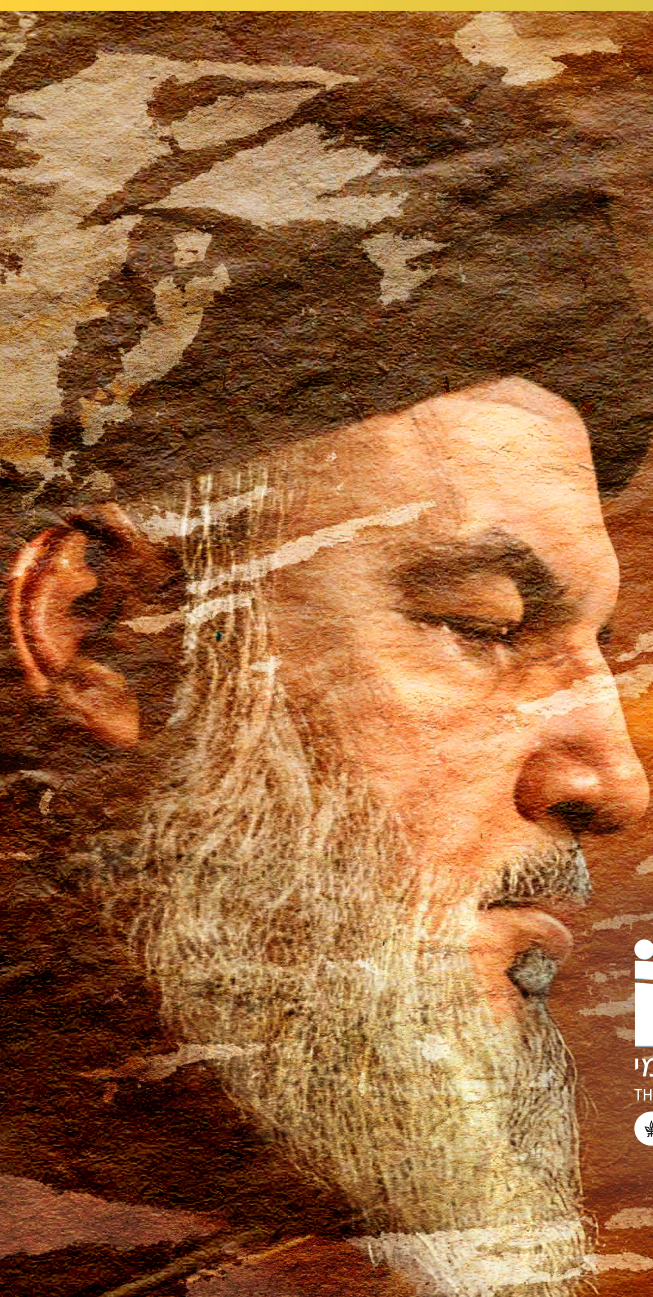




STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT

A Multidisciplinary Journal on National Security

Volume 27 | No. 4 | November 2024

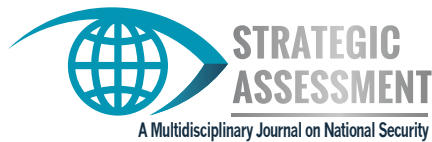


iNss

המכון למחקרי ביטחון לאומי
THE INSTITUTE FOR NATIONAL SECURITY STUDIES



אוניברסיטת תל אביב
TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY



Strategic Assessment: A Multidisciplinary Journal on National Security is a journal published by the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS). It aims to challenge and to enrich the scholarly debate and public discourse on a range of subjects related to national security in the broadest sense of the term. Along with its focus on Israel and the Middle East, the journal includes articles on national security in the international arena. Academic and research-based articles are joined by policy papers, professional forums, academic surveys, and book reviews, and are written by INSS researchers and guest contributors. The views presented are those of the authors alone.

The Institute for National Security Studies is a public benefit company.

Head of the Editorial Advisory Board

Tamir Hayman

Editors

Raz Zimmt and Gallia Lindenstrauss

Associate Editor

Sarah Mandel

Journal Coordinator

Revital Yerushalmi

Editorial Advisory Board

Dima Adamsky · Abraham Ben-Zvi · Azar Gat · Eytan Gilboa ·
Yoel Guzansky · Efraim Halevy · Tamar Hermann · Anat Kurz ·
Eviatar Matania · Benjamin Miller · Itamar Rabinovich ·
Asher Susser · Eyal Zisser

Cover design: Shay Librowski

Logo Design: b-way digital

Graphic Design: Michal Semo-Kovetz,
Tel Aviv University Graphic Design Studio

Printing: Orniv Ltd., Holon

The Institute for National Security Studies (INSS)

40 Haim Levanon • POB 39950 • Tel Aviv 6997556 • Israel

Tel: +972-3-640-0400 • Fax: +972-3-744-7590 • E-mail: editors-sa@inss.org.il

Strategic Assessment is published in English and Hebrew.

© All rights reserved.

ISSN printed version: 0793-8950

ISSN online version: 2789-9519

Contents

■ Research Forum

- Choke Point: Great Power Infrastructure Competition in the Red Sea**
Tomer Dekel 3
- Lebanon after the Doha Agreement of 2008: The Birth of the Undeclared Shiite Republic in Lebanon**
Yusri Hazran 23
- Environmental Diplomacy: The UAE and Israel before and after October 7**
Francesca Fassbender and Udi Sommer 47
- Europe's Response to the War in Gaza: Capabilities and Actorness**
Maya Sion Tzidkiyahu and Azriel Bermant 74

■ Policy Analysis

- Shall the People Dwell Alone? Israel between Unprecedented Isolation and Precedent-Setting Partnerships**
Jonathan Nevo-Abitbol 91
- How China is Acquiring Control of Global Metal & Mineral Markets**
Yehoshua Kalisky 102
- Light in the Darkness: How Can Israel-Egypt Energy Relations be Strengthened?**
Ofir Winter 109
- From Curiosity to Skepticism: Israeli Public Opinion on China**
Roy Ben Tzur 114

■ Professional Forum

- Symposium: The Role of Ideology in the Conduct of Islamist Actors**
Raz Zimmt 121

■ Book Reviews

- How Can “Deterrence à la Russe” Explain Israel's October 7 Failure?**
Daniel Rakov 127
- Nothing Lasts Forever: On the Fragility of Civil Society's Confidence in the Military**
Kobi Michael 131
- Israel and the Island Next Door**
Gallia Lindenstrauss 135



Choke Point: Great Power Infrastructure Competition in the Red Sea

Tomer Dekel

Independent researcher

This article examines the competition over infrastructure as a central pattern of conflict between great powers, and explores how it is being conducted today in and around the Red Sea. It involves a process in which a great power makes major investments in locations that control and threaten a strategically important transport and connection route. The investments are directed at both ensuring the transport and connectivity needs of the great power and its partners and at establishing the ability to threaten those of its enemies. The article begins by laying the theoretical foundation of the various spheres—arrangements and infrastructure—in which the competition is expressed. This is illustrated with a brief survey of the competition in the Indo-Pacific region between China and the United States and their partners. A detailed overview is then provided of the resource-intensive infrastructure competition that is taking place in and around the Red Sea area, with its many participants—Russia, China, the United States, India, the European Union, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey and Qatar — followed by a discussion of the possible consequences for Israeli strategy. The discussion ends with a call to consider various supplementary alternatives to Israel’s policy concerning this competition, including establishing partnerships with countries in the Red Sea area and also with the countries of the “Indo-Pacific arc,” especially with India, which has growing interests in this area.

Keywords: Infrastructure competition, transport routes, ports, Houthis, Red Sea, military bases, great powers, China, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Russia, Iran, Turkey, India, United States, Egypt, Sudan, Eritrea, Somalia, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Jordan

Introduction

For many years, the existence and functioning of global trade routes were taken for granted in most research. In recent years, there have been increasing disruptions in supply chains, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the blocking of the Suez Canal following the Ever Given container ship accident, or pirate attacks. But

as evident in the recent article by Yigal Maor and Yuval Eylon (2024), these disruptions were understood as unpredictable “black swan” events, because the reasons for them are diverse and even random. The Houthis’ attacks in the Red Sea, however, which forced a significant portion of global trade to change routes and

sail around Africa on a long route between the West and the East, raise the question of whether these are only unexpected episodes, or whether the disruption of transport and connectivity between countries and continents could be a result of calculated measures within geopolitical strategies, which can certainly be foreseen.

During the peak years of globalization, many trade routes were opened and agreements between countries were signed, signaling an era of unprecedented international trade and connectivity. But as will be presented below, it seems that this period is on the wane, and instead of connecting countries, the main trade routes are now becoming a central arena of conflict between them. This arena sometimes flares up, as with the current Houthi attacks, but this is only the tip of the iceberg. This article reveals how great powers invest enormous resources in developing infrastructure that will strengthen their control of the major international trade routes, both to ensure the security of their trade and that of their partners, and in order to establish their ability to threaten their competitors. As will be clarified, this is a characteristic pattern of cold conflict, a strategic process of projecting power that every great power or geopolitical bloc of countries needs to take part in as the polarization between countries and blocs intensifies. This process has the potential to have a very significant impact on Israel, due to its location in the Red Sea area, which it borders, and due to the importance of that Sea for Israel's own trade and connectivity. This article is the continuation of a current research effort in Israel on the geopolitics of energy infrastructure (e.g. Dekel, 2024) and maritime transport (e.g. Maor and Eylon, 2024), and an examination of how these will affect Israeli geo-strategy.

The article opens by laying theoretical foundations for what will be defined as "infrastructure competition" (Leonard, 2021). Afterwards a concise illustration of the theory is provided by describing the competition over infrastructure between China and the emerging

Eurasian bloc on the one hand and the United States and the countries of the "Indo-Pacific arc" that surrounds China on the other hand. The third section contains an in-depth overview of the infrastructure competition in the Red Sea between many great powers and countries with diverse interests, from the United States and China to the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Turkey, Qatar, the European Union, India, and Russia. In conclusion, possible directions are raised regarding how Israel should approach these developments on its southern front.

The Motivations and Characteristics of Infrastructure Competition

The complete dependence of modern economies on the movement of trade between countries and between continents constitutes a vulnerability and incentivizes their adversaries to threaten their trade routes. A considerable portion of the important trade routes in the world pass through "choke points"—straits in which much traffic must pass through a narrow sea passage that is controlled from all sides—, which leads to clear competition for their control. The blocking of a major transport route causes price increases, limitations on the supply of products, and in certain cases even economic crisis, unless the threatened power is able to find an alternate route that is safe from threats. As a result, great powers engaged in a cold conflict are forced to wage a sophisticated game of chess that combines strengthening and reinforcing the routes they need, projecting power, and containment of the adversary on all sides by tightening the hold on its "lifelines" in order to render them choke points at the moment of truth (Gaens et al., 2023; Leonard, 2021; Schindler et al., 2024).

The reconfiguration of global movement is creating a new kind of regional¹ world order in which major blocs of neighboring countries consolidate independence within themselves, detached from others (Chen, 2023). This regionality is growing stronger, especially due to the increasing tension between

the competing blocs led by China and the United States (Schindler et al., 2022, 2024). The blocs are gradually organizing themselves into large regions, albeit in processes full of internal contradictions, and not within absolute boundaries. The most distinct and well-established bloc is the Atlantic bloc—Europe and the United States. Another bloc whose consolidation has been evident in the past decade is the Eurasian bloc, which surrounds China and includes Russia, Iran, and some of the countries of Asia and the Middle East. Finally, in response to the growth of the Eurasian bloc, a new constellation is forming (whose boundaries are the vaguest)—the Indo-Pacific bloc composed of India, Japan, and some of the countries of Southeast Asia, which are increasing their partnerships with the United States (Gaens et al., 2023). The development of the blocs, despite the differences and even tensions among their member countries, stems in many respects from the interest in creating safe trade and connectivity routes in their home territories, which they control, but also vice versa—the deployment of infrastructure networks shapes the blocs around it (Flint & Zhu, 2019).²

The geopolitical literature on the intersection between the development of great power infrastructure, trade routes and choke points is not broad, and no comprehensive model has been proposed yet that details the motivations and all of the methods used in the competition between the great powers. For example, the extensive discussion that exists on the topic of the infrastructure that China is developing throughout Asia does not address the practice of cultivating proxy organizations in failed states as a method of threatening a route; and vice versa, the research on proxy organizations dedicates little attention to their role in the infrastructure competition between the great powers. To this end, a model is proposed here based on connecting the phenomena, each of which is illuminated separately in the literature, and it is validated using the case study of the Red Sea.

