to exert future pressure on Israel (Zimmt, 2017).

Iran is clearly intensifying its efforts to expand its influence in the Palestinian theater. In recent years, Iranian leaders, led by Khamenei, have emphasized the imperative of extending the "Palestinian resistance" from the Gaza Strip to the West Bank. The plethora of Iranian comments about events in the West Bank coincides with Israel's discoveries of growing Iranian activity in this theater. This includes attempts to establish Iranian intelligence infrastructure in Israel and the West Bank, create terrorist networks disguised as civil organizations, and deliver explosives via drones. Three primary factors drive Iran's escalating efforts to broaden its influence in the West Bank:

- Increased tension between Iran and Israel, especially notable after the attributed Israeli attacks against Iranian targets in Syria, on the Syrian-Iraqi border, and even in Iran itself.
- Weakness of the Palestinian Authority and Palestinian security agencies, coupled with the rising wave of terrorism in the West Bank, which offers Iran new opportunities to expand its activities.
- Warming ties between Iran and Hamas, which had been strained for several years due to Hamas's objection to the Assad regime and

its support for the Saudi Arabian military campaign in Yemen (Zimmt, 2023b).

Iran adapted its strategy in response to new circumstances in the Middle East following the death of Qasem Soleimani, the commander of the Revolutionary Guards Quds Force, in a US attack in January 2020. It has placed major emphasis on the Palestinian theater as a key front in the struggle of the "axis of resistance." In addition, Iran perceives the Abraham Accords and the normalization process between Israel and Arab countries as a growing threat to its regional standing. These developments are seen as an opportunity to increase coordination between the Palestinian terrorist organizations, Hamas and Islamic Jihad, and other elements in the axis of resistance. This coordination aims to focus on a common struggle against the perceived common enemy, Israel. Iran views Israel's efforts to establish a broad regional front against Iran, including cooperation with "pragmatic" Arab countries, as an attempt to establish an Israeli presence close to its borders, with the Abraham Accords having openly placed Israel in the Persian Gulf. Following the Accords, Iranian leaders issued explicit threats against the United Arab Emirates (UAE). For instance, the editor of the hardline daily *Kayhan*, affiliated with the Supreme Leader, asserted that the UAE's betrayal of the Palestinians was making it a "legitimate and easy target" (Guzansky, 2022, p. 3). In implementing a strategy against Israel, Tehran decided to establish a joint operations room for military, logistic, and intelligence coordination and planning. This effort included cooperation between Hamas and Islamic Jihad in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, pro-Iranian militias in Syria, the Shiite militias in Iraq, and the Houthis in Yemen (Tabnak, 2023).

The war in Gaza has provided a significant initial opportunity to assess the degree of cooperation between Iran's elements of the resistance front in the framework of the "convergence of the arenas" doctrine (Azizi, 2023). This is not the first time that the mutual commitment between the members of the front

has been tested. The first occasion took place during the escalation along Israel's borders over the 2023 Passover holiday, centering on the tensions at the Temple Mount and Hamas's activation of the Gazan, Lebanese, and Golan Heights theaters. Iran and its proxies leveraged this crisis to advance their "convergence of the arenas" doctrine—the merging of the Palestinian resistance axis, consisting of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, with the Iran–Hezbollah axis—designed to improve the deterrent balance against Israel and the response to Israel (Dekel, 2023; Shine & Zimmt, 2023). This doctrine signifies increased operational coordination between the organizations operating in the framework of the loose resistance front coalition under Iranian leadership with substantial involvement from Hezbollah. The objective of this coordination is to encircle Israel from its southern border (the Gaza Strip), eastern border (the West Bank), and northern borders (Lebanon and Syria), and to improve Iran's deterrent capability and the effectiveness of the anti-Israeli forces in a future war against Israel. Such a war is designed to include Hamas and Islamic Jihad in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, Hezbollah in Lebanon and southern Syria, the Shiite militias in Iraq, and the Houthis in Yemen (Tasnim, 2023a; Vazirian, 2023).

At the same time, for the first time, the war in Gaza has posed a significant threat to the very survival of Hamas, one of the key elements in the resistance front; the war, therefore, also constitutes an important initial test of Iran's ability to use Hamas to deter Israel. Regardless of whether Hamas's attack on October 7, 2023, took Iran by surprise, the war in Gaza has proved the pro-Iranian axis's capability for strategic synchronization, including a division of labor between the various elements of the axis and an adjustment to the war's emerging circumstances (Azizi, 2023). Throughout the war, Iran has acted in accordance with gradual steps of escalation, which have included:

- Hezbollah's partial involvement in the war, mainly against IDF border positions;

- Dozens of attacks by pro-Iranian Shiite militias in Iraq against US bases in Syria and Iraq aimed at exacting a price from the United States for its support for Israel and expediting the withdrawal of American forces from Syria;
- Inclusion of the Houthis in Yemen in the war against Israel, mainly through launching missiles and drones at southern Israel, as well as targeting vessels in the Red Sea.

For the first time, the Israeli–Iranian conflict, the underlying cause of which is the Islamic Republic's ideological hostility toward the Jewish state, has now become a multi-front war between Israel and the pro-Iranian axis conducted effectively by Tehran to promote its strategic goals.

The Nuclear Program

Even the Iranian nuclear program should not be viewed solely in the context of Israel. Like most of the other elements of Iran's strategic and military might, the nuclear program began during the Shah's reign. Following the Islamic revolution, Khomeini ordered the suspension of the project, claiming that the atom was the work of the devil. European countries and the United States stopped providing their services for the program, leading to the cancellation of most contracts for the construction of nuclear power stations and causing most German and French engineers and technicians who had been building them to leave Iran. It was the Iran–Iraq War that prompted the Islamic regime to renew the Iranian nuclear program. In 1982, the Iranian Atomic Energy Organization was reorganized, and its activity was renewed, primarily for the purpose of assembling the technical and scientific infrastructure that would later enable Iran to function independently in the nuclear field (Kam, 2004).

The decision to renew the nuclear program was made as a countermeasure to Iraq's mass destruction capabilities, especially considering the significant setback Iran experienced in its war with Iraq. The primary concern for Iranians was that Iraq had already deployed chemical

and biological weapons, along with missiles capable of reaching Tehran and other cities in Iran, and was progressing toward acquiring weapons. Subsequently, concurrent with Iraq's decline following the first Gulf War in 1991, the Iranian regime's pursuit of nuclear weapons was driven by what it perceived as a growing need to deter the United States from utilizing its strategic capabilities against Iran. Additionally, the Iranian regime sought to deter Israel from potentially attacking Iran's nuclear facilities, while Iran's belief that Israel possessed nuclear weapons did not seem to play a significant role in the decision to develop such weapons (Kam, 2007).

In the late 1980s, several Iranian leaders made statements suggesting that, under certain conditions, Iran was likely to develop nuclear weapons, or at least would not rule out such a possibility. In a speech to Iranian combat soldiers in October 1988, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, then chairman of the Iranian parliament and later president of Iran, stated, "With regard to chemical, bacteriological, and radiological weapons training, it was made very clear during the war that these weapons were very decisive . . . We should fully equip ourselves in the defensive and offensive use of chemical, bacteriological, and radiological weapons" (Kam, 2004). In September 2006, Rafsanjani disclosed in his memoirs a letter sent by Khomeini in July 1987 to senior Iranian military officers. In this letter, the leader of the Iranian revolution explained the background of his decision to consent to the ceasefire between Iran and Iraq, bringing an end to their war. Khomeini quoted a letter sent to him on June 23, 1987, by then-Revolutionary Guards Commander Mohsen Rezaee, in which Rezaee admitted that Iran would be unable to achieve victory in the next five years unless the necessary resources, including, "a considerable number of laser and nuclear weapons," were made available to the Revolutionary Guards (Fathi, 2006).

The statements hinting at Iran's intention to develop nuclear weapons came to an almost complete halt, likely because Iran realized that this effort could lead to increasing pressure on the country. Nevertheless, Khamenei never wavered from his doctrine that achieving a threshold nuclear military capability would provide Iran with effective deterrence against its enemies, serving as an essential insurance policy for the regime's survival. This stance was particularly crucial in Iran's regional environment, which included countries with nuclear capabilities, such as Iran's neighbor, Pakistan, and reportedly, Israel. Khamenei did not retract his position that the nuclear program was merely an excuse for the West to exert pressure on Iran, isolate it, and weaken it, all aimed at laying the groundwork for the accomplishment of its main strategic goal—the overthrow of the Islamic regime. In a speech on February 8, 2014, marking the 35th anniversary of the revolution, Khamenei asserted that the United States continued its efforts to promote the downfall of Iran's revolutionary Islamic regime. "One of the things which American politicians say in their speeches to our officials is that they do not intend to change the regime of Iran. First, they are lying. If they could, they would not hesitate even for a moment to destroy the foundation of the Islamic Republic," he stated (Khamenei.ir, 2014a).

On several occasions, Khamenei reiterated his view that the nuclear issue was merely an excuse to hinder Iran's technological progress (Khamenei.ir, 2015). On another occasion, he emphasized that the West's efforts to exaggerate the Iranian nuclear threat were based on a lie, stating, "what they are and should be afraid of is not a nuclear Iran, but an Islamic Iran" (Voice of America, 2012). In the midst of the negotiations between Iran and the West on the nuclear issue, the official website of the Supreme Leader published an infographic under the headline, "The Nuclear Issue Is an Excuse." The infographic displayed nine matches symbolizing the West's claims against Iran on

various issues, such as Iran's attitude toward Israel, its support for the resistance camp in the region, the Iranian missile program, and human rights in Iran. According to the Iranian regime, the West would use these claims to justify its hostile policy toward the Islamic Republic even if the nuclear issue were settled (Khamenei, 2014b). Khamenei asserted that the 2003 agreement by former Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi to dismantle his country's nuclear program, which ultimately did not prevent his downfall aided by Western countries, proved that Iran was justified in refusing to surrender to Western dictates in exchange for Western benefits, likening it to giving candy to a child (Pomeroy, 2011). Iran also sees the disparity between the immunity enjoyed by nuclear-armed North Korea and the fate of Saddam Hussein, who did not possess such weapons, as evidence that nuclear weapons are essential (Litvak, 2023).

Iran's propaganda consistently emphasizes the civilian and defensive nature of its nuclear program. Senior Iranian officials have repeatedly asserted that Iran is not pursuing nuclear weapons and has no intention to do so. They argue that developing such weapons holds no benefit, and that Iran's leader believes that nuclear weapons are forbidden according to Muslim religious law. At the same time, it is evident that Iran takes seriously Israel's threats to attack its nuclear facilities, aiming to prevent Iran from acquiring military nuclear capabilities. While these threats may not necessarily be sufficient to alter Iran's nuclear strategy, as it has not yet decided to break out to nuclear weapons, they contribute to Iran's sense of being under threat. This heightened perception of danger may potentially prompt Iran to adjust its policies, seeking to establish a strategic nuclear balance against Israel.

Furthermore, the clandestine preventive actions attributed to Israel in recent years have hastened the pace of Iran's nuclear program. Until the end of the first decade of the 21st century, Israeli efforts against the Iranian

nuclear program were relatively limited, despite Iran's considerable progress in this area and in its ballistic missile program. Israel primarily focused on persuading European countries and the United States to take action against the Iranian nuclear program. Toward the end of the decade, the IDF engaged in force-building measures designed to facilitate operations within Iran. In 2010, Israel began stepping up its preventive actions against the nuclear program with secret operations, some of which were reported in the media. Notable among these operations were the Stuxnet computer worm and the elimination of scientists involved in the nuclear project, occurring between 2010 and 2012. These efforts helped delay the Iranian program. Although the nuclear agreement signed in 2015 led to the temporary suspension of covert operations against the nuclear program, these operations were renewed and intensified after President Trump withdrew from the agreement in May 2018, and particularly after Iran's decision in the summer of 2019 to violate its obligations under the nuclear agreement (Iran Primer, 2021). Simultaneously, alongside the campaign against the nuclear project, clandestine operations against crucial infrastructure in Iran, secret military facilities, and employees in sensitive security installations were heightened (Bergman, 2022).

The covert Israeli campaign against the nuclear project in recent years may have delayed its progress to some extent. However, in retrospect, it seems to have triggered Tehran's decision to increase its uranium enrichment levels to 20% after the assassination of nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, and later to 60% following the explosion at the Natanz enrichment facility in April 2021 (Ynet, 2021). The war in Gaza could also influence Iran's nuclear strategy. After the war, Iran will need to assess whether its ability to ensure essential security interests through its network of proxies has been preserved. If the answer is no, Iran may reconsider its nuclear strategy. A growing sense of being under threat could lead Iran to shift its

nuclear strategy, driven by the realization that it can no longer rely solely on proxies or being on the nuclear threshold to deter its enemies. Iran has altered its nuclear strategy in the past and may be inclined to do so again.

The Internal Theater

The desire to ensure the regime's survival against internal and external threats is one of the Islamic Republic's supreme goals, shaping its national security doctrine. Although no existential threat to its survival has emerged since the regime stabilized in the early 1980s, the Islamic Republic has faced a significant legitimacy crisis in the past two decades. Alongside the prevailing social and economic distress in Iran, a widening gap is observed between the regime's institutions and the Iranian public, especially the younger generation. Given the regime's ongoing failure to address public needs and alleviate distress, criticism of the Islamic Republic has escalated over the years. Public trust in state institutions has waned, and a sense of despair has spread (Zimmt, 2022a). These trends have been manifested in protests in Iran in recent decades, reaching a peak during the wave of protests that began in mid-September 2022, following the killing of a young woman, Mahsa Amini, by the "morality police" for allegedly not wearing the veil. In contrast to the preceding waves of protest in Iran in recent years, which focused mainly on demands for economic improvement, the 2022 protests bore a strongly political and anti-establishment character. The demonstrators did not limit their demands to the repeal of the requirement that women wear veils, the disbandment of the morality police, or even greater personal freedom; instead, they sought to replace the existing political order (Zimmt, 2022b).

These processes of social change have not escaped the regime's attention. The Iranian authorities are aware of the public's growing alienation from state institutions, and recognize the need to respond to it, despite differences of opinion among the leadership about the

required solutions. Like other autocratic regimes, however, this one prefers to deflect responsibility for its internal challenges toward its external enemies, whether real or imaginary. As protests in Iran escalated, Iran's leader again accused the West of supporting the protests. In early October 2022, a few days after the most recent wave of protests began, Iran's Supreme Leader Khamenei stated that the United States and Israel were behind the unrest. He alleged that American and Israeli intelligence services, with "some treasonous Iranians abroad helping them," had planned the disturbances (Khamenei.ir, 2022). In his speech on the occasion of the Iranian New Year (Nowruz) on March 21, 2023, Khamenei asserted that the US president and leaders of several European countries had openly supported the riots. He mentioned that their support went beyond rhetorical expressions and included providing financial and security assistance to the demonstrators in order to weaken the Islamic Republic (Khamenei.ir, 2023a).

Similar allegations have been made in response to earlier waves of protest. In early January 2018, Khamenei accused Iran's enemies, led by the United States and Israel, of using various means—including money, weapons, and intelligence agents—to support the demonstrations that erupted nationwide in late 2017 (Khamenei.ir, 2018). In December 2009, former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad blamed the United States and Israel for the violent demonstrations led by the Iranian reformist Green Movement, which began following allegations that the Iranian presidential elections in the summer of 2017 had been fraudulent. Ahmadinejad labeled the opposition rallies as a foreign-backed "nauseating masquerade" (Islamic Republic News Agency, 2009). The Islamic Republic's tendency to accuse foreigners of being primarily responsible for internal protests within Iran is not unique; even the deposed Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi attributed growing internal

opposition to his regime to foreign groups (Zimmt, 2023a).

The Iranian leadership consistently regards the United States as the primary force behind efforts to instigate regime change in Iran. Khamenei has reiterated on numerous occasions that the American government seeks to overthrow the Iranian regime by supporting Iran's internal and external adversaries and by exerting political, economic, and military pressure on Iran. Furthermore, Iranian leaders have contended for years that the United States employs soft power in its endeavors to distance young Iranians from the revolutionary ideology, undermine the regime's popular support base, and erode the Islamic Republic's social cohesion (Eisenstadt, 2015).

While the Iranian government has previously accused the Israeli intelligence services of attempting to destabilize Iran internally, Israel's escalating covert activities against the Islamic Republic—including actions within Iran that have been attributed to Israel—have underscored the notion that Israel plays a significant role in efforts to change the Islamic regime.

In recent years, Israel has assumed a more central role in Iran's threat perception to the regime's stability. While the Iranian government has previously accused the Israeli intelligence services of attempting to destabilize Iran internally, Israel's escalating covert activities against the Islamic Republic—including actions within Iran that have been attributed to Israel—have underscored the notion that Israel plays a significant role in efforts to change the Islamic regime. Since the beginning of the current decade, Israel's actions have extended beyond Syria, where attacks have increased, to the covert campaign against the Iranian nuclear project. Israel is now conducting kinetic attacks and cyber operations against targets in Iran, some unrelated to the nuclear program or Iran's military buildup. This shift

in strategy aims “to cut off not just the arms of the octopus, but the head itself” (Kahana, 2022). For instance, in May 2022, a senior officer in the Revolutionary Guards Quds Force was assassinated by assailants riding a motorcycle in Tehran. Simultaneously, the Revolutionary Guards announced the uncovering of a ring linked to the Israeli intelligence service. Revolutionary Guards spokesperson Ramazan Sharif acknowledged that activities attributed to Israel took place within its territory, including espionage and assassinations (Iserovich & Lev-Ram, 2022). In recent years, the conflict has expanded into cyberspace, targeting critical civilian infrastructure on both sides. For example, Israel executed a cyberattack on Bandar Abbas Port in southern Iran in May 2020 in response to an Iranian cyberattack against water and sewage infrastructure in Israel (Even & Siman-Tov, 2020).

In recent years, Israel has openly declared its intentions to destabilize the Iranian regime. For instance, in October 2021, a senior diplomatic source confirmed that the Ministry of Defense had developed a doctrine aimed to increase public pressure in Iran. According to this source, the Iranian population would not tolerate disruptions to their daily life and could influence the regime's nuclear policy. This disclosure followed a cyberattack that caused malfunctions and disruptions in Iran's gas distribution. The source asserted that the long lines for gasoline would cause the “spoiled rich kids” of Tehran to exert pressure on the regime (Lis & Reuters, 2021). In April 2023, a few months after a wave of protests in Iran, Reza Pahlavi, the son of the late deposed Shah, visited Israel at the invitation of Minister of Intelligence Gila Gamliel. This visit underscored Israel's intention to support the exiled Iranian opposition in its efforts to overthrow the regime.

Iran's perception of Israel as a growing threat to the regime's stability can be found in an extensive interview with Brigadier General Mohammad Kazemi, the commander of the Revolutionary Guards Intelligence Organization,

featured on the Iranian Supreme Leader's website in June 2023. Kazemi highlighted the involvement of intelligence services from nearly 20 countries, including the United States, Israel, Saudi Arabia, UAE, United Kingdom, France, Germany, Canada, and Bahrain in the 2022 protests. He especially underlined the US and Israeli involvement in supporting the demonstrations and asserted that the American government had aided the protests by waging a cognitive war, encouraging strikes, and supplying weapons to opposition groups operating near Iran's borders. Furthermore, Kazemi accused the Israel intelligence services of establishing a fund, supported by the United States and other countries to aid the strikers and demonstrators, adding that they were cooperating with American intelligence in supporting anti-Iranian "terrorist groups." Kazemi revealed details of a meeting held in one of the regional countries, with US Israeli, and UK representatives, where it was allegedly decided that the US Fifth Fleet would arm Kurdish separatist groups in Iran, provide intelligence support to the Iranian opposition organization Mojahedin-e-Khalq (MEK) for identifying key targets within Iran, and encourage anti-revolutionary groups to carry out covert operations on Iranian soil. He also alleged that the Israeli and UAE intelligence services held occasional meetings in an Arab country to coordinate support for the riots in Iran (Khamenei.ir, 2023b).

In addition, Iranian media have shown special interest in Israel's employment of soft power in its efforts to undermine popular support for the regime and challenge its stability. This supposedly includes Israel's financial and logistic backing of media outlets run by Iranian exiles, notably the Iran International television station based in London (Tasnim, 2023b).

Conclusion

To this day, the Islamic Republic's hostility toward Israel has remained one of the cornerstones of its foreign policy, distinct from its adversarial stance toward the United States.

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While Iranian hostility to the United States is primarily a result of American policy, its enmity toward Israel is rooted in Israel's very existence. As Khamenei once stated, Iran's contention with the United States could potentially be mitigated through US policy change, respect for Iran and the rights of the Iranian people, and refraining from interference in internal Iranian affairs (Al-Monitor, 2013). In contrast, Iran's animosity toward Israel is fundamentally immutable. Iranian leaders have asserted that Iran will never recognize Israel, and that the only way to solve the Middle East crisis is the destruction of "the Zionist regime," which is both the root of the crisis and the reason why the crisis exists in the first place (Litvak, 2004).

Nevertheless, Israel's policies undeniably influence how the Iranian leadership perceives Israel as a threat and shape Iran's strategy toward Israel. Although the root of Iranian hostility toward Israel lies in the ideology of the Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the Islamic revolution, Iran's strategic doctrine over the years, vis-à-vis both internal and external threats to its national security, was not originally shaped by its conflict with Israel. However, as direct conflict and friction escalated between the two countries, Iran became increasingly threatened. The Israeli campaign against Iran's nuclear program, the campaign between the wars in Syria, the expansion of Israel's activity against Iran to additional arenas—including the maritime theater and cyberspace—and Israel's implementation of the "head of the snake" doctrine that advocates attacks on Iranian territory have convinced Iran of the

need to enhance its response. Iran's strategy is to continue relying on proxy organizations, developing improved military capabilities, escalating its presence and establishing military infrastructure near Israel's border, along with revenge attacks against Israelis and Jews outside Israel.

Although Israel was not the sole or primary factor shaping Iran's strategic doctrines, including the use of proxies, asymmetric warfare, "forward defense," and "strategic depth," Israel has become a catalyst and a motivating factor for applying these strategies against it. The Iranian leadership views Israel as an aggressor seeking to change the rules of the game and the balance of deterrence, with Iran positioning itself as the party forced to respond to this aggression. Furthermore, while Israel was formerly regarded as a junior partner of the United States in its efforts to weaken the Islamic Republic, in recent years, Israel has emerged as a significant, and sometimes the leading, partner in the war against Iran across the internal, regional, and international arenas. This shift means that Iran's conflict with Israel, once primarily an ideological one, now increasingly revolves around national interests and security concerns.

This does not imply that Israel should ignore the risks posed by the Iranian threat or adopt a passive approach to it. Any discussion of the optimal Israeli strategy toward Iran must acknowledge that Israel's actions have escalated tensions with Iran, prompting Iran to accelerate its offensive efforts both regionally and in the nuclear sphere. Iran remains a major regional power and is unlikely to abandon its efforts to consolidate its regional influence or its pursuit of a military nuclear option, seen as crucial for the regime's survival. Israel should acknowledge this reality and redefine its security interests concerning Iran, focusing on realistic, achievable goals and minimizing actions that exacerbate the friction with Iran and contribute to the vicious circle of continuous escalation.

Dialogue, let alone reconciliation, between Israel and Iran is not on the agenda at this stage. It is highly doubtful that the Islamic Republic will agree to any channels of communication, whether direct or indirect, without a substantive change in the Iranian leadership and its worldview, which outright rejects the very existence of Israel. Even the departure of Supreme Leader Khamenei is unlikely to change the Islamic Republic's fundamental stance toward Israel. The current political elite in Iran is deeply conservative and largely comprised of former members of the Revolutionary Guards, particularly veterans of the Iran-Iraq War. They have been raised in Iran with minimal exposure to Western education or influence. In foreign policy, their stance tends to be hawkish, ultra-nationalistic, and defiant toward the West. They view the West in decline and believe that Iran should adopt an aggressive policy in its pursuit of regional influence and international power (Alfoneh, 2012).

In this context, Israel should reassess whether a violent conflict with Iran is inevitable or if it can stop the collision course between the two countries, in which Israel plays a major role. Reassessing Israel's strategy toward Iran must take into account the ramifications of the war in Gaza, which has reshaped the regional dynamics, affecting Iran as well. Although there is no evidence of direct Iranian involvement in the October 7 attack, the Islamic Republic may need to reconsider its foreign policy, given the possible shifts in the balance of power in the Middle East (Zimmt, 2023). Israel, for its part, will have to consider not only how to force Iran to bear the cost for its hostile anti-Israeli policy but also how to shape a new strategic reality that limits Iran's ability to expand its influence next to Israel's borders.

Iran's success in advancing its political goals in the region largely hinges on the outcomes of the war in Gaza. Should Israel fail to neutralize Hamas's governing and military capabilities, leading to a prolonged state of anarchy in the Gaza Strip, Iran will continue to maintain its

influence, hindering efforts toward regional normalization with Israel. Conversely, the following developments are likely to give rise to a new political reality that could diminish the influence of the pro-Iranian axis and undermine Iran's regional position:

- The removal of Hamas from power and the elimination of its military capabilities;
- The formation of a transitional government until a political arrangement can be achieved;
- Beginning the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip with the support of an Arab and international coalition;
- Renewing the Arab–Israeli normalization process.

Iran's ability to strengthen its involvement and influence in the region is largely due to the prevailing conditions of instability and warfare. Processes of a diplomatic settlement and tension relief, including in the Palestinian arena, are likely to significantly constrain Iran's ability to exploit the crisis situation as an opportunity to deepen its influence. Furthermore, reducing Iran's involvement in the region is contingent on providing the countries in which it operates with alternatives to its influence across various spheres, including the economy. Such alternatives, provided by Western countries or the Gulf states, for example, would not necessarily halt Iran's activity in the Arab world, especially in Syria and Iraq, but would grant Arab leaders more room to maneuver and help balance Iranian influence. A carrot-and-stick approach is inadequate in curbing Iran's ambitions to extend its influence in the region; rather, a strategy to diminish the factors that enable Iran to continue its regional influence is required. In the efforts against Iran after the war in Gaza, Israel cannot stand alone. Cooperation with both the United States and moderate Arab countries will be essential to counter the Iranian threat and all of its components.

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Israeli Deterrence and the October 7 Attack

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For several decades, the strategy of deterrence has been an important pillar of Israel's security doctrine. The October 7 attack brings up a number of questions and challenges that relate not only to the effectiveness of this strategy but also to Israel's heavy reliance on it. The article seeks to analyze the failure of deterrence and even more so, the question of why Israel places its confidence in the strategy of deterrence against Hamas, although it is not at all clear that this strategy is effective against the threats that this organization poses. Despite several indications in recent years that Israel's deterrent threat has had a limited effect on Hamas's behavior—chiefly the recurring rounds of violence and even an increase in the scope of the violence from one round to the next—the strategy of deterrence has remained a central component of Israel's confrontation with Hamas.

Keywords: deterrence, Hamas, Israel, October 7

Introduction

The brutal Hamas attack on October 7 brought up a variety of strategic issues, including questions about the strategy of deterrence and Israel's reliance on it. Among other things, much has been written in the past few decades on the question of whether it is possible to deter terrorist organizations. While the initial literature on this topic that developed in the 1990s cast doubt on the possibility of deterring these organizations (for example Bowen, 2004, p.55; Davis & Jenkins, 2002), over the years, researchers pointed to a variety of factors and ways of increasing the effectiveness of the deterrent threat toward them (for example Almog, 2004; Gearson, 2012; Trager & Zagorcheva, 2005). From this perspective, Hamas's large-scale attack on Israel raises several research challenges. Ostensibly, deterrence was

supposed to have restrained the organization's activity, given that as a nationalist terrorist organization it aspires to attain international legitimacy. Unlike other terrorist organizations, Hamas is also a territorial organization that rules over a specific population, and is thus presumably more sensitive to deterrent threats, compared to organizations that do not have these characteristics and thus lack significant assets that can be threatened.