Great powers must constantly expand their investment in developing infrastructure in foreign countries, by financing (investing or providing loans) or establishing it themselves, and thus dependence emerges, and cooperation increases with the great power

Of the phenomena described in the literature, the competition can be defined as comprising two spheres—physical infrastructure and arrangements (or alliances)—each of which is composed of several complementary components. The two spheres simultaneously pertain to both strengthening and protecting a great power's control of a route, and to building up its ability to threaten the competitors' routes. The first level is the **sphere of physical infrastructure** and the first component of it is **civilian infrastructure**. Great powers must constantly expand their investment in developing infrastructure in foreign countries, by **financing** (investing or providing loans) or **establishing** it themselves. This comprises investment in transport infrastructure—roads, railroads, pipelines, canals, ports, and so on—but also other infrastructure (for example communications, dams, and power lines) or supplementary projects (training, research, and more), and thus dependence emerges, and cooperation increases with the great power (Harlan & Lu, 2024; Schindler et al., 2024). Moreover, the establishment of infrastructure is often an opening for the great power's entry—via private or governmental companies—as an **operator**, maintainer, or partner in them, thus ensuring the deepening of its control of traffic on the route (Kardon, 2022).

Civilian infrastructure can be crucial to establishing an intercontinental route (for example a port or railroad), or alternatively infrastructure that is not directly related to the route (for example, investment in an industrial zone or power plant). Investment in the latter kind may seem like it does not pertain

to infrastructure competition, but in fact, in many cases they are closely connected. A great power's investment in any kind of infrastructure in a certain country both strengthens the relations and the dependence between them and paves the way for the development of necessary infrastructure in the future, so the great powers are in an intensifying race to invest in all areas of civilian infrastructure in countries at strategic locations.

The willingness to establish infrastructure involves exceptional benefits, including supplementary aid and development projects, the provision of loans, trade agreements and the expansion of economic relations with the great power and, of course, arms deals and military alliances that many countries desire

It is important to note that some of the infrastructure established is in fact **bypass infrastructure**, meaning infrastructure that paves alternative routes that bypass the (potentially) threatened route and ensure the continuity of transport even if the route becomes blockaded. This type of infrastructure includes railroads, pipelines, roads, or cables that are placed on overland routes and pass through friendly countries (Dekel, 2024; Murton & Narins, 2024).

The second component in the sphere of physical infrastructure is **military infrastructure**. In order to threaten and simultaneously protect a choke point, it is necessary to station defensive and offensive capabilities (for example missile launchers or drones) in positions that grant control of the area; and in order to protect these positions and the route itself from attack by the adversary, it is necessary to station military units that are capable of performing defensive or offensive actions in the threatened area over time. Whether these are naval, air, or land units, a broad deployment of military infrastructure is necessary in the whole region, including ports, bases, logistical facilities, outposts, launchers,

communication facilities, electronic warfare, and so on (Becker, 2020; Dasgupta, 2018; Donelli & Cannon, 2023; Dunn, 2023).

The arrangements sphere concerns the nature of relations between the great power and the country at the strategic location, and the first component of it pertains to official or unofficial **agreements** between them. The establishment of infrastructure, whether civilian or military, depends first of all on agreement and on the arrangement of relations between the establishing country and the country hosting the base or serving as a "transit country" for infrastructure, which in turn affects an especially complicated web of alliances. Small countries see this as a golden opportunity to charge rent and to attract investment and support from the interested great power. Aside from the establishment of infrastructure that will also serve the residents of the country itself, the willingness to establish infrastructure involves exceptional benefits, including supplementary aid and development projects, the provision of loans, trade agreements and the expansion of economic relations with the great power and, of course, arms deals and military alliances that many countries desire (Chen, 2023; Schindler et al., 2022). Agreement to host a base of a foreign power or to allow it to use existing infrastructure brings its defensive capabilities with it. On the other hand, in this kind of deal, the host countries expose themselves to the great risk of taking a position against the adversarial power, which could lead to pressure from it or even denunciation, boycott or military retaliation.

The second component in the arrangements sphere pertains to situations in which the great power has difficulty reaching a sufficient arrangement or alliance. In such situations, the great power could choose a military takeover of choke points (Dunn, 2023), or support rebel groups to this end. When a country refrains from allowing the establishment of the infrastructure of a certain great power, the latter has an increased incentive to meddle in the country's internal affairs and to support opposition parties

or coup attempts that would enable it to have a foothold at the strategic point. Sometimes the great power will expect that a friendlier regime will be established, and sometimes, especially in failed states that have difficulty exercising sovereignty in their territory, proxy organizations will be established that will function as a military force in the indirect service of the great power (Nazir, 2024; Spanier et al., 2021).

In this theoretical model, there is no intention of representing all of the initiatives as if their sole purpose pertains to controlling routes. A great power's investment in infrastructure could stem from pure economic interests, and alternatively, the role of the infrastructure or arrangement could be to establish influence in the host country not only due to its location that controls the route, but also for other purposes (for example obtaining contracts for mining resources). However, establishing control surrounding choke points is becoming one of the most important elements in current geopolitics and a central motivation for the development of infrastructure by the great powers (Schindler et al., 2024). The next section briefly illustrates how these spheres are applied in the Asiatic and Indo-Pacific regions, as part of the increasing tension between China and the United States and their partners.³

Infrastructure Competition in Asia and the Indo-Pacific Arc

To China's dismay, all of the routes leading to China's ports, which its economy is dependent on, pass through choke points dominated by countries allied with the United States. The "first island chain" extends eastwards of China, in the direction of the Pacific Ocean, stretching from Japan via Taiwan and the Philippines to Australia. In the south, the Strait of Malacca between Indonesia and Singapore is the main route to the Indian Ocean, where most of its oil and gas comes from (from the Gulf countries) and through which most Chinese goods are shipped to Europe's markets. This vulnerability is known as the Malacca Dilemma (Lanteigne,

2008), and the solutions provided for it by China, and by the countries threatened by it, are diverse.

In order to prevent China from blockading transport routes, the Quad was established—a maritime coalition of four powers, Japan, the United States, India, and Australia—in the framework of which joint naval exercises and maneuvers are conducted in the Indo-Pacific region

China has declared, contrary to international law, that the South China Sea belongs to it. In order to reinforce its demand, it has started to build naval bases on coral reefs, while harassing and chasing away vessels of the countries bordering the sea—Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia. Meanwhile, China has invested in military buildup, especially in the navy and in "prevention of entry" capabilities (Tangredi, 2019). The growing threat has prompted Japan to lead a counter-alliance called the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)—including a broad range of countries from around Asia: from Japan and South Korea at one end, via Southeast Asia and India, to East Africa (Hosoya, 2023; Ranglin Grissler & Vargö, 2021). In order to prevent China from blockading transport routes, the Quad was established—a maritime coalition of four powers, Japan, the United States, India, and Australia—in the framework of which joint naval exercises and maneuvers are conducted in the Indo-Pacific region, along with the AUKUS alliance for military cooperation between the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia (Koga, 2024). These join a network of military infrastructure that the United States has deployed with its partners along the first island chain and the second island chain (another chain of islands that is sparser and further from the continent), which dominate China's exits to the Pacific Ocean (Tangredi, 2019).

In parallel with these processes, China is advancing the giant infrastructure project known as the Belt and Road Initiative—a

network of bypass routes via the interior of the Asian continent towards the Indian Ocean, to the heart of Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and Africa. The roads, railroads, and pipelines that China is establishing with enormous investments are, for the first time, connecting underdeveloped countries, especially those without seaports, to the Chinese economy, including Laos, Nepal, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, and Myanmar. The infrastructure connection being established between Russia, a huge energy supplier, and China, a huge energy consumer, creates increasing regional integration between the economies of the superpowers that share the Eurasian region (Khan, 2021; Schindler et al., 2022, 2024). China's overland routes connect to a series of seaports in and around the Indian Ocean that is called the String of Pearls, which enables the transport of energy and goods around the Strait of Malacca and the stationing of military infrastructure around the entrance to the threatened straits (Mengal & Mirza, 2022).

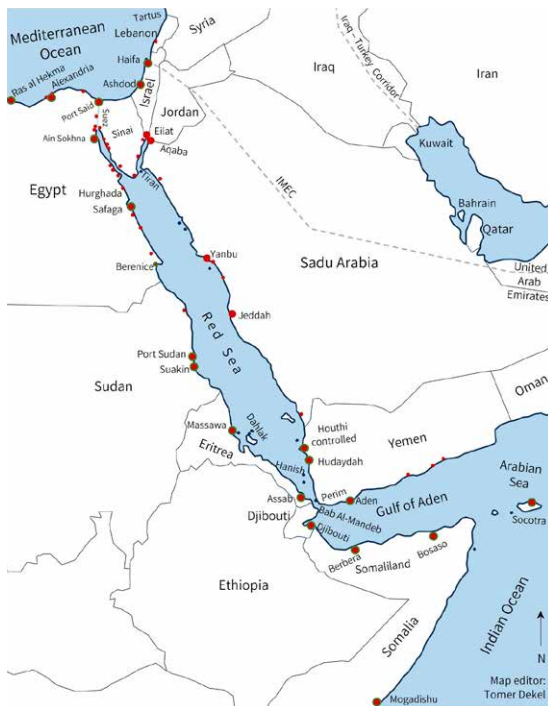
The implementation of the Belt and Road Initiative, which began in 2013, reveals to the

competing powers the magnitude of the threat of infrastructure competition with China, and they have gradually announced competing initiatives. In 2021, the European Union launched the Global Gateway program, which aims to invest 300 billion euros over six years in infrastructure throughout Asia, Africa, and South America (European Commission, 2023). Japan expanded its investments in East Asia and together with India announced their intention to establish the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) (Schindler et al., 2022; Taniguchi, 2020). India is also investing in naval capabilities to strengthen its control in the Indian Ocean (Dasgupta, 2018), in military alliances, and in building the Necklace of Diamonds ports throughout the "Indo-Pacific arc," to counter Chinese influence (Mengal & Mirza, 2022). The United States, which is a partner in many of these initiatives, is also working to establish the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), which could connect India to Europe via the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Israel (Dekel, 2024)—more on this in the next section.

Civilian and military infrastructure along the Indo-European and Indo-Pacific arc (map editor: the author)⁴



Civilian and military infrastructure in the Red Sea region (map editor: the author)



Infrastructure Competition in and Around the Red Sea

If the Strait of Malacca is the eastern gateway to and from the Indian Ocean, the western gate is the Red Sea, with its two entrances—in the south the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, the Gulf of Aden and the Arabian Sea, and in the north the Suez Canal and the eastern Mediterranean Sea. Like the Strait of Malacca, an enormous volume of global shipping passes through it (for comparison, about 30 percent of global shipping passes through Malacca, while about 15 percent passes through Suez, the next biggest choke point in terms of the volume of shipping; see Notteboom et al., 2022), including oil and gas, food, and other goods, in addition to all of the undersea communications cables between Asia and Europe, and as a result, the great powers are dependent on it to a large extent (Getahun, 2023; Kjellén & Lund, 2022; Lons & Petrini, 2023). The military threat to what can be called the “Indo-Pacific arc,” which leads from the ports of Europe via the Red Sea and the Horn of Africa to the ports of the Gulf countries, India and East

Asia, has changed form over the years, from the blockade of the Straits of Tiran in the Six Day War and the closing of the canal after the Yom Kippur War to pirate attacks in the Horn of Africa and the rise of the Houthis in Yemen in 2014. Its great importance has made it an arena of cold conflict and infrastructure competition for many great powers, with each one striving to establish control there for itself, and sometimes also as part of broader alliances. The actions of the great powers in the competition will be reviewed below separately for each great power or group. It is important to note, as the findings will show, that the competition in this area is complicated and does not directly match the inter-bloc competition described in the previous section. Especially striking here is the functioning of regional actors operating in the area relatively independently of the bloc that contains them, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Iran, and also Israel.

Iran

Despite Iran’s geographical distance and economic limitations, which led researchers to define it as a secondary actor in the Red Sea (Marsai & Rózsa, 2023), recent events prove how significant it is there. Since 2011, Iran has invested extensively in long-term consolidation in the “Indo-European arc,” in demonstrating the military presence of its navy, in establishing maritime infrastructure, and in penetrating geopolitically unstable places. The reasons are diverse, but one of the main ones is the establishment of control over the Red Sea, to secure its trade routes and threaten its adversaries. Iran’s support for the rebel faction in Yemen, the Houthis, who have become its proxies, has helped strengthen their ability to choke the Red Sea area. Through them, Iran has succeeded in killing two birds with one stone: striking Israel and the countries of the Sunni camp (especially the Emiratis and the Saudis), which are dependent on the shipping of oil and gas. With Iranian support, training, and backing,

as early as a decade ago, the Houthis started attacking Saudi Arabian targets, with which it waged a brutal struggle (Shay, 2018). In 2015, when Houthi forces seized the Yemeni island of Perim, which lies in the middle of the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait, Iranian forces deployed on it and their declaration indicated their purpose—for their presence there to “continue forever” (Fargher, 2017)—but the island was conquered shortly afterwards by the Government of Yemen and its allies Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The conflict between them reached a climax in Operation Golden Spear in 2017 (Shay, 2018), but only after October 7, 2023, was there a rise in the quality and volume of attacks at the choke point, when the Houthis started to attack ships that they identified as Israeli (although most were not; only a small portion had an Israeli partner among the owners) (Maor and Eylon, 2024; Pedrozo, 2024).

In recent years Riyadh and Abu Dhabi increased their investments in all of the countries in the area to the point of direct deposits of billions of dollars for governments, signing defense agreements, mediating peace agreements (for example, between Ethiopia and Eritrea and between Ethiopia and Sudan) and placing a practical demand on these countries to choose sides and distance themselves from Iran.

Like Yemen, Iran also supported and armed Sudan, partly with the expectation of building a port on its coast, and even offered a helicopter carrier in return. The connection with Iran was suspended in the past decade due to Western and Saudi Emirati pressure, but recently one of the generals claiming power in Sudan announced the thawing of relations and the implementation of a large-scale arms deals with Iran (Dabanga, 2024; ADF, 2024; Karr, 2024). In Eritrea, which has been isolated from the West due to its government’s human rights violations, Iran has used the Port of Assab since 2008 to dock its fleet for the purpose of conducting

patrols and protecting Iranian ships in the Red Sea. Iran has expressed its ambition to build military bases in Djibouti and Somalia too, but so far this ambition has not been fulfilled (Marsai & Rózsa, 2023). However, since the Houthis’ attacks, the government of Somalia has moved to tighten its relations with the Iranians (which were cut off due to Saudi Emirati pressure in 2016, see below) and spoken out against Israel (Horn Observer, 2024).

Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates

The Iranian hold greatly worried its regional adversaries, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, alongside greater fears of instability among their neighbors which overlook their borders and their trade routes. Therefore, in recent years Riyadh and Abu Dhabi increased their investments in all of the countries in the area to the point of direct deposits of billions of dollars for governments, signing defense agreements, mediating peace agreements (for example, between Ethiopia and Eritrea and between Ethiopia and Sudan) and placing a practical demand on these countries to choose sides and distance themselves from Iran, which was indeed achieved for a certain period (in 2016 Somalia and Sudan cut off their diplomatic relations with Iran; Marsai & Rózsa, 2023). Under the leadership of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden Council was established, bringing together all of the countries in the area in a defensive alliance (Darwich, 2020; Ding, 2024). Another reason for Saudi Arabia’s great interest in the area is the establishment and expansion of civilian port infrastructure along its eastern coasts, at the Port of Yanbu, Jeddah, or in the futuristic city of Neom (Arab News, 2023).

Each year, Saudi Arabia invests billions of dollars in infrastructure and industries in Egypt (Ahran Online, 2023). Egypt’s economic dependence on Saudi Arabia was expressed in 2016 when el-Sisi, the president of Egypt, agreed to cede sovereignty over the islands of Sanafir

and Tiran, which dominate the entrance to the Gulf of Eilat, to Saudi Arabia. This sparked strong public opposition in Egypt, which delayed its implementation for years. The formal transfer finally occurred in 2023 after pressure from the Americans, who saw it as an important step towards advancing normalization between Saudi Arabia and Israel (since Israel's consent to the deal pertaining to the straits leading to the Port of Eilat was necessary) (Al-Anani, 2023). Moreover, under the influence of the Americans, Saudi Arabia is working to establish a land route that bypasses the Red Sea and also allows Americans forces to use its ports along the Red Sea—issues that will be described below.

The United Arab Emirates operates in the area in relative coordination with Saudi Arabia but also with great independence, and may even be taking the lead.⁵ They are currently looking at the establishment of a series of ports and bases under their control, an Emirati version of the String of Pearls (Quilliam, 2022) alongside a series of “flexible military bases” that are established quickly at various sites and abandoned as needs change (Ardemagni, 2024). Egypt receives most of the Emirati investment, which reaches exceptional sums (for example, in 2022 they invested 27 billion dollars in Egypt; EY, 2023), in a wide array of infrastructure and other economic sectors. The United Arab Emirates is acquiring industries in many sectors: It develops or operates the Red Sea ports in the cities of Sharm El Sheikh, Hurghada, Safaga, and Ain Sokhna, and on the Mediterranean coast it is establishing a new port city at Ras el-Hekma (and apparently also a military base) with an enormous investment of 35 billion dollars (Hassan, 2024; Kumar, 2023). It also had a base in Djibouti and for a long period operated ports there, until the government cancelled the contracts, claiming that the Emirati company betrayed its obligations (Donelli, 2022). In Eritrea, the United Arab Emirates leased the Hanish Islands and the Port of Assab (which it recently abandoned, and it is possible that Iran has started to man it in the vacuum that was

left) and also established bases on the Yemeni islands of Perim and Socotra at the entrance to the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait (Ding, 2024; Donelli & Cannon, 2023; Getahun, 2023; Sofos, 2023), as well as developing and operating three ports in southern Yemen (Meester & Lanfranchi, 2021).

The countries of the Horn of Africa are a focus of great interest for the United Arab Emirates, which has invested more than 11 billion dollars since the beginning of the twenty-first century in huge civilian infrastructure projects in these countries (for comparison, Saudi Arabia invested only about a third of that sum in those states). In Somaliland, a rebel province in Somalia on the coast of the Gulf of Aden, the United Arab Emirates is building giant ports in the cities of Bosaso and Berbera, investing hundreds of millions of dollars in each of them (Ding, 2024; Getahun, 2023; Sofos, 2023). Their establishment paved the way for the establishment of military ports nearby that rely on them (Quilliam, 2022). By paving a new road from the Port of Berbera to Ethiopia, whose 120 million residents currently lack an effective connection to the sea, the United Arab Emirates aspires to compete with the Chinese corridor (details below) that will connect Ethiopia to the Port of Djibouti (Meester & Lanfranchi, 2021).

It should be added that the Emirati-Saudi drive to establish infrastructural-military dominance in the area is not only part of their struggle with Iran, but also part of their parallel struggle with the Turkish-Qatari axis, which supports the Muslim Brotherhood that threatens them (Donelli & Cannon, 2023; Marsai & Rózsa, 2023)—a conflict that reached a climax a few years ago but has moderated since then. For example, in 2017, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia demanded that Somalia cut off its relations with Qatar, but it refused (other countries in the area, such as Djibouti, did in fact cooperate with this demand). From that point onward, the United Arab Emirates diverted its support from the capital, Mogadishu, to Somaliland. Because of this abandonment, Turkey succeeded in becoming Somalia's

main military supporter, as detailed below (note that recently the United Arab Emirates again announced the establishment of a new base in Somalia; Ardemagni, 2024). In 2022, the United Arab Emirates signed an enormous 4-billion-dollar deal with the government of Sudan to establish a new port north of Port Sudan (Quilliam, 2022). Since the outbreak of the civil war in Sudan, the United Arab Emirates has become the main supporter of one of the factions, in order to refortify its influence in the country (Mahjoub, 2024).

Turkey and Qatar

Turkey has made the establishment of naval power a high strategic priority, as can be seen in the Blue Homeland doctrine that it published in 2006. Another policy document published recently titled, “The Century of Türkiye,” clarifies that although most of Turkey’s attention is focused on the seas directly around it (the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea), Turkish interests very much involve securing the transport of goods and energy resources from the Indian Ocean (Cubukcuoglu, 2024; Saha & Cannon, 2024). Turkey started to implement this doctrine in 2011 in Somalia, where it chose to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in humanitarian projects, peacekeeping measures, and later in the establishment of a Turkish military base in the capital, Mogadishu (the biggest outside of Turkey) (Sofos, 2023). In 2024, new, broader agreements were signed between the countries for the supply of weapons and training. Turkey started to upgrade the Port of Mogadishu and has been operating it since 2013, and the new agreements between the countries make clear that Turkey will be able to use the port for the purposes of its navy, which it will use to project power towards the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean (Cubukcuoglu, 2024).

Aside from Somalia, Turkey is now investing 7 billion dollars in establishing an industrial zone, logistics and railway infrastructure at the port of Jarjoub in northern Egypt (Port2Port, 2024). Such investments, each in the hundreds

of millions of dollars, have increased recently, while attempting to moderate the tension that exists between Turkey and Egypt and simultaneously to render Egypt as Turkey’s “gateway to Africa” (Yehia, 2024). In 2017 in Sudan, Turkey led a large-scale investment campaign in industry, agriculture, water infrastructure, the construction of an airport, and above all, the leasing of the port of Suakin, an ancient Ottoman fortress, in order to build a civilian and military port there. Meanwhile, Turkey’s partner, Qatar, announced the investment of 4 billion dollars in the construction of a port at that site, along with huge investments in roads in Sudan, Eritrea, and Somalia (Ding, 2024; Tekingunduz, 2019). After the coup in Sudan in 2019, the contract was suspended, in part due to Saudi and Emirati pressure. At present Turkey is supporting one of the factions fighting in Sudan, in the hope of reestablishing its foothold in the country (Sofos, 2023; Sudan Tribune, 2024). Turkey is also active in supporting Hamas (though as a marginal actor) and Islamic communities in Israel, in building informal infrastructures in Bedouin settlements (Dekel et al., 2019) and in supporting the (recently triumphant) rebel factions in Syria.

Russia

Russia also has a growing interest in extending its influence along the “Indo-European arc” (Rogozińska & Olech, 2020). The sequence of Russian “strongholds” starts at the Syrian port of Tartus on the Mediterranean coast, which they received after President Bashar al-Assad survived the coup by the skin of his teeth, thanks to their military intervention in the civil war (the recent events in Syria will probably force them to withdraw and enable Turkey to enter the vacuum). The sequence continues in Egypt, which, despite protests from the United States, has been strengthening its ties with Russia for more than a decade with military cooperation, major arms deals, permission for Russian military use of Egyptian bases and

ports (Kjellén & Lund, 2022), and the Russian construction of a nuclear power plant, which is based on an investment of 20 billion dollars, in the city of El Dabaa in northeastern Egypt (Tharayil, 2024). In this way Russia is helping Egypt renew and strengthen its military force in an exceptional manner and thus build an especially strong naval force (Henkin, 2018), which is based on military ports at Berenice in the Red Sea, Port Said in the Suez Canal, and Jarjoub in the Mediterranean Sea. It is possible that Russia intends to help Egypt in its struggle against Islamic terrorism in Sinai and thus to gain a complete foothold in the area, similarly to its model of operation in Syria.