While it is still too early to state with certainty the reasons for the failure of deterrence, and some cast doubt on the ability to deter a terrorist organization like Hamas, we can presume that several factors had a decisive impact on the decision regarding the timing of the attack. Chiefly Hamas's expectation of a deterioration in the status quo for them, with the progress of Israel's normalization process

with countries in the region, especially Saudi Arabia, while neglecting the Palestinian issue. In this sense, and as I will expand on below, researchers have indicated that deterrence is influenced not only by the ability of the putative challenger—the actor that the defender (the deterring actor) is trying to dissuade from carrying out the unwanted act—to succeed in achieving its objectives (deterrence by denial; see, for example, Snyder, 1959), and by the cost that the challenger will pay in the retaliation that it will suffer (deterrence by punishment; see, for example, Morgan, 2003, pp. 15–20). Rather, deterrence success is also affected by the challenger’s level of satisfaction with the existing status quo (Huth & Russett, 1990, pp. 469–470).

But despite the importance of these challenges, the focus of the article deals with another challenge: If there are such great limitations on the ability to deter Hamas, how did it happen that Israel relied so extensively on this strategy? My proposed answer to this question is based on the argument that over the years Israel adopted the identity of a deterrent actor that sees its role in the international arena in terms of deterrence that it must exercise. In this way, the deterrent actor can feel that it is taking active measures to attain security and simultaneously seek to avoid using violence (Lupovici, 2016). But when such an actor is subject to a significant violent attack, the challenge is not only to the physical security of that actor; it is also a threat to its identity (as a deterrent actor) and its ability to consistently tell the story of being a deterrent actor.

In addition, my argument is that the explanations for these two kinds of challenges complement one another. Israel’s heavy reliance on the strategy of deterrence stems to a large extent from the Israeli deterrence identity, which influences the interpretation of events and limits the nature of the response to them. But this led to a situation where it was convenient to see how deterrence operates and accordingly to tell the story that Hamas is deterred. But this story,

which was only loosely connected to reality, served in effect as a justification for continued progress on the path of normalization with the Arab countries, without taking into account the consequences for the Palestinians, as Hamas was thought to be deterred and thus not really having the ability to act and cause significant damage to Israel or to the process.

The rest of the article is constructed as follows: The first section reviews the literature on the connection between deterrence and terrorist organizations and discusses various factors that can influence the success or failure of deterrence against these actors. The second section discusses the deterrence of Hamas: the use of the strategy of deterrence received a prominent place in dealing with the organization, but it failed. In this context, a discussion is presented on the challenges related to this failure and the reasons for the limited influence of Israeli deterrence against Hamas. The third section addresses the main research challenge, which is the reasons for Israel’s reliance on the strategy of deterrence despite this strategy’s limited influence on restraining Hamas’s behavior over the years. I argue that the Israeli identity of deterrence has a central role in shaping the strategy of deterrence against Hamas and the way it was carried out. The conclusion proposes several future directions and consequences that stem from these arguments—about the need to rethink the place of deterrence in Israel’s security perception and about better adapting this strategy to the international strategic and political reality.

Deterrence and Terrorism

There is broad agreement among researchers that for a strategy of deterrence (by the threat of punishment) to succeed in dissuading putative challengers from harming the defending actor, three main conditions are required. First, the defender must have capabilities that enable it to exact a price from the putative challenger; that is, it can carry out retaliation that causes

significant damage. This requires not only capabilities for causing damage but also means of delivering these capabilities. For example, having nuclear capability alone is not sufficient for achieving nuclear deterrence; effective means of delivering this capability into the enemy's territory, such as through aircraft or missiles, are also necessary. Second, it is argued that the defender's threat needs to be credible, meaning that the defender would be willing to use its capabilities when necessary to exact the price from the putative challenger. And third, the defender must effectively communicate its capabilities and its willingness to use them to the putative challenger, ensuring that the challenger understands that it will face consequences if it carries out an act that the defending actor is trying to prevent (see, for example, Morgan, 2003, pp. 15–20).

This research direction—the ability to exercise successful deterrence—guided the researchers who deal with the deterrence of terrorist organizations. The scholarly literature tended to downplay the ability to deter terrorist organizations and apply the conditions for successful deterrence against them. Researchers indicated several factors that limit the ability to deter these organizations. First, at the most basic level, the aim of terrorist organizations is to change the status quo, while a strategy of deterrence aims to preserve the status quo (Lupovici, 2010, pp. 708, 718). Therefore, it is clear that establishing deterrence over time with these actors, which are based on maximalist (religious or ideological) objectives (Bowen, 2004, p. 55; Davis & Jenkins, 2002, pp. 4–5, 62–63; Ganor, 2005, p. 65), would be difficult. Terrorist organizations tip the balance of interests in their favor, making it difficult to achieve credible deterrence. These problems are intensified by the difficulty of communicating with these organizations, which cannot always be identified (Paul, 2005, p. 55), and by the challenge of finding valuable targets that can be harmed in order to exact a heavy price from the terrorist organization and its leaders. Moreover,

due to various political needs, these actors may even want the defender to retaliate (Adler, 2010; Freedman, 2004, p. 122; Löwenheim, 2007, pp. 179–180; Paul, 2005, p. 55). Thus, the threat of retaliation, however harsh and credible it may be, could be insufficient to dissuade such actors from taking action.

However, several researchers have argued that deterring terrorist organizations is not impossible. Contrary to the claim that these organizations are irrational (Davis & Jenkins, 2002, p. 5; Ganor, 2005, p. 74; Payne, 2001, pp. 7–11), it is argued that there are opposing indications (Lebovic, 2007, pp. 105–115; Trager & Zagorcheva, 2005, pp. 93–94). This does not, of course, guarantee that deterrence will work, as there could be significant gaps in terms of the willingness of terrorist organizations to comply with international rules and norms. However, the indications that terrorist organizations are rational actors make it possible to reject categorical claims that these actors cannot be deterred, as rationality is considered a fundamental precondition for the success of deterrence (see, for example, Trager & Zagorcheva, 2005, pp. 96–105). Furthermore, several researchers have even suggested ways that could make the deterrence of terrorist organizations possible. First, it is necessary to distinguish between the various kinds of actors involved in carrying out terrorist attacks and to use appropriate threats for each kind. For example, threats can be directed toward the operatives themselves, leaders in terrorist organizations (Almog, 2004, pp. 513–514), the states hosting terrorist organizations, and against the states assisting them (Ganor, 2005, pp. 81–82; Press-Barnathan, 2004, p. 201). Researchers have also argued that a variety of measures can be relied upon, including law enforcement forces, military forces, and even tools from international law (Ganor, 2005, p. 67; Wheatley & Hayes, 1996, pp. 13, 19–20). Second, a few researchers have proposed a strategy of “tailored deterrence” toward terrorist organizations, which requires the defender

to have a close familiarity with the putative challenger and its culture in order to adapt the type of threats to the vulnerabilities of the challenger (Lantis, 2009, pp. 476–478).

It is also argued that deterrence of non-state actors such as terrorist organizations is not binary like nuclear deterrence. The deterrence literature developed based on nuclear deterrence, which creates a clear distinction between the success and failure of deterrence. When it comes to deterring terrorism, the goal could be limited, such as delaying the action, reducing it, or changing its purpose (Rid, 2012). In this sense, while the failure of nuclear deterrence is unacceptable due to its enormous cost, conventional deterrence, especially deterrence of terrorist organizations, can be partially successful. This approach, as I will expand on below, has even gained considerable traction in the Israeli security perception. Similarly, there has been support for the argument that deterrence—even of terrorist organizations—can be cumulative, and that these organizations can learn over time the cost they will have to pay if they challenge the status quo (Almog, 2004).

Furthermore, in recent years, as part of the development of research on deterrence by denial, several ways of deterring terrorism have been proposed based on this strategy. The distinction between deterrence by the threat of punishment and deterrence by denial was proposed by Glenn Snyder as early as the end of the 1950s. Deterrence by the threat of punishment focuses on the price that will be exacted from the challenger through retaliation, while a strategy of deterrence by denial is based on the threat that the challenger will not succeed in achieving its objectives (Snyder, 1959). In other words, while a strategy of deterrence by the threat of punishment is based on fear of the damage that will be caused after carrying out the act, deterrence by denial is based on the fear of failure (Wilner & Wenger, 2021, p. 7).¹ Compared to the extensive research literature on deterrence by punishment, the literature on

deterrence by denial is much less developed in establishing the fundamental conditions for its success (Stein & Levi, 2015, p. 411). However, in recent years, the research of this strategy has considerably expanded (Adamsky, 2021; Brantly, 2018; Lupovici, 2023; Wilner & Wenger, 2021), in part due to changes in the international threat environment, mainly threats of terrorism, alongside cyber threats (Wilner & Wenger, 2021, pp. 4–5).

Researchers who have discussed deterrence by denial have also proposed possible ways of deterring terrorism that are based on preventing the success of these organizations. Some studies have explored military prevention by denying the possibility of success, such as through defensive measures and physical barriers, either directly or with the assistance of external actors (Brantly, 2018, p. 35; Mezzell, 2019; Mitchell, 2015, pp. 124–125; Trager & Zagorcheva, 2005). For example, John Sawyer argued that communication by the defending actor about steps taken to strengthen the defense of targets that the challenger could attack enables conveying to the adversary the message that it must adopt new tactics, which could increase the challenger's costs or uncertainty about its ability to succeed (Sawyer, 2021, p. 111). Additionally, scholars have highlighted the cumulative effect of deterrence by denial that can be achieved over time (Kirchofer, 2017), based on defensive successes that cause the challenger to repeatedly fail (Sawyer, 2021, p. 111; Wilner, 2021, pp. 50–51).

Other researchers have identified social mechanisms to strengthen deterrence against terrorist threats—whether by strengthening the resilience of the society facing the threat of terrorism, making it clear to the challenger that its goals cannot be achieved (Gearson, 2012, p. 191), or through delegitimization of the terrorist organization and its activities (Adler, 2010, p. 219; Gearson, 2012, p. 183; Stein & Levi, 2015). As Alex Wilner argues, “[T]he objective is to reduce the challenger's probability of achieving his goals by attacking

the legitimacy of the beliefs that inform” its behavior”. (Wilner, 2011, p. 26). This strategy aims to influence the challenger’s perceived sense of success, particularly in translating an attack into a political achievement (Wilner, 2011, p. 27). In this sense, delegitimization can weaken the organization’s ability to gain local and international support, which are important sources of material resources and manpower.²

Finally, it is worth emphasizing that the deterrence literature distinguishes between various levels of deterrence—including general deterrence and immediate deterrence. General deterrence aims to dissuade an adversary from considering the possibility of challenging the defending actor. Immediate deterrence relates to the threats of deterrence that the defender employs—usually during a crisis in which the adversary seriously considers attacking the defender (Morgan, 2003, p. 9).³ In other words, immediate deterrence is needed when general deterrence has failed. While a few researchers have rejected the relevance of this distinction, which was developed in the context of superpower relations during the Cold War, to terrorist threats (see, for example, Almog, 2004, p. 8), it could have value in understanding how to address the nature of the various threats of terrorist organizations.

Not only was it declared that the goal of each round was to achieve deterrence, but at the end of each round, it was claimed that deterrence had been achieved (or “restored”), and Hamas had been deterred.

Israeli Deterrence and the October 7 Attack

Although many issues regarding Israeli deterrence toward Hamas will be clarified in the future, we can already point out two basic components. First, Israel greatly emphasized the strategy of deterrence against Hamas—both by the threat of punishment and by denial. Second,

given the results of the attack—especially Hamas’s building up its capabilities, training its forces, and other preparations over the years—it is clear that Israeli deterrence did not work. Not only did it not reduce the scope of the act or delay it, as several deterrence researchers propose in relation to how deterrence can work against terrorist organizations, it also did not prevent the most severe scenario that could have been imagined regarding the nature of Hamas’s attack. In other words, we can point to both the implementation of the strategy by the defender (Israel) and its failure, which was expressed in the act carried out by the challenger (Hamas) that was unwanted from the defender’s perspective.

The Implementation of the Strategy

Israel employed a strategy of deterrence against Hamas in two main forms. The first was by emphasizing the threat of punishment and making it clear that Hamas would face heavy consequences if it posed a serious challenge to Israel. This attempt included direct declarations of threats against Hamas and various actions in previous rounds of fighting, such as in operations Cast Lead, Pillar of Defense, Protective Edge, and Guardian of the Walls. These military operations aimed in part to create cumulative deterrence by demonstrating Israel’s determination to take action and impose costs on Hamas while damaging the organization’s various assets. In other words, Israel developed a “deterrence paradigm” that viewed each round as part of a cumulative deterrence process (Baidatz & Adamsky, 2014; Yadai & Ortal, 2013; Lupovici, 2016). Not only was it declared that the goal of each round was to achieve deterrence, but at the end of each round, it was claimed that deterrence had been achieved (or “restored”), and Hamas had been deterred. As explained below, although flawed, this logic demonstrates in practice how Israel’s strategy relied on deterrence by the threat of punishment and, in fact, also by the use of punitive measures for future deterrence. For example, during

Operation Guardian of the Walls in May 2021, Netanyahu declared that “ Hamas and the Islamic Jihad have paid and [...] will pay a very heavy price for their aggression [...] their blood is on their own heads” (Kan News, 2021). This declaration aimed to highlight the cost of challenging Israel in order to deter another round of fighting. Two years later, when Hamas did not join the Islamic Jihad’s attacks, Netanyahu claimed that this was exactly the result of the price that the organization paid during Operation Guardian of the Walls, as he explained in a meeting of the Likud faction in May 2023:

Operation Guardian of the Walls [...] inflicted on Hamas the heaviest blow in its history—destroyed its aerial capabilities, its maritime capabilities, its underground capabilities. This caused a change in the balance of deterrence and at least it has worked like this for years, two years. Our intention in Operation Shield and Arrow was to change the balance of deterrence of the Islamic Jihad too, and this, of course, brought about the result that it brought. Not only in the PIJ [Palestinian Islamic Jihad], our intention was not only the PIJ. Anyone who comes to harm us will now better understand the meaning of the words: “your blood is on your own heads” (Kan News – the Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation, 2023).⁴

In this sense, each round of fighting ostensibly aimed to consolidate the conditions for the success of deterrence. Israel sought to make its capabilities for taking action and its willingness to use them clear to Hamas (and to other adversaries). Each use of force served as a way to convey the deterrent message, alongside the accompanying declarations. According to these declarations, the decision-makers believed that their threats influenced

the decision-making processes of Hamas’s leaders. For example, a few days before the October 7 attack, Tzachi Hanegbi, the head of the National Security Council, said that Israel had deterred Hamas for the next 15 years (Wasserman & Barsky, 2023),⁵ following the previous rounds of fighting between Israel and the organization. Hanegbi expressed not only the Israeli strategy and goals but also the prevailing Israeli conception that this strategy was effective.

Along with emphasizing the strategy of deterrence by punishment, Israel also started to emphasize a strategy of deterrence by denial as part of a greater reliance on defense in its security doctrine (Baidatz & Adamsky, 2014, pp. 22–24). This was done through reliance on several preventive measures, primarily the land barrier on the border with Gaza and the accompanying technological measures, which aimed to physically prevent Hamas’s ability to attack Israel, and in particular, to penetrate Israel via tunnels. These measures were intended to make it clear to Hamas that it would not succeed in harming Israel. For example, Benny Gantz, who served as defense minister when the land barrier was completed in December 2021, claimed, “The barrier, which is a first-rate technological and creative project, denies Hamas one of the capabilities that it tried to develop, and places an iron wall, sensors, and concrete between it and the residents of the south. This wall grants a sense of personal security that will allow this beautiful area to continue to grow. Daily life here is our victory” (Zitun & Tzuri, 2021).

In addition to the land barrier, Israel relied on other defensive and preventive measures, such as the Iron Dome. While these measures had clear defensive and preventive goals—preventing damage in the case of an attack and not necessarily dissuading the adversary from taking action—they were also presented as having the ability to influence Hamas’s considerations for acting at all (see, for example, Wilner, 2021, p. 56).

The fact that Hamas attacked Israel—despite these attempts at deterrence and the declarations of Israeli officials that Israel is working to deter Hamas, and the threats that were made to Hamas—indicates the failure of deterrence.

Challenges in Explaining the Failure of the Strategy of Deterrence

As stated above, Israeli deterrence was based on two kinds of threats related to the harm that would be inflicted on the adversary in the event of an attack on Israel (deterrence by the threat of punishment) and that Hamas would not succeed in carrying out its activities (deterrence by prevention). Regarding the second kind, the explanation for the failure is quite clear and relates to Hamas's ability to overcome the various measures, such as the land barrier that was supposed to impede its operations. This was partly due to poor preparedness in Israel for such an attack, including the disruptions that Hamas utilized to hinder the effectiveness of the systems (see, for example, Gilead, 2023). When a challenger believes that the defender will not succeed in preventing an attack because the challenger has tactical solutions to counter the various defensive measures, it is not surprising that deterrence does not work. It is also evident that the Iron Dome is not an effective means of deterrence. While it plays an important role in intercepting rockets, it also provides incentives for Hamas to challenge Israel. This is because the cost of intercepting a rocket fired from the Gaza Strip toward Israel is significantly higher than the cost of launching such a rocket (Brantly, 2018, p. 36). Additionally, launching rockets toward Israel has allowed Hamas to create a comfortable status quo from its perspective, in which it disrupts daily life in Israel, but since a large portion of the rockets are intercepted, the damage caused is limited and therefore Hamas does not pay a high price for these actions (see also Golov, 2014, p. 79). Thus, the defensive solution gives Hamas an incentive to continue

using these measures, even though it has an important role in reducing the potential damage caused by the rockets.

But the main deterrent failure relates to deterrence by the threat of punishment—a central strategy that Israel emphasized in its interactions with Hamas. As already mentioned, Israel invested great efforts in attempting to establish this deterrence, both in attaining means that would enable it to (credibly) threaten Hamas and other actors with painful retaliation, and in attempts over the years to convey such messages regarding Israel's capabilities and its willingness to use them, via the rounds of retaliation against the organization. The fact that Hamas attacked Israel—despite these attempts at deterrence and the declarations of Israeli officials that Israel is working to deter Hamas, and the threats that were made to Hamas—indicates the failure of deterrence.

However, my argument is that the failure of deterrence raises several research challenges. Apparently, the deterrence was supposed to work, as the balance of power between the sides is clear, and it was clear to Hamas that Israel has means that can exact a heavy price from it and that it is willing to use them. Not only does the war that broke out subsequently after the October 7 attack make this aspect clear, but it was also clear to Hamas that this would be the Israeli response, and it prepared for it, especially by creating an enormous network of tunnels, preparedness in terms of food and other means of staying there for many months, and preparing ambushes for Israeli forces (Zitun, 2023b; Mann, 2023). In this respect, the researcher Michael Milshtein believes that even though Yahya Sinwar, the leader of Hamas in the Gaza Strip, was mistaken in the way he perceived Israeli society, he expected the Israeli response attack. According to Milshtein, "I am mostly trying to get inside Sinwar's head. I think that when you look in general at the way he devised the plan for the attack, and here you cannot separate the attack from Sinwar and also from the way it was implemented and its consequences, I think

that he says to himself that he expected Israel to respond in this way” (103fm, 2023). Similarly, evidence from documents captured during the war and published in *Yedioth Ahronoth* by Nadav Eyal reveal that “ Hamas prepared for this moment. For years. It understood that the result of the October 7 attack would be a massive IDF invasion of the Gaza Strip. It prepared for the hostages to be held underground. It expected that the goal would be to eliminate Sinwar” (Eyal, 2023). Furthermore, while there are various assessments regarding the expectations of Hamas and its leaders with respect to the Israeli response, as discussed below, it seems that Israel’s powerful response is actually in Hamas’s interest, as it helps it in the struggle for legitimacy and for global public opinion.

In addition to the basic conditions for deterrence success that were supposed to influence Hamas’s behavior, two other factors were expected to increase the impact of Israeli deterrence of Hamas. First, researchers on deterring terrorist organizations have pointed out that state characteristics might moderate the activity of these organizations. According to this logic, a terrorist organization with a territory that it rules and civilians it is responsible for could be more sensitive to deterrence threats than one that lacks these characteristics. The reason is that organizations with state characteristics (or semi-state organizations) need to attain domestic legitimacy (Naveh, 2015). Additionally, Uri Bar-Joseph argues that actors with state characteristics can prevent spontaneous outbursts of violence that might lead to escalation, and state characteristics also create assets that can be threatened (Bar-Joseph, 1999, p. 27; Honig & Yahel, 2019, p. 1211). While Hamas is not a state actor,⁶ it does possess several semi-state characteristics that, according to the logic proposed, should have increased its sensitivity to deterrent threats.⁷ For example, Kobi Michael and Omer Dostri concluded that not only was Hamas deterred since Operation Protective Edge, but one of the factors affecting deterrence was Hamas’s

sensitivity to “the civilian population—expressing a pattern of more responsible and restrained conduct.” They believed that while deterrence did not completely prevent the use of force against Israel, it did limit it, partly “out of its sense of responsibility for the population in the Gaza Strip and its desire to maintain its standing as legitimate sovereign” (Michael & Dostri, 2019, pp. 74, 76). In fact, even in the IDF, a discussion took place on these issues and on the connection between Hamas’s control of the territory and the chances of violence. For example, Tamir Hayman, who served as the commander of the Military Intelligence Directorate, argued that Hamas was going through a process of change in which “they are committed to increasing sovereignty and this creates tensions within Hamas between the desire to fight, and sovereignty and concern for infrastructure” (Kubovich, 2024).

Second, researchers have argued that nationalist terrorist organizations, meaning those that seek to achieve self-determination, need international legitimacy. For example, Ayşe Zarakol argues that nationalist terrorist organizations seek to attain legitimacy from the Westphalian system, which is based on the idea of sovereign territorial entities, in contrast with terrorist organizations such as al-Qaeda, which seek to challenge the norm of sovereignty itself (Zarakol, 2011, pp. 2330–2331). Allegedly, nationalist terrorist organizations that seek international recognition need the support and legitimacy of the international community, so they are supposed to restrain their behavior and to be more sensitive to deterrent threats. Thus, such organizations are subject to tension between involvement in terrorism and the need to “normalize their relations with the world in order [...] to gain some de facto international legitimacy” (Honig & Yahel, 2019, p. 1213).

In fact, these arguments regarding the need for international support are also tied to issues related to deterrence by denial through means of delegitimization. The basic claim in these studies is that another way to achieve

deterrence could be based on convincing the putative challenger that it will not achieve its aims. While most of these studies address the connection between domestic legitimacy and deterrence by denial through restricting financial and human resources for terrorist organizations, the idea is similar to restrictions that the international community can place on terrorist organizations to prevent them from achieving a central goal: international recognition of their sovereignty. In other words, it is possible to achieve deterrence by getting these actors to understand that they will not succeed in translating tactical achievements (for example an act of terrorism in which many are killed) into political achievements. As Boaz Ganor argues, some nationalist terrorist organizations operate as a political arm that aims to gain “legitimacy in the international arena—in an attempt to achieve political goals and to translate the impact of terror activities into concrete political achievements” (Ganor, 2008, p. 276). While Ganor notes that Hamas never gave up on the demand for a Palestinian state that would replace the State of Israel, which, according to its leaders, should cease to exist, and in this sense the organization expresses maximalist goals that are based on extreme religious motivations (Ganor, 2008, p. 275), even such an organization needs the support of global public opinion to achieve its nationalist goals.

The two arguments raised here present somewhat of a research challenge regarding Hamas’s behavior. First, the organization was supposed to be sensitive to deterrent threats, as it has state characteristics that ostensibly were supposed to moderate its activity. In other words, penetrating into Israel’s territory, entering communities, murdering and harming many civilians and soldiers, and the massive launching of rockets toward Israel—all express a situation in which there is no threat by Hamas that Israel succeeded in deterring. Second, it is difficult to explain the cruelty of the organization’s actions, as expressed in the

October 7 attack, given its need for international legitimacy. The expressions of support and sympathy that Israel received from many countries immediately after they learned about the dimensions of the catastrophe indicate that Hamas, contrary to expectations, was not sensitive to the international public opinion that it supposedly needs in its national struggle and in its demand for a Palestinian state.

This article does not purport to provide absolute answers to these challenges, but we can already offer several explanations for the failure of Israeli deterrence. First, we can identify that for some time, even before October 7, 2023, Israel’s general deterrence against Hamas was not effective. Hamas documents captured by the IDF during the war show that in January 2023, Sinwar himself referred to “the great plan” for the attack on Israel. According to this evidence, Sinwar assessed that it was possible to carry it out, which indicates that such a plan already existed even beforehand (Maariv Online, 2024). As Amos Harel reported in *Haaretz*, “The first signs of the operational plan reached the IDF a few years ago, and as time passed a clearer picture emerged. More than a year before the attack, the full plan became clear to Israel” (Harel, 2023). Operative planning before an attack—even if it has not yet been carried out—shows that Israel did not succeed in dissuading Hamas from even thinking about such a possibility, thus it is an expression of the failure of general deterrence.

Subsequently, we can provide explanations that concern the failure of Israel’s immediate deterrence. One such explanation relates to the credibility of the Israeli threat. While we can assume that there was no doubt about the intensity of Israel’s capabilities and the scope of the damage that it can cause to Hamas, and undoubtedly many attempts were made to communicate Israeli deterrence to Hamas through various statements and declarations over the years, we can point to the limited credibility of the Israeli threat. Various figures raised these doubts, highlighted by IDF

Spokesperson Brigadier General Daniel Hagari, who declared that Hamas's motivation will become clear in a future investigation, but "it is likely that the characteristic of a rift, the army's readiness, maybe in its (Hamas's) view, is one of the characteristics related to this" (N12, 2024). In other words, the political crisis in which Israel found itself under Netanyahu's leadership negatively affected Israel's deterrence, as some had warned prior to the war (for example Zitun, 2023a; Yadlin & Evental, 2023).⁸ In this sense, not only did these processes affect the attention of the political leadership, which was busy advancing the judicial overhaul, they also made it difficult to consolidate Israel's deterrence and to convey an effective deterrent message.

Another explanation that takes into account both the aspect of immediate deterrence and long-term processes relates to the negative change in the status quo for the Palestinians. One aspect of this change stemmed from the fear that the status quo on the Temple Mount would change with the rise of the right-wing government. As Nadav Eyal wrote, "Sinwar and his associates [...] convinced themselves that the status quo on the Temple Mount is in danger due to the extreme right in the government (Eyal, 2024). Hamas even conveyed a strong threat to Israel via Egyptian mediation and the UN representative that it would respond to a visit by Ben-Gvir to the Temple Mount. According to the report, Hamas made it clear to Israel that it would not stand idly by in the face of this act, which "would cause the situation to blow up" (Shabi, 2023).

Moreover, the balance of interests changed to the detriment of the Palestinians due to the regional peace initiative advanced by the Netanyahu government. Despite its advantages, not only did the initiative neglect the Palestinian issue, but it also symbolized the loss of hope for the Palestinians.⁹ For example, the Palestinian foreign minister, Riyad al-Maliki, claimed in August 2023 that "there is concern that such an agreement will further weaken the Arab world's support for the Palestinians and undermine the

hopes for an independent Palestinian state" (Berdichevsky, 2023). In an opinion piece on the topic, Mohammad Abu Rumman, who served as a minister in the government of Jordan, wrote in 2023 that "the Palestinians are well aware that normalization with Saudi Arabia, which for them is a slight opportunity for improvement, is a big prize for Israel. If relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel gain momentum, in the future Israel's leaders will not feel any real pressure to make progress toward a genuine agreement, and the gates to the Arab and Muslim world are expected to be opened wide for Israel." Similarly, Khaled Elgindy from the Middle East Institute explained in an interview with *Foreign Affairs* that what intensified the despair in Gaza was the new status quo taking shape given the normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia and the removal of the Palestinian issue from the international agenda (Mackinnon, 2023).¹⁰

While these are not statements by Hamas spokespeople, they largely reflect the Palestinian sentiment. Furthermore, the intelligence assessment that emerged in Israel, based on documents and other Hamas sources that were captured following the conquest of the Gaza Strip, offers a similar explanation, which Nadav Eyal published in *Yedioth Ahronoth*. He wrote that "Sinwar and his associates came to the conclusion that the situation was becoming especially dangerous for the Palestinian issue [...] in light of the approaching normalization with Saudi Arabia, a huge symbolic and regional event, they believed that the Palestinian issue would be left behind, perhaps for generations" (Eyal, 2024).¹¹

These claims regarding concerns about a negative change in the status quo touch upon important insights brought up over the years by deterrence researchers. As mentioned above, while many deterrence scholars emphasize the cost involved in the punishment that the putative challenger will suffer, others also point out the price of dissatisfaction with the status quo and the expectation of a negative change in the status quo as factors that weaken the

deterrent threat.¹² It is argued, for example, that not only punishment but also positive incentives can increase the gap between maintaining the status quo and violating it, such that the putative challenger will have more to lose (Huth & Russett, 1990, pp. 469–470; Wilner, 2015, pp. 30–31). In other words, as the price of the status quo becomes higher and less tolerable for the putative challenger, the effectiveness of the strategy of deterrence decreases.¹³ According to this explanation, the removal of the Palestinian issue from the agenda became another factor that harmed the effectiveness of Israeli deterrence and reduced the potential loss for Hamas.