South of there, Russia is also establishing arrangements to receive docking permits at ports throughout the Indian Ocean, and is conspicuously holding joint naval exercises with China and Iran in the Arabian Sea (Elmas, 2024; Kjellén & Lund, 2022). In Sudan, Russia is striving to establish an independent base in the city of Port Sudan and has already begun to devise a deal with the government, which led to a clear threat from the United States towards the Sudanese government, leading the government to postpone signing (Satti, 2022). Recently however, against the backdrop of the civil war in the country, one of the generals claiming power in Sudan approved the deal with Russia to establish a logistical and military port at Port Sudan (Dabanga, 2024; Karr, 2024; Knipp 2024). Meanwhile, there appear to be signs that Eritrea will also allow Russia to establish a base in the port city of Massawa (Plaut, 2024).

India

India also has great interest in projecting its power into the Red Sea area, especially as part of the Necklace of Diamonds strategy, whose goal is to compete with China's growing influence in the region via a chain of ports under its control. After a long period during which India focused on establishing infrastructure in the eastern Indian Ocean extending towards the Strait of Malacca, it declared that it is restoring its emphasis on

It is possible that Russia intends to help Egypt in its struggle against Islamic terrorism in Sinai and thus to gain a complete foothold in the area, similarly to its model of operation in Syria.

the western Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden. To this end, India is investing a great deal of capital in establishing the Chabahar Port in Iran (Dagan Amos, 2024; Mengal & Mirza, 2022) and in establishing naval bases in the Seychelles, Maldives, and Minicoy Island—all of them surrounding the Arabian Sea and enabling the activity of the Indian Navy in the Red Sea area (Xiaojun, 2024). Oman allocated a logistics complex to the Indian Navy at the Port of Duqm (Chaudhury, 2024), and India is considering additional large-scale investments to develop this port (The Economic Times, 2024) and other ports and industries in the country, which it considers to be of special strategic importance for it in the area (Khan, 2024). With the Houthis' attacks during the October 7 War, the Indian Navy increased its presence and activity at the entrance to the straits to an unprecedented level, even if it still refrains from officially participating in the Western coalition against the Houthis (Pant & Bommakanti, 2024).

China

The Houthi crisis in the Red Sea was defined by various commentators as an important turning point in the decline of American hegemony vis-à-vis China. Despite China's economic losses from the harm to maritime trade and although the United States has urged it to participate in the military operation and also to pressure Iran (which China sponsors in many ways) to stop the Houthis (its proxies), China has refrained from acting except for limited measures of military escorts for Chinese ships. The Houthis even declared that they would not harm Chinese or Russian ships (even though a Chinese ship was in fact attacked, which was

explained as a misidentification) (Kumon, 2024). The commentator Nathan Levine claims that whether China finally pressures Iran and brings about the cessation of the attacks or whether the threat continues, with shipping under Chinese patronage continuing to be considered safer, China will benefit because it will be portrayed, for the first time, as the great power ensuring freedom of navigation at sea. Thus it will seize this historic role, which is an important pillar of establishing its hegemony, from the United States (Levine, 2024).

China sees the Red Sea area as the direct strategic continuation of the Belt and Road Initiative, which connects Europe and Africa to it. During the past decade, in certain periods China was the biggest source of foreign investment in Africa, although recently its standing has declined again and it is significantly behind the United States, France, the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates and also India. In the Red Sea area, China has not yet surpassed the investments coming from Western sources, and in particular compared to the United Arab Emirates (EY, 2023), and it is apparently focused on more strategic specific projects than competition over general investments.⁶ China has a naval base in Djibouti (alongside the bases of other countries, see below), which to date is the first base established outside of its territory, and it is expanding it as a central point for control in the Red Sea and towards the Indian Ocean (Becker, 2020). China goes a long way in investing in ports and other infrastructure in the area and in establishing alliances with countries there, to the dismay of the United States. Of the dozens of countries that China is investing in as part of the Belt and Road Initiative, Saudi Arabia has been in the lead recently in the volume of investment in building infrastructure—about 5.6 billion dollars in 2023 alone (Nedopil, 2024). It has additional holdings in the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Somalia, and Sudan, and invested 12 billion dollars in expanding and operating a wharf at the Port of Djibouti and in connecting it to neighboring Ethiopia with the

Yaji Railway and oil pipelines, in order to secure its transformation into the “Singapore of the Horn of Africa” (China exploited the opportunity to gain a foothold at the Djibouti ports after the United Arab Emirates was banned from operating them. Donelli, 2022).

China’s navy maintains a routine presence in all of the Red Sea ports, participates in joint operations against pirates in the Gulf of Aden, and is establishing itself as a growing arms supplier for many of the countries in the area (Wuthnow, 2020). It is also working to position itself as a mediator between enemies in the Initiative of Peaceful Development in the Horn of Africa, which it announced in 2022 (Eickhoff & Godehardt, 2022), and also throughout the Middle East, for example between Saudi Arabia and Iran or between the Palestinian factions. In Egypt, China has become a major investor in industrial and logistics projects that support the expansion of the Suez Canal and also in the Ain Sokhna Port south of it, Port Said, and the Port of Alexandria (Getahun, 2023; Meester & Lanfranchi, 2021; Shay, 2023; Zou, 2021).⁷

In Jordan, which China sees as a “gateway to the Levant” for the Belt and Road Initiative, China has committed to investing 7 billion dollars in industry, in commercial centers and a large coal-fired power plant (which has been defined as the largest private Chinese investment outside of China), in railroads, in a new oil pipeline to Iraq, in a Chinese university and more⁸ (Marks, 2022). Finally, China has also become an important infrastructure player in Israel—it built the South Port in Ashdod and operates the Bayport in Haifa under a franchise. This led to warnings from American officials, who were concerned about a Chinese foothold that would pose a threat to future American use of the port (Ella, 2019; Chaziza, 2022; Kampeas & Staff, 2019; Invest Saudi, 2024; and see criticism of these claims: Lavi and Orion, 2021). In 2019, growing concerns about Chinese involvement in investments in infrastructure and parallel sectors in Israel led to the establishment of a regulatory mechanism

to oversee foreign investment (Ella, 2019). The continued deterioration of relations with China is leading sources in Israel to identify other countries that will be able to handle the implementation of major infrastructure tenders “out of a desire to dilute the dependence on China—in light of its hostile attitude towards Israel” (Reuven, 2024).

The United States and the European Union

The United States has an extensive deployment of about 50,000 military personnel (soldiers and contractors) in the area, with sea, air, and land bases in Israel, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia and additional bases in countries close to the straits, including the United Arab Emirates and Qatar in the Persian Gulf, Oman in the Indian Ocean, and Turkey and Greece in the Mediterranean Sea (Denison, 2022; Wallin, 2022).⁹ In recent years, it has expanded the flexible posture method in western Saudi Arabia, arranging for American army use of Saudi air and sea ports along the Red Sea. In this way forces can be deployed quickly and pulled back as needed, both to establish control in the straits themselves and as a set of rear bases in the case of war with Iran (Gambrell, 2021). The United States also maintains extensive control of the base of the multinational observer force established to preserve the peace agreements with Egypt in the Sinai Peninsula (Multinational Force & Observers, n.d.).

The focal point where a very large quantity of military infrastructure is concentrated is the tiny country of Djibouti, which is located on the western coast of the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait. The country has become a multinational center for naval bases, including of the United States, Germany, Italy, France, Japan, and as mentioned above, also China (Becker, 2020; Shay, 2023) (note that the United States’ presence is much more prominent than that of other countries—4,000 soldiers are stationed at the American base, 1,400 at the French base, 1,000 at the Chinese base, and only a few dozen

at each of the other bases; Masuda, 2023). These bases are used by the countries of the Western coalition in the struggle against pirates, and since 2023 in Operation Prosperity Guardian against the Houthi attacks. This situation has spurred the Americans to expand their involvement in other countries around the straits, which is expressed in a 100-million-dollar agreement to aid in the establishment of bases for the Somali army (U.S. Embassy in Somalia, 2024), and also Congress’ recent decision to deepen cooperation with Somaliland, and in particular the use of the Port of Berbera, which is in its territory. The details of the decision clearly express its goals, which are defined in the near term as to “support United States policy focused on the Red Sea corridor, the Indo-Pacific region, and the Horn of Africa [...] defeating the terrorist threat [...] the malign influence of the Iranian regime [...] counter China’s influence and interests in port facilities in Djibouti, Mombasa (Kenya), Massawa, and Assab (Eritrea)” (U.S. Congress, 2024). Moreover, the United States is involved in extensive aid programs in most countries in the area, for example in 315 million dollars of humanitarian aid that was recently provided to alleviate the hardships of the civil war in Sudan (USAID, 2024).

The European Union, in its attempt to achieve influence in the region (aside from the bases of EU countries in Djibouti), has since the 2000s invested over 17 billion euros in aid and development projects in Horn of Africa countries. In 2021, it defined the area as a “top priority” and in 2023, as part of the Global Gateway project, it worked to implement an extensive infrastructure development package in the Horn of Africa, with a focus on Ethiopia and Somalia (European Commission, 2023). However, Europe’s policy has not yet become clear, and it is far from the achievements of the competing actors (Lanfranchi, 2023)—an issue that has become even more important since the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine War in 2022. Because of the war, Europe is looking

for alternative sources of energy to reduce the dependence that it has developed on the supply of natural gas from Russia, and to this end it has turned to the Gulf countries. The oil and gas of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are transferred in ships via the choke points in the Red Sea, and these countries were well aware of the threat inherent in this region even before the flare-up in 2023. Note that the Saudis have an oil pipeline to the Port of Yanbu, which bypasses Bab el-Mandeb, but its size is limited and, in any case, transport from it to Europe remains dependent on passing through the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, which are threatened by attacks from countries bordering the sea. Thus, the Gulf countries and the Western countries see great strategic significance in establishing a bypass route, in order to create an alternative that would ensure the transport of energy in an emergency: railroads and pipelines that would be laid between the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Israel, so that natural gas would flow from the Port of Haifa to Europe.

This vision, under the leadership of the United States, which is called the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), started to take shape with the Abraham Accords and was also dependent on the normalization agreement between Israel and Saudi Arabia. The harm to these arrangements due to Hamas' attack on October 7 played well into the hands of the partners in the Eurasian bloc: the Iranians, as the attack harmed an agreement being formed between their adversaries; the Russians, who reconfirmed Europe's energy dependence on them; and the Chinese also see this as an advantage, as the IMEC economic corridor under American control challenged the parallel routes being established as part of the Belt and Road Initiative (Dekel, 2024). The situation also plays into the hands of Turkey and Iraq, which at the beginning of 2023 announced their intention to establish a "Suez bypass" corridor of railroads and roads from the coast of the Persian Gulf to the Black Sea coast, with the assistance and funding of the United Arab Emirates and Qatar (Blair, 2023).

Conclusion and Discussion: Israel in the Infrastructure Competition

In recent years, the Red Sea area, located at the heart of the "Indo-European arc"—a critical bottleneck that connects the East and West—has become an arena of intensive competition to establish control by various powers, the clearest expression of which is the competition over infrastructure. In this competition, as defined and characterized in the article, each power is investing great resources in order to set up civilian and military infrastructure that enables it to guarantee its ability to use the transport and connectivity route, as well as to establish a military threat to its competitors in such a way that it would be able to close the route at a choke point when it sees fit. The investment in infrastructure is divided into two spheres—the sphere of physical infrastructure, meaning the direct establishment of infrastructure enabling practical control of the route; alongside investment in civilian infrastructure, industries, and military deals in countries at strategic locations, thus establishing in them the second sphere, the sphere of arrangements, which enables forming alliances with them that will lead them to allow the establishment of infrastructure dominating the route, or alternatively to operate or receive the right to use it as needed. In a country that refrains from enabling the establishment of or access to infrastructure, the rejected power turns to supporting rebel factions (in an existing civil war or in causing the country to deteriorate into such a war) in order to receive an arrangement, and through it, support for the necessary infrastructure after the victory of those factions.

Given the special effort by various powers to establish infrastructure, in diverse ways, as revealed in the study, we can say that an infrastructure competition or even an "infrastructure scramble" is developing in and around the Red Sea. We claim that it is becoming one of the key components shaping the politics and economics of the countries along its coasts. The countries that have established or are

striving to establish infrastructure in the area include the United States, China, Russia, India, Turkey, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the European Union (and additional countries can also be mentioned whose foothold is expressed only or mainly in bases in Djibouti—Germany, Italy, France, and Japan). This trend also challenges the argument of Maor and Eylon (2024), who recently explained that disruptions to the supply chain stem mostly from black swan events, that is, unexpected crises. Given the tremendous effort invested in the Red Sea area, it is clear that this is a systemic strategic process and not a passing episode, and it is likely that at one stage or another, the threat will be carried out.

The first specific implementation is the Houthi attacks on the Red Sea route, which were made possible by Iranian investment in building up the military capabilities of the rebels dominating the choke point. While the intensity of the impact of the Houthis' "blockade" of Israel has not yet become clear, the infrastructure competition in the area could lead to much more severe developments in the future, with the establishment of Iranian, Russian, Turkish, and Chinese infrastructure (and that of their proxies). The ability of the current coalition led by the United States to fight against them is already insufficient, and there are concerns that a prolonged economic and political war of attrition could erode the United States' incentive to invest in it. In addition, the continued investment of the Eurasian bloc—whose hostility to Israel is gradually being revealed—in civilian infrastructure in countries such as Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, and more, could pull them towards it.

It is worth mentioning the critical position of Federico Donelli and Brendon Cannon (Donelli & Cannon, 2023), who argue that while the efforts of the United Arab Emirates and Turkey to establish military infrastructure in the Horn of Africa appear to be preparation for conflict, in practice these countries have no ability to maintain an effective military presence over time, and they expect that the efforts will fade.

The findings in this study do not contradict the fact that at present the regional powers may be limited in their ability to establish control in the area, but the consistent and significant efforts certainly indicate their long-term intentions and the likelihood that their capabilities will grow during that time. Another question that currently remains open is how a conflict will be expressed in a country in which several powers have an infrastructural foothold (two prominent examples are Djibouti and Egypt, albeit each in a different way). It is possible that the host country will, when the time comes, be forced to choose sides and expel the opposing side (a demand that was indeed made by the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia towards several countries in the area, regarding detaching from Turkey and Qatar), or the opposite—perhaps the dual presence will prevent each side from gaining an advantage, thus actually preventing escalation towards conflict in this area.

A strategic approach by Israel to the threat could be expressed in creating resilience and diversifying the supply sources of goods and energy (Maor and Eylon, 2024), but at the same time, also in fully entering the infrastructure competition. Due to Israel's limitations as an independent infrastructure player, four complementary alternatives are proposed here for implementing this strategy, which are based on the insights that arose in the article regarding the dynamic of the infrastructure competition:

1. Even though the land routes are limited in scope compared to the sea routes, they serve as an important alternative for emergencies. Therefore, additional importance should be placed on the agreements with Saudi Arabia in order to ensure that the infrastructure that it is establishing will serve Israel and not be used by its enemies, and that a central route of trains and energy pipelines will be established from the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia via Israel (before a competing Iraqi-Turkish route is established).
2. If Israel were to form international partnerships and recruit major investors,

it would be able to significantly expand its involvement in the establishment and operation of major infrastructure in the fields of renewable energy and water in the dry and sun-soaked Red Sea area. Huge projects that provide energy, water, and food security to Jordan, Egypt, or Sudan, which are always on the verge of economic collapse and famine, would increase their dependence on Israel and its leverage over them (see Deutch, 2023).

3. Israel could look further east and formulate a strategy regarding “stretching” the “Indo-Pacific arc” up to Israel’s coast, meaning getting the major actors from the East—Japan, Australia, and India—to see the Red Sea in particular and the “Indo-European arc” in general as an area that is important to their interests, and to enlist them in partnerships in infrastructure and military force (it is even possible to imagine Israeli partnership in defensive frameworks such as the Quad). In this respect, India with its growing power could turn out to be a central actor, and strengthening relations with it would consolidate Israel’s security in the Red Sea over time.
4. A strong American presence in the Red Sea should be seen as a necessity for recruiting capital and military force to counter the spread and consolidation of China, Russia, Iran, and Turkey into Israel’s “back yard.” Determined Israeli action in the competition over infrastructure could establish the necessary control in the Red Sea area, re-enlist partners, and ensure the ability to prevent or reduce “choking” in the future.

Dr. Tomer Dekel is a planner and geographer, and head of the planning and development unit at the OR Movement, which works to develop the Negev and the Galilee. He deals with the strategic planning of cities, functional urban areas, and industrial clusters. Dekel also engages in research on issues of metropolitan development, Bedouin settlement in the Negev, military geography, and infrastructure geography. tomerdkl@gmail.com

Sources

- ADF staff (2024, July 30). *Iran pours weapons into Sudan in push for naval base*. <https://tinyurl.com/4tjey6cy>
- Ahram Online (2023, November 19). *Saudi investments in Egypt hit \$6.3 bln: Minister*. <https://tinyurl.com/2ehv9vda>
- Al-Anani, K. (2023, March 29). *Geopolitics of small islands: The stalemate of Tiran and Sanafir’s transfer impacts Egypt-Saudi relations*. Arab Center Washington DC. <https://tinyurl.com/53894vba>
- Arab News (2023, June 18). *Saudi Ports Authority signs deal to construct integrated bunker station at Yanbu port*. <https://tinyurl.com/bdp65ryw>
- Ardemagni, E. (2024, April 30). *Flexible outposts: The Emirati approach to military bases abroad*. Sada. <https://tinyurl.com/2ad5dtsy>
- Bea (n.d.). *U.S. direct investment abroad: Balance of payments and direct investment position data*. Graph: Position on a historical-cost basis, financial transactions without current-cost adjustment, and income without current-cost adjustment. <https://tinyurl.com/5n7rc3ym>
- Becker, J. (2020). *China maritime report no. 11: Securing China’s lifelines across the Indian Ocean*. U.S. Naval War College. <https://tinyurl.com/js644fmr>
- Blair, A. (2023, September 20). *Turkey moves against Europe with trade corridor alternative to IPEC*. Railway Technology. <https://tinyurl.com/5n8knwxv>
- Chaudhury, D.R. (2024, February 8). *Amid Red Sea crisis, India gets a specific zone in Duqm Port*. The Economic Times. <https://tinyurl.com/2xwxz7yv>
- Chaziza, M. (2022). *Israel-China relations in the new era of strategic rivalry and competition between great powers*. *Strategic Assessment*, 25(2), 19-30. <https://tinyurl.com/54e8js2e>
- Chen, X. (2023). *Corridorizing regional globalization: The reach and impact of the China-centric rail-led geoeconomic pathways across Europe and Asia*. in M. Steger (ed.), *Globalization: Past, Present, Future* (pp. 145-160). University of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520395770-011>
- China Africa Research Initiative (2024). *Chinese FDI in Africa data overview*. Johns Hopkins University. <https://tinyurl.com/2x6f6huz>
- Cubukcuoglu, S.S. (2024, May 26). *Maritime security aspects of Türkiye-Somalia defense cooperation agreement*. TRENDS Research and Advisory. <https://tinyurl.com/vcwpyfn3>
- Dabanga (2024, May 29). *Sudan general confirms Red Sea base deal with Russia, strengthens ties with Iran*. <https://tinyurl.com/4j8dzw8>
- Dagan Amos, L. (July 10, 2024). *The Chabahar port – India’s entry into geopolitical influence*. *Perspectives Papers* 2,291, Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies. <https://tinyurl.com/3cyw9ap5>
- Darwich, M. (2020). *Saudi-Iranian rivalry from the Gulf to the Horn of Africa: Changing geographies and*

- infrastructures. In *Sectarianism and International Relations* (pp. 46-42) POMEPS Studies 38; SEPAD <https://tinyurl.com/4ebdrrcu>
- Dasgupta, A. (2018). India's strategy in the Indian Ocean region: A critical aspect of India's energy security. *Jadavpur Journal of International Relations*, 22(1), 39-57. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0973598418757817>
- Davis, H. (2023, August 2). *How Jordan is stuck in billions of dollars in debt to China*. The New Arab. <https://tinyurl.com/yc5ewwbz>
- Dekel, T., Meir, A., & Alfasi, N. (2019). Formalizing infrastructures, civic networks, and production of space: Bedouin informal settlements in Be'er-Sheva Metropolis. *Land Use Policy*, 81, 91-99. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landusepol.2018.09.041>
- Dekel, T. (2024). Hamas and the new big game. *Strategic Assessment*, 27(1), 3-15. <https://tinyurl.com/3jnm2b2s>
- Denison, B. (2022, May 12). *Bases, logistics, and the problem of temptation in the Middle East*. Defense Priorities. <https://tinyurl.com/2xk9mery>
- Deutch, R. (2023). The heart and the arteries: Strategic vision for Israel as a central country, *Hashiloach*, 33, 105-126. <https://tinyurl.com/b4rwdbmfb>
- Ding, L. (2024). The evolving roles of the Gulf states in the Horn of Africa. *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, 18(1), 1-14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25765949.2024.2340332>
- Donelli, F. (2022). The Red Sea competition arena: Anatomy of Chinese strategic engagement with Djibouti. *Afriche e Orienti*, 25(1), 43-59. <https://tinyurl.com/35v9juup>
- Donelli, F., & Cannon, B.J. (2023). Power projection of Middle East states in the Horn of Africa: Linking security burdens with capabilities. *Small Wars & Insurgencies*, 34(4), 759-779. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592318.2021.1976573>
- Dunn, E.C. (2023). Warfare and warfarin: Chokepoints, clotting and vascular geopolitics. *Ethnos*, 88(2), 246-263. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00141844.2020.1764602>
- Eickhoff, K., & Godehardt, P.N. (2022). *China's Horn of Africa initiative: Fostering or fragmenting peace?* Megatrends Africa. Working Paper 1. <https://tinyurl.com/bdf2yadn>
- Ella, D. (November 18, 2019). A regulatory mechanism to oversee foreign investment in Israel: Security ramifications. *INSS Insight* No. 1229, Institute for National Security Studies. <https://tinyurl.com/3s7dacs>
- Elmas, D. S. (February 5, 2024). Amid the Houthis' attacks in the Red Sea: Iran, Russia, and China will conduct a joint naval exercise. *Globes*. <https://tinyurl.com/2w6683sh>
- European Commission (2023, December 15). Global gateway: EU and Horn of Africa countries sign Alliance to boost economic development and combat climate change. <https://tinyurl.com/tvx2uss2>
- EY (2023). *A pivot to growth. EY Attractiveness Africa*. <https://tinyurl.com/374r7ub8>
- Fargher, J. (2017, April 5). 'This presence will last forever': An assessment of Iranian naval capabilities in the Red Sea. *CIMSEC*. <https://tinyurl.com/3x78z2hn>
- Flint, C., & Zhu, C. (2019). The geopolitics of connectivity, cooperation, and hegemonic competition: The Belt and Road Initiative. *Geoforum*, 99, 95-101. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2018.12.008>
- Gaens, B., Sinkkonen, V., & Vogt, H. (2023). Connectivity and order: An Analytical Framework. *East Asia*, 40, 209-228. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12140-023-09401-z>
- Gambrell, J. (2021, January 26). *US exploring new bases in Saudi Arabia amid Iran tensions*. Military Times. <https://tinyurl.com/477dka2r>
- Getahun, S. (2023). The new global superpower geo-strategic and geo-economics rivalry in the Red Sea and its implication on peace and security in the Horn of Africa. *Jurnal Ekonomi Teknologi dan Bisnis (JETBIS)*, 2(5), 375-390. <https://tinyurl.com/4sxwd97x>
- Harlan, T., & Lu, J. (2024). The cooperation-infrastructure nexus: Translating the 'China Model' into Laos. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 45(2), 204-224. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sjtg.12535>
- Hassan, M. (2024, March 5). *What are the hidden details of the Egypt-UAE Ras Al-Hikma deal?* MEMO. <https://tinyurl.com/429bs8km>
- Henkin, Y. (January 7, 2018). *The buildup of the Egyptian army*. Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security. <https://tinyurl.com/2r74v3cc>
- Horn Observer (2024, July 3). *Somalia's PM to engage with Iranian IRGC in Iraq amid Houthi and Al-Shabaab deal*. <https://tinyurl.com/2pzke3p4>
- Hosoya, Y. (2023). Japan's defense of the liberal international order: The "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" from Abe to Kishida. In G. Rozman & R. Jones (eds.), *Korea policy – Rethinking the liberal international order in Asia amidst Russia's war in Ukraine* (pp. 40-55). KEI. <https://tinyurl.com/3cn6mnr>
- Invest Saudi (2024). *Saudi Arabia foreign direct investment report*. <https://tinyurl.com/2d6b6kst>
- Kampeas, R., & TOI Staff (2019, June 14). *US Senate warns Israel against letting China run Haifa port*. The Times of Israel. <https://tinyurl.com/bdzftcw>
- Kardon, I.B. (2022). China's global maritime access: Alternatives to overseas military bases in the twenty-first century. *Security Studies*, 31(5), 885-916. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2022.2137429>
- Karr, L. (2024, May 31). *Africa file, May 31, 2024: Russian Red Sea logistics center in Sudan*. ISW Press. <https://tinyurl.com/4mbprhds>
- Khan, F. (2024). *The multi-faceted trajectory of the India-Oman strategic partnership*. Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses.
- Khan, S.A. (2021). Sino-Russian convergence on Eurasian integration: Understanding the long-term engagement. *South Asian Studies*, 36(1), 7-16. <https://tinyurl.com/msvkpxvf>
- Kjellén, J., & Lund, A. (2022). *From Tartous to Tobruk: The return of Russian sea power in the eastern Mediterranean*. FOI-R--5239--SE. FOI. <https://tinyurl.com/ye4resk5>
- Knipp, K. (2024, June 16). *Russia's military presence in Sudan boosts Africa strategy*. DW. <https://tinyurl.com/45wzptr>