These failures, the last of which was expressed in the October 7 attack, underscore the question of why Israel consistently relies on a strategy that has failed again and again.

The Big Challenge—Israel’s Reliance on the Strategy of Deterrence Against Hamas

I argue that a greater research challenge relates to Israel’s significant reliance on the strategy of deterrence. More surprising than the failure of deterrence is the fact that Israel continued to rely on this strategy despite its recurring failures in dissuading Hamas from acting. The failure of deterrence is actually less surprising, as there is accumulated evidence of the limitations of Israel’s deterrent threat toward Hamas over the years.¹⁴ These failures, the last of which was expressed in the October 7 attack, underscore the question of why Israel consistently relies on a strategy that has failed again and again.

We can learn about the limitations of deterrence, for example, from the dynamic that accompanied previous rounds of fighting between Israel and Hamas, such as operations Cast Lead, Pillar of Defense, and Protective Edge. Not only did each round take place despite the powerful response by the IDF in the previous round, but from one round to the next, Hamas

greatly increased the number of rockets that it launched and their range (Lupovici, 2016, p. 172). This is despite the fact that Israeli actions in the previous round were purported to send a deterrent message in order to dissuade or at least limit future action. Moreover, Operation Cast Lead should not have even occurred following the Second Lebanon War because Israel had supposedly demonstrated its capabilities and intentions, with the message of that war intended for the various actors in the region, not only for Hezbollah.

Furthermore, while there were supporters of the claim that deterrence against Hamas was working, as described above, there were other voices that challenged the claim that deterrence was effective. Among them, even publications in public IDF forums, such as *Eshtonot* of the Research Center of the National Security College, included experts who demonstrated great caution and even doubts about the ability to translate Israel’s actions against Hamas into effective deterrence (for example Baidatz & Adamsky, 2014; Yadai & Ortal, 2013),¹⁵ and warned against drawing conclusions about the effectiveness of deterrence based on the lack of violence (Baidatz & Adamsky, 2014, p. 27).¹⁶

But many tended to ignore these warnings, as mentioned above, and emphasized not only the importance of deterring Hamas but also the previous successes of this strategy, which brought “quiet.” Even Tamir Yadai and Eran Ortal, who cast doubt on the deterrent impact of previous rounds, pointed to the supposed deterrent effect that these rounds provided, at least in the short term. According to them, in the long term, the deterrence operations have a limited impact, and in the short term, there is a deterrent effect that is expressed in “a certain period of quiet after them,” like after the Second Lebanon War and Operation Cast Lead (Yadai & Ortal, 2013, p. 12).¹⁷ This dynamic recurred in later rounds. For example, as described above, even in 2023, at the beginning of Operation Shield and Arrow, Netanyahu continued to emphasize the deterrent goal of the rounds

of fighting against Hamas and against the Islamic Jihad (Kan News – the Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation, 2023).

Of course, methodologically, we cannot necessarily attribute the “success of deterrence” to a lack of violence, as this can stem from factors such as the challenger not having a specific interest in acting, being engaged in other arenas, or, alternatively, preparing for a future round and waiting for more convenient conditions. Furthermore, the lack of violence can be explained by the use of force in the previous round by the defending actor, but the reason for not challenging, especially in the short term, does not have to be the success of deterrence achieved in the previous round of fighting, but rather the considerable harm to the capabilities of the putative challenger. Therefore, as long as it has not succeeded in restoring its capabilities, we will not see violence, but this “period of calm” does not stem from a lack of motivation on the part of the challenger—which the deterrent threat is supposedly attempting to influence—but from the lack of capabilities or appropriate means.

It is thus not surprising that the question of the success of deterrence has been discussed extensively in the research literature due to various methodological problems in establishing a causal relationship between issuing the deterrent threat and its influence on the behavior of the adversary.¹⁸ Given these challenges, Yossi Baidatz and Dima Adamsky argue that the correlation “between the IDF’s use of force and the desired behavior of the adversary is perceived as causal. Quiet is usually perceived as confirmation of the effectiveness of deterrence, while violence is perceived as the direct result of the failure of the use of force. However, this causal connection must be proven, and not assumed” (Baidatz & Adamsky, 2014, p. 27; see also Lupovici, 2008, pp. 79, 83, 87).

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The Identity of Deterrence: The Explanation for Adhering to the Strategy of Deterrence in Israel

I believe that for various reasons—cultural, political, and strategic—Israel has not only heavily relied on a strategy of deterrence over the years but also become attached to this strategy, resulting in what I refer to as holding an identity of deterrence: a perception in which the actor sees its role in the international arena in terms of deterrence, as a deterrer actor. I argue that an actor that has an identity of deterrer needs to define relations of deterrence toward significant others (so that they are deterred) and seeks to consistently hold to the narrative that deterrence is maintained and applied, and in this way it achieves its security. In other words, an actor with a deterrer identity tells itself a story regarding its role in the international arena and regarding its relations with its adversaries (Lupovici, 2016, pp. 69–76). This identity has several main characteristics: It provides an interpretation of events, reduces the range of strategic possibilities such that deterrence becomes an end in itself and shapes the public discourse. These elements were extremely prominent in shaping Israel’s behavior in the period preceding the October 7 attack.

Interpretation of Events

The identity of actors provides them with a perspective through which they interpret reality.¹⁹ An identity of deterrence similarly influences actors. In this situation, they interpret a lack of violence against them as the success of deterrence, while they interpret violence that

they experience as the failure of deterrence. For example, Netanyahu declared on several occasions after various operations that the quiet achieved—meaning the lack of harm to Israel—resulted directly from the deterrence achieved in operations. In May 2023, after Operation Shield and Arrow against Islamic Jihad targets, Netanyahu declared:

I think that we have changed the deterrence equation. I have no doubt at all about this. I can't tell you, we'll never go back to attacks, and when exactly it will happen, but there is no doubt that we have strengthened Israeli deterrence, and this also has several precedents. The last precedent is what we did with Hamas. In Guardian of the Walls, we struck them with a blow that they had never suffered in their history, and since then I think they haven't fired even a single rocket into our territory. Two years have passed, and not without reason. And therefore, they didn't take part. Not in the previous operation, and not in the current operation. Now we have dealt a very powerful blow to the Islamic Jihad, and I think this has left a strong impression on them (Netanyahu, 2023) [my emphasis].²⁰

Prior to Operation Guardian of the Walls, Aharon Haliva, who was then head of the Operations Directorate, stated that “the deterrence is a lot stronger than what people think. Sinwar knows that he is in a position where the cost of defeat is greater than the cost of war and escalation.”

This interpretation of the connection between the use of force in a previous round and deterrence has also gained wide traction among the military leadership over the years. For example, prior to Operation Guardian of the Walls, Aharon Haliva, who was then head of the Operations Directorate, stated that “the deterrence is a lot stronger than what people think. Sinwar knows that he is in a position where the cost of defeat is greater than the cost of war and escalation” (Kubovich, 2024). The

fact that this statement was made in a closed forum not only strengthens the claim that it was an authentic assessment of the situation and was not intended as a political message for the general public, but also supports the claims presented above that Israel consciously sought to achieve deterrence against Hamas.

However, it is also clear that a lack of violence is not necessarily the result of the success of deterrence. Indeed, this is what the defending actor hopes for and how it wants to see things, that the strategy used is supposedly the factor that shapes the adversary's behavior, as discussed above. However, there could be various reasons why an actor did not use force against an actor seeking to deter it. Therefore, an interpretation in which the failure of deterrence led to the violent act is a possible interpretation of the events, it is not necessarily an accurate one. First, often the failure of deterrence occurs long before the use of force, as the adversary needs time to prepare for the violent act and its possible consequences. Second, as mentioned, it is not at all clear whether there was successful deterrence at any previous stage, so it is not as if it stopped working and then the challenger attacked but rather that it did not work in the first place.

In the context of the October 7 attack, it is clear that this perspective, which was dominant in Israel, made it extremely difficult to see the reality and, in effect, helped create the conception that Hamas was deterred. Various acts that Hamas did or did not do were interpreted through this mistaken conception. One of the consequences of this conception was the assumption that, unlike the Cold War, deterrence should be understood as a continuum rather than a binary state of success or failure (Almog, 2004; Rid, 2012). Speakers such as Yossi Kuperwasser, who in the past served as head of the research division in the Military Intelligence Directorate and as Director-General of the Ministry of Strategic Affairs, expressed this conception clearly. Thus, in the context of a short round of fighting in May

2018, during which rockets were launched at communities in southern Israel, Kuperwasser said that “deterrence is not zero or one [...] in deterrence there are several degrees, and it is an entire theory. The Islamic Jihad and Hamas needed to release pressure and they did so to a certain degree and at a certain level and in certain ranges for a short period of time, and the Israeli response is what caused them to understand that it is time to stop” (Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 2018). These words reflect not only the idea that Hamas’s use of force indicates the weakening of deterrence, but also the interpretation that the IDF’s action succeeded in restoring deterrence and attaining quiet again.

Furthermore, Kuperwasser, like other senior officials, emphasizes that the success of deterrence is not a binary state. This conception provides both a supporting framework for interpreting deterrence and a justification for the concept itself. In this sense, the approach that complete deterrence should not be expected is not only a realistic approach that recognizes the complexity of reality, but also provides a justification for not needing to acknowledge the failure of deterrence, thus preserving the illusion that deterrence works. In other words, although various actions have been carried out that could challenge the claim that Israeli deterrence was working, they were interpreted as part of a doctrine that suggested that challenges did not necessarily indicate the failure of deterrence, as it cannot prevent all possibilities nor does it try to. Furthermore, as soon as IDF actions are carried out, they immediately restore deterrence.

Reducing the Possibilities for Action

The identity of deterrence shapes the nature of Israel’s responses. Over the years, actors who have adopted the identity of a deterrent actor are constrained in how they are able to act. When they perceive a situation as undermining deterrence, they feel the need to restore it and take steps to do so. Thus, the lack of deterrence

is not only a problem of physical security but also a threat to their identity. Restoring deterrence becomes not only a means of achieving security but also an end in itself, as it validates their identity.

The assumption is therefore that if forceful actions are carried out, the deterrence can be restored. These assumptions, as part of this paradigm and conception of deterrence, also led to a lack of thorough consideration of how to act in order to achieve deterrence. The assumption was that the use of force is necessary for achieving deterrence, and that the more force is used, the more effective the deterrence will be attained. However, these assumptions made it difficult to formulate and deeply examine the relevant issues. Baidatz and Adamsky argue that goals such as strengthening or restoring deterrent capability were not shaped in a coherent, systemic manner (2014, p. 26). After the Second Lebanon War, in which the working assumption was also that deterrence would be achieved through the use of force, it was claimed that a significant effort was not made to understand under what conditions and how it would be possible to achieve deterrence in practice (Lupovici, 2008, p. 81). For example, in testimony to the Winograd Commission, which was appointed to investigate the war, Chief of Staff Dan Halutz was unable to answer the question of how the IDF should operate to achieve deterrence and what documents this conception was based on (Winograd Commission, 2007, pp. 69–70). The assumption was that great force needed to be used to restore deterrence (which had supposedly been lost) after the kidnapping of the soldiers from the Lebanese border in July 2006 (Lupovici, 2008; Lupovici, 2016, pp. 137–148).

Yadai and Ortal argue that

during the last 20 years, no formal theory or doctrine has been written that professionally recognizes this kind of operation, conducts a

theoretical discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of ‘crisis operations’ (for deterrence) or ‘levels of escalation’ (deterrence and regularization), and defines the military and other tools that should be prepared as part of carrying out these operations. All the more so, we did not recognize the fact that for years we have been carrying out these operations as a military doctrine and as a state strategy” (Yadai & Ortal, 2013, p. 21) [emphasis in the original].

Another dimension of the tragedy in this respect is the need for a clearer definition of deterrence, its objectives, and the ways to achieve it, which were already discussed many years ago. As early as 2004, Shmuel Gordon stated that although Israel had already dealt with limited conflicts for decades, it had not developed a clear deterrence concept to address them (Gordon, 2004, p. 189). Moreover, the partial report of the Winograd Commission on the Second Lebanon War, published in 2007, stated that “specific operative decisions were made, and general objectives (weakening Hezbollah) or even comprehensive objectives (**strengthening Israel’s general deterrence**) were also mentioned. But we did not find an orderly discussion of the compatibility between the achievement of the objectives and the military or political modes of operation that were decided on” (Winograd Commission, 2007, p. 118) [my emphasis].

The assumption was that the use of force would strengthen Israeli deterrence, and that it must be used occasionally to maintain “deterrent capability” (Lupovici, 2008, pp. 83–84). This conception expresses the idea that deterrence actually depends on what Israel does. Thus, for example, the rounds of violence could be interpreted as methods of achieving deterrence, as Israel demonstrated its strength, and therefore the other side was supposed to be deterred. However, it is clear

from the deterrence scholarship that the success of deterrence does not only depend on the actions taken by the side trying to deter but also on the interpretation that the challenger attributes to them. For example, the fact that Israel responded forcefully to previous attacks could have taught Hamas that it needed to be deterred, but Hamas could also have learned a different lesson, such as that the Israeli deterrence had failed; otherwise, Israel would not have made the effort to respond and explain that it was acting to restore its deterrence. Moreover, the challenger has various considerations that do not only relate to the expected response of the actor seeking to deter it. A central factor influencing the challenger’s considerations relates, as mentioned, to its level of satisfaction with the status quo. But framing the situation as part of a “capability”²¹ that Israel cultivates or achieves by using force has allowed for the obscuring of the situation and strengthening the belief in deterrence.

Conclusion

It is too early to determine with certainty the factors that led to the failure of Israel’s deterrence against Hamas as expressed in the October 7 attack. However, the ability to deter Hamas was probably limited given the various factors presented, including the high cost for Hamas of continuing the status quo, the lack of hope, and the undermining of the credibility of Israeli deterrence due to internal political processes in Israel. In light of past experience in the recurring rounds of violence between Israel and Hamas, it is not at all certain that general deterrence against Hamas has been effective since the end of the 2000s. Throughout this period, failures in immediate deterrence were evident. Every few years, Hamas not only struck various targets in Israel but also increased the strength of its attack, indicating that despite the prominent discourse in Israel suggesting that “Hamas is deterred,” that was not necessarily the case. In other words, the Israeli discourse on deterrence and the impact

of Israel's threats on Hamas's behavior had become superficial. Hence, the main challenge is not why deterrence failed—an issue that in itself raises several important theoretical and empirical issues—but rather why Israel chose to emphasize the strategy of deterrence, despite indications that its contribution to restraining Hamas's behavior was limited.

The answer that I have proposed to this question is that Israel became attached to the strategy of deterrence that provides it not only with a means of achieving physical security but also with a way of validating its identity (as a deterrent actor). Although this strategy (and even this identity) has several advantages in achieving security, this identity could have negative consequences. First, it contributed to overreliance on the strategy of deterrence. The identity had decisive impacts on the way events were interpreted, and the mistaken interpretation that deterrence was working enabled decision-makers to advance political processes that pushed the Palestinians into a corner, worsened the status quo for them, and reduced the effectiveness of the strategy of deterrence, which needed to contend with a balance of interests that became tilted more and more in favor of Hamas. That is, Israel told itself the story that deterrence was working and shaping its enemies' behavior. The deterrence, and even more so, the Israeli attachment to it, created the illusion that deterrence was seemingly solving Israel's problems, and thanks to it, it was possible to attribute less importance to Hamas's threats (as it was deterred); there was no need for an arrangement with the Palestinians, as they were deterred (and therefore it was possible to move forward diplomatically in a way that did not take into account the Palestinians).

The lesson is that there needs to be a rethinking not only of Israel's interests—what is the price of the status quo and what are the price and advantages of comprehensive political processes that take into account the Palestinians—but also of which objectives of

the State of Israel should be protected and included in the umbrella of deterrence, and what constitutes overreliance on the strategy in a way that threatens its effectiveness. As Uri Bar-Joseph argued, deterrence is not an alternative for sensible foreign policy (Bar-Joseph, 1999, pp. 24–25). Similarly, Israel must develop a clear operative framework not only for achieving deterrence—how it is achieved, toward whom, against what threats—but also for how to check and ensure whether a certain adversary is deterred. Such a methodology of deterrence is challenging, but it is necessary and requires integration of specific intelligence gathering and analysis efforts. As Baidatz and Adamsky wrote in this context, there is a need “to invest a greater intellectual effort in improving the research methodology for assessing the achievement of the campaign,” which would enable identifying deterrence success (2014, p. 27).

The strategy of deterrence could have a key role *vis-à-vis* various strategic threats, but decision-makers in Israel need to be more aware of what it can achieve and how. While the strategy of deterrence could be an important factor in deterring strategic threats from Iran, for example, it is limited with respect to other threats such as those posed by Hamas, especially in the case of low levels of violence. Furthermore, the assumption that the greater the amount of force used, the better deterrence will work is problematic. As discussed above, the previous rounds between Israel and Hamas showed no evident connection between the intensity of the Israeli response and the deterrent effect. Moreover, not only is it not clear that the increased use of military force contributes to deterrence, but it could even weaken it. This is because it raises the prices that Israel pays in the international arena, and this undermines its legitimacy to use force and increases the hostility of the civilian population, which tilts the balance of interests against Israel and adds another component that weakens its deterrence in the long term.

We can also identify a negative contribution of the identity of deterrence to security, as the need to maintain deterrence and the use of force should it fail strengthens the adversary's ability to plan attacks in a way that serves its interests. An example of this is the "damned if you do, damned if you don't" dilemma presented by Emanuel Adler. In this situation, Israeli decision-makers are forced to choose between a response that serves the interests of the terrorist organizations and a heavy price in internal public opinion for not responding. While not responding to such a provocation would be politically costly to an actor who has internalized the ideas of deterrence and when the public expects retaliation, a response to the provocation of the challenging actor could play into the hands of the challengers, who are often interested in retaliation and in carrying out a round of violence to advance various political aims (Adler, 2010). But the Israeli identity of deterrence adds another supplementary layer to this claim. The identity of deterrence provides not only the internal need for retaliation to achieve deterrence but also allows an adversary who is familiar with Israel to predict how it will behave in certain situations. Thus, although deterrence has many advantages, an identity of deterrence is a factor that makes it more difficult to manage the strategy, as it provides further motivation to challenge Israel.²²

The consequences of this dynamic are also evident in Hamas's attack on Israel in October 2023. Knowing and being familiar with the Israeli strategy of deterrence and knowing that Israel would not be able to refrain from a massive response, Hamas hoped for a massive Israeli response that plays into its hands, using it for propaganda and as a means of limiting the duration and nature of the Israeli response. The hope is that over time Israel will not be able to continue such an attack, which invites international criticism of Israel and reduces its legitimacy to continue the war. For example, some interpretations hold not only that Hamas was aware that Israel would have to respond

with great force, but that it also hoped for such a response. Hamas's brutal attack on Israel aimed, among other things, to set a trap for Israel that would hurt it politically (Kiley, 2023). Similarly, Page Fortna argues that "Hamas's leaders know that they cannot defeat the IDF militarily. Their only hope is to create a provocation that will push Israel to kill enough Palestinian civilians in order to defeat Israel politically" (Fortna, 2024).²³ In other words, the Israeli strategy of deterrence and the identity of deterrence were exploited by Hamas, which could have presumed Israel's need for a massive response, and intentionally launched a brutal attack partly in order to invite such an attack by Israel, which it prepared for, as mentioned.²⁴ All of these demonstrate the inherent advantages of such a strategy for Hamas, whose logic is actually to increase the intensity of Israel's attack in order to harm its legitimacy and to attain a political achievement through the organization's survival despite the Israeli attack.

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- is an explanation of the way the implementation of the threat supposedly worked.
- 5 Hanegbi said in an interview on Army Radio on October 1 2023: “Since Guardian of the Walls, in May two years ago, there has been a decision by the Hamas leadership to demonstrate unprecedented restraint. For over two years there has not been proactive fire of even a single Hamas rocket from Gaza. Hamas is very, very restrained and understands the implications of further defiance” (Kubovich & Lis, 2023). When he was confronted after the attack with his statement that “for over two years there has been no fire from Hamas, it is very deterred for 15 more years, it is not looking for escalation,” he responded that this “is my mistake, [which] reflects the mistake of other bodies. As we had indeed believed that Hamas [had learned] the lesson of Guardian of the Walls” (Wasserman & Barsky, 2023).
 - 6 In fact, this was Bar-Joseph’s claim, which was formulated specifically with respect to advantages related to the establishment of a Palestinian state. According to him, such a course of action would, in part, allow for a more effective use of the strategy of deterrence.
 - 7 On Hamas and its development as a semi-state actor, see, for example, Berti, 2013, pp. 79–129.
 - 8 As Amos Yadlin and Udi Evental (2023) wrote a few weeks before Hamas’s attack, “the complex security reality and the threats of escalation in the various arenas are also related to the severe tailspin that the judicial overhaul has put Israel in. Undermining internal cohesion, the reserves crisis and the harm to the IDF’s competence, the government’s attacks against the heads of the security establishment and the defense forces, the rift with Washington, its strategic mainstay—all of these elements weakness and severely harm deterrence. Consequently, the most immediate and effective step to restore deterrence is to roll back and shelve the judicial overhaul.”
 - 9 For a more extensive discussion of the connection between emotions and deterrence, see Crawford, 2000, pp. 146–149; Lupovici, 2016, pp. 73–76.
 - 10 On the challenge of the Palestinian issue for the Saudis as part of the emerging agreement, see, for example, Guzansky, 2023, p. 7.
 - 11 However, Eyal (2024) notes that concerns were also raised within Hamas about a renewed policy of targeted assassinations, as well as an assessment that Israel was internally weak due to the judicial coup.
 - 12 Scholars have shown that an expectation of deterioration in the status quo reduces the putative challenger’s sensitivity to deterrence, even when the balance of power between the sides is clear. For example, despite India’s strategic advantage over Pakistan, it did not succeed in dissuading Pakistan from such an attack in the war between the countries over Kashmir in 1965 because the Pakistanis were concerned that the Kashmir issue was being removed

Notes

- 1 Despite the clear distinction between the strategies, some argue that there is not a sharp differentiation between these types of deterrence. Even in the case of deterrence by denial, there are prices that the putative challenger could pay, such as the costs involved in attaining the resources and preparations for the act, or the costs inherent in carrying out the act itself (Matania & Bachrach, 2023; Lupovici, 2023, pp. 6).
- 2 However, the connection between delegitimization and deterrence by denial success in practice is complicated (see Lupovici, 2023, p. 11).
- 3 For example, in nuclear deterrence, the goal is to achieve general deterrence—to cause the adversary to refrain from even considering the option of carrying out a nuclear attack on the defender. The goal is not to be forced into a situation of immediate deterrence, where there are indications of the challenger’s intent to use nuclear weapons, and the defender responds with a series of specific threats to dissuade them from doing so.
- 4 Note that the threat “your blood be on your heads” appears in both quotations. In the first one, it is a direct threat toward Hamas and in the second quotation, it

- from the international agenda and a situation was solidifying in which the region is part of India. Furthermore, the Pakistanis were concerned that the power differences between the countries were growing quickly, which could have both reduced their future chances of success in the struggle over the region and exacted a higher price from them for such an action in the future (Ganguly, 1990, p. 84). Similarly, it is claimed that prior to the invasion of Kuwait, Saddam Hussein took into account the expectation of the emergence of a new and less convenient status quo for him after the end of the Cold War and the decline of the Soviet Union's strength and influence over the international system. According to this explanation, deterrence to prevent Iraq's invasion of Kuwait did not work, as Hussein's expectation was that such an act in the future, when the Soviet Union would no longer support Iraq, would be much more expensive. While Saddam Hussein was mistaken in his assessment of the Soviet Union's willingness to support the invasion, he understood the significance of the change in the international system and the high price that Iraq would pay for such an act in the future (Stein, 1992, p. 173).
- 13 The idea behind this claim is simple. There is a gap between the price of the status quo and the price that will be exacted from the putative challenger through possible retaliation. When this gap is large, deterrence under certain conditions can work better because it creates a clear distinction between maintaining the status quo and violating it. Hence it is possible to influence deterrence in two ways: One is raising the price of retaliation and thus increasing the gap between the status quo and the situation that will result from the unwanted act. The other is increasing the gap by making the status quo more comfortable for the putative challenger. In other words, the more comfortable the status quo is, the more the putative challenger will have to lose if it carries out the unwanted act.
 - 14 An example of this is Kubovich's description of the IDF's surprise at the launch of rockets toward Jerusalem in May 2021, given the expectation that Israel's deterrence was effective. As a result, Hamas's threats that they would launch rockets at Jerusalem were rejected as empty threats (Kubovich, 2024).
 - 15 For example, Yadai and Ortal wrote in the context of Operation Pillar of Defense that as in previous operations, it aimed "to maintain deterrence against non-state enemies." They wrote that "this phenomenon has become the de facto doctrine of the State of Israel and the IDF," due to Israel's unwillingness to defeat Hamas or its inability to achieve this objective. While wars with Arab countries led over the years to the gradual weakening of their desire to fight with the State of Israel, "the deterrence operations [...] are not achieving a similar result. On the contrary, **from round to round, we are encountering stronger enemies, both politically and militarily. Paradoxically, the achievements of the active defense systems in Operation Pillar of Defense are providing the enemy with an incentive to persevere in its fight against us**" (Yadai & Ortal, 2013, p. 6) [my emphasis added].
 - 16 Although many believed in the concept of deterrence against organizations like Hamas, several prominent voices stated on various occasions that Israeli deterrence against Hamas was not working, such as former defense minister Moshe Arens (Arens, 2009; Arkin, 2021).
 - 17 Regarding Operation Pillar of Defense, which ended around the time their article was completed, they claimed that it was too early to determine (Yadai & Ortal, 2013, p. 12).
 - 18 For a methodological discussion, see, for example, Huth & Russett, 1990; Lebow & Stein, 1990; Lupovici, 2021.
 - 19 On how identity provides a perspective through which reality is interpreted, see Hopf, 2002, pp. 1, 5; Weldes, 1999.
 - 20 Netanyahu repeated similar statements on various occasions after the operation; see, for example, Cohen et al. 2023. However, it is worth noting that these conceptions regarding the way that military actions create future deterrence or constitute an explanation for the lack of violence have also been presented by others. For example, former prime minister Yair Lapid declared after Operation Breaking Dawn, which also targeted Islamic Jihad, that "the operation has restored Israeli initiative and deterrence. All of the objectives have been achieved" (Eichner, 2022).
 - 21 It should be noted that the Hebrew term for deterrence capability often used, is *kosher ha'arta'a*, which "literally means that deterrence is subject to being fit or in good physical condition" (Lupovici, 2016: 57).
 - 22 A similar claim can be made about the 1991 Gulf War. Iraq's launching of missiles toward Israel, from this perspective, stemmed not from a lack of Israeli deterrence but actually from Israeli deterrence. Saddam Hussein presumed that Israel would have no choice but to respond to the attack, given the importance of deterrence in Israel's security doctrine. Thus, he hoped to disrupt the plans to present an international coalition led by the United States, as the Arab countries that joined the coalition would have difficulty supporting such an alliance when Israel was using force against Iraq (Mendelsohn, 2003, pp. 97-100).
 - 23 On the topic of a provocation against Israel that caused Israel to use massive force to achieve deterrence but also intended to harm Israel's legitimacy in world public opinion, see Adler, 2010, pp. 212, 214.
 - 24 Thus, we can also wonder when Hamas restrained its behavior in the past, if this was indeed a result, as several researchers proposed, of Israeli deterrence whose influence stemmed in part from Hamas's sensitivity to the citizens located in the territory under its control (see, for example, Michael & Dostri, 2018, p. 76).