- Koga, K. (2024). Tactical hedging as coalition-building signal: The evolution of Quad and AUKUS in the Indo-Pacific. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13691481241227840>
- Kumar, P. (2023, December 28). *AD Ports to invest \$200m to develop Egypt's Safaga port*. AGBI. <https://tinyurl.com/49ccf2f6>
- Kumon, T. (2024, April 27). *Chinese cargo ships poised to gain from Red Sea tensions*. Nikkei Asia. <https://tinyurl.com/yjcw4m96>
- Lanfranchi, G. (2023, December 19). *The European Union in a crowded Horn of Africa*. CRU Policy Brief. Clingendael. <https://tinyurl.com/urh8n8sf>
- Lanteigne, M. (2008). China's maritime security and the "Malacca Dilemma." *Asian Security*, 4(2), 143-161. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14799850802006555>
- Lavi, G. and Orion, A. (September 2, 2021). The Launch of the Haifa Bayport Terminal: Economic and Security Considerations. *INSS Insights* No. 1516, Institute for National Security Studies. <https://tinyurl.com/mr8sr6zm>
- Leonard, M. (2021). *The age of unpeace: How connectivity causes conflict*. Penguin; Random House.
- Levine, N. (2024, February 11). *China is winning the battle for the Red Sea; America has retired as world policeman*. UnHerd. <https://tinyurl.com/2n2xw9fm>
- Lons, C., & Petrini, B. (2023). The crowded Red Sea. *Survival*, 65(1), 57-67. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2023.2172851>
- Mahjoub, H. (2024, May 24). It's an open secret: The UAE is fueling Sudan's war – and there'll be no peace until we call it out. *The Guardian*. <https://tinyurl.com/5ujnvbd4>
- Maor, Y. and Eylon, Y. (2024). The disruption of global and national supply chains—aspects and insights. *Strategic Assessment*, 27(1), 16-31. <https://tinyurl.com/5n95f6p3>
- Marks, J. (2022, August 24). *Jordan-China relations: Taking stock of bilateral relations at 45 years*. Stimson. <https://tinyurl.com/26wfdadx>
- Marsai, V., & Róza, E.N. (2023). The late-comer friend: Iranian interests on the Horn of Africa. *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, 17(4), 356-370. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25765949.2023.2300582>
- Masuda, K. (2023). *Competition of foreign military bases and the survival strategies of Djibouti*. JICA Ogata Research Institute for Peace and Development. <https://tinyurl.com/4krr828f>
- Meester, J., & Lanfranchi, G. (2021, October 12). *Foreign direct influence? Trade and investment on the Red Sea's African shores*. Hinrich Foundation. <https://tinyurl.com/3e45zu35>
- Mengal, J., & Mirza, M.N. (2022). String of pearls & necklace of diamonds: Sino-Indian geo-strategic competition. *Asia-Pacific-Annual Research Journal of Far East & Southeast Asia*, 40, 21-41. <https://doi.org/10.47781/asia-pacific.vol40.iss0.5862>
- Multinational Force & Observers. (n.d.). *Multinational peacekeepers*. <https://mfo.org/about-us>
- Murton, G., & Narins, T. (2024). Corridors, chokepoints and the contradictions of the Belt and Road Initiative. *Area Development and Policy*, 1-21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23792949.2024.2311904>
- Nazir, T. (2024). *Terrorist threats to maritime navigation and ports: Risk assessment and prevention strategy*. Terrorism Issues, Islamic Military Counter-Terrorism Coalition. <https://tinyurl.com/2cy3ahtn>
- Nedopil, C. (2024, February 5). *China Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) investment report 2023*. Green Finance & Development Center. <https://tinyurl.com/35r65r76>
- Notteboom, T., Pallis, A., & Rodrigue, J.P. (2022). *Port economics, management and policy*. Routledge.
- Pant, H.V., & Bommakanti, K. (2024, February 7). *Dynamic shift: Indian navy in the Red Sea*. ORF. <https://tinyurl.com/47zwjhtr>
- Pedrozo, R.P. (2024). Protecting the free flow of commerce from Houthi attacks off the Arabian Peninsula. *International Law Studies*, 103, 49-73. <https://tinyurl.com/2csa8hn5>
- Plaut, M. (2024, January 14). *Is Putin now acting on plans to build an Eritrean naval base?* Martin Plaut. <https://tinyurl.com/3rrcs2hf>
- Port2Port (March 25, 2024). *Egypt: A Turkish logistical industrial zone will be established*. <https://tinyurl.com/ckcknfuy>
- Quilliam, N. (2022, November 2). *UAE and KSA: Growth and influence along Red Sea*. Azure. <https://tinyurl.com/47984kmx>
- Ranglin Grissler, J., & Vargö, L. (2021). *The BRI vs FOIP: Japan's countering of China's global ambitions*. Institute for security and development policy. <https://tinyurl.com/32bbubth>
- Reuven, Y. (May 12, 2024). The Race to the bottom: South Korea Is aiming for Israel's biggest transportation project. *TheMarker*. <https://tinyurl.com/jaa9a8kp>
- Rogozinska, A., & Olech, A. (2020, December 9). *The Russian Federation's military bases abroad*. Institute of New Europe. <https://tinyurl.com/yc6pwfj5>
- Saha, R., & Cannon, J.B. (2024, April 18). *Answering big questions about Türkiye in the Indian Ocean*. ORF. <https://tinyurl.com/2hx24djt>
- Satti, A.O (2022, September 28). *US warns Sudan of consequences if it hosts Russian military base*. AA. <https://tinyurl.com/yeywr56e>
- Schindler, S., Alami, I., DiCarlo, J., Jepson, N., Rolf, S., Bayırbağ, M.K., ... Zhao, Y. (2024). The second cold war: US-China competition for centrality in infrastructure, digital, production, and finance networks. *Geopolitics*, 29(4), 1083-1120. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2023.2253432>
- Schindler, S., DiCarlo, J., & Paudel, D. (2022). The new cold war and the rise of the 21st-century infrastructure state. *Transactions of the institute of British geographers*, 47(2), 331-346. <https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12480>
- Shay, S. (2018). *The war over the Bab al Mandab straits and the Red Sea coastline*. Institute for Policy and Strategy. <https://tinyurl.com/y2dyanas>
- Shay, S. (2023). China and the Red Sea region. *Security Science Journal*, 4(2), 70-84. <https://tinyurl.com/2uymndhf>

- Sofos, S. (2023, July 6). *Navigating the horn: Turkey's forays in East Africa*. PeaceRep. <https://tinyurl.com/ta782dkn>
- Spanier, B., Shefler, O., & Rettig, E. (2021). *UNCLOS and the protection of innocent and transit passage in maritime chokepoints*. Maritime Policy & Strategy Research Center, University of Haifa. <https://tinyurl.com/4ph99s9u>
- Statista (2024). *Leading sources of foreign direct investment (FDI) into Africa between 2014 and 2018, by investor country*. <https://tinyurl.com/49f54ce3>
- Sudan Tribune. (2024, May 6). *Erdogan, Burhan discuss bilateral cooperation*. <https://tinyurl.com/333yk4a6>
- Tangredi, S.J. (2019). Anti-access strategies in the Pacific: The United States and China. *The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters*, 49(1), article 3. <https://tinyurl.com/yt9j5yyw>
- Taniguchi, T. (2020, October 19). Should we forget about the Asia-Africa growth corridor? *Lettre du Centre Asie*, 87. <https://tinyurl.com/2syekjuz>
- Tekingunduz, A. (2019). *The Saudis, Emiratis, and the future of Turkish projects in Sudan*. TRT World. <https://tinyurl.com/nhchp4xs>
- Tharayil, R. (2024, January 24). *Egypt, Russia launch construction of new unit at El-Dabaa NPP in Egypt*. NS Energy. <https://tinyurl.com/584xkxzc>
- The Economic Times (2024, March 4). *Duqm port development deal with Adani Group is open: Oman official*. <https://tinyurl.com/25mfzej4>
- U.S. Congress (2024). *S.Amdt.821 to S.2226*. <https://tinyurl.com/t2aj9tku>
- U.S. Embassy in Somalia (2024, February 16). *United States increases security assistance through construction of SNA bases*. <https://tinyurl.com/4fdawmfm>
- USAID (2024, June 14). *The United States announces more than \$315 million in additional humanitarian assistance for the people of Sudan*. Press Release. <https://tinyurl.com/bdemb24r>
- Wallin, M. (2022). *US military bases and facilities in the Middle East*. American Security Project. <https://tinyurl.com/2p8mx4ax>
- Wuthnow, J. (2020). *The PLA beyond Asia: China's growing military presence in the Red Sea region*. Strategic Forum. National Defense University Press. <https://tinyurl.com/2m93wpm8>
- XiaoJun, K.Z. (2024, April 4). *New Indian naval base*. Risk Intelligence. <https://tinyurl.com/2z8bvjwz>
- Yehia, A. (2024, May 15). *We invest in Egypt as a gateway to Africa and the Middle East: Ambassador of Türkiye*. Ahram Online. <https://tinyurl.com/2n3rc6dd>
- Zou, Z. (2021). China's participation in port construction in the Western Indian Ocean region: Dynamics and challenges. *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, 15(4), 489-504. <https://doi.org/10.1080/25765949.2021.2018862>

Notes

- 1 Regional in the sense of blocs on the scale of continents, not in the sense of districts or areas within countries.
- 2 Schindler et al. claim that the second cold war is defined through competition between the great powers in four parallel fronts: infrastructure, the digital realm, production and finance (Schindler et al., 2024).
- 3 Tension that, for many, indicates the rise of a second cold war.
- 4 The maps only present the countries, sites, and infrastructure discussed in the article. As a result, the infrastructure in the Red Sea region appears in full detail, but the infrastructure located in the Indo-Pacific arc does not present the full picture in this vast area.
- 5 In fact, while the Emiratis have a huge corporation, on a global scale, that specializes in building and managing ports—DP World, which is the flagbearer of their interests in the infrastructure competition—the Saudis do not have a similar company, and they are often dependent on partnership with the Emiratis to this end (Quilliam, 2022).
- 6 From 2014 to 2018, China was the biggest investor in the African continent in terms of capital, with 16 percent of the total sources of foreign direct investment inflow (FDI), with the U.S. and France behind it with only 8 percent of FDI inflow in the continent (Statista, 2024). In contrast, in 2022 China's standing in this area deteriorated and its investments constituted only 3 percent, which is about 2.6 billion dollars per year. For comparison, that year the U.S. invested 6.8 billion dollars, the United Kingdom and France together about 46 billion, India about 22 billion, and the United Arab Emirates topped the list with about 50 billion dollars of investment in Africa (EY, 2023). However, it is important to emphasize several characteristics of the breakdown of investments—while the U.S. and European countries have a broad distribution among various countries and projects throughout the continent, China is the leader in infrastructure projects in the area south of the Sahara and in East Africa. The leading country in the continent in attracting investment is Egypt (by a large margin, especially compared to its neighbors in the Red Sea area), which in 2022 attracted about 107 billion dollars of capital investments (in comparison, the next country is South Africa with only about a quarter of the investment in Egypt). The biggest investor in Egypt that year was the United Arab Emirates, which invested over 27 billion dollars in the country—more than half of its total investment in Africa (EY, 2023). It should be noted that also in other countries there is a gap between Chinese and other investments. The FDI inflow in Saudi Arabia from U.S. sources in 2023 stood at about 2.5 billion dollars, and from Chinese sources at only about 135 million dollars (also ahead of it in the list of investors are Japan, several European countries, India, and more). There is a gap, albeit

smaller, in the FDI stock—20 billion dollars from the U.S. and 5 billion from China (Invest Saudi, 2024). On the other hand, in other countries in the Red Sea area, the U.S. does not invest at all for political reasons, while China makes investments, even if not especially large. In comparing the years 2020-2022 in Ethiopia: in 2020 China invested 310 million dollars compared to 30 million dollars that the U.S. invested (also there China had previously invested hundreds of millions of dollars); in Eritrea, China invested between 50 and 150 million dollars, with no U.S. investment; and in Sudan in 2021 China invested almost 100 million dollars, with no U.S. investment (Bea, n.d.; China Africa Research Initiative, 2024). Thus, China's entry into Africa is significant but the trend has not yet shown stability over time, and in addition, its investments are not widely distributed and consistent, but focused in certain areas and projects, especially in countries where it can establish a foothold.

- 7 As mentioned above, the volume of China's investments in Egypt (the top recipient of foreign investment in all of Africa) is significantly lower than other countries, including the U.S., the United Kingdom, France, India, and in particular the United Arab Emirates.
- 8 Although it is claimed against it that it has difficulty fulfilling its promises, and also that Jordan is sinking into a Chinese debt trap that it will not be able to pay. See, Davis, 2023.
- 9 According to Benjamin Denison (Denison, 2022) the U.S. had close to 3,000 military personnel (soldiers and contractors) in Jordan, a similar number in Saudi Arabia, a few hundred in Egypt and Oman, and close to 30,000 in the Gulf countries (the Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Iraq, and Bahrain). According to Kanako Masuda (Masuda, 2023), 4,000 American soldiers are stationed at Camp Lemonnier in Djibouti. These numbers have of course increased since the outbreak of the Gaza war, and they have been changing frequently in accordance with its development.



Lebanon after the Doha Agreement of 2008: The Birth of the Undeclared Shiite Republic in Lebanon

Yusri Hazran

Shalem College

This article argues that the Doha Agreement of 2008, in which Hezbollah received a veto on all Lebanese central government decisions, signaled the birth of an “undeclared Shiite republic” in Lebanon. Since then, political control of the Lebanese establishment has remained in Hezbollah’s iron fist. The agreement, which was signed after three formative events—the assassination of Rafik Hariri, the Syrian army’s withdrawal from Lebanon, and the Second Lebanon War with Israel—handed control of Lebanese politics to Hezbollah and the coalition under its leadership. Instead of trying to establish an Islamist regime, make constitutional changes, or antagonize internal Lebanese divisions, Hezbollah adopted a pragmatic policy of accepting the existing political system, while at the same time attempting to control the centers of political power and to ensure that official state policy was consistent with the dictates of “the Islamic resistance in Lebanon.” All the significant developments in Lebanon between 2008 and the signing of the natural gas treaty with Israel at the end of 2022, support the claim that Hezbollah dictated decision making in the Lebanese state. The Doha Agreement was not the product of the circumstances in the shadow of which it was signed, but rather the outcome of two deep-seated processes that began decades earlier: the militarization of the Shiite community in Lebanon, and external patronage. These processes positioned the Shiite community as the center of gravity in Lebanese politics and the Doha Agreement solidified their position. Although most senior positions in the country (except for the Speaker of the Parliament) are not held by Shiites, none of them can be appointed or elected without Hezbollah’s consent. This is the essence of the model of the undeclared Shiite republic: controlling the governing systems without needing to seize control of them by force. Hezbollah’s control of the political system does not stem from a recognition of the legitimacy of its existence. Rather, it is a measure intended to ensure that the political system does not pose a threat to the autonomy of the “Islamic resistance” in Lebanon.

Introduction: The Shiite Community in Lebanon

It is widely believed that the roots of the Shiite community in Lebanon reach back to the seventh century, when Abu Dharr al-Ghifari, the well-known companion of Muhammad the Prophet, was exiled to Jabal Amil in southern Lebanon due to his great fondness for Ali (Al-Zayn, 1973, pp. 76-80; Al-Safa, 1958, p. 33; Sherara, 1996, pp. 32-33). Shiite historians and writers maintain that Shiite settlement in Lebanon intensified in the eleventh century following the establishment of the Shiite Fatimid Empire. Three regions were populated by Shiites: Jabal Amil in southern Lebanon, the Lebanon Valley in the east, and Kisrawan at the foot of Mt. Lebanon. Later, the Shiite peasants were expelled from Kisrawan by the Sunni Mamluks, who launched a series of military raids against their villages (Halawi, 1992, pp. 29-30; Hamzeh, 2004, p. 9). During subsequent periods, the Shiite community was a target of suspicion and discrimination by Sunni rulers—that is to say, the Mamluks and the Ottomans, who associated them with the movement of heretics within Islam and viewed them as a potential extension of the Safavid Empire in Iran (Al-Safa, 1958, pp. 71-80).

In addition to the lowly standing of the community, was the failure of its traditional leadership, which never tried to improve the community's social and political situation or to challenge the Lebanese state and accuse it of discrimination and neglect.

Like the Sunnis and the Druze, the Shiites were also not consulted on the establishment of Greater Lebanon by the French colonialists in 1920. When their lands were annexed to Lebanon, the Shiites became citizens of the new state, which they associated with Maronite hegemony and Western imperialism (Zamir, 1985, pp. 82-82). The mandate of the French authorities typically did not deviate from the traditions of their predecessors, which

disregarded and excluded Shiites. However, in 1926, the French were the first to grant Lebanese Shiites the status of a recognized religious community with its own autonomous legal system. With this decision, the French sought to win the hearts of the Shiite masses and to prevent the spread of the great Syrian Revolt that erupted in the Druze areas of Syria at the end of 1925 (Firro, 2006, p. 742). This recognition created a sense of identification between the Lebanese state entity and Shiite particularism and motivated Shiite leaders to demonstrate political allegiance to the new state, which, for the first time, recognized their community as a religious group in its own right.

The independence of Lebanon and the foundation of the National Pact between the Maronite and Sunni elites in 1943 curbed neither the discrimination against the Shiites nor the exclusion of their community, which, according to the division of power that was based on an ethnic index, received the position of Speaker of the Parliament. Nonetheless, within independent Lebanon, the Shiites were left with a sense of alienation and poverty, and their underrepresentation was also reflected in the government administration. Empirical studies on the Lebanese bureaucracy during the period preceding the Second Civil War (1975-1989) show that the Shiites were the group with the least representation in the Lebanese government (Crow, 1962, pp. 510, 519; Halawi, 1992, pp. 98-99).

This underrepresentation in the state system was not the Shiites' only complaint. Additional grievances stemmed from the fact that the lion's share of the Shiite population lives in the regions bordering Israel. For many years, the Shiites complained that the state was leaving them to their fate, first in the face of the Palestinian organizations' seizure of control of the region and the Israeli reprisal operations against the Palestinian guerilla forces, and later during the Israeli military occupation in the late 1980s and the 1990s. Also relevant, in addition to the lowly standing of the community, was the failure of

its traditional leadership, which never tried to improve the community's social and political situation or to challenge the Lebanese state and accuse it of discrimination and neglect (Norton, 1987, p. 33).

The Taif Agreement of 1989 increased the Shiite's parliamentary representation (from 19 to 27 seats, out of a total of 128 seats), thereby equalizing their representation to that of the Sunnis. Still, the Shiite leadership received the increase with many reservations, not only because it was achieved through Saudi mediation, but also because it did not meet their political demands—annulment of the ethnic index system, or at least increasing Shiite representation so that it more accurately reflected the demographic growth of the ethnic group (Alagha, 2006, pp. 40-41, 247-269). These reservations had clear justification, as since the 1980s the Shiite community had become the largest community in Lebanon.

By all measures, the Shiite community was the most oppressed community in the country for a long period of time and it is ironic that the root cause of their eventual rise actually lies in the community's inferior status. The first step towards Shiite empowerment was the demographic change experienced by the community in recent decades and the migration to the big city, which yielded the basis for the radical politicization of Shiite collective consciousness and placed the community at the center of the political game in Lebanon. The Shiites' treatment as a marginal group ended after the Second Lebanon War in 2006 and the signing of the Doha Agreement in 2008. After that, the new reality in which the Shiites enjoyed political dominance did not assume an institutional form, and Hezbollah ruled without having seized control of the Lebanese political system as a whole. This development was a product of the political, social, and demographic processes that characterized the Shiite community after the 1960s. Hezbollah's political hegemony in Lebanon maintains a mechanism of self-restraint in three areas:

refraining from seizing direct control over the state institutions, diluting its discourse against the model of consociational democracy, and, most important, maintaining the status of the Lebanese army as the focus of the national and political consensus in Lebanon.

Discussion regarding the demographic changes in the Shiite community since the late 1950s lies beyond the scope of this article. Instead, we focus here on two elements that are relevant to the consolidation of the Shiite community in Lebanon, though it is clear that both changes are closely related to the demographic shifts.