The Lost “Iron Wall”: Rethinking an Obsolete National Security Concept

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The ultimate goal of the founders of the Zionist movement was to establish a sustainable Jewish state, and upon its establishment, to persuade the Arabs to agree to end the conflict by building an insurmountable military “iron wall.” This strategy was realized in 1967. Prior to the Six-Day War, Israel did not have the bargaining chips that could be traded for Arab recognition of its right to exist, but the conquest of the territories during the war created this option. Nevertheless, Israel continued to emphasize military force and “security lines” as its security concept. With the exception of the peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan, Israel refused to make use of the political option, and efforts to settle the conflict have remained incomplete for various reasons. Against this backdrop and given new emerging threats, the persistent reliance on military force while ignoring the diplomatic channel, especially the Arab Peace Initiative that strives to end the conflict, is leading Israel into a military dead end, and it could pay a heavy price for this in the future.

Keywords: security concept, military activism, diplomatic activism, Six-Day War, fixation, alternative, the Arab League’s peace initiative

Introduction

The term “national security,” which emerged after World War II, refers to the protective measures that a state takes to defend its core values, also known as national interests. These include the state’s sovereignty, its territorial integrity, and the security of its citizens. The national security doctrine forms the most comprehensive and intellectual foundation for all issues related to national security, first and foremost, defining the values that must be defended, the nature of threats, and the methods of achieving defense. The national security concept is the dominant framework guiding policy decisions.

Unlike the [United States](#) and other countries, Israel does not have a written national security doctrine; instead, it has an oral doctrine, known as the “national security concept.” However, some view the document written by David Ben-Gurion in [October 1953](#) as a formal security concept based on Jabotinsky’s “[iron wall](#)” idea from the 1920s (Ben-Israel, 2013). In practice, Ben-Gurion’s document was more of a strategic situation assessment, focusing on questions related to the force buildup of the Israel Defense Forces (Bar-On, 2017, p. 297; Bar-Zohar, 1978, p. 955; Segev, 2018, p. 486). The only significant attempt to address this gap was the establishment of the [Meridor Committee](#),

in response to a mandate from Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Minister of Defense Shaul Mofaz. Although the committee submitted its conclusions and recommendations in 2006, and they were adopted by the minister of defense, they were not formally approved by the Ministerial Committee on National Security.

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The absence of a written and up-to-date national security doctrine in a country like Israel, which has experienced many wars, has significant drawbacks. First, decision-makers lack a guiding framework to shape their decisions as they relate to security. Furthermore, the security establishment does not release an updated document after a given period of time or following prominent military events, nor does it conduct a systemic discussion on the changing strategic environment, and ways of addressing new challenges, or the need to stop investing resources in dealing with obsolete threats. Consequently, there is no process of learning from past failures and successes. This has resulted in a series of strategic political and operational failures in Operation Protective Edge in 2014 (Shelah, 2015), and the same failures have occurred in the current war in Gaza, with new ones being added.

Most researchers who have written about Israel’s national security policy (e.g., Eisenkot & Siboni, 2019; Elran et al., 2016; Wald, 1987; Tal, 1996; Yaniv, 1994; Levite, 1989; Arad & Ben-Har, 2016; Freilich, 2019; Shelah, 2003; Maoz, 2006; van Creveld, 2002) have focused on the military aspect of policy and have proposed suggestions for improving decision-making processes.

The purpose of this article, however, is not to suggest improvements to the existing policy but rather to present an alternative. The main argument presented here, based on a historical analysis, is that the predominant concept that has shaped Israel’s national security policy for over 70 years, which emphasizes enhancing military capabilities, relying on deterrence, early warning, and decisive victory, was suitable and relevant until the Six-Day War. However, since June 1967, the exclusive adherence to this concept and the reluctance to pursue political settlements based on the principle of “land for peace”—except for the peace agreement with Egypt—have led Israel into a deadlock, culminating in the Swords of Iron war. The future appears even more bleak; the missile arsenals of Hezbollah and other forces in the axis of resistance pose a semi-existential threat for which there is no real effective military response. Furthermore, if Iran passes the threshold and becomes a nuclear state, Israel will face an existential threat to which deterrence, the only response that has been relied on in the past, has already proven unsuccessful.

This leads to a clear conclusion: Israel’s security must be based on a combination of achieving political settlements that will create a status quo acceptable to all sides, including the Palestinians. This will reduce the motivation of potential adversaries for hostility and maintain military capabilities to support the settlements reached. Only this combination will provide the State of Israel with reasonable security at a reasonable cost.

The Security Concept Until 1967

Although the Zionist movement initially tried to ignore the fact that Palestine was not a land without a nation, the Jaffa riots (May 1921) highlighted the need to address the Arab threat. One result was the establishment of the Haganah. The second, more conceptual result was formulated in Jabotinsky’s essay “The Iron Wall,” which essentially stated that the Arabs would only accept the existence of

the Jewish state after being convinced that they could defeat it through military force. In light of the results of the War of Independence, it appeared that this moment had arrived. However, the failure of attempts to achieve settlements, along with an increase in routine security incidents, made it clear that this was not the case, and Israel would need to prepare itself for a long-term conflict. Against this backdrop of escalating border tensions, a conflict between two concepts emerged among Israel’s leaders: “diplomatic activism,” championed by Minister of Foreign Affairs Moshe Sharett, and “military activism,” led by Prime Minister and Minister of Defense David Ben-Gurion. The first approach emphasized consolidating Israel’s international standing, exercising military restraint, and moderating the conflict through diplomacy. The second approach focused on building Israel’s military strength and demonstrating the use of force through reprisal operations as a means to achieve security (Bialer, 1984).

The differences between the two approaches related to the means, but the ends, as defined in the 1920s, were shared by both: creating a situation in which Arab countries would agree to end the conflict without significant changes to the borders and without accepting a large number of Arab refugees (Shalom, 1998). Ben-Gurion clearly expressed this at various opportunities. For example, in a private letter that he sent in April 1956 to his childhood friend Shlomo Zemach, who had expressed objections to the use of force, Ben-Gurion clarified the essence of his security concept: “The future of the Jewish people will not depend only on the sword. Our neighbors have forced war on us—and we will fight as long as there is a danger to our existence, but we will not build our future on wars. Israel’s future will depend only on our ability to work and create” (Ben-Gurion, 1956).

The removal of Moshe Sharett as minister of foreign affairs in June 1956 proved a historic turning point. His departure left the decision-making leadership without a central figure who could serve as a counterbalance to the

dominant concept, resulting in the elimination of diplomatic activism from the security concept. The immediate expression of this was a quick military escalation on the borders, culminating in the Sinai Campaign initiated by Israel in the fall of 1956. The military success of the operation further solidified the reliance on force.

The decade that followed, from the Sinai withdrawal in March 1957 and ending with the Egyptian army’s entry into Sinai in May 1967, was the golden age of the military activism concept. This concept relied initially on a deterrence strategy, leveraging the Arab fear of the IDF’s strength and the willingness of Arab leaders, particularly Egypt’s Gamal Abdel Nasser, to accept the status quo as long as it was tolerable.

The result was that this period was considered the best decade in Israel’s history. The security situation was calm, allowing most state resources to be dedicated to developing the economy and infrastructure. The population grew rapidly, the economy thrived, industrialization was boosted, the GNP increased at an unprecedented rate, and the living standard and public services improved. The calm also enabled significant investment in the defense budget in preparing the IDF for the future, including quantitative buildup of both the armored forces and air force as well as intensive training for war. In addition, the nuclear facility—another “iron wall”—was built in Dimona to support the conventional deterrence capability.

However, despite these positive developments, the conditions necessary for resolving the conflict at an acceptable price for Israel did not materialize during this decade. The first shift in Arab sentiment occurred in the spring of 1965 when [Habib Bourguiba](#), the president of Tunisia, gave a speech at a refugee camp in Jordan, where he denounced calls for Israel’s destruction and advocated for partitioning the land and pursuing Jewish-Arab cooperation in exchange for Israel’s withdrawal to the partition plan borders and acceptance

of the return of the 1948 refugees. In response, Prime Minister Levi Eshkol reaffirmed Israel's position of striving for peace within the current borders and refusing to accept a large number of refugees.

The Six-Day War resulted in four significant changes in Israel's defense capabilities. First and foremost, Israel's conquering of the Sinai Peninsula, the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and the Golan Heights provided the necessary assets to maintain security and resolve the conflict on terms favorable to Israel.

The Security Concept During the Years 1967–2024

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The second change came with the UN Security Council Resolution 242, issued in November 1967. This resolution established the principle of "land for peace," meaning that the territories captured during the war would be returned in exchange for an end to the conflict. Essentially, the international community acknowledged Israel's demand for Arab recognition of its prewar borders as legitimate and unchangeable, only to be altered through mutual agreement. The resolution also called for a mutually agreed-upon solution to the refugee problem.

The third change saw a gradual transformation in the Arab world's stance, particularly Egypt's stance, toward Israel. Prior to the war, Arab leaders consistently declared their objective of "eliminating the State of Israel" (Harkabi, 1968, p. 15). However, these declarations, more symbolic than actionable, started to fade after the humiliating defeat in the Six-Day War. The Arab nations began to

seek change in the new status quo through military and diplomatic means. Alongside the slogan "what is taken by force will be returned by force," the Egyptians engaged in rapid military rehabilitation and initiated hostilities along the Suez Canal. They also accepted Resolution 242, which acknowledged Israel's right to exist. After Sadat came to power, Egypt formally announced that they would be willing to sign a peace agreement and end the conflict if Israel returned to the international border. Another step in this direction occurred in February 1973 when Sadat's emissary presented Henry Kissinger with a proposal addressing the majority of Israel's security demands.

The fourth change that occurred was Israel's stance. On June 19, 1967, the Eshkol government made a [secret decision](#) that Israel would agree to return to the international border with Egypt and Syria (but not with Jordan) in exchange for security arrangements and ensuring freedom of navigation in the Straits of Tiran and the Suez Canal. However, once it became clear that there was no immediate international pressure to return the conquered territories, Israel stated that it would "fortify its standing" in the territories based on security needs. In practice, this demand for "secure borders" (Pedatzur, 1996, p. 113) reflected confidence in the IDF's strength and a preference for military capabilities over diplomatic options. It became a major obstacle in reaching a settlement and basing the state's security not only on force but also on reducing the Arabs' motivation to harm it.

Despite the territorial changes brought about by the Six-Day War, Israel's security concept still relied on deterrence, early warning, and decisive victory. Although these had proven effective in the decade before the war, their limitations became evident. It seemed that the crushing victory, the Arab loss of military strength, and Israel's ability to threaten strategic assets would deter a new Arab military initiative, but the reality was different. The Arab refusal to accept Israeli control of the conquered territories led

to a willingness to challenge Israeli deterrence. This resulted in a low-intensity, continuous conflict on all borders and eventually escalated into an intensive war of attrition along the Suez Canal after the rehabilitation of the Egyptian army. While the IDF's deterrent capability prevented a large-scale military initiative, it struggled to end a limited conflict that was becoming increasingly costly.

The limitations of Israel's deterrence became evident in October 1973. In a confidential meeting a year earlier, Sadat declared his intention to go to war despite Israel's military superiority. He [explained at length](#) that this was a “difficult challenge,” but “Allah knows that we have no other solution.” From Sadat's perspective, maintaining the status quo was stagnation and would result in complete ineptitude. He asserted that they would not accept this and that the outcome of the war would decide their existence.

Israel's strategy, which bolstered Egypt's desperate decision to go to war, clearly reflected Israel's reliance on military force as the sole solution to their security problems. This was evident in Prime Minister Golda Meir's “kitchen cabinet,” composed of Minister of Defense Moshe Dayan, who strongly advocated for military activism; Yisrael Galili, the prime minister's close adviser and a leader of the hawkish faction within the Labor Party; and Meir, who was chosen to replace Minister of Foreign Affairs Sharett due to her hawkish views and who made no attempt to incorporate diplomatic strategies into the security concept upon assuming the role. All three correctly assessed that deterrence would not hold up under the burden imposed by continuing the status quo with Egypt. However, rather than seeking to alleviate the burden through a partial arrangement at the Suez Canal, which was feasible and carried minimal security risks, they chose to rely on the IDF's superiority. Their hope was that while war could not be prevented, an Egyptian defeat would sustain the status quo for a few more years.

A prominent expression of this concept, perhaps the most noteworthy in Israel's history, occurred during [a discussion on April 18, 1973](#). The discussion was prompted by reliable sources, which warned that Egypt intended to go to war in mid-May. Meir, Dayan, and Galili during the discussion agreed that Israel was indeed headed toward a major war. At one point, Galili mentioned the possibility of avoiding war through diplomatic discussions and a return to the previous border. On the surface, he presented a diplomatic alternative. However, all three recognized that considering this option was pointless, as the preference for a successful war over a settlement was evident. Their main concern was preventing a discussion of this matter within the government forum.

The limitations of the warning capabilities were also evident during this period. Although the Military Intelligence Directorate (MID) provided a timely warning of war a few months before the outbreak of the War of Attrition, it completely failed to anticipate the possibility of Soviet military intervention in the war. This failure brought Israel to the brink of a conflict with a superpower, limited the air force's operations, and influenced the decision-makers to agree to end the War of Attrition under conditions they had previously rejected (Adamsky & Bar-Joseph, 2006). There is no need to further discuss the MID's failure to provide warning before the Yom Kippur War. This failure provided clear evidence that this aspect of the security concept could not be relied upon, particularly during a period when the intelligence community's capabilities reached new heights.

Finally, the reality in which the IDF maintained more secure positions than in the past also revealed the weakness of the third element of the security concept—the notion of decisive victory. The IDF did not defeat the Egyptians in the War of Attrition, a prolonged static war of which it had no previous experience, and despite its excellent quality, it did not achieve

a decisive victory in the surprise outbreak of the Yom Kippur War (Kober, 1995, pp. 313–396).

The seven years between the Six-Day War and the end of the Yom Kippur War unequivocally showed the high price Israel paid for adhering to the concept that Israel's security should rely exclusively on military force and "security borders." Despite the IDF's military superiority, this period witnessed the most intense series of military conflicts in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The number of casualties increased from under 200 during the previous decade to over 4,000. Additionally, the defense budget, which had previously been less than 10 percent of GNP, more than doubled. The number of military companies engaged in operational activity also rose significantly from 8 to almost 70 (Nadel, 2006, p. 170), and the burden of regular and reserve service increased considerably. According to these indicators, when Israel had "security borders" and was at the peak of its military power, it was actually less secure than during the period before the Six-Day War, when its borders were referred to as "the Auschwitz borders."

The lesson from the Yom Kippur War, that Israel's security relies on both Arab acceptance of the status quo and the IDF's strength was not internalized. The main conclusion drawn from the Yom Kippur War of "never again," fueled skepticism and mistrust toward diplomatic settlements as a means of reducing the threat. This was evident during the negotiations over the disengagement agreement between Israel and Syria, with the settlers in the Golan—a central pressure group opposing it, due to fears of renewed Syrian aggression—stating they would only agree to an IDF withdrawal if "the agreement will bring quiet for two years." Minister of Defense Shimon Peres estimated it would last about a year (Gur, 1998, pp. 45, 60). Even when the two disengagement agreements, at the Suez Canal and the Golan, lasted for years skeptics did not change their stance. The Rabin government's opposition to Kissinger's initiative to reach a second disengagement

agreement in Sinai, which led to the Israeli-American crisis and the Ford administration's policy of "reassessment," exemplified this well.

The "never again" policy also led to an intensive process of strengthening the IDF in response to the diminished Arab military threats. Although oil profits did open new avenues of empowerment for some Arab countries, these were not the countries in direct confrontation with Israel. In contrast, the Egyptian army did not undergo a proper rehabilitation process after the war, partly due to the disconnect between Egypt and the Soviet Union. While the Syrian army did recover, it did not have state-of-the-art weapons systems. Egypt made clear its desire to end the conflict, and Syria's leader, Hafez al-Assad, also expressed readiness for a formal peace agreement with Israel in exchange for a full withdrawal from the Golan Heights (Maoz, 1998, pp. 110–112). However, the assessment of the Military Intelligence Directorate (MID) exaggerated the threats to Israel, resulting in an extensive quantitative and qualitative buildup of the IDF. This focus on military buildup came at the expense of other needs and contributed to severe inflation, a deficit, an economic crisis, and a lost decade for the Israeli economy.

Chief of Staff Mordechai Gur, who led the military buildup process, eventually acknowledged that the buildup was largely unnecessary. After Sadat's visit to Jerusalem and the head of the MID admitted their mistaken conception of the Egyptian threat, Gur concluded that Israel needed to reflect on its demands since 1974 to strengthen the IDF. He highlighted the significant budgets invested and commitments made to the United States, based on military and economic aid. Gur emphasized that this occurred while Egypt had already abandoned the option of war and pursued peace (Gur, 1998, p. 344).

Subsequent military actions demonstrated a lack of real soul-searching, except for personal reflection by Minister of Foreign Affairs Moshe Dayan and Minister of Defense Ezer Weizman.

After the Yom Kippur War, they dropped the demand for “security borders” in Sinai and focused on achieving a peace agreement with Egypt, which involved an Israeli withdrawal to the international border. It is worth noting that this narrowly reached agreement remains one of Israel’s most significant strategic assets for security.

The peace agreement with Egypt, the Iran–Iraq War, the First Gulf War, and the collapse of the Soviet Union temporarily reduced Israel’s fundamental security challenges, creating an opportunity to resolve the conflict. Speculating on how the Middle East and the threats to Israel would have appeared if the Oslo Process had not been curtailed by Rabin’s assassination, the 2000 Camp David summit had not failed, or a peace agreement with Syria had been achieved is challenging. Such an agreement would have aimed to disarm Hezbollah among other objectives. The ongoing conflict with the Palestinians and Hezbollah’s military buildup have imposed a substantial cost on Israel, suggesting that these failures have compromised Israel’s ability to defend itself more than the withdrawal from the Golan Heights and the evacuation of most settlements in the West Bank would.

In 2002, Saudi Arabia proposed a comprehensive peace initiative that later became the Arab League’s peace initiative. This initiative focused on several key points: a complete Israeli withdrawal from the territories conquered in 1967, the establishment of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel, an end to the conflict, Arab countries’ recognition of Israel, and the normalization of relations with Israel. This peace plan was the long-awaited solution to Israel’s security problems, but unfortunately, it became entangled in the complexities of Israeli politics and ultimately faded away. Among the many missed opportunities in the Israeli–Arab conflict since 1967, the ongoing disregard for the Arab Peace Initiative for over 20 years is a puzzling pattern of behavior.

While accepting the initiative in its current form may not fully address the threats posed by the radical axis led by Iran, it does offer good chances of reducing these threats, establishing regional allies, and effectively tackling the growing security challenges. Despite Iran’s unwavering ideological stance of seeking the elimination of the “Zionist regime,” it has clearly stated to the Syrians, both in 1993 and again in 1999, that it does not oppose talks with Israel or an Israeli–Syrian settlement (Sagi, 2011, pp. 191–192). Iran is also a member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which [consistently supports](#) the Arab League’s peace plan and the two-state solution. If Israel is willing to proceed with a diplomatic plan based on the Arab peace proposal, it is likely to put the Iranian leadership in an uncomfortable position. This would make it difficult for them to oppose measures that are acceptable to the Palestinian Authority. Furthermore, starting a large-scale diplomatic process that would strengthen regional stability [“could reduce the influence of the pro-Iranian axis and undermine Iran’s regional standing.”](#)

Moreover, accepting the Arab Peace Initiative would bring several benefits. First, it would strengthen the alliance between moderate Sunni countries and Israel, enhancing security cooperation among them. This, in turn, could improve Israel’s ability to freely operate militarily in regions near Iran. By establishing “forward siege bases” and posing a threat to Iran, Israel may increase Iran’s military concerns. Consequently, Tehran may become more inclined to engage in direct dialogue with Israel. Initially, this dialogue could minimize the risk of accidental conflict and eventually extend to addressing other important matters (Haiminis, 2023).

Conclusion

In light of the security benefits associated with accepting the Arab Peace Initiative, it is clear that the decision to dismiss the option of ending the conflict under reasonable conditions is more

indicative of the political shifts Israeli society has undergone over the years, rather than genuine security concerns. This is because, over the course of several decades, the concept of security has changed significantly to align more closely with the diplomatic activism of Moshe Sharett. The role of military personnel is particularly important in this context. At the end of the Yom Kippur War, military personnel were “the forgotten heroes of the negotiations [...] who gave Kissinger the ideas and the security arrangements that formed the basis of the breakthroughs that he succeeded in making” (Indyk, 2023, p. 390). In the 1990s it was generals like Amnon Lipkin-Shahak and Uri Sagi who paved the way for bold steps with the Syrians, and it was ultimately political considerations that prevented the process from being completed (Rabinovich, 1998; Sagi, 2011). The establishment of the group Commanders for Israel’s Security, which sees political-security arrangements with the Arab world, combined with advancing an agreement with the Palestinians based on the principle of two states for two peoples, as a top **national objective**, is the clearest expression of the current position held by most senior officials in the security establishment. Those who have prevented progress toward a comprehensive settlement are not military personnel but rather politicians driven by ideological and narrow concerns and not security considerations.

Hamas’s attack on October 7, 2023 dealt a severe blow to the belief that military superiority alone can ensure Israel’s security. Deterrence crumbled, early warning systems failed, and defense was ineffective for many hours. A decisive victory was also delayed. While the tragic failure and the significant loss of lives were attributed to a series of human errors, the fact remains that Israel has suffered heavy losses in the only two surprise attacks in its history, underscoring that adhering to a security concept that has not stood the test puts the country at high risk. Therefore, our experience teaches

us that the current policy must be changed as soon as possible to adapt to the harsh reality.

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Russia Struggles for a New World Order—Where Are Israel and the Muslim World Positioned?

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The dissolution of the Soviet Union led to the collapse of the bipolar global system that was formed after World War II, resulting in Russia's loss of superpower status that had been held by the Soviet Union. Thus, in the mid-1990s, the Russian government adopted a perception that the world order was changing and transitioning from a unipolar system led by the United States to a multipolar system characterized by multiple centers of power. According to this view, Russia holds a status similar to that of a superpower, alongside the United States, China, and other countries. Throughout Putin's rule, the idea of transitioning to a multipolar world became established and it developed into a guiding principle of Russia's perception of the world system, as reflected in the foreign policy concept documents of the Russian Federation. Russia's engagement with the multipolar world order intensified even further with its invasion of Ukraine in 2022. However, a thorough examination of the official Russian discourse reveals that the concept of the multipolar world order is vague, partial, inconsistent, and has internal lacunae and contradictions. Despite these difficulties, it is possible to identify the general guidelines of this perception that steer Russia's foreign policy toward Israel and emphasize the centrality Russia attributes to the place of the Arab world and the Muslim world in the struggle against the West, in order to establish a multipolar world order. Due to the significance of this perception in the official Russian discourse, its presentation—despite its incoherence—is critical in analyzing Moscow's position toward Israel, comprehending its standing alongside Israel's enemies following the October 7 attack, and outlining future Israeli policy toward Russia.

Keywords: Russia, Israel, New World Order, United States, China, Muslim World, Ukraine

Introduction—The Perception of the Multipolar World Order in Russian Foreign Policy

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the collapse of the bipolar world order led by the United States and the Soviet Union, the Russian elite found themselves in a unipolar world led by the United States. Toward the middle of the 1990s, Russia began to emphasize the transition from a unipolar world order to a multipolar world order. This approach helped present Russia's deteriorating position in the world system as part of a wide global trend of changing the world order, and not as a result of internal weakness. Andrei Kozyrev, the first foreign minister of the Russian Federation (1990–1996),¹ used the term “multipolar world” several times and argued that the future world order would not be bipolar, nor would it be led by the United States. However, he advocated for rapprochement with the West, and the transition to a multipolar world during his time was not part of the agenda promoted by the Russian elite.

Yevgeny Primakov, whose views were conservative and who did not completely break away from Soviet perceptions, replaced Kozyrev in January 1996 as Foreign Minister, after having served as the head of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service. Primakov laid out his doctrine in 1996 and claimed, contrary to his predecessor, that one of the main trends of the international system is a transition to a multipolar world, and that Russia maintains a decisive role in this world order.² He sought to advance Russia's relations with non-Western countries at the expense of fostering ties with the West and worked to strengthen Russia's control over countries of the former Soviet Union. In 1997, Primakov even succeeded in securing a jointly signed Chinese–Russian declaration on the subject of a multipolar world and the creation of a new world order. In 1998, after being appointed Prime Minister, he proposed to establish a trilateral cooperation mechanism between Russia, China, and India, as

a practical step toward institutionalizing global multipolarity, although this initiative did not gain traction. This approach also appeared in Russia's national security concept document that same year, characterizing the world system as moving toward the formation of a multipolar world order. With Putin's accession to the presidency of Russia in 2000, the aspiration to create a multipolar world order became one of the main pillars of Russia's foreign policy concept.

In his speech, Putin referred to the United States as a hostile country and described it as leading a unipolar world order that produces conflicts and wars and strengthens the nuclear arms race.

Shifts in the relationship between Russia and the West have also led to changes in the perception of the transition to a multipolar world. Tension in the relations between Russia and the United States gradually escalated in the 2000s following significant events, such as the withdrawal of the United States in 2002 from the ABM treaty limiting the possession of ballistic missiles, the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, Russian suspicions regarding the involvement of the United States in the color revolutions in Georgia in 2003 and in Ukraine in 2004, and the expansion of NATO. Under the influence of these events, a change in Russia's attitude toward the United States began to take shape in 2005–2006, and it was considered an unfriendly country. The worsening of this approach and Russia's treatment of the United States as a hostile pole in the full sense of the word was evident in Putin's famous speech at the Munich Security Conference in February 2007. In this speech, Putin referred to the United States as a hostile country and described it as leading a unipolar world order that produces conflicts and wars and strengthens the nuclear arms race. The Russia–Georgia war in 2008, the Russian invasion of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, and Russia's entry into Syria in 2015

increased tensions and led to a deterioration in Russia's relations with Western countries. As a result, Russian rhetoric toward the United States and the West intensified, prominently emphasizing the desire to build a multipolar world in which Russia would play a decisive role.

An [examination](#) of the idea of a multipolar world order in the five foreign policy concept documents³ issued since 2000 reflects the change that has also taken place in Russia's self-perception regarding its position in the international system. It illustrates how, with the rebuilding of Russia's military and economic power, its self-perception has changed from a country that strives to rehabilitate itself to one that strives to influence the world system. While the first document in 1993 did not mention the term multipolarity whatsoever and the emphasis was on Russia's need to be a full-fledged member of the international community, subsequent documents of the Russian foreign policy concept clearly discussed the need to build a multipolar world order and Russia's decisive role in it.

Flaws and Incoherence in the Russian Perception of the Transition to a Multipolar World

Although the perception of the multipolar world order has been one of the main pillars of Russian foreign policy for nearly three decades, and the ruling elite [claim](#) that the process of transition is already underway, the structure of the multipolar world order is vague and lacks a clear definition. Basic questions regarding the future structure, including the division into poles that will comprise the new order, the composition of the countries of each pole, which countries will lead the poles, and more, currently remain unanswered. At this stage, the obscurity serves the Russian interest, since any division into poles could cause disagreements among the various players in the international system, and as long as the details are obscure, it is likely that there will be less opposition to a Russian format of the new world order.

Nonetheless, statements on the subject by Putin and other officials provide a glimpse into the architecture of the multipolar order as it is characterized in the Russian discourse.

The Poles Mentioned in the Russian Discourse

The Eurasian pole led by Russia: This is the main pole in the new world order that aims to unite the entire Eurasian space under Russia's leadership. Despite its obvious importance for Russia, there are hardly any detailed references to this pole. Sometimes referred to as the Russian pole and sometimes as the Eurasian pole, there is no breakdown of the countries that comprise it. It is reasonable to assume that Russia's aspiration is to lead the former Soviet Union republics, and this pole will include at least Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. These countries, together with Russia are members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, and all of them except for Tajikistan are also members of the Eurasian Economic Union. The affiliation of the other republics of the former Soviet Union to this or any other pole is not mentioned. It is important to note that there are also no explicit mentions of Ukraine's position in the new world order. Yet Russia's war against it suggests the importance of its being part of the Russian sphere of influence, and therefore the war can be seen as an attempt by Moscow to restore Ukraine to its "natural place" under Russia's auspices, as part of the Eurasian pole under its leadership.

The Western or Anglo-Saxon pole: The use of the term "Anglo-Saxon countries" [became frequent](#) in Russia with its invasion of Ukraine and appeared for the first time in Russia's foreign policy concept document in 2023. The use of this term has affected the stance toward the pole led by the United States. In Russian discourse it is sometimes referred to as the Anglo-Saxon pole and other times as the Western pole. Therefore, there is no clear answer to the question whether the United States is the leader of the entire Western camp

or if it will stand at the head of the Anglo-Saxon countries only, while Europe will be a separate pole in and of itself. It should be emphasized that both the pole led by the United States and the European pole are perceived by Russia as hostile poles, and all other poles that Russia considers its allies must unite in the struggle against them.

The East Asian pole led by China: The composition of the Chinese pole is also obscure. The Russian concept does not make any reference to the question whether this pole will include China alone, or if countries in Southeast Asia will also be part of it.

The Muslim pole and the Arab pole: These poles are of great importance to Russia, especially after the invasion of Ukraine. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov [said](#) in March 2023, “together with our friends from Muslim countries, we are championing the establishment of a more democratic and just multipolar world, based on the principles of the United Nations.” The term “Arab pole” was prevalent in the Russian discourse in the past, but in recent years the term “Muslim pole” has become more common. This distinction has a decisive impact on the composition and nature of the pole, as an Arab pole will not include Iran, Turkey, and other non-Arab Muslim countries. However, if it is a Muslim pole, the issue of who leads the pole is not at all obvious: Will Saudi Arabia, Iran, a country from Southeast Asia, or another country lead the pole? In addition, Aleksandr Dugin, a prominent ideologue among Russian extreme nationalists, [claimed](#) that if the unification of the Muslim world into one pole is delayed, the entire process of forming a multipolar world order will be deferred.

The African pole: Reference to the African pole is almost non-existent. However, in an [article](#) written by Putin in advance of the 2023 Russia-Africa Summit, he claimed that Africa will be an important part of creating the new world order, and in doing so, it will free itself from the legacy of colonialism and neo-colonialism.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said in March 2023, “together with our friends from Muslim countries, we are championing the establishment of a more democratic and just multipolar world, based on the principles of the United Nations.”

Additional poles: The lack of clarity among Russian officials regarding the architecture of the multipolar world order is expressed by Lavrov in an interview at the end of December 2023, in which he [claimed](#) that “this is multipolarity, where not only countries become poles (Brazil, India, China, and Russia will always be independent poles), but also associations of countries that are not so large, but also medium and small.” In that same interview, Lavrov additionally claimed that cooperation organizations among countries, such as the Eurasian Economic Union, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the African Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, and other organizations will also become poles. Therefore, it is not clear at all what the structure of the new world order will be and how it will simultaneously comprise countries and organizations. It is also important to emphasize that the African Union includes the Arab countries in North Africa, but at the same time, these countries are supposed to be part of the Arab pole or the Muslim pole, creating a lack of clarity regarding the future structure. However, the importance of various organizations, especially BRICS, is indeed mentioned in the discourse. For example, Putin [claimed](#) that the BRICS expansion process (the joining of Iran, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, and Ethiopia) in 2024 is an expression of the process of forming a multipolar world. The member countries of the organization have complex relations with the United States, some of which are hostile. Russia sees this platform as having the potential to cultivate relations with countries that will

be friendly poles against the Western pole, by creating a competing economic partnership to the United States and the Western economy.

It should be emphasized that in addition to a multipolar world, two other related concepts can be identified in the Russian discourse: a multilateral world and a polycentric world. In the Russian discourse these concepts are considered synonymous, although some [researchers](#) insist on differences between them. The main distinction between the concepts lies in the idea of equality among all partners in a multilateral world order, as opposed to hierarchy in a multipolar world order.

Russia did not succeed in swiftly defeating Ukraine as it expected, and what was initially referred to as “a special military operation” has turned into a war of attrition that exacts a heavy toll on Russia, with no end in sight. Therefore, the war is presented to Russian citizens not only as a conflict between Russia and Ukraine but also as Russia’s battle against the Western camp led by the United States, accelerating the transition to a multipolar world order.

The Perception of the Multipolar World Order and the Position of Israel and the Muslim World in it Against the Backdrop of the War in Ukraine

The invasion of Ukraine marks a significant turning point for Russia and has influenced the development of its foreign policy. The international system is now viewed exclusively through the prism of the war. Even before the war began, the Russian government [claimed](#) that the United States was intentionally creating chaos in the Middle East to maintain a unipolar world order. These claims have become increasingly frequent since the invasion of Ukraine, with the war in Ukraine being presented as the start of a new phase in the struggle for a multipolar world order, characterized by overt confrontation and a prolonged struggle. The

Russian government has invoked, among other things, the transition from a unipolar to a multipolar world to justify and explain its lack of military success in Ukraine. Russia did not succeed in swiftly defeating Ukraine as it expected, and what was initially referred to as “a special military operation” has turned into a war of attrition that exacts a heavy toll on Russia, with no end in sight. Therefore, the war is presented to Russian citizens not only as a conflict between Russia and Ukraine but also as Russia’s battle against the Western camp led by the United States, accelerating the transition to a multipolar world order.

This approach is [detailed](#) in Russia’s foreign policy document published in March 2023, about a year following the outbreak of the war. This document describes how the unipolar world order allowed colonial powers to exploit countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America for centuries. However, now the tide is turning with the rise of non-Western global and regional powers. The Western neo-colonialist countries are not ready to relinquish their hegemony and influence and refuse to acknowledge the reality of a multipolar world order. Therefore, Western countries employ a wide range of illegal measures such as sanctions, incitement of color revolutions and military conflicts, threats, manipulation of groups and entire nations, and more. Additionally, the United States instigates chaos in various parts of the world to undermine global stability, with the war in Ukraine part of this scheme. The strong American resistance to changing the world order implies that change will only be achieved through a violent and prolonged struggle, ensuring the collapse of the old system in the foreseeable future. Russia attributes great importance to the countries of the “global South,” believing that they will support its struggle against the dominance of the “collective West” in the unipolar world order.

As previously mentioned, according to the Russian perception, the United States instigates conflicts in strategic locations to maintain its hegemony and the unipolar world order, such

as the conflict between [China and Taiwan](#), or the color revolutions. Putin has [claimed](#) that the war between Israel and Hamas is also part of this, stating that “We must understand who is truly behind the tragedy of the nations in the Middle East and in other regions of the world, who is generating this deadly chaos, who is benefiting from it. Today, in my opinion, it is clear to everyone [...] these are the elites of the United States and its satellites, and they are the beneficiaries.”

The Russian perception of Israel as a protectorate state and the executive arm of the United States, along with their characterization of the war between Israel and Hamas as part of the struggle against the United States for world order, has significantly shaped Russia’s policy toward Israel since the October 7 attack. An example illustrating this is a [caricature](#) published in the “Secret Service Agent” journal of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service, accompanying an article by Sergey Naryshkin, the head of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service. According to the caricature, the world is divided into two camps, with the United States leading the Western camp, attacking the camp led by Russia. Russia symbolized by a bear, stands as a defender against the United States, while the Western pole (G7 countries) appears weak and wounded. Israel is portrayed as a parasite on the United States’ neck.

Another prominent example is a program that was [broadcast](#) in February 2024 on Channel One Russia, reflecting the government’s messages and propaganda. This program focused on the Muslim world as part of a series on civilizations and the creation of the new world order. It highlighted the negative attitude of Muslim countries toward the West, portraying the burning of flags of the United States and Israel in a positive light. Furthermore, the war between Israel and Hamas was presented as a unifying issue for the entire Muslim world against Israel, which is depicted as acting aggressively and violently under the auspices of the United States. Additionally, [Putin’s statement](#) that “the

fate of Russia, the future of the entire world and the Palestinian people will be determined on the Ukrainian front” offers further insight into the Russian perspective. It underscores the belief that the outcome of conflicts in the struggle for a multipolar world order is contingent upon Russia’s success on the battlefield in Ukraine.

The deterioration of Moscow’s policy toward Israel following the invasion of Ukraine reflects an escalation and intensification of the policy toward Israel. This is part of an attempt to achieve dominance in the regional system and strengthen ties with Muslim countries, particularly Iran. Russian policy toward Israel is driven by instrumental considerations rather than a close relationship based on shared values or long-term interests. This approach allows Russia a wide range of action while taking advantage of opportunities in the region to promote Russian interests within the framework of the formation of a multipolar world order.

Israel is positioned in the Russian discourse as part of the Western camp hostile to Russia, while Israel’s enemies, including Iran, are placed in the Muslim pole. This pole is presented in the Russian discourse as a friendly pole that fights together with Russia to create a more just world order.

Israel is positioned in the Russian discourse as part of the Western camp hostile to Russia, while Israel’s enemies, including Iran, are placed in the Muslim pole. This pole is presented in the Russian discourse as a friendly pole that fights together with Russia to create a more just world order. This is despite the fact that there are players in the Arab and Muslim world who have acted or are acting contrary to Russian interests, such as the preservation of the Assad regime, which is of great importance to Moscow. According to the Russian perspective, the strengthening of relations with the Muslim world in recent times, due to the needs of the war cannot be separated from the perception of the Muslim world as a co-pole in the struggle

for a new world order against the West. Arab and Muslim countries, for the most part, did not condemn Russia in the war against Ukraine. Now, as Russia seeks new partners in lieu of the West, it sees great potential for cooperation in these countries. Lavrov also commented on this, stating that the Middle Eastern countries, including Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar are close partners of Russia. Therefore, since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Muslim pole is presented as an integral part of establishing the new world order. It is important to note that in the various references to the Muslim world in the Russian discourse regarding the multipolar world order, there is almost no mention of controversies or nuances. For example, Lavrov often [refers](#) to the multipolar world and the Muslim world as one entity, without addressing differences between Arab countries and non-Arab countries, between Shiite and Sunni, or conflicts within the Muslim world.

The importance attributed to the Muslim pole in recent times in Russia can be seen in Sergey Naryshkin's [claim](#) that in 2024, the Arab world will be a key arena in the struggle alongside Russia for the new world order. According to Naryshkin, there is a resurgence occurring in the Middle East, leading to opposition against the United States. He asserts that the Muslim world was severely damaged by the United States' attempts to maintain its dominance. Events such as the American invasion of Iraq, the Arab Spring, the war in Syria, the destruction of Libya and Yemen, the rise of ISIS, and the conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran are the result of American policy and that of other Western countries seeking to maintain their hegemony and the United States' position as the ruler of the unipolar world order. Naryshkin adds that an awakening has begun in the Middle East, and the countries in the region are no longer willing to accept American conduct. This process is demonstrated through the presence of strong leaders in Arab countries who pursue independent policies vis-à-vis the United States

and the strengthening of anti-American and anti-Western sentiment in these countries.

The 2023 foreign policy [document](#) extensively references the Muslim world, stating that the countries within the friendly Muslim pole have the potential to become an independent center in a polycentric world order. The document also states that these countries could be reliable partners, and cooperation with them could ensure stability, security, and the resolution of regional and global economic problems. Therefore, Russia aims to increase cooperation with the member countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation while respecting their social and political systems as well as their traditional spiritual and moral values.

In the Russian discourse, the significance of relations with Iran among the countries of the Muslim world is emphasized, as evident in the 2023 foreign policy document. Iran assists Russia militarily, and their relationship has deepened, even becoming a strategic alliance after the start of the war in Ukraine.

Examining the Russian considerations related to the new world order shows that the importance of the Muslim world for Russia is considerably greater than the importance of its relations with Israel, which is perceived as belonging to the enemy camp. Therefore, Russia's resolute stance alongside Hamas and its hostile position toward Israel following October 7 are not surprising.

Conclusion and Recommendations

According to the Russian perception, as mentioned earlier, the United States and Western countries are sowing destruction and chaos worldwide to maintain their hegemony and prevent the emergence of a just, multipolar world order. According to this perspective, Israel is part of the hostile pole that must be fought against, while Israel's enemies—Iran, Syria, Hamas, and others—are aligned with Russia. Although the concept of a struggle for a multipolar world order is not entirely clear and has flaws and inconsistencies, it is an

important tenet of Russia's foreign policy. In our assessment, the promotion of the idea of a multipolar world order will be a central component of Russian policy in the foreseeable future, mainly due to the ongoing war in Ukraine. Despite the significance of this concept within the highest levels of government and Israel's problematic position within it, Israel's attention to it is minimal. Israel should develop a deep understanding of this perception, which is fundamentally anti-Israel, particularly regarding the positioning of the Arab and Muslim world within the new system.

Israel's policy—to act in a way that does not “upset” Russia at the expense of relations with the West—could be detrimental, because such actions will not change Israel's position as part of the hostile camp in the perception of the multipolar world order. Israel must internalize Moscow's view of the world system and shape its policy toward Russia accordingly. Russia is a significant player in the international and regional arenas; therefore, Israel should be prepared for the possibility of Russia further escalating its relations with Israel's enemies, especially given the significant strengthening of ties between Russia and Iran following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine.

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Notes

- 1 Andrei Kozyrev began to serve as the minister of foreign affairs of the Russian Federation in 1990, prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union.
- 2 For a comprehensive overview of the term “multipolar world order” in official Russian discourse during the years 1991–2019, see A. Kortunov (2019), *Between polycentrism and bipolarity. Russia in Global Affairs*, 17(1), 10–15, <https://doi.org/10.31278/1810-6374-2019-17-1-10-51>
- 3 The official foreign policy concept documents of the Russian Federation were published in 1993, 2000, 2008, 2013, 2016, and 2023, and signed by the president of Russia.



Africa and the War in Gaza: Analyzing Israel's Current Standing and Future Prospects in Africa

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The responses of African countries to the Hamas attack and the war in Gaza shed light on Israel's strengths and weaknesses on the African continent. Analyzing the characteristics of their responses shows that it is both plausible and beneficial for Israel to strengthen its alliances with certain countries in Africa. Stepping up Israel's diplomatic efforts on the continent in the short and long term could be useful in aiding security concerns (primarily around the Red Sea), preserving and extending the accomplishments of the Abraham Accords, and improving the balance of African votes at the UN in Israel's favor.

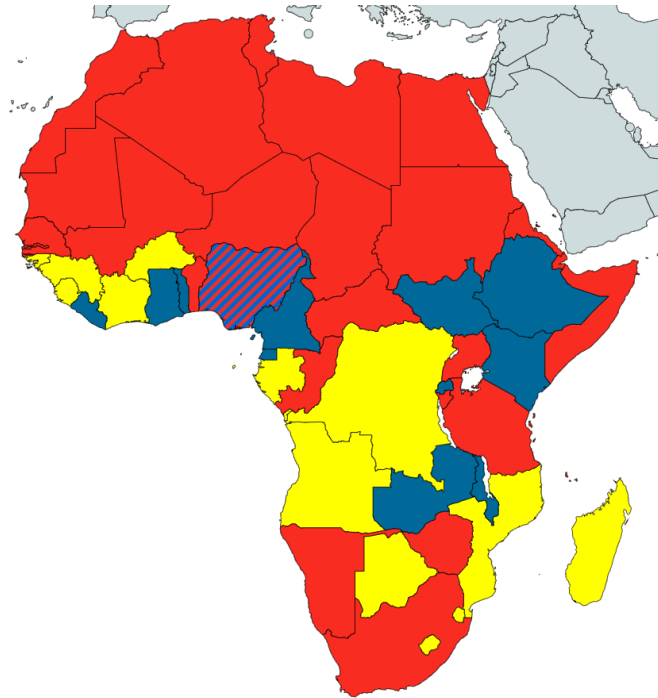
Keywords: foreign policy, Africa, Swords of Iron, UN, Red Sea, legitimacy, South Africa, Abraham Accords

In recent decades, Israel has devoted strenuous diplomatic efforts to forming and upgrading relations with various African countries. The [diplomatic history of relations](#) between Israel and Africa is dramatic. In the 1960s, Golda Meir, then Israeli foreign minister (and later prime minister), orchestrated a stormy "honeymoon" in these relations. This was followed by a period

During the recent governments of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, these relations have undergone another renaissance. Netanyahu has visited Africa five times (more than any other Israeli prime minister); Israel has opened a number of new embassies and economic offices on the continent; and since 2016, Israel has established or renewed relations with a number of Muslim countries in Africa: Guinea in 2016, Chad in 2019, and Morocco and Sudan in 2020.

of deteriorating relations following the Yom Kippur War in 1973, when Israel was almost totally expelled from Africa. In the 1980s, African countries began gradually restoring their relations with Israel. During the recent governments of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, these relations have undergone another [renaissance](#). Netanyahu has visited Africa five times (more than any other Israeli prime minister); Israel has opened a number of new embassies and economic offices on the continent; and since 2016, Israel has established or renewed relations with a number of Muslim countries in Africa: Guinea in 2016, Chad in 2019, and Morocco and Sudan in 2020. For a short time, Israel also managed to recover its observer status at the Organization of African Unity (OAU), [before being expelled from the organization in the past year](#) under pressure from South Africa and Algeria.

Figure 1: Voting by African Countries at the UN About the Gaza War (a Call for a Ceasefire and a Proposed Amendment Condemning Hamas)



Legend:

Red – Countries that consistently vote against Israel

Yellow – Countries that vote for a ceasefire with some degree of balance (abstention or absence in votes on condemning Hamas)

Blue – Countries that voted in favor of Israel at least once

Blue with red stripes – Nigeria, which changed from supporting the condemnation of Hamas to opposing it

Source: The author

Since the 1970s, however, many countries in Africa have adopted a pro-Palestinian line in international forums and have also recognized Palestine as an independent state. Although they softened this pro-Palestinian position in many cases, it persisted even after renewing relations with Israel. Most African countries realized that they could simultaneously issue pro-Palestinian statements and maintain proper bilateral relations with Israel. This dual approach complicated attempts by politicians, diplomats, and scholars to assess the effectiveness of Israel's recent efforts to forge alliances in Africa. Has Israel developed genuine alliances with African countries? Will these countries abandon Israel during a large-scale regional crisis, as has happened in the past?

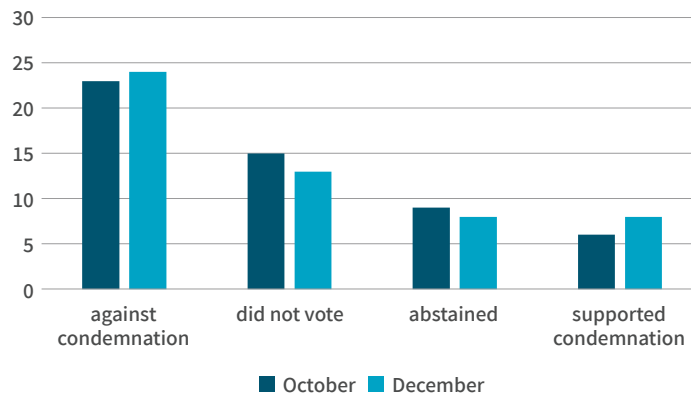
The Hamas attack on October 7, 2023 and the subsequent Swords of Iron war therefore

constitute an important test case for Israel's standing in Africa. The intensity of the events sheds new light on the nuances involved in Israel's position on the continent, highlighting which of Israel's African alliances are more solid than others. Additionally, it underscores the impact of other broad currents in Africa, such as religiosity, terrorism, and great power rivalry, on Israel's position there.

African Countries in the Wake of the Hamas Attack and the Swords of Iron War

African countries reacted [in different ways](#) to the Hamas attack on October 7 and the War in Gaza. In the days following Hamas's attack, a number of African countries condemned the atrocities, among them were Kenya, Ghana,

Figure 2: Distribution of African Countries According to the Number of Votes in October and December on the Amendment to the General Assembly Resolution (the Proposed Condemnation of Hamas)



Togo, Cameroon, Zambia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In contrast, South Africa and Arab countries in North Africa blamed Israel for the escalation. South Africa stood out as the leading [non-Muslim African country most hostile](#) to Israel. Aside from Chad, it was the only African country to recall its diplomatic representatives from Israel, and the South African Parliament [passed a resolution](#) calling on the government to completely sever its ties with Israel. In December, [South Africa demanded](#) that the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague investigate Israel for war crimes and genocide in Gaza. Yet, despite South Africa's exceptional measures since the outbreak of war, its attitude also reveals a desire for maintaining a balance between its vigorous pro-Palestinian denunciation of Israel—motivated by its leaders' declared "liberation ideology"—and its government's apparent interest to avoid completely severing relations with Israel, with which Pretoria has non-negligible economic ties.

Most African countries, including a number of countries that have good bilateral relations with Israel (such as Uganda and Angola), have either employed ambiguous and neutral language in statements or have completely ignored the war. Tanzania, two of whose citizens were murdered by Hamas, [delegated a senior diplomatic representative](#) to attend a ceremony in Israel in December in commemoration of one

of these victims, but it [has officially adhered](#) to a vague call for a de-escalation, humanitarian aid for Gaza, and continuation of the peace process in line with the two-state principle. The government of Uganda [distanced](#) itself from the pro-Israeli ruling of the Ugandan judge, Julia Sebutinde, at the ICJ. As time has passed and the war has continued, a number of countries [who initially condemned](#) Hamas have since issued vague general statements about peaceful solutions.

The litmus test of Israel's standing in Africa during the war was the UN votes on [October 27](#) and [December 12](#) (see Figures 1 and 2). The resolutions adopted on these dates called for an immediate ceasefire and did not condemn Hamas, and, thus, Israel and its close allies opposed them. These resolutions won substantial support in Africa, and even countries friendly to Israel, such as Kenya and Ghana, voted for them. At the same time, a few African countries stood by Israel. Liberia voted against the December 12 resolution, while Cameroon, South Sudan, Malawi, Cabo Verde, Equatorial Guinea, and Togo abstained on both votes. Ethiopia and Zambia abstained on the first vote but supported the later resolution.

These two votes were accompanied by votes on Western-sponsored amendments that condemned Hamas. These votes have special value in evaluating Israel's standing in Africa, and the results of these votes were more favorable

to Israel. In the vote on October 27, six countries (Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Malawi, Cabo Verde, and South Sudan) voted in favor of the amendment condemning Hamas, nine countries (among them Angola and Ivory Coast) abstained, and 15 countries cast no vote on the amendment. The results on the amendment condemning Hamas on December 12 [were slightly better](#) for Israel. Eight countries supported the condemnatory amendment, including three that had abstained or had not voted on the October 27 amendment: Rwanda, Ethiopia, and Liberia. Guinea, which had voted against the October 27 amendment, abstained on the December 12 amendment. Nigeria changed its October 27 support for condemning Hamas to opposing the amendment on December 12. Although a majority of the UN General Assembly supported both the amendments condemning Hamas, in both cases the majority was a few votes short of the two-thirds needed to pass the amendments in the General Assembly. In this case, African countries close to Israel, such as Cameroon and Zambia, which did not vote at all, could have tipped the scales in favor of Israel.

Israel's Ambiguous Standing in Africa

The responses of the African countries to the war illustrate the great discrepancy in Israel's standing in various parts of the continent. Many aspects are at play here. The prevalent religiosity in each country, the local histories of Israel's image, and each government's international orientation and security challenges all shape Israel's current position.

First, Israel's standing is relatively weak in most of the Muslim African countries. The [nine African countries](#) that do not have any diplomatic relations with Israel are all Muslim countries in North Africa, the Sahel, and the Horn of Africa. The Muslim aspect affects not only the African countries that are members of the Arab League (from Mauritania through Djibouti) but also countries with substantial non-Arab Muslim populations that were formerly considered

“moderate” in their attitude to Israel, such as [Senegal](#) and [Nigeria](#), where there have been instances of popular unrest in protest against the war in Gaza.

Israel's standing is weak in the southern part of the continent, where politicians and large parts of the population remember Israel's cooperation with their white oppressors in the 1970s and 1980s, and where the Palestinian cause enjoys relatively broad support.

Second, Israel's standing is weak in the southern part of the continent, where politicians and large parts of the population remember Israel's cooperation with their white oppressors in the 1970s and 1980s, and where the Palestinian cause enjoys relatively broad support. In recent decades, South Africa has been one of the most critical voices against Israel in Africa. The South African government's anti-Israeli stance stems from a feeling of historical and cultural [solidarity](#) with the Palestinians, accompanied by deep anti-Zionist feelings. In recent years, the South African criticism has been increasingly expressed through [support for Hamas](#) in the latter's conflicts with Israel. South Africa downgraded its representation in Israel even before the current war; the governing party in the country has expressed support for the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement; and the South African government led a successful campaign to deprive Israel of its observer status at the OAU. 2024 is also an election year in South Africa, and [there are indications](#) that for the first time, the ruling African National Congress party is likely to lose the absolute majority it has enjoyed in Parliament since the apartheid regime came to an end. An aggressive attitude toward Israel therefore also serves the ruling party in its competition with its political rivals, some of which are even more hostile to Israel. In addition to South Africa, [Namibia has also voiced](#) anti-Israel views and has expressed support for

South Africa's campaign at the International Court of Justice at The Hague to have Israel tried for genocide.

Furthermore, the weakening of American influence in Africa vis-à-vis both China and Russia in recent years has negatively affected the ability of the United States to gain support from African countries for Western interests around the world, such as the war in Ukraine and the war against Hamas. Countries that have become close to Moscow in recent years, such as the [Central African Republic](#), have also tended to adjust their UN votes to reflect Russia's views. A comparison between how the African countries have voted at the UN on the war in Ukraine and their votes on the Israel–Hamas war show some degree of correlation (albeit not absolute) between them, as well as [conspicuous overlap](#) between the countries that refrained from condemning Russia and those that refrained from condemning Hamas.

Conversely, Israel has good relations with Christian-majority countries in Eastern, Central, and Western Africa. Israel also benefits from broad popular support in those countries, which is also [supported](#) by the Christian Evangelical religious revival there (especially the Pentecostal movement), which has expanded in recent decades. This is especially true for countries that also face Islamist terrorism (whether Sunni Jihadi terrorism or terrorism linked to Iran and Hezbollah). Kenya, which is being [challenged by Sunni Islamists](#) from Somalia and has also been affected by the attacks of the Houthis in the Red Sea, is a prime example of this, as are South Sudan and the Christian population in southern Nigeria. [A survey](#) conducted in 2007 by the Pew Research Center in a number of African countries shows that the publics in Ivory Coast, Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia, and Ghana tend to be more sympathetic to Israel in the conflict with the Palestinians, while in Senegal, Mali, Tanzania, and Nigeria, which have Muslim majorities, sympathy for the Palestinians is much greater. South Africa, despite its official hostility toward Israel, has a considerable

African Christian population that is supportive of Israel, particularly among members of the Evangelical faith.

It should be emphasized that most African countries, including those severely critical of Israel, such as South Africa, are still following a dual policy that includes having both extensive bilateral ties with Israel and expressing criticism or neutrality toward it through voting on the Palestinian issue in international forums. As of the writing of this article, not a single African country—including the Muslim countries that have recently established relations with Israel, such as Chad, Sudan, Guinea, and [Morocco](#)—has officially severed its relations with Israel. From a historical perspective, this alone is an Israeli achievement; as noted, during the Yom Kippur War and in its aftermath, more than 20 African countries broke off diplomatic relations with Israel (then it was a result of a combination of Arab pressure and disappointment with the benefit of their relations with Israel). This act led to the almost complete expulsion of Israel from the continent, a development that is recalled as one of the biggest catastrophes in the history of Israel's foreign relations. Breaking off relations by African countries around events related to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict also happened in the first decade of the 21st century: Niger and Mauritania broke off relations with Israel following the Second Intifada and Operation Cast Lead (respectively), but this has so far not occurred during the current war. The fact that the Persian Gulf monarchies, which are very influential in parts of Africa, are not exerting pressure to sever relations has also influenced the moderate responses on the continent.

Conclusions and Paths Forward

Despite the official vague or neutral stances that many African states have adopted regarding the war, there is substantial potential for support for Israel in large sections of Africa. Growing activities by Jihadist groups in Central, East, and West Africa cause the struggle against Hamas to resonate in some African countries. Such

countries see, or can see, the Israel– Hamas war as another manifestation of their own struggle against Jihadism, and they are able to understand its urgency and necessity. At the same time, the wish of many African countries to avoid becoming involved in the Israeli– Palestinian conflict and to maintain proper relations with the Arab world (or other forces critical of Israel, such as Turkey, China, and Russia) has caused them to adopt a neutral or equivocal stance on the issue. Israeli diplomatic efforts to better communicate the horrors of October 7 to Africans may be effective in raising sympathy in parts of Africa, due to the similarity of the violent terrorist attacks that both Africans and Israelis have had to endure in recent decades.

Africa is important to Israel for many reasons, even during wartime. Severance of ties with Israel by an African state may cause a domino effect and undermine the prospects for renewing the impetus of the Abraham Accords after the war. African votes at the UN, as mentioned earlier, could have actually made a difference when it came to the organization’s condemnation of Hamas. There are also security and economic benefits to relations with Africa. The escalation of the Houthi threat in the Red Sea requires an enhanced presence in the region and emboldened strategic alliances. Countries such as Kenya and Ethiopia (which is [currently seeking](#) access to the Red Sea) may prove effective security partners in this context. Given certain circumstances, Eritrea, which is strategically located close to the Houthi territory, may assent to security cooperation (in the past, [Eritrea hosted](#) a base of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) used in operations against the Houthis), despite its current troubled relations with Israel. Somaliland, a de facto independent country that is not recognized by Israel (or by most of the world), even though [its leadership has previously expressed](#) positive views about Israel, may also be relevant in this context. In view of the events in the Red Sea, Israel may want to reconsider its relations with this

polity. Economically, the example of the Israeli [agreement](#) with Malawi to employ Malawian agricultural workers in Israel in response to the labor shortage caused by the war reflects some of the economic potential of relations with African states during wartime.

The escalation of the Houthi threat in the Red Sea requires an enhanced presence in the region and emboldened strategic alliances. Countries such as Kenya and Ethiopia (which is currently seeking access to the Red Sea) may prove effective security partners in this context.

Officially, Israel has not invested major resources in its relations with Africa and it seems to lack thorough strategic planning for its ties with the continent. The Israeli efforts on the continent have been based largely on a slim diplomatic cadre, the presence of non-governmental organizations (in diverse spheres, from humanitarian aid to agricultural startups and security industries), and leveraging the prestige of Israel’s alliance with Washington. Expanding these efforts is likely to improve Israel’s standing in Africa. Moreover, Israel should consider ways of collaborating with religious communities across the continent that feel an affinity for the Jewish state and it should rethink how to translate these feelings of sympathy into stronger connections. Special attention to countries that share Israel’s challenges in combating terrorism and Iranian expansionism may substantiate deeper alliances, in which security will only be one, however crucial, aspect. The fact that the UAE has been pursuing a vigorous African policy—it was the [largest external investor](#) in Africa in 2023—and that Abu Dhabi and Jerusalem share many interests may also be part of this new Israeli vision needed for its relations with Africa.

Israel’s diplomacy during crises tends to focus on its relations with the West, whose support Israel deems necessary for the basic functions of its military and economy during

war. This focus, however, leads to the neglect of other regions, among them Africa. Israel's foreign policymakers should realize that paying more attention to the continent (even if aimed largely at specific strategic countries) is likely to reap rewards. Such efforts should include clear messages about the similarity between Hamas and the terrorist organizations currently spreading and expanding throughout large parts

of Africa and that the survival of Hamas will negatively affect Africa's stability and will boost both Jihadist groups and Iranian intervention on the continent.

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South Africa and the Claim Israel Is Committing Genocide in Gaza

Arthur Lenk

South Africa initiated a legal proceeding against Israel at the International Court of Justice on December 29, 2023, claiming that Israel violated its obligations under the Genocide Convention. This action should not come as surprising, given the history of South Africa in its relations with Israel and the Palestinians over the years and given South Africa's domestic and foreign policy needs and priorities entering 2024. This article reviews South Africa's history of relations with both the Palestinians and Israel and how it has responded to them since the Hamas massacre of October 7, 2023. It also looks at some trends in South African foreign policy and reaches a number of conclusions regarding the benefits and risks for South Africa in submitting the case before the court.

Keywords: South Africa, International Court of Justice, genocide, lawfare, Gaza, Palestine, Israel, international law

Introduction

South Africa initiated a [legal proceeding](#) against Israel at the International Court of Justice on December 29, 2023, claiming that Israel violated its obligations under the Genocide Convention. This action should not be seen as surprising given the history of South Africa in its relations with Israel and the Palestinians over the years and given South Africa's domestic and foreign policy needs and priorities entering 2024.

Although there is certainly a significant amount of cynicism and opportunism in the action, taken on behalf of the Palestinians, the step fits with the positions and statements of South Africa since the beginning of the current war between Israel and Gaza, which began with Hamas's massacre in Israel on October 7, 2023.

It is almost certain that the procedure was undertaken at the request of the Palestinians, as Palestine has not joined the Genocide Convention. The documents were likely prepared by an international legal team that

works with the Palestinian Negotiation Affairs Department (NAD) with many locally sourced quotes, details, and numbers and only lightly edited with South African touches. South Africa does not have any meaningful local presence or inside knowledge to have been able to develop such a filing. A similar tactic of using a replacement plaintiff occurred in 2013 when the Union of Comoros made a referral against Israel to the International Criminal Court (ICC) after the Mavi Marmara incident, because Turkey could not do it, as it is not an ICC State Party. In addition, in November 2023, five countries—including South Africa—filed a referral against Israel to the ICC regarding the current war in Gaza.

Even if the claim may seem bizarre and even frivolous to many Israelis and their supporters, there is an internal logic to the action from the perspective of the South African government, despite the real reputational risks involved. This article will attempt to explain the historic and

policy considerations that led to South Africa's submission of a document that it did not have the resources to create but acted as a proxy for the Palestinians in its lawfare with Israel.

Historical Relations With Palestine

The African National Congress (ANC), the primary South African liberation movement established in 1912 and banned in 1960, engaged in foreign relations during much of the period as it fought against apartheid in the country. It built relations with allies and supporters across Africa and the globe, such as the Soviet Union, China, and Cuba, which offered training, political support, and funding. The ANC also found common cause with other liberation movements around the world, including the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

Much of the ANC's foreign policy has preserved relations with its historic allies, including with the PLO. One of the first meetings Mandela held after his release from prison was with PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat, who joined a delegation of leaders. Despite pressure from many in the West and from South Africa's Jewish community, Mandela continued to preserve and develop that relationship. South Africa formally recognized Palestine as an independent state in 1995.

For years, the ANC was known around the world for its fight against apartheid in South Africa. Key steps in South Africa's post-apartheid transformation included the unbanning of the ANC and the release of Nelson Mandela after 27 years in prison, both in February 1990. Four years later, democratic elections led to the ANC becoming the ruling party in South Africa, and it has held an absolute majority in every election since, even as its reputation has been deeply damaged due to corruption and ineffectiveness in many spheres.

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An iconic Mandela quote from a [speech in Pretoria in December 1997](#) marking the International Day of Solidarity with Palestinian People promised, "But we know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians; without the resolution of conflicts in East Timor, the Sudan and other parts of the world." Over the years, the semicolon was replaced by a period and the second half of the sentence disappeared, with the quote commonly cited as only referring to the Palestinians.

South Africa's government [funds the Palestinian embassy in South Africa](#) (it did the same for the partially recognized Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, supporting it against Morocco over the disputed territory of Western Sahara). It has long had a diplomatic representative to the Palestinian Authority, formally a staff member of the South African Embassy in Israel, but who acts independently and is considered in South Africa as its ambassador to Palestine. Certainly, South Africa's legacy of civil society activism for the Palestinians goes back to the controversial 2001 Durban World Conference against Racism, another important South Africa–Palestinian connection.

Relations With Israel

In the early 1960s Israel actually supported the ANC in [anti-apartheid votes in the United Nations](#). This position was consistent with Israel's early period outreach to Africa in the [1950s and 1960s](#). In fact, the vote at the UN against South Africa drew [aggressive protests from Hendrik Verwoerd](#), the South African prime minister. After the Six-Day War in 1967

and especially the Yom Kippur War in 1973, Israel found itself isolated in Africa with most countries cutting off relations; it saw the connection with South Africa as a path to alleviate that challenge. Israel's relations with the apartheid government grew, and the two sides developed [significant economic and military ties](#).

Israel eventually ended those ties under pressure from the international community and its boycott of South Africa, and particularly at the request of the United States—the Reagan administration and the US Congress. The heyday of the Oslo peace process in the early 1990s provided an opening to relations between Israel and the newly democratic government led by Nelson Mandela. In fact, President Ezer Weizman was a guest at Mandela's historic presidential inauguration ceremony in May 1994 and attended a [private meeting with Mandela](#)—later joined by Yasser Arafat—immediately following the ceremony.

During the presidency of Mandela's successor, Thabo Mbeki, [a private meeting was arranged between Palestinians and Israeli peace activists](#) in 2002 at a presidential retreat at Spier Farm, near Cape Town. Mbeki and then deputy Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert developed a personal relationship, and ties between the two countries [grew in the short term](#). Some of these developments were due to South Africa's hope that it could play a role in a renewed peace process between Israelis and Palestinians based on that meeting at Spier Farm.

Nevertheless, for the most part, South Africa saw itself both as a leader in the non-aligned movement and an ally of the Palestinians. Although it regularly called for a two-state solution, South Africa increasingly tilted its relationship toward the Palestinians and away from any engagement with Israel. It has left behind any aspirations of Mandela or Mbeki to positively impact a Middle East peace process. For the past decade, at least, Israeli and South African ministers have not held any public meetings. From 2013–2017, when I served as Israel's ambassador to South Africa, the then

minister of international relations would not meet with me, even once. In 2018, South Africa [recalled its resident ambassador](#) to Israel and has not replaced him.

South Africa's Reaction Since the Events of October 7, 2023

On October 7, South Africa's Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) issued a statement calling for an immediate ceasefire, even as the Hamas massacre in Israel was still happening. It made no mention of Hamas, the killing of 1,200 Israelis, or the taking of hostages. [That statement](#), in fact, blamed Israel for the events of that day: "The new conflagration has arisen from the continued illegal occupation of Palestine land, continued settlement expansion, desecration of the Al Aqsa Mosque and Christian holy sites, and ongoing oppression of the Palestinian people."

In mid-October, South Africa's Minister of International Relations Naledi Pandor had a controversial phone conversation with Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh. After Hamas released a readout thanking South Africa for calling and expressing support, [DIRCO issued a "clarification"](#) and claimed that the conversation occurred in response to a "request to call" Haniyeh and that "Minister Pandor reiterated South Africa's solidarity and support for the people of Palestine and expressed sadness and regret for the loss of innocent lives [of] both Palestinians and Israelis."

Regardless of the exchange during that conversation, in late November, a delegation of [Hamas officials visited South Africa](#), apparently as guests of the ANC. This was not the first time Hamas officials had visited the country, and there are even claims, denied by South African government officials, that Hamas has opened an office in the country. Earlier that month, South Africa recalled its remaining diplomats and temporarily shuttered its embassy in Israel. As South Africa's Parliament prepared to vote to call for the closure of Israel's Embassy (a non-binding resolution was passed with a significant

majority), [Israel recalled its ambassador](#) for consultations, criticizing South Africa's aggressive statements made against it.

Another change has been playing fast and loose with international human rights. Mandela's South Africa was once considered a shining example to the world, having overcome apartheid with a new constitution and having undertaken a mostly peaceful transformation to a democracy. More recently, however, South Africa's global reputation has been challenged by its being rebuked by the ICC for refusing to arrest Sudan's Omar al-Bashir, wanted for crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide in Darfur, and instead spiriting him out of South Africa and for having a more realpolitik view of international law.

In mid-December, President Cyril [Ramaphosa met with a delegation](#) from South Africa's Jewish Board of Deputies where both sides aired their concerns, but very little common ground seemingly was found. Interestingly, the board noted that Ramaphosa stated that although the government did not plan to break off relations between the two countries, South Africa's diplomats would only return to Israel at the end of the war. This meeting was another example of the complicated situation of South Africa's small but vibrant Jewish community, which has existed for well over 180 years. The majority of the community remains loyal citizens while deeply identifying with Israel.

[South Africa's application to the ICJ](#), submitted on December 29, lists many of its own public statements and speeches that express its views on the question of genocide. The application even includes a condemnation of Hamas's attack on Israelis, sent quite belatedly to Israel:

South Africa unequivocally condemns the targeting of Israeli and foreign national civilians by Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups and the taking of hostages on 7 October

2023, as expressly recorded in its Note Verbale to Israel of 21 December 2023.

Some Trends in South African Foreign Policy

South Africa is quite proudly the "S" in the BRICS international grouping, an acronym for Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. Since joining BRICS in 2010, one year after the organization was formed to expand economic ties between the countries, South Africa has deepened its relations with the other members, especially Russia and China. As the smallest of the primary group of countries, before welcoming five additional members earlier this month, South Africa sees BRICS as a forum where it can be seen as a large, successful international player.

One of South Africa's key international positions has been its [support of Russia in the war](#) against Ukraine. Similar to its relationship with the Palestinians, the friendship with Russia is a legacy of the ANC's earlier era of struggle and the movement's connections to the Soviet Union. The fact that Ukraine was also part of the Soviet Union has not deterred South Africa from actively voting and working behind the scenes in support of Russia at the United Nations and other international fora.

This pro-Russia policy has rankled the United States in its attempt to build an international coalition to support Ukraine. The US–South Africa relationship came to a head in December 2022 after the *Lady R*, a sanctioned Russian ship carrying military cargo, docked at a naval port in the city of Simon's Town, near Cape Town. The American ambassador to South Africa accused the South Africans of secretly supplying arms to Russia. While the two sides seem to have smoothed over the issue after an [investigation](#), for awhile it seemed that South Africa could lose its preferred trade relationship with the United States within the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA).

Another change has been [playing fast and loose with international human rights](#).

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Conclusions

Many South Africans may know that screaming claims about “genocide” and “apartheid” in reference to Israel and not making similar claims against Sudan or Iran sound cynical and hypocritical to some in the West. It seems that South Africa has prioritized its benefits in organizations such as BRICS in recent years over its former “rainbow nation” reputation. South Africa's continued movement toward BRICS and its drift away from the United States and Europe fit with a one-sided position regarding Israel–Palestine and is certainly not a model for peacemaking. By moving in that direction, it joins other, more realpolitik countries, such as China and Russia.

South Africa will be holding elections this year. Recent polling has shown that support for the ANC continues to decline, as it has in recent years, with some political commentators believing that the party may not have an absolute majority for the first time. Some members of the ANC hope that the government's vocal, international effort to show a radically pro-Palestinian position may be a nod toward the one million Muslims in the country who

primarily live in the Western Cape—the one province not controlled by the ANC. Although the Muslim population has not traditionally voted for the ANC, there is little to lose in trying to reach these middle-class voters.

The ANC cadres are nostalgic for the heroic days of the freedom struggle. Seeing themselves as standing behind claims of international law and justice against the suffering of their Palestinian comrades fits that narrative nicely, even if it is a rose-colored memory of glorious bygone days. Given the elections, the ANC may also be trying to change the public narrative, which has focused on the usual domestic stories of entrenched corruption, massive electricity shortages, violent crime, infrastructure failures, and an unbreakable cycle of unemployment.

South Africa is open to putting its name on the process at the ICJ and in joining with others in a complaint to the ICC against Israel. The action can serve as a counterbalance to South Africa's opposing the use of international law against Russia or past discussions that it made about leaving the ICC. It also serves as an attempt to reframe South Africa as a protector of international humanitarian law while possibly giving South Africa some international credence. Even if the ICJ rejects the claim, South Africa will remain a loyal champion of the Palestinian cause with very little risk or downside despite the myriad of ways South Africa could gain from more responsible Western gazing leadership.

Although the United States may seem overburdened in preserving friends and allies, it should push back. Some in South Africa feel that it is free to move even closer toward BRICS without repercussions in terms of AGOA benefits or American HIV assistance. As the United States seems to have backed down regarding its Lady R threats, then perhaps South Africa faces even less risk in acting against Israel. However, the Americans could potentially influence South Africa if they are willing to use issues like access to AGOA trade benefits as a lever.

Israel and South Africa share very few strategic interests and have almost no direct

interaction, making the price of leading this action quite low for South Africa. The South African government has shown no interest in promoting bilateral trade, despite the existence of meaningful business-to-business (B2B) contacts between the two countries and a significant South African expat community in Israel. Part of this may be due to the fact that the Jewish community in South Africa is small and aging and does not support the ANC in any meaningful way, neither as voters nor economically.

Therefore, Israel should not necessarily focus on grievances with South Africa until that country revisits its decision regarding friendly bilateral relations. Israel has a wide range of important and friendly partners across

Africa, and it does not share any critical national priorities with South Africa, other than its South African Jewish brothers and sisters. As for the ICJ case, Israel's focus should be on its legal arguments, as its legal team impressively did on January 12, 2024, presenting before the Court in a convincing manner why the South African claim of genocide has no merit, even if there might be room for criticism during the war in Gaza.

Arthur Lenk was Israel's ambassador to South Africa from 2013–2017. He also served as ambassador to Azerbaijan and as director of the Department of International Law at Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



China–UAE Space Cooperation: Risk or Opportunity for Israel?

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Abstract

In 2011, the American Congress passed the Wolf Amendment, which prohibits NASA from collaborating with China and organizations identified with China on space research. However, as shown in this paper, information collected by NASA and the Israeli Space Agency could reach China indirectly through the United Arab Emirates, which collaborates with both the United States, Israel, and China. Could collaboration with the UAE on space research put Israel at risk and lead to friction with the US (for example, in a situation where Israeli technology passes from the UAE to China), or could the UAE precedent pave the way for broader collaborations in the field of space that could create new opportunities for Israel?

Keywords: China, United Arab Emirates, United States, Israel, space

Introduction

The field of space research demands enormous investment of resources, and it is therefore largely controlled by central players such as the United States, Russia, and China. Smaller countries with limited resources that seek to participate in the game must create technological collaborations with large space powers. In most cases, countries do not collaborate simultaneously with countries from both “blocs” but only with countries belonging to their “space bloc”—the European–American bloc or the Chinese–Russian bloc. An exception to this rule is the United Arab Emirates, which maintains simultaneous collaborations with the US and China. After signing the Abraham Accords, Israel, which sees itself as part of the European–American bloc, began to set up collaborations on space

research with the UAE. The question arises whether these collaborations lead to the transfer of advanced technologies from Israel to China via the UAE, thus putting Israel’s collaborations with the US at risk, or could they create new opportunities for Israel and pave the way to broader collaborations in the field of space research?

China’s Space Program

During the era of the “space race,” which began in 1957 when the Soviet satellite Sputnik 1 was launched, the great powers were exposed not only to the scientific, economic, and technological benefits of space research but also to its inherent security advantages. At that time, in the context of the struggle between the US and the Soviet Union, China began to formulate its own space program, led by Qian Xuesen, a Chinese engineer who had studied

in the US and had helped found NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, but then was arrested and deported from the US in 1955, accused of being a communist. At the end of the 1960s and in the early 1970s, when the space race between the two powers reached its peak with the landing on the moon, Mao Zedong decided that China must not fall behind and started to accelerate the Chinese space program. In 1970, China successfully launched its first satellite (Dong Fang Hong 1); some five years later, it launched its first reconnaissance satellite FSW-0—a capability that until then only the US and the Soviet Union possessed. Since then, China successfully launched a range of satellites including communications, meteorological, and tracking systems and developed a stable infrastructure of space institutions, comprising R&D centers, launch sites, tracking stations and centers, and production facilities.

The Gulf War in 1991, considered the first war in which space played a significant role in the fighting, marked a turning point in China's concept of using space technologies. In this conflict, the US enjoyed unfettered access to space-based technologies for tracking, communications, and navigation, while NATO placed an embargo on all satellite data for Saddam Hussein. The war clearly illustrated the advantage a country with access to developed space technology held compared to one without such access. After the war, China reassessed American capabilities and accelerated the development of its space technologies.

Until the 1990s, China's space capabilities remained limited, but as the pace of the bilateral space race slowed down during that decade, China began to expand its space collaborations. Using the China Great Wall Industry Corporation (CGWIC), it began supplying relatively cheap launch services (compared to the US) to foreign clients. The success rate of these launches proved low, and [a series of accidents](#) weakened trust in Chinese technology. A particularly serious disaster occurred in February 1996 when the Chinese launch vehicle Long March

3B failed during a launch, veered off course, and collided with the American communications satellite Intelsat 708, killing six people. China received help from American companies to understand the causes of the failures and dramatically improved Chinese rockets with their assistance. However, China later used the technological information from the Americans to develop intercontinental ballistic missile technology, provoking [strong criticism](#) from US security officials and politicians. After this episode, the US Congress passed laws limiting information sharing with Chinese space companies and banned satellites with American-made components from launching on Chinese rockets.

The combination of technical failures and fears of information theft significantly damaged China's ability to partner with Western countries in space research. Therefore, China began participating in projects with [developing countries](#) such as Nigeria, Venezuela, Laos, Bolivia, and Pakistan that wanted to access space technology benefits but could not purchase Western options. At first, China supplied satellites, launch vehicles, and other infrastructure, and then, seeking to reduce costs, it began offering launch services instead of selling the technological infrastructure it manufactured. This approach increased China's autonomy and control of space technologies, and, as discussed below, it is still used (in one form or another) in the satellite services China supplies as part of its Digital Silk Road venture.

The Chinese space industry grew significantly in the first decade of the 21st century with advances in rockets, communications satellites, and remote sensor capability. But in January 2007, China carried out a test of anti-satellite weapons (ASAT), creating extensive space debris and leading to [fierce international criticism](#). The test exposed the vulnerability of various space systems (particularly American ones). It was perceived as a return to the aggressive space activities after the Cold War (although space was militarized during the Cold War, the US and

Soviet Union avoided such tests). Following this test, the US passed the [Wolf Amendment](#) (2011), banning NASA from hosting Chinese citizens at its facilities and participating in joint scientific activity with China.

American-imposed restrictions, however, failed to halt advances in Chinese space technology, partly due to China's economic growth. China continued to record space achievements: In 2013, it became the third country ever to land a mission on the moon with [Chang'e-3](#); in 2019, it became the first country to land on the moon's far side with [Chang'e-4 rover](#); and in 2020, it successfully sent a mission to Mars with [Chang'e-5](#).

In recent years, [China has intensified](#) its international space collaborations. Since 2016, it signed numerous space cooperation agreements and treaties with countries and international organizations. Additionally, as part of its Digital Silk Road initiative and to establish a global network of space infrastructures, including satellite navigation and communication systems, China continues supplying space solutions to developing countries and offers launch services, spacecraft, and ground support (to bypass US restrictions). Particularly noteworthy is its BeiDou system—competing with America's Global Positioning System (GPS), Russia's GLONASS, and Europe's Galileo—which China uses to provide [satellite services](#) to countries (including the UAE), conferring significant security and intelligence advantages.

Although treaties and agreements limit the military's use of space, and there are currently no known weapons in space, most achievements in countries' civilian space programs are directly linked to the same technologies (with adaptations) in the military. Therefore, space now constitutes a "fourth environment" integral to military action after land, sea, and air. Decades after the 1966 [Treaty on Outer Space](#) fostered a relatively peaceful space environment and encouraged East-West cooperation, countries are now reviving space activities with offensive capabilities. For example, Russia and the United

States engage in maneuvers close to satellites of other countries and have developed secretive dual-use systems. In 2018, America published its first national space strategy, recognizing that its rivals had turned space into a battlefield.

In 2013, it became the third country ever to land a mission on the moon with Chang'e-3.

The UAE and Space Research

The UAE signed the [Artemis Accords](#), a series of international agreements between several countries, including the US and Israel, which state that signatories will share scientific data, provide each other with assistance in emergencies on the moon, and will use lunar research for peaceful aims only. China did not sign the agreement, however, claiming that the US unilaterally tried to impose its will and values on the entire international system by outlining the rules of the game and its boundaries and by setting the agenda of the next era of lunar research. The UAE—a long-standing strategic partner of the US and China's close strategic ally (in [a comprehensive strategic partnership](#))—continues to collaborate with both powers in lunar research, education, and launching, despite having received extensive NASA aid for some space projects and the fierce competition and growing tensions between the US and China. The conduct of the UAE makes it an exception in international space collaborations since, as mentioned, countries usually only cooperate within the same bloc, either European-American or Chinese-Russian.

The 2006 UAE space program launch was part of a broad program intended to diversify the oil-based economy toward one based on knowledge and innovation. In 2014, the UAE Space Agency was established and since then, the country became the Arab world's most important space power with achievements, including successful launchings of observation satellites, launching the Rashid Moon probe, and [sending the Hope research probe](#) to Mars in

2020, which was launched by a Japanese rocket but positioned the UAE as one of five countries successfully sending a Mars probe. The UAE was motivated not only by economic priorities but also by security considerations. Understanding that a developed space industry would serve as a technological engine and accelerate progress as well, the UAE recognized the need to establish [technology, scientific knowledge, and personnel](#) for an independent space infrastructure similar to Israel's. However, unlike Israel, the UAE does not have independent launch capabilities and therefore has had to rely on other countries (and private companies) to develop and launch its research and communications satellites, and even for military ones. Therefore, in recent years, the [UAE has been motivated](#) to move toward greater independence in space, relating not just to prestige and competition but also to the need to address potential threats, especially from Iran. Therefore, the UAE has created academic partnerships to strengthen its scientific-human infrastructure.

The UAE launched the Mars 2117 initiative to establish the first human settlement on Mars by 2117.

In 2013, the UAE purchased from French companies [two advanced French reconnaissance satellites](#) (Falcon Eye), which provide images with at least a reported 0.7-meter resolution (after the [US imposed difficulties](#) on the deal, causing delays). In August 2022, the UAE military reportedly discussed purchasing [space weapons](#) from Turkey. The security context did not escape Israeli attention, and in 2021, Shlomi Sudri, general manager of the Space Division of the Israel Aerospace Industries [claimed that the UAE–Israel](#) military space collaboration had potential due to the shared concerns for Iranian hostility. But unlike Israel, which can independently launch and operate small, advanced satellites, the UAE relies on foreign assistance to launch larger satellites.

UAE Collaborations With China and the US in the Space Sphere

In 2015, the UAE Space Agency and China signed a [memorandum of understanding](#) (MoU) on space-related collaboration and since then have worked together on technology, education, and research projects:

Launches: The China Great Wall Industry Corporation assisted in launching several UAE-owned satellites. China's Long March 2C rocket launched the Emirates' first observation satellite, KhalifaSat, into space. China also provided technical manufacturing support for the DunaiSat-2 satellite.

Satellites: In 2016, the League of Arab States promoted using China's BeiDou global navigation satellite system. China and the UAE also partnered to build a space center in Abu Dhabi to develop remote-sensing satellites for monitoring Emirati agriculture, strengthening oil and border security, and providing information services.

Regulation: In 2021, the UAE and China signed an MoU on cooperation in space law to promote collaboration in areas such as space research, satellite activity, and space debris management.

Space Education and Research: Khalifa University of Science and Technology in the UAE and the Chinese Academy of Sciences signed an agreement to collaborate on scientific research, including astrophysics and space materials. The Emirates Institution for Advanced Science & Technology (EIAST) signed contracts with Chinese space companies and institutions on various initiatives. In 2021, Dubai's MBRSC (Mohammed Bin Rashid Space Center) hosted a joint UAE–China space research forum, bringing together experts from both countries to discuss joint space research and collaboration opportunities.

Other Areas: The UAE launched the [Mars 2117 initiative](#) to establish the first human settlement on Mars by 2117. China expressed interest in collaborating on aspects like technological R&D and astronaut training. Also, Origin Space, a

Shenzhen-based Chinese company that exploits space resources (including asteroid mining), announced it was setting up an exhibition and R&D center in Abu Dhabi's Khalifa industrial zone. In September 2022, MBRSC and the China National Space Administration signed an agreement to [collaborate on lunar rover missions](#). The 2026 Chang'e-7 mission plans to carry the UAE Rashid 2 rover to the moon's South Pole region to study the crater floor for potential ice reserves (an essential resource for human habitation on the moon). This mission intends to lay the foundation for a China-led international Moon research station.

The US also collaborates with the UAE in the space sphere. The first Emirati [astronaut was invited to visit](#) the International Space Station (ISS) in April 2019. In 2020, the UAE's Hope satellite—built at the University of Colorado's Laboratory for Atmospheric and Space Physics (LASP) with American-made components and extensive mission coordination and cooperation from NASA—was launched. In October 2020, the UAE Space Agency [signed the Artemis Accords](#).

Additionally, NASA and the UAE Space Agency signed agreements to collaborate on human space flights. As part of the agreement with MBRSC, and in cooperation with it, both agencies will examine the feasibility of field studies and biology research in space. The project utilizes NASA's Human Research Analog and the UAE's Mars Scientific City, which are uniquely designed to investigate the effects of space flight on humans.

The UAE and the Inter-Power Struggles

The relationship between China and the UAE has been somewhat overshadowed by the competitive rivalry between China and the US. For years, the UAE, like other Gulf countries, adopted a hedging strategy to improve its status and prosperity while at the same time it has sought to gain influence over the US. Survival motivations drive this strategy, allowing the Gulf states to express their dissatisfaction

with US policy. Although the UAE is critical of American policy in the Gulf, especially regarding its security alliances, it views its partnership with China positively, which it sees as stable, predictable, and dependable.

It was specifically the [Houthi missile attacks](#) on the UAE—[dubbed the UAE's 9/11](#)—in early 2022 that led to a [belated and weak American response](#) in the eyes of the UAE. Despite the considerable differences between the attacks, the UAE compares them to the Iranian attack on Saudi facilities in 2019. Moreover, the Gulf states are worried not just about the American inattentiveness to their security problems, especially the threat posed by Iran, but also about US force reductions. The US Central Command (CENTCOM) forces [declined by 85%](#) from its peak in 2008, with 2023–2024 already seeing a [15% cut in forces](#), including in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The war in Ukraine and the ensuing energy crisis have strengthened the perception of some of the Gulf states that [they are critical assets](#). Even if they are overstating their value, the growing Chinese involvement amid the competition between the great powers provides them with an incentive to intensify their hedging. Led by the UAE, some of the Gulf states are leveraging their enhanced status to promote their national interests, believing that the US will have to make the necessary adjustments.

Indeed, the Gulf hedging strategy seems to bear fruit, given the policy adjustments the US has begun to make. A change in American policy is evident, for example, in relation to the tensions between the US and Saudi Arabia during the first two years of the Biden administration. Currently, the US is discussing with Saudi Arabia about upgrading its relations, including a defense treaty, advanced weapons, and civilian nuclear collaboration, and reportedly including permission to enrich uranium. Also, in September 2023, the US and Bahrain signed [a comprehensive agreement \(C-SIPA\)](#), which includes prominent security components. These US policy adjustments have

not yet reached the UAE, and the US may be ambivalent about these policy shifts. Although these shifts indicate US recognition of the need to change its policies toward the Gulf states and respond to their demands, at the same time, the incentives offered to Saudi Arabia—the UAE’s competitive neighbor—and especially the willingness to enrich uranium, do not sit well with Abu Dhabi, which gave up this capability to gain nuclear cooperation with Washington.

In 2023, China–UAE cooperation moved forward in security, banking, energy, trade, and diplomacy. China constitutes the UAE’s largest trading partner, with (non-oil) [trade worth \\$72 billion](#) in 2022, a rise of 18% since 2021. The UAE—a logistic, banking, and energy hub—also represents China’s [largest trading partner](#) in the Middle East. In 2021, the US leaked information about security ties between China and the UAE, specifically noting construction at the Khalifa Port of a military facility on a container platform managed by the Chinese shipping company COSCO. The US also identified Chinese military involvement in the construction of an airfield in the UAE. In April 2023, it was reported that [work at the port continued](#), while activity of the Chinese military was identified at several UAE bases, where drones and rocket defense systems were operating. It should be noted that these are areas of collaboration between Israel and the UAE.

In November 2023, [US intelligence agencies warned](#) that the collaboration with the Emirati company G42 with Chinese companies, including telecommunications company Huawei, could be used to transfer technology and data on millions of Americans to the Chinese government. In 2021, the same company, G42, [signed an agreement](#) with the Israeli company Rafael to set up a joint company for artificial intelligence technology and big data for the civilian market. In the space sphere, in November 2023, the UAE’s Sharjah University [signed an MoU](#) to collaborate with China on its permanent international lunar research station that China plans to build on the moon by the

2020s. This initiative is seen as competing with NASA’s Artemis program.

Growing cooperation between the UAE and China in space and other spheres has not escaped US attention. [According to reports](#), the agreement to fly the UAE Rover aboard the Chang’e-7 mission breached the US government’s International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR). These regulations ban the sale or export of defense-linked components, technologies, or software to limit access by certain parties, such as China, to sensitive US-made components. Following American pressure, it was reported that the UAE ultimately [renounced its partnership](#) with China on this mission.

UAE–Israel Space Research Collaborations

As part of the Abraham Accords, the UAE Space Agency [signed an MoU](#) with its Israeli counterpart to increase cooperation in space research and accelerate economic growth and human progress. Although the Israeli government has chosen at this stage to focus only on collaborations in the field of water and desertification issues, in which both countries have a mutual interest, Israel and the UAE have begun several collaborations in the sphere of space:

- The countries launched [a joint Israeli–Emirati research](#) project analyzing data from the earth observation satellite VENμS. In part, the Israel Space Agency will share with the UAE Space Agency the satellite data collected by the micro-satellite, which also serves France.
- Universities in Israel and the UAE are promoting joint projects and sharing information they have collected and discovered. For example, researchers from the Asher Space Institute at the Technion, together with the UAE’s National Space & Science Center and ImageSat International (ISI), intend to launch a satellite by the end of the decade to the first Lagrange point (L1) at a distance of about one and a half

million kilometers from Earth. The aim of this project, called Cool Earth, is to demonstrate for the first time the technological feasibility of neutralizing the effects of global warming by spreading a sail in space to block some of the sun's radiation from reaching planet Earth.

- It was agreed that the UAE will assist in developing scientific instruments for Israel's Beresheet2- mission.
- Apart from signing the Artemis Accords, Israel and the UAE are also members of the I2U2 group, established in 2021, which also includes India and the United States. At the group's first summit meeting in July 2022, the countries declared their intention to cooperate in various fields, including space research (as part of the US attempt to [compete with similar Chinese initiatives](#)).
- Israel does not perceive the possibility of advanced technologies leaking through these collaborations to China or Iran as a serious risk. Adv. Keren Shachar, senior deputy to the Foreign Ministry's legal advisor, claimed to the writers of this article that "the Ministry of Defense supervises exporting space technologies from Israel" (which takes into account fears of leaks), but "there is no hermetic assurance that can prevent leakage." It should also be remembered that many technologies in the field of space are [dual-use](#), like sensors and cameras.

Conclusion

In the past year, UAE-China relations have developed and progressed, reflecting the strategic preferences of the UAE, one of the leading Arab countries and one of Israel's regional partners. Through its contacts with China, the UAE seeks to improve its status and increase its prosperity while at the same time developing leverage to pressure the US. Indeed, it appears that the hedging strategy of the Gulf states is bearing fruit, given the adjustments that Washington has begun to make in its policy

toward the Gulf states; however, this is a delicate balancing act, which has its cost.

Ignoring China's remarkable space research progress in recent years is impossible. Like other areas, China successfully attracts many countries with which China is the only option for cooperation, as the United States has refused to cooperate with them or limits the collaboration. An exception is the UAE, which simultaneously collaborates with both powers in a way that is potentially challenging for Israel: How can Israel expand its space capabilities by promoting fruitful new collaborations with a friendly state while at the same time avoiding risks associated with transferring advancing technologies to America's greatest rival—China?

Unlike the US, which cooperates with the UAE in several space-related areas, Israel's collaboration with the UAE focuses mainly on green energy, which China has also greatly emphasized. China has acquired control of nearly all aspects of the global green energy supply chain in recent years as it seeks to achieve zero emissions by 2060. Therefore, cooperation on the issue of green energy, as part of Israel's cooperation with China on space research, directly or indirectly, could also benefit Israel, as it has numerous capabilities in advanced technology development in these fields.

Given the potential for cooperation in the field of space, with the UAE alone or with China, Israel must set limits to these contacts because of the sensitivity of the US and the fear that dual-use advanced technology will be leaked to China. The Ministry of Innovation, Science & Technology, through the Israel Space Agency, should hold a dialogue with its American counterparts to understand the security measures taken by the US in its collaboration with the UAE. Accordingly, the government should formulate updated regulatory rules to address the new situation based on the understanding that the collaborations with countries that have signed the Abraham Accords are expected to become broader and more

significant over time. Finally, the regulator should publish updated and clear guidelines for Israeli industry and entities engaged in space research, in order to direct these collaborations to suitable areas.

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The Israeli Media Enlisted for War

Interim Conclusions From the Behavior of the Israeli Media and Press in the Aftermath of October 7, 2023

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The Swords of Iron war has created a complex reality for most of the Israeli public, as well as for media personnel and journalists. Various media outlets—from editors to the last reporter in the field—adopted the national narrative immediately after October 7 and “recruited” themselves to the battle against the cruel enemy in the South. Along the way, they abandoned journalistic and classic norms, which were replaced by unity, patriotism, and a lot less criticism of those in the field. Will these journalists be found to have been correct from a historical perspective and in terms of the outcome? It is still too early to say, but the phenomenon is fascinating and raises many questions about the role of the media in wartime and at any other time.

Keywords: Operation Swords of Iron, Gaza war, Hamas, media, influence, October 7

Introduction

The morning of Saturday, October 7, 2023, witnessed a massive shift in the tectonic plates in Israel. Not only was the Israeli defense establishment overwhelmed by a terrifying tsunami, and not only was the public sphere trampled under the weight of a massive failure that turned into a horrific tragedy, but the independent Israeli media was also overrun by an unprecedented wave of conformism unseen in the past 15 or 20 years. Many Israeli media outlets became part of the ongoing influence campaign that the State was waging through its various branches. To be clear: this was not a case of journalists being recruited by the Israeli establishment; it was a case of voluntarily serving as part of the psychological, social and public-opinion campaign that was launched within Israel the moment the war broke out. In other words, journalists did not

become employees of the state, although their behavior and actions aligned perfectly with the national interest as it was perceived in the first weeks of the war.

In this article, we will examine the argument that the war in Gaza has had a significant and profound influence on the way Israeli media outlets have conducted themselves and continue to conduct themselves. Due to the enormity of the trauma caused by the events of that “Black Saturday,” members of the media and journalists chose to become “agents of unity,” whose goal was to unify the Israeli people, maintain national morale, and provide full support for the operations of the IDF and other branches of the Israeli security establishment as they sought to topple or eliminate the Hamas regime in the Gaza Strip and ensure the return of the hostages.

To examine the conduct of the Israeli media during the war, we conducted a closed-door session with senior Israeli journalists, in which they expressed their opinions on the subject.* The session became a kind of “reckoning,” during which participants expressed a degree of self-criticism regarding their performance throughout the war, alongside an understanding that the dramatic context required them to act differently than in normal times. Although the participants were representing only themselves in the round-table discussion, they spoke at length about the media outlets with which they are affiliated and the editorial, writing, and presentation considerations that have changed so dramatically since October 7. Representatives of the IDF, experts, and researchers from the field of media influence also participated in the discussion, and anonymity was guaranteed.

The media provided nonstop coverage of the mass mobilization of Israeli civil society, filling the governmental void that existed when the war erupted.

The Media Protects the People

Let us start by going back to the morning of October 7: As news began to emerge about Hamas’s terror attack against communities in the South, Israeli media outlets immediately started live and uninterrupted broadcasts from various battle scenes. Even at the earliest stages, when the situation was unclear, some of the reporters conveyed the horrors that were unfolding in towns, cities, and kibbutzim, where terrorists were freely roaming the streets and butchering Israelis almost undisturbed. Residents of the Western Negev were interviewed, one after another, speaking in hushed voices about what was happening just outside their safe rooms. Journalists, for many hours, tried to assist the people under siege by providing them with a

platform to express their anguished cries of having been abandoned by the state; they even helped direct security forces to those locations.

It is our contention that, from that moment on, the Israeli media became an integral part of the Israeli establishment, which was on a mission to dismantle the terrorist organization that had attacked Israeli citizens. The majority of diplomatic, military, and political correspondents aligned themselves with the unequivocal demand for “the dismantling of Hamas at any price” and wholeheartedly supported the IDF’s need and desire to make the terrorist organization pay a heavy price. Israeli airstrikes, artillery attacks, Special Forces operations, and tank convoys, all received favorable media coverage. In the meantime, reporters continued to amplify voices and images from the South, while refraining from showing what was happening in Gaza, images that were inundating social media platforms, especially Hamas’s Telegram channels. Their primary concern, it seems, was to avoid disturbing their Israeli audience and spare them from images that would undoubtedly be difficult to watch.

The media was the first to serve the public during the critical first hours of October 7 and in the weeks that followed. It also provided nonstop coverage of the mass mobilization of Israeli civil society, filling the governmental void that existed when the war erupted. The operational goal to achieve unity and the ability to portray it among the people was clear. Images of citizens driving back and forth with countless packages of supplies for soldiers were published endlessly on all channels, as were the “war rooms” set up by civilians who joined the public diplomacy effort and operations to purchase and import tactical equipment for IDF soldiers.

It is safe to say that, during the first weeks of the war, the Israeli media worked tirelessly to heal the deep rift that was created in Israeli society by the judicial reform the government had been advancing since the beginning of 2023. Given the massive rifts that emerged in

* This session took place at the Institute for National Security Studies on December 28, 2023, and was attended by media figures, experts, and researchers of media and influence from Israel and overseas.

Israeli society, the media tried to create a new image—a refreshing and optimistic image of Israelis from all parts of the country coming together to save the nation and the homeland. Images of this kind are common during times of conflict, but the unity of rank that Israeli citizens demonstrated in their actions and their voluntary enlistment appears to be an exception and was significant on a national level. Previous military operations in Gaza—and even all-out wars against Arab states—did not generate the same intensity we have witnessed since October 7. It is important to note at this stage that the understanding that this was “something different,” a war and not an operation, quickly seeped into the consciousness of most of the Israeli public, and the media was quick to adopt and even spearhead this new narrative.

Although in the initial hours of previous operations in Gaza in recent years support for the IDF was generally widespread as people rallied around the flag, that support very quickly cleared the way for criticism regarding the way the campaign was being conducted, its goals, and the destruction that was being wreaked over the border. In this context, we can unequivocally say that not only has the Israeli media refrained from criticizing the extent of the devastation in the Gaza Strip, but it has also been careful to avoid airing disturbing imagery showing “the real situation” in Gaza, the extent of the destruction, or anything that could be seen as aiding and abetting the enemy’s psychological warfare or undermining public support in Israel for the war.

In fact, most Israelis have not been exposed at all to the outcome of Israel’s heavy bombardment of the Gaza Strip or to the fact that hundreds of thousands of people have been displaced. These images, which in the past were controversial and the subject of debate in television studios or on the editorial pages of newspapers, have become a rarity in the Israeli media. It is our contention that the editors of various media outlets made a deliberate decision to focus on unity and on the painful attack on the Israeli people, particularly on

the communities in the Western Negev and the Supernova Music Festival. This decision is consistent with other decisions made by these editors such as displaying the Israeli flag onscreen at all times, airing countless articles a day about the atrocities of October 7, and keeping tabs on the families of the hostages, the displaced Israelis, and the fallen soldiers—in pain, empathy, and sympathy.

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Israeli media consumers rewarded the television channels and newspapers by paying them a great deal of attention; the number of people watching the news on television, listening to news on the radio, and visiting internet sites also rose significantly in the first weeks of the war. According to surveys conducted since October 7, while the public’s faith in Israel’s political leadership showed a marked decrease, trust in the media experienced a sharp and impressive increase. This is not something that we can simply ignore: for years, both the media and politicians faced a complete lack of trust from the Israeli public, and against the backdrop of polarization in Israeli society, trust in both has steadily declined in recent years. However, for journalists, this decline was halted along with the sound of roaring cannons, thanks to the patriotism displayed by many of them.

Media Impressions: An Initial Reckoning

One after another, some of the participants in the colloquium admitted that the events

One after another, some of the participants in the colloquium admitted that the events of October 7 radically altered their approach to what was happening and to the enemy. In their view, Hamas had turned into a murderous organization similar to the Nazis or ISIS, and reporters did not hesitate to use that framing in their various reports.

of October 7 radically altered their approach to what was happening and to the enemy. In their view, Hamas had turned into a murderous organization similar to the Nazis or ISIS, and reporters did not hesitate to use that framing in their various reports. One senior journalist from one of the broadcast media shared that this war had changed her personally as well as her attitude towards the issue she covers. She said that the objectivity to which she had adhered throughout her lengthy career was no longer relevant to her work. The significance is that the emotional involvement of the journalist in her work had increased and influenced her reporting. She pointed out that she understood that since the war erupted, she could no longer be objective in her interactions with politicians serving in the current government and regarding events in Israel since she now believed that part of her role was to represent a certain set of values that she believed exemplified Israel's essence.

A senior editor from a different outlet said she felt that her place of work joined the war effort from the very first day. She demonstrated it by saying that the outlet and its editors consciously decided to be a platform for delivering the daily messages from the IDF spokesperson without any real editorial process, to conceal what was happening in Gaza from Israeli readers and viewers, to not ask too many questions about what the IDF was doing on the other side of the border (on the assumption that “the army knows what it is doing”), and to not be overly critical of the army and its commanders, especially given the need to fully support the soldiers on the front line. At the same time, criticism of the

government and the dysfunction of the various ministries on the civilian front has been a key element of that outlet's reporting.

Another senior editor from the broadcast media said that the program she worked on had been harshly criticized for its coverage of the inadequate treatment of people who had been wounded and released from the hospital due to shortage of medical personnel to care for them. The need for public discourse about the lack of adequate treatment of wounded soldiers, as opposed to the desire of some citizens to sweep the nation's troubles under the rug, often leads to criticism and conflict during wartime. The editor stressed that she and her colleagues had no editorial dilemma over how to handle the story and whether to air it. However, reactions following the broadcast were furious, accusing the outlet of “harming national morale.”

At the same time, participants also spoke about the dilemma they faced when it came to interviewing Arabs and Palestinians who identified with Hamas. In the past—and not at a time of war—it was acceptable to broadcast interviews with people who represent the enemy's positions. However, during the war, it is no longer the case, and journalists have repeatedly been asking themselves whether to provide a platform for these messages. For the most part, the answer has been negative, and therefore the voices from the other side remain unheard. It appears that this attitude stems from a sense that Israelis' trauma is different, from frustration, and from an ardent desire not to “spoil” the atmosphere of unity that has gripped the Israeli public. Showing the suffering of the other side would not only infuriate many Israelis, who see themselves as the aggrieved party that has the right to “revenge,” but could also raise questions about the long way to toppling the Hamas regime in the Gaza Strip.

A senior researcher based in Europe, told participants that, from the outside, the Israeli media seems to be extremely mobilized and pro-Israel. While this feels good for Israelis, who

experience the entire country as united, it also leads to confrontations with the international media, which does not see the war in the same way as Israelis and their media outlets. She added that even the IDF spokesperson, who has become a much-admired figure in Israel and one of the most trusted, has not managed to deliver the message across to the rest of the world or provide a satisfactory response to the allegations that Israel has used excessive force in Gaza. While Israelis view a uniform-wearing spokesperson as a reassuring figure of authority, the rest of the world views the spokesperson as bellicose and biased, heightening concerns over Israel's militarization. The researcher also pointed out that the Israeli media has a vital role to play not only in raising national morale, as it has done during this war, but also in promoting a liberal worldview. She added that the Israeli media, in part, should continue insisting on "the public's right to know"—even during wartime.

One senior journalist who worked for several media outlets said that on one of his shows, he tried to avoid interviewing "extremist figures" who used to be a main component of the show and even generated most of his headlines. He said that the war has sidelined petty politics and extremist politicians, who will say anything to get a headline. However, if the overall picture of the war were to change, the political coverage would increase, and it would be impossible to entirely ignore those extremists.

One participant argued that the Israeli media has been traumatized since October 7. Journalists are wondering among themselves whether they were critical enough of the war or whether they were asking the wrong questions for the longest time. Many journalists are now engaged in self-reflection regarding the content they have published. Among other things, media outlets are shifting responsibility for some of the sensitive material they publish onto government officials to avoid angering the public and to not be perceived as violating the code of secrecy during the war. In other words, if publishing certain information is likely to enrage the public,

editors ensure that the item is accompanied by a clarification that the information has been officially cleared for publication. This is done so that the public recognizes that they are playing by the rules, even in cases where no such approval was needed for publication.

The videos of Israeli hostages published by Hamas are another example of the dilemmas with which the Israeli media has been grappling. Some media outlets decided in principle not to air the first video that was published, as they believe that only the families of the hostages have the right to decide whether the images are aired. In this instance, too, what is interesting is not just whether the videos were aired, but the fact that journalists, who do not see themselves as subject to officials or external directives during normal times, agreed to restrict themselves in wartime due to a powerful desire to operate within the national consensus. We contend that this represents a significant and even dramatic change in the relationship between the media and the state—a change that is the direct outcome of the horrific events in southern Israel on October 7.

Many people at the colloquium said that the behavior of the Israeli media during the first days of the war was in all likelihood the result of the general trauma that gripped the entire country. Many also pointed out that this war saw civilians attacked in their homes, which meant that the response of Israeli society was deeply connected to previous traumas, including the Holocaust. At the same time, they also said that, given the length of the war, journalists and media personnel must return to the ethical norms of their profession and criticize the IDF and the defense establishment, and they must also report on what is happening on the enemy's side.

A Return to Routine?

After a certain period of time, the media did indeed start—gradually and only partially—to return to its critical role. The same criticism that was leveled during the first two months of

the war at the government, over the ministries' dysfunctional response to a national emergency, started to be directed against the IDF as well. In this context, it is worth noting that most military correspondents have not been critical of the IDF, just as they are not critical during normal times; rather, they played the role of intermediaries between the military and the public. Moreover, most of the reporters who were embedded among the troops were not military correspondents, but they played a key role in building public trust in the IDF, which was severely damaged during the first days of the war because many believed the army had abandoned the communities along the Gaza border. They covered events from a perspective that squared completely with the IDF's perspective ("the reporter in the tank"). The turning point, it seems, in coverage of the army's operations in Gaza came when three Israeli hostages—Alon Shamriz, Yotam Haim, and Samer Talalka—were accidentally killed by the IDF after managing to escape their captors. This incident began a new stage in the media's coverage of the war. Although coverage became more critical, the events of October 7 still held a central place in the Israeli media—especially in the evening news—as part of an effort to forge a collective Israeli memory.

Conclusion

Did the Israeli media pass the tests of objectivity and professional ethics during the war in Gaza? Did journalists faithfully perform their job, according to the classic parameters of the type of journalism that apparently no longer exists? It is still too early to answer these questions, but we must look at the events of October 7 as a turning point for Israeli journalists. When we come to examine the professional considerations that should guide journalists in their work, we must not ignore the ramifications of the atrocities committed by Hamas. Israeli journalists are also citizens of the country and every reporter and every editor knows at least one person affected in some way by October 7. This fact has a direct

impact on how journalists cover reality, as well as the filters through which they process the information they gather. Moreover, in addition to being Israelis, journalists see themselves as representing values that are the antithesis of those espoused by Hamas and the atrocities it committed and they felt a moral duty to expose those horrors.

This intimate colloquium with senior Israeli journalists, convened at INSS, raised the question of whether the Israeli public receives all the relevant information about the war from the media. Objectively speaking, it seems that this is not the case. Intentionally or not, a substantial number of Israeli journalists chose not to present the full picture for an extended period of time. The suffering of the people of Gaza was not a top priority for Israeli journalists, including both reporters and editors, perhaps out of a desire to avoid upsetting the Israeli public who has been largely oblivious to the suffering of the Gazans, or out of a deep sense of solidarity with the Israeli casualties and shock that has deeply affected them since October 7. The desire not to anger the public, coupled with complete identification with Israeli citizens during such a traumatic time, led to a significant shift in the worldview of many journalists, some of whom abandoned journalistic principles, including the requirement to present a balanced view or, at the very least, a portrayal that reflects as much of reality as possible. Instead, they presented what they and almost all Israelis perceive as the greater tragedy.

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Israel's Foreign Policy—The Long Struggle Over Its Direction and Status

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Knocking on Every Door – Israel's Foreign Policy, 1948–2018

by Abraham Ben-Zvi and Gadi Warsha
Lambda – The Open University, 2023
478 pages [in Hebrew]

I was pleased to receive Abraham Ben-Zvi and Gadi Warsha's book on Israel's foreign policy. The work covers a wide range of topics that relate to Israel's foreign policy. Its chapters deal with core principles in the following areas: Israeli foreign policy, Israel–US relations, Israel–Soviet Union relations, Israel–Europe relations, Israel–China relations, Israel and neighboring states, Israel and developing countries, Israel and the UN. However, before diving into these chapters, I will first make some preliminary comments on the role of foreign policy in shaping the State of Israel's policy and positions in the international and regional arenas.

The State of Israel has unique characteristics that significantly limit the influence of foreign policy in shaping its positions in the international and regional arenas. The State of Israel was borne out of a war for its existence in 1948. In many ways, it can be said that this war still takes place today. Therefore, it is not surprising that the military and the other security agencies practically play a dominant role in the formulation of Israel's policy in the international and regional arenas. These bodies—the Intelligence Directorate in the IDF, the Mossad and the Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet)—have gained this position as a result of the fact that they possess control over the vital sources of information necessary for shaping Israeli policy. These bodies are basically under the authority of the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defense.

Unfortunately, for many years, the State of Israel lacked a formal framework of rules that gave the Foreign Ministry access to the classified information sources to which the security bodies had access. At some stages, attempts were made to formalize the transmission of information. However, the Foreign Ministry staff was always in an inferior position compared to the security bodies, who held the most important information for shaping Israel's foreign policy.

It can be said that all of Israel's foreign ministers were excluded from valuable and highly classified information, to varying degrees, by the Prime Minister's Office and the security system. Needless to say, this phenomenon harmed their ability to shape Israel's foreign policy. In one of the conversations with Kissinger in mid-June 1973, a few months before the outbreak of the Yom Kippur War, the Israeli ambassador to the United States, Simcha Dinitz, presented the prime minister's position on a certain strategic issue to Kissinger. Kissinger asked, "Does the Foreign Minister [Abba Eban] know about this position?" Dinitz responded, "No, absolutely not," probably not for the first

time. “Only the Prime Minister is aware of the full picture” (White House, 1973b, June 15).

The book naturally focuses on the issue of Israel–United States relations. It covers central events in the relations between Israel and the US administrations. The authors discuss on several occasions the checks and balances between different elements of the American government: the White House, the judiciary, and Congress. Public opinion and the press can also be added to this list.

This system enabled Israel, particularly governments that had a deep understanding of this complex system and carefully planned their actions, to achieve significant accomplishments over the years. These achievements, it should be stressed, were made without straining relations with key players in setting foreign policy, namely the White House and the State Department. In a conversation with his advisers in May 1973, President Nixon made a statement that reflected the power of the Israel lobby in Washington: “The Israeli lobby is so strong that it makes Congress act illogically” (White House, 1973a). Numerous documents concerning Israel–US relations explicitly demonstrate the immense influence that Israeli governments were able to exert in Congress and on the American public. On multiple occasions, we see senior administration officials requesting or even pleading with Israeli leaders to “allow” the administration to take certain actions, such as selling weapons to Arab states, by convincing members of Congress to support these actions. Israel often complied, usually after being promised something in return.

In certain cases, Israel used its connections in Congress to prevent strategic moves by the administration. Perhaps the most significant example is Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s speech to Congress on March 3, 2015, which aimed to undermine the US–Iran agreement on Iranian nuclear activity. This move drew harsh criticism for allegedly damaging Israel’s relations with the Obama administration and making it

harder to halt the Iranian program. According to the authors of the book, “the prime minister failed to sway American public opinion and the majority of Democratic legislators against the nuclear agreement with Iran, and was unable to hinder the approval of the agreement. Furthermore, he faced consequences for his opposition to the President, in particular when the agreement became a reality” (p. 171).

It would have been important, at the same time, to present the stance of Netanyahu’s supporters in this context. They claim that when dealing with an existential threat to the State of Israel, the Israeli government cannot afford to make “marginal” political calculations and must sound the alarm over the severe threat being faced, no matter what the political price would be. They also argue that the impact of Netanyahu’s speech to Congress cannot be judged solely by what occurred during the Obama administration. Its effects were gradually felt in US public opinion and came to fruition during the Trump administration.

The book’s title, “Knocking on Every Door,” seems to express a worldview shared by many Foreign Ministry staffers from the early days of the state onwards. This perspective tends to assume that the international community will be receptive to Israel’s positions and adopt them if Israel, in turn, makes an effort to adopt the stances acceptable to the international community. Moshe Sharett, the man who symbolizes more than any other Israeli public figure the importance of the need for Israel to pursue diplomacy, believed that it was possible for Israel to take into account the stances of the international community without compromising its own essential interests.

Ben-Gurion and his associates tended to perceive this approach as naive. They took it as a given reality that the international community would not be in favor of Israel, primarily due to political and economic interests they have in the Arab world. Ben-Gurion also considered religious motivations to be a factor explaining the unfriendly, sometimes even hostile, attitude

of the international community toward Israel. As a result, Ben-Gurion was always suspicious of the international community and its approach to the State of Israel. He did not accept Sharett's stance that intensive diplomacy could lead to a fundamental change in the international community's attitude toward Israel. He and his associates adopted the worldview of Hans Morgenthau, who believed that states' views are based on interests and power. Therefore, in order to enhance its position in the international community Israel must strengthen its diplomatic, economic, military, and technological power. That is the only way in which states will come to support it.

Though being in an inferior position Moshe Sharett never gave up in his efforts to convince public opinion and political figures in Israel that the diplomatic approach was a highly valuable asset and should by no means be neglected. He should be highly appreciated for that. Eventually, of course, David Ben-Gurion who had a charismatic leadership and served in extremely powerful positions, as both prime minister and minister of defense minister, had the upper hand.

In all the years he served in office, Sharett questioned the security policy set by Ben-Gurion. In particular he criticized the tendency to ignore international criticism, which characterized Ben-Gurion's worldview and that of his associates. Sharett sought to present an approach based primarily on diplomatic channels, public diplomacy, and persuading international actors that Israel's actions were justified under the harsh reality in which Israel found itself. Gradually and quietly, he worked to consolidate Israel's status in the international arena in general and in the Middle East specifically. He did not rule out the use of military force but aimed to use it in as limited and moderate a way as possible.

Sharett was given the opportunity to prove the validity of his stances and demonstrate that the diplomatic path he believed in could lead Israel to safe harbor. In late 1953, Ben-Gurion

announced his resignation and move to Sde Boker. Sharett did not join those who asked him to reconsider his resignation. He was happy to finally have the chance to shape Israel's policy in line with his beliefs. It is still unclear today what prompted Ben-Gurion to resign and isolate himself in a remote location like Sde Boker.

In the final days before his resignation, Ben-Gurion managed to obtain government consent to appoint Moshe Dayan as the IDF Chief of Staff, following a long and difficult struggle with the government and the Mapai party. In historical perspective it can be argued that this move was aimed at placing an extremely powerful figure in a highly dominant position which would enable him to thwart Sharett's efforts to prioritize diplomacy over security policy. (Shalom, 2022).

Moshe Sharett eagerly took on the role of prime minister. As mentioned before, he aimed to make Israeli diplomacy central in shaping the country's decision-making, including in matters of security. He sought to expand Israel's international relations and even potentially reach agreements with Egypt's ruler, Gamal Abdel Nasser. Sharett garnered significant support from political figures who disagreed with what they perceived as Ben-Gurion's aggressive militarism. Those who had been adversely affected by Ben-Gurion also aligned themselves with Sharett in an effort to prevent Ben-Gurion's return to national leadership.

Ultimately, Sharett did not succeed in his mission. The diplomatic path did not improve Israel's status in the realms of diplomacy and security. Why? Sharett firmly believed that Egypt's ruler would prioritize the economic advancement of his country over the irrational hostility toward Israel. Sharett thought there was a chance that Nasser would seek a resolution that would reduce the conflict with Israel, and that he might even desire Israel's assistance in advancing his own nation. However, Sharett's hopes were swiftly dashed as Nasser quickly transformed Egypt into Israel's primary enemy. Turning away from the image of a peace-seeking

leader who focused on his country's economic progress, he became seen in Israel as the most dangerous threat to Israel's very existence.

Sharett quickly realized that in the war-weary State of Israel, where daily killings and robberies were common, the military agenda would be the dominant factor shaping the country's path. Military events that occurred during his term from January 1954 to November 1955, such as the Uri Ilan affair, the Lavon affair, and the Maaleh Akrahim massacre, not only set a military agenda in Israel's public life, but also significantly damaged Sharett's authority as prime minister. These events made it abundantly clear that security policy, rather than diplomatic policy, would take precedence in the State of Israel.

Unfortunately, Sharett's international achievements during his term were also limited. Those who hoped that the American administration would appreciate Sharett's moderate approach and provide support to Israel were greatly disappointed. In fact, the authors describe the US policy toward Israel during those early years as "the cold shoulder." However, this term is too moderate for describing the American administration's policies toward Israel. Despite opposition from many senior officials, the Truman administration decided to recognize the State of Israel. The authors correctly state the three main concerns of those who opposed recognition: the fear of losing support in the Arab world, the fear of disrupting the oil supply, and the fear of having to intervene militarily if Israel faced defeat.

Within Israel itself, there were also varying degrees of opposition to the declaration of statehood. Senior officers in the IDF, including Yigal Yadin, who held an equivalent position to the Chief of Staff, voiced reservations. Yadin believed that the chances of victory were "fifty-fifty" and suggested postponing the declaration for several months. Undoubtedly, these positions of influential military and political figures were conveyed to senior American officials, thus further strengthening

their resistance to recognition (p. 396). The authors correctly mention the initiative taken by American administration officials to suspend the Partition Plan, which raised great hopes within the Jewish community in Israel, that their long enduring dream for an independent Jewish state would eventually be realized (p. 399). Furthermore, they highlight the role played by Chaim Weizmann and prominent representatives of American Jewry, along with a sense of guilt over US policy during the Holocaust, in motivating President Truman to sign the document recognizing the State of Israel.

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Recognition of Israel was unfortunately one of few positive American decisions toward Israel during that time. In the years that followed, the US had a callous approach toward the State of Israel. The main objective of American policy was to prevent Israel from retaining most of the gains it had made during the War of Independence. For instance, the American administration denied Israel the right to respond militarily to acts of murder and theft committed on its territory against soldiers and civilians, which were referred to as "infiltrations" at that time. The Israeli leadership correctly believed that imposing a heavy cost on Arab states for acts of hostility on Israeli territory would compel them to take action against the terrorists and put an end to the terrorism. However, the US did not support this stance taken by Israel.

Numerous arguments were presented to deny Israel this basic right (pp. 111–113). These included the claim that retaliatory measures

would harm innocent civilians and violate international law, that such measures would only further incite hostility toward Israel instead of promoting calmness, and that the measures were disproportionate to the acts of terrorism carried out against Israel. The administration insisted that only a diplomatic agreement could bring an end to hostile activities against Israel and that Israel should focus on pursuing such an agreement. The administration was fully aware that the significant differences between the positions of Arab states and Israel made it impossible to reach such an agreement. Ultimately, the US suggested that Israel should focus on defensive means and even offered to provide such means. Naturally, Israel could not accept this proposition. Terrorist attacks became a regular occurrence, eroding confidence in the capabilities of the IDF and, in some cases, causing residents to abandon their homes.

The book is also accessible to members of the general public seeking to understand the conduct of the State of Israel in the international and regional arenas since its founding. It is written eloquently, in a professional and balanced manner, and draws on a wide range of sources. It covers events until almost the present day.

The second issue in which the US demonstrated a callous approach toward Israel was its efforts to compel Israel to withdraw from the borders agreed upon in the 1949 Armistice Agreements. Despite playing a key role in formulating these agreements, the United States still attempted to impose a significant Israeli withdrawal, especially in the Negev region. Shortly after the agreements were signed, particularly during the Lausanne Convention, Israel was pressured to withdraw to the boundaries outlined in the Partition Plan, with the assertion that these were the only internationally recognized borders.

A few years later, the US, in collaboration with the United Kingdom, devised a secret plan known as the Alpha Plan. This plan aimed to force Israel to withdraw from substantial portions of the Negev in order to create a corridor between Egypt and the Arab world. Israel clearly communicated to the administration that creating a corridor between Egypt and the Arab world did not necessitate the relinquishment of sovereign Israeli territory (pp. 50, 112, 255). Free movement between Middle Eastern countries, it argued, could be facilitated in a peaceful situation. However, the administration rejected this argument and issued severe threats against Israel if it refused to comply with their demands.

On the issue of refugees, the US administration also made significant efforts to compel Israel to absorb over 100,000 people who had left their home during the War of Independence. The administration was well aware that absorbing so many refugees would create serious security threats and endanger the Jewish character of the state (pp. 355–365). Additionally, the administration opposed Israel's positions on the status of Jerusalem and Israel's desire to strengthen the status of the portion of the city that remained under Israeli sovereignty after the war (pp. 402–405).

To present a balanced picture, it is important to note that the United States offered generous economic aid to Israel during all of these years, particularly in the fields of food and oil. During an era when the existence of the state was constantly questioned, American officials consistently expressed support for the existence of the Jewish state. It is doubtful whether the State of Israel could have existed without American assistance. Particularly moving are the portions of the book that discuss the Yom Kippur War. The authors describe the significant rupture in Israel–US relations after the war. Until the war, the administration tended to support Israel's position on a diplomatic agreement, though with reservations. It saw Israel as a reliable and powerful ally, with whom it shared secrets and planned actions to serve the

interests of both countries. The US believed that a strong, principled Israel could create reliable deterrence against Egypt, thanks to its varied capabilities. And if Israeli deterrence were to fail, the US believed that Israel could still defeat the Egyptian Army rapidly and unequivocally.

Senior American officials believed that Israel's strength would further American prestige in the international arena. Arab states would learn that only the United States could influence Israel to soften its stances. It would therefore be worthwhile for the Arabs to abandon the Soviet bloc, which had no real impact, and join the Western bloc. However, all of these assumptions and hopes were proved wrong on Yom Kippur 1973. Israeli intelligence, which had unparalleled prestige before the war, took a heavy blow, and the heads of the administration were puzzled by its colossal failure. Furthermore, many American officials claimed that the incorrect assessments by American intelligence were mostly caused by their reliance on Israeli intelligence.

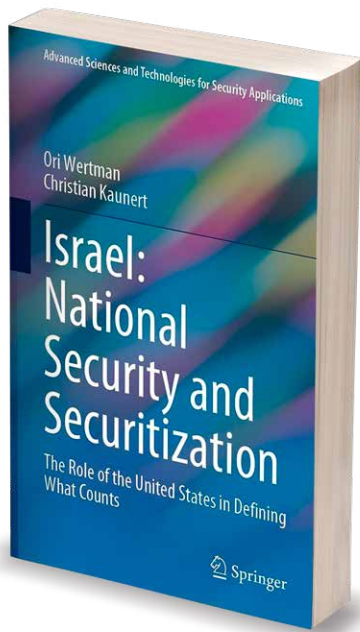
In summary, Abraham Ben-Zvi and Gadi Warsha's book is a textbook of primary importance in an academic context for students, researchers, and lecturers. The book is also accessible to members of the general public seeking to understand the conduct of the State of Israel in the international and regional arenas since its founding. It is written eloquently, in a professional and balanced manner, and draws on a wide range of sources. It covers events until

almost the present day. This is an obligatory work for all those who value the field of Israel studies.

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

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Is Security (Securitization) Indeed the Face of Everything?

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Israel: National Security and Securitization – The Role of the United States in Defining What Counts

by Ori Wertman and Christian Kaunert
Springer, 2023
181 pages

This book by Ori Wertman and Christian Kaunert, the scholar and his mentor, adds a further layer to the theoretical foundation of security or securitization. In this context, the book's contribution is dual in nature. Together with a theoretical expansion of the components of the concept, referring to both the definition of extreme means and the types of audience, which can certainly be seen as an innovation, the authors have selected case studies—such as the Six-Day War—and have applied to them the principles of securitization in their latest and broadest conceptualization.

In their selection of essentially military-security case studies, which in any case were perceived as severe security threats, the authors stretch the definitions and the conceptual foundation of securitization to extremes that make the concept, its uniqueness, and its significance superfluous. The conceptual and theoretical development of securitization by the Copenhagen School and its successors was intended to provide an analytical tool to explain the way in which leaders seek to legitimize the use of extraordinary and extreme measures in order to deal with problems that are civilian by nature. The theoretical foundation provides the explanation through the idea of security argumentation and the conceptualization of an essentially civilian problem, by means of the same argumentation, as a severe and even existential security threat (for example, problems of migration, crime, and so forth). Given the existence of a serious or existential threat, it is essential to adopt extraordinary and extreme measures, including those that affect individual rights. If, as the authors propose, security threats, which in any case are conceived through security argumentation, can also undergo securitization, the unique contribution of the concept with reference to essentially civilian problems becomes superfluous. In my opinion, there is a logical failure in the very idea of securitizing a security problem, unless this controversial claim of theirs is the foundation for theoretical disputes that can sharpen and improve the existing theoretical foundation, and in this sense “a sword's blade can only be sharpened against another one.”

The book is divided into seven central chapters, and the main points are covered in a long and detailed preface that gives a very clear presentation of the claims and innovations in the book. The first chapter presents the literature on the subject of securitization, referring to prominent milestones in the development of the theory and the most prominent scholars in this field, and with a partly critical discussion of

the issues regarding the audience, the player, and the means of conveying the message from the player to the audience.

In the second chapter, the authors present the broader contribution to the conceptual foundation of the audience in the theory of securitization, which they seek to establish by means of four case studies later in the book. In this chapter, by critically engaging with the existing literature, they present two new concepts: the legal audience, which according to the laws of the state is the element that is authorized to approve the actions of securitization, and the political audience, whose support or lack of opposition is deemed essential for the implementation of these actions.

In the following four chapters (3–6), the authors present four case studies dealing with various security threats that the State of Israel has been forced to address (chapter 3—the Six-Day War; chapter 4—the Oslo Accords 1993–1995; chapter 5—Operation Defensive Shield; chapter 6—Operation Outside the Box—the bombing of the Syrian nuclear reactor in Deir ez-Zor, 2007). For each of these cases, the authors refer to relations between the political and military echelons, and between the government of Israel and the US administration. They have chosen case studies in which the American administration had an important role in one way or another, because in each case they refer to the American administration as a type of audience to which they apply their innovative conceptual development.

In the final chapter of the book, the authors sharpen their theoretical innovation, which they have established through the four case studies. They define the book's contribution to the existing literature, in the field of both international relations and Israeli studies, with an emphasis on American involvement and its impact on Israel, as well as indicating possible directions for further research.

As stated, the book's main contribution is the first and unique reference, as far as I know,

to the political-treaty process (the Oslo Process) as an expression of an extreme measure, essentially involving the recognition of the PLO, which until then was legally banned in Israel, and the political agreement with it, basically amounting to separation from the Palestinians. Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin (the player), as an epistemic authority, sought to enlist public and political legitimacy for implementing the agreement, perceived by the Israeli public as an extreme and surprising move, through securitization of the danger of a binational state, which he conceptualized and presented as an existential threat to the State of Israel, requiring and justifying the use of what was an extreme measure for the time and circumstances.

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To this significant innovation, the authors have added their expanded and updated conceptualization of the audience in the securitization equation, in which three components are recognized: the player, the audience, and the message. Apart from the typology of two types of audience (legal and political), the authors stress the role of the audience and its necessity for the sake of the legitimacy and success of the securitization process (p. xiii). In their reference to the issue of extended audiences, the authors refer to the existing literature while broadening their conceptual reach by clarifying or stressing the subjective dimension of how the threat is perceived. Their emphasis on the subjective dimension is also presented as a critique of

what they define as the consensus over the objective dimension of threats. The authors are certainly persuasive with regard to the subjective dimension, but I am not convinced that treating the objective dimension as an existing consensus in the study of securitization is indeed valid.

In their comprehensive preface, the authors emphasize the book's unique contribution, as the first broad treatment of the securitization of Israel's terror threats and security threats, and because of their integrated approach that combines the worlds of international relations, the Middle East, political psychology, and sociology (p. xiv). Without detracting from the book's contribution, the authors appear to have somewhat overstepped the mark with their stress on integrating a range of fields of knowledge. There is a difference between the use of concepts from the various disciplines and their theoretical integration. For example, their statement that "the book bridges the gap between accepted approaches to the security of the Middle East and synthesizes them with a perception and erroneous perception in international relations" (p. xiv) sounds rather pretentious.

The methodology chosen by the authors is a comparative analysis of case studies, with each case study chosen according to three main criteria: Each case study presents a different type of security threat; each case study describes a successful process of securitization; and for each case study, sufficient sources are available, taking into account the restrictions of Israeli security censorship. The three criteria were intended to ensure a sufficiently broad canvas for an analysis of the cases based on the updated and extended conceptualizations introduced by the authors and to validate them. The authors have relied on primary and secondary sources and based their work on personal interviews with a long and impressive list of Israeli decision-makers from the political and security-military echelons. In this context, it is worth stressing the methodological limitation

of personal interviews, especially when the subject of the interview refers to events that happened many years ago and the interviewees may have a tendency to change their versions or adapt them to the zeitgeist. For example, this applies to the interviews with Ehud Olmert on the Annapolis process that took place in 2010–2012, compared to interviews in later years in which he presented some of the events in a different manner.

As stated, the case of the Oslo Accords—unlike the Six-Day War, Operation Defensive Shield, and the bombing of the Syrian nuclear reactor, which in my opinion were essentially security-military events to which the logic of securitization does not really apply—is an important innovation. Here a political move is referenced as securitization. The political move is the extreme measure that was taken and for the purpose of legitimizing its implementation, securitization was activated, hence the security argumentation.

The authors' innovative reference to the audience and its typology—political and legal audiences—is persuasive and has added an important analytical tool to the analysis and understanding of securitization processes. Here the authors unintentionally point to an additional dimension that is worthy of further theoretical development and linked to the audiences. This additional dimension is the aspect of duality, as expressed in cases where the legal audience can at some stage become a political audience, and vice versa, or where a specific audience may be simultaneously both legal and political. For example, this could apply to the Israeli government in the case of the Oslo process when Yitzhak Rabin, as prime minister, had to persuade the government as the political audience of the necessity of the move and obtain their consent, to legitimize it. Another duality may be expressed when a political or legal audience becomes a player. For example, the Israeli government starts as the legal and political audience, which after legitimizing a securitization move, becomes

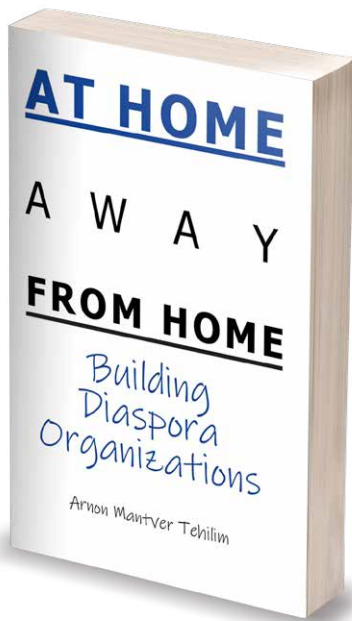
a player facing another audience, such as the American administration (p. 19). This duality adds complexity that requires further theoretical development.

In summary, the book is focused, readable, and correctly structured, although it would be a good idea to tighten the links between the chapters, which seem to have been written as independent articles, in order to avoid repetition. It is important to be scrupulous with historical comparisons and define the significance of the context in each comparison. For example, there is the problematic comparison between two prime ministers, Ehud Barak and Arik Sharon (p. 155). It may be assumed that if Prime Minister Barak were operating in the context in which Prime Minister Sharon operated, he would not have acted differently from Sharon, and not in the way attributed to him in that comparison. The book contains a dimension of theoretical innovation, partly controversial in my opinion, and worthy of further discussion, and it certainly makes an important contribution to the existing literature on securitization, with reference to cultural and political differences between countries, and its emphasis on the subjective

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dimension in the perception of threats (p. 154). This adds another interesting angle to the discussion, analysis, and understanding of the way in which Israel has tackled security threats and the place of the United States in these contexts.

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How Do You Build a Diaspora?

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At Home Away from Home: Building Diaspora Organizations

by Arnon Mantver Tehilim

Dfus Har Homa, 2023

220 pages

The book *At Home Away from Home: Building Diaspora Organizations* by Arnon Mantver deals with the organizational capabilities of diaspora communities—groups with a history of migration residing in one country and maintaining ties (material or conceptual) with another country or homeland (real or imagined). Changes associated with globalization processes, and especially the ability to cross borders and maintain a transnational relationship more easily, have brought to the fore the international political activity of diaspora communities. For example, Eritrean expatriates living in Tel Aviv-Yafo demonstrate for or against a festival held on behalf of the Eritrean government; the

descendants of migrant workers from Turkey living in Germany organize to support or criticize the Turkish government; Ukrainian immigrants in various countries work to transfer donations to the war effort in Ukraine.

For the Israeli public, these examples are not new: The Zionist movement was a transnational Jewish organization, and the State of Israel relies to a large extent on diplomatic, financial, and political assistance from the Jews of the diaspora (especially Jews in the United States). These examples are also not new to the author of the book, Arnon Mantver, who immigrated to Israel from Ukraine at the age of five with his parents and sister, who were Holocaust survivors. He later served as the CEO of the Jewish Agency's Immigration and Absorption Department and CEO of the Joint Israel. Because of this, the book provides a unique opportunity to learn about the organization of diasporas from both a broad academic perspective and a practical one of someone with experience in the field.

The central question around which the book is built is what components make up successful diaspora organizations. The assumption at the base of the book, which is also well supported by the academic literature on the subject, is that proper organization of diasporas also translates into stronger and more effective political mobilization. The book focuses on five key characteristics that explain successful diaspora organization: organizational leadership; resources; the demographic composition of the diaspora; the connection of the diaspora to different networks; and the degree of geographic concentration of the diaspora. Each chapter focuses on a different characteristic, and the book is interspersed with examples mainly from the Jewish diaspora, but also with anecdotes about diasporas related to Poland, India, China, Moldova, Mexico, Croatia, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka.

In terms of organizational leadership, the first chapter distinguishes interestingly

between different dimensions that make up the leadership of diaspora organizations: leaders versus managers versus volunteers. They all lead the diaspora organizations to some extent, but each type of leadership has different characteristics and functions in the organization. The chapter also distinguishes between various types of knowledge that are essential for effective leadership. First, successful leadership of diaspora organizations has local cultural knowledge about the language, laws, culture, and norms of behavior in the country where diaspora people live. This knowledge allows the leadership of the diaspora organizations to operate in the local political environment. Second, successful leadership possesses professional knowledge related to immigration and the integration of immigrants. This knowledge allows the leadership of the diaspora organizations to help new immigrants integrate into the country they moved to, and it also connects that leadership to other diaspora and migration networks.

The important role of knowledge also appears in the second chapter of the book, which deals with resources. Although economic resources are essential for the mobilization of the diaspora, other resources are also important; for example, a diaspora whose members possess certain technological and scientific knowledge can assist in the development of the “homeland” state. Moreover, human capital, social relations, education, and business entrepreneurship are resources that the diaspora can harness to its advantage. Tourism in the homeland, such as the Taglit (“Birthright”) or Masa (“Journey”) programs, which are certainly known to the Israeli public, is also a resource of the diaspora (although some argue that programs of this type are the result of using diaspora resources and not necessarily a resource in itself).

The third chapter of the book is devoted to demographic components of the diaspora that affect the success of its organization: the amount of time that has passed since the original immigration of the diaspora members; their

average age; their level of education; and the employment characteristics of the members.

The fourth chapter focuses on the network structure of the diaspora: the various organizations that compose it, the community structure (which sometimes crosses sovereign borders), and the family ties in it. A special part of the chapter is dedicated to digital networks, which allow the diaspora to strengthen existing networks and create new ones in a way that does not depend on a specific territory. Naturally, strong and diverse networks help to organize a successful diaspora.

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Finally, the book focuses on the degree of geographic concentration and dispersion of the diaspora (what Mantver calls “enclaves”). As academic literature on the subject has already shown, the geographical concentration of the diaspora community makes it easier for it to organize and mobilize and helps it translate its power into political influence.

Conceptually, some of the analytical distinctions the book makes are fuzzy. Knowledge is a leadership characteristic but also a resource; the scientific and technological establishment of companies and members of the diaspora is a resource of the diaspora but also part of the demographic component that characterizes it; the network structure of the diaspora is geographically decentralized (and sometimes characterized by de-territorialization), but immigrant enclaves help the diaspora to be successful. It is possible that the conceptual spillover from one chapter to the next is due to the fact that the book unconsciously switches between different goals of diaspora organizations: to assist in the

absorption and integration of new immigrants, to mobilize during a conflict in the homeland, to advocate for rights and recognition in the country where friends and members of the diaspora live, to donate and transfer money to their families remaining in the homeland, to fight for the homeland's independence or promote a certain policy toward it.

However, the book manages to weave well the academic literature and the author's own experience, and this is the book's main strength. When Mantver shares his personal experiences, the readers (or at least the writer of this review) are drawn into the world of Jewish-Israeli politics and its complexities. The fact that it is not an academic book in the traditional sense of the term allows Mantver to write freely and avoid cumbersome jargon. Another advantage of the book (which also stems from the personal biography of its author, who is also the founder and chairperson of the Center for International Migration and Absorption) is the connection between the politics of diaspora and the politics of immigration. The book illustrates the connections between local and international immigration organizations and various diaspora organizations that help new members of that diaspora, or immigrants who are not members of the diaspora at all.

Another prominent advantage of the book is the multiple examples that allow readers to observe the Jewish-Israeli case from a comparative perspective. The Jewish case is considered exceptional since not all Jews have been residents or citizens of the State of Israel. At the same time, many diaspora organizations (as well as governments around the world) see Jewish organizing in the diaspora and the ties between Israel and the diaspora as a source of learning and inspiration. Mantver himself was interviewed for Alan Gamlen's book (Gamlen, 2019) and talked about learning from Israel in the context of recruiting.

One of the main questions that arises from reading the book is the role of the country of origin or the homeland of the diaspora. As research on the subject illustrates, many countries are formulating diaspora policies, such as fostering organizations, opening government offices that deal with the issue, and extending the right to vote of citizens living abroad. Clues to the role of the state appear in the book in the description of the struggle for the liberation of the Jews of the Soviet Union—a struggle in which Israel played an important, if hidden, role. The focus on diaspora organizations leaves the home state in the background, and this opens the door for further research on the subject regarding its involvement.

In conclusion, the book is relevant for those who study the mobilization and organization of diaspora and for those in the field of migration and diaspora (either in Israel or abroad). I would like to end the book review on a personal note. The back cover of the book includes blurbs from researchers and activists in the field. The first blurb is from Prof. Gabriel Sheffer, emeritus professor of Political Science at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, who died close to the date of publication of the book. The late Prof. Sheffer was one of the pioneer researchers in the field of diasporas and international relations and set a path for many of us. This review is dedicated to him.

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Call for Papers for *Strategic Assessment*

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

Strategic Assessment, a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary peer-reviewed journal on national security, cyber, and intelligence, was launched in 1998 and is published 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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Research Forum—academic articles of a theoretical and research nature on a wide range of topics related to national security, of up to 8000 words in Hebrew or 10,000 words in English, including source material (with APA-style documentation). Articles should be researched-based and include a theoretical perspective, and address a range of subjects related to national security. All articles are submitted for double blind peer review. Submissions must include an abstract of 100-120 words; keywords (no more than ten); and a short author biography.

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

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

Academic Survey—a survey of 1800-3000 words (up to 4000 words in English) including references and recommended reading (APA-style) of the latest professional literature on a specific topic relating to national security. Submissions must include a short author biography.

Book Reviews—book reviews of 800-1500 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.

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

Raz Zimmt and Gallia Lindenstrauss
Editors, *Strategic Assessment*