Although a census was not carried out in Lebanon in 1932, the popular view is that the Shiites emerged as the largest religious community in the country, constituting approximately 40 percent of the population (1.4 million out of a total population of four million)

Although a census was not carried out in Lebanon in 1932, the popular view is that the Shiites emerged as the largest religious community in the country, constituting approximately 40 percent of the population (1.4 million out of a total population of four million) (Haddad, 2006, p. 23; Hamzeh, 2004, p. 13). The following table demonstrates that the birthrate in the Shiite community is the highest of any community in Lebanon (Norton, 2007, p. 13). Moreover, the Shiite community doubled its demographic presence in six decades, from 19.6 percent in 1932 to approximately 40 percent since the beginning of the 1990s. Despite these figures, according to the Central Intelligence Agency, the Shiite community is the second largest community in the country and constitutes 31.2 percent of the Lebanese population (see Table 1) (The World Factbook, n.d.).

On the eve of Lebanon's Second Civil War, the Shiites made up over half the population of Beirut and its suburbs. A sizeable majority

of them were migrants and displaced persons from lower socioeconomic classes who had come from the south, making it easier to recruit them for anti-establishment protest activity (Schemeil, 1976, p. 63). In terms of the matter at hand, the trends that began to develop in the 1970s and that intensified after the Second Civil War, led to the consolidation of the Shiite community in Lebanon. This process culminated in the signing of the Doha Agreement in 2008. The consolidation of the Shiite community stemmed from a combination of two major processes: rising militarization beginning in the 1970s, and the evolution of an ideological and strategic alliance with two regional patrons. The Doha Agreement, with all its implications, is an integral part of these two formative historical processes.

Table 1. Shiite Demographics in Lebanon

Year	The Shiite Population	Total Lebanese Population	Percentage
1932	154,208	785,543	19.6%
1956	250,605	1,407,868	17.8%
1975	668,500	2,550,000	26.2%
1984	1,100,000	3,757,000	29.3%
1988	1,325,000	4,044,784	32.8%
2005	1,400,000	4,011,000	35%

Sources: Halawi, 1992, p. 50; Hamzah, 2004, p. 13; Johnson, 2001, p. 3; <https://tinyurl.com/fxcz636z>.

What’s Unique about the External Patronage of the Shiite Community?

The Shiites in Lebanon were not the first community to request the protection of regional or international powers. For centuries, the Maronite Christians maintained an historic alliance with France, whereas the Sunnis consistently viewed the Arab world as the country’s natural cultural and political environ. Their friendly relations with Egypt during the postcolonial period were later replaced by ties with Syria and Saudi Arabia. The Shiites’ quest for external protection was a direct result of

their sense of oppression and alienation from the Lebanese state. Imam Musa al-Sadr, born in Iran, was a pioneer in the establishment of Shiite political alliances with regional powers, particularly with the Ba’ath Party in Syria. This alliance was the product of mutual political interests: al-Sadr sought external protection that could strengthen the Shiites domestically, whereas Hafez Assad sought Islamic legitimacy for his regime, which was subject to systematic attacks by the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria.

For this reason, in 1973 al-Sadr issued a fatwa (an Islamic religious ruling) that recognized the Alawite community in Lebanon as an integral part of Shiite Islam (Maoz, 1988, p. 151). The alliance with the Syrians grew much stronger following Syria’s military intervention in Lebanon in 1976, developing into a strategic partnership of mutual support in the days of al-Sadr’s successor Nabih Berri (Norton, 1987, p. 48). Assad’s rise to power in 1970 was viewed as a victory of the heterodox rural periphery over the Sunni urban center, which found itself unable to make peace with this change. For the urban center, the promulgation of a new constitution in 1973, with its elimination of the customary mention of Islam as the religion of the president of the state, was an opportunity to challenge the Ba’ath regime. Against the background of the popular protests that occurred in the cities of Syria, and the challenge posed to the regime by the Muslim Brotherhood, an alliance between Assad’s Ba’ath regime and Musa al-Sadr was formed. The latter headed the Supreme Islamic Shia Council and was willing to throw a lifeline to Assad by issuing a fatwa declaring that the Alawites were a legitimate branch of Islam (Ajami, 2006, p. 201). Although this legal ruling was never published, it laid the foundations for a political alliance between Syria and the Shiites in Lebanon. Moreover, al-Sadr himself was not considered to be a legal authority, and his fatwa was not truly accepted by the Islamist circles in Syria. The ruling also ran completely counter to the legal position of Shiite Islam, as reflected in letters from the great Shiite scholars

of the Middle Ages (Zine El Abidine, 2012, p. 147). Nonetheless, this fatwa served the regime in its war against the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria and became an important milestone in the establishment of a political alliance between those in Syria seeking legitimacy and those in Lebanon seeking a supportive patron.

A recent study reveals that al-Sadr also skillfully exploited his ties to Iran to improve the lot of the Lebanese members of his sect (Chehabi, 2006, pp. 137-161). The Islamic Revolution (1979) marked a turning point in the external relations of the community. In contrast to Fouad Ajami's claim that the Islamic Revolution exempted the Shiite community from what he referred to as "the Iranian connection," ties between the Lebanese Shiites and Iran in fact increased after 1979, with their common anti-Western Islamic revolutionary ideology (Ajami, 2006, p. 191). Islamist Iran's patronage of the Shiite community culminated in the establishment of Hezbollah, following Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982. This patronage was not only based on the ideological-religious connection, but was accompanied by unlimited political, military, and financial support.

As a result, some have argued that Hezbollah was nothing but an extension of the regime of the Islamic Republic in Iran (Wege, 2011, p. 9).¹ However, a meticulous examination reveals that such statements are clouded with ideological agendas, which tend toward oversimplicity and ignore the objective conditions and the internal forces underlying the establishment of Hezbollah (Shay, 2005). The intransigent Shiite quest for foreign patronage did not begin suddenly and did not stem from ethnic ties alone; rather, it was deeply rooted in the Shiite community's dissatisfaction with their political status in the Lebanese confessional system. It arose in the face of a policy of marginalization and neglect that was entrenched in the state. Many Shiites maintain that after decades of exclusion and neglect on the part of the central government, they lost their faith in the Lebanese state's ability and willingness to provide them

with basic functions: security, infrastructure, and social services. The development and crystallization of relationships with regional powers were a way to correct the absence of political representation and material resources. The Shiites in Lebanon did not develop irridentist leanings vis-à-vis Syria and Iran; they also did not attempt to eradicate the Lebanese political entity. They regard the two states as legitimate sources of support, and as authentic political surroundings, providing an environment of belonging in terms of political culture.

The transnational allegiance of the Shiites in Lebanon stems from the structural crisis of the Lebanese confessional system and longstanding policies, which exclude and discriminate against the Shiite community. The desire for an external patron must be seen in this context and should be understood as part of Shiite efforts to improve their status in domestic and regional politics. Clearly, the Shiite's political role in Lebanon would be impaired by a dramatic change in the regimes in Syria and Iran. Given the internal implications of this dependence, the Shiites' political behavior is shaped by a Domino Theory model (Bullock & Trombley, 1999, p. 236).² They identify Lebanon with the orientation of their external patrons instead of adapting the patronage network to Lebanese particularism.

After the Second Lebanon War, the most significant challenge facing Hezbollah pertained to the Syrian army's withdrawal from Lebanon. The Taif Agreement anchored Hezbollah's military organization within the legitimate national struggle against occupation. Although the IDF's unilateral withdrawal from Lebanon in May 2000 did not influence Syria's support for Hezbollah's right to continue bearing arms, the Syrian army's withdrawal from the country left Hezbollah with no direct military backing. In a sense, Hezbollah's participation in the government was a preventative measure meant to ensure that no decision made by the central government could undermine Hezbollah's status or violate the status quo created by the Taif Agreement.

The Islamist organization known as Hezbollah was modelled on the Islamic Revolution in Iran both ideologically and organizationally. It's superfluous to state here that Iran was and continues to serve as Hezbollah's main source of the funding on which it relies. It should be noted, however, that Iran founded Hezbollah in the Lebanon Valley—a region that was under the patronage and hermetic control of Syria. It is doubtful whether Iran would have been able to establish the organization without Syria's consent. Syria at the time understandably regarded Hezbollah's establishment as part of the proxy strategy in the struggle against the IDF (Azi, 1998, pp. 69-70). Some researchers hold that Syria played the role of the dominant partner in the Hezbollah-Iran-Syria axes only during the 1980s, but that it continues to function as Hezbollah's primary patron, with the ability to block the connection to Iran in terms of the provision of weapons (Samii, 2008, pp. 37-38).

From the 1970s onward, Syria became the primary political patron of the Shiite community in Lebanon. It also initiated the Taif Agreement of 1989, which served as a legitimate political umbrella for Hezbollah's continued existence as a military organization by giving it freedom of action independent of any political authority and allowing it to continue operating under the title of a resistance movement. Since 1982, Syria has been Hezbollah's source of oxygen and its primary weapons supply route. Syria was also the only Arab state to side with Hezbollah, and only thanks to its supports did "the resistance" achieve its goals by liberating occupied land (the IDF's withdrawal from southern Lebanon). In this context, Naim Qassem, former deputy to Nasrallah and current secretary-general of Hezbollah, states that the alliance with Syria is not a fleeting episode; it was never based solely on hatred of Israel, but rather on ideological harmony, political-strategic partnership, and an unshakeable geopolitical calculation (Qassem, 2009, pp. 417-419). These three factors offer perhaps the best explanation for Hezbollah's

military involvement in the war in Syria and its willingness to sacrifice thousands of fighters to prevent the fall of the Syrian Ba'ath regime.³

At the beginning of 2011, Hezbollah welcomed the eruption of waves of protest that spread throughout the Arab World. Nasrallah called demonstrators "poor, freedom seekers, lovers of liberty, rejectors of humiliation and disgrace" (Berti & Schweitzer, 2013, p. 42). Hezbollah continued to maintain this position as long as the uprisings were limited to places such as Egypt and Tunisia; but when they spread to Syria later in 2011, the organization resolutely backed the regime, calling the protests a "Western plot." Hezbollah's backing of the Ba'ath Party regime found initial expression in a declaration of support and the provision of advice to the Syrian army. Beginning at the outset of 2013, Hezbollah played an active role in the hostilities, fighting shoulder to shoulder with the Syrian army (Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2014). In a speech delivered on May 24, 2013, marking the anniversary of Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon, Nasrallah stated:

If Syria falls, the resistance [Hezbollah] will be besieged. Israel will invade Lebanon to impose its conditions and restore its control. If Syria is lost, the resistance [*muqawama*] will also fall—and Palestine too. (Zisser, 2014, p. 177).

The first testament to Hezbollah's change in policy was evident in 2013. Hezbollah sent thousands of fighters to al-Qusayr and went into battle beside the Syrian army. At the beginning of the operation, Hezbollah's leadership, headed by Nasrallah, presented the campaign for the city as defense of the large Shiite population in the region (which numbered approximately 30,000). It quickly became apparent, however, that Hezbollah's military involvement was strategic and was meant to tip the scale in the Ba'ath regime's favor (Zisser, 2014, pp. 176-177).

The period between the initial years and the regime's victory over the opposition in 2018 was characterized by broad military intervention in Syria on the part of Hezbollah; thousands of elite fighters were sent to Syria with only one goal: to prevent the fall of the regime. The scope of Hezbollah's involvement in Syria leaves no room for doubt that Syria was and remains the Shiite community's primary ally in Lebanon.

“Arms are an adornment of men”⁴: The Rise of Shiite Militantism

The militarization of the Shiite community is closely related to Lebanon's involvement in the Israeli-Arab conflict and Israel's policy toward Lebanon since the 1960s. Since then, the Shiite population in Lebanon has been the group most exposed to the escalation of the conflict. For almost a decade and a half, the Shiite community found itself between a rock and a hard place in the war that was being fought between Palestinian organizations and the IDF. The Palestinian groups seized control of the Shiite villages, instilling fear into them and turning the villages into bases for carrying out hostile actions against Israeli targets, civilian and military alike. At the same time, the IDF responded with reprisal operations targeting the same villages.

Between 1969 and 1983, the Shiites paid the price of this struggle in blood, without any intervention by the Lebanese state, which had turned its back on its Shiite citizens (Hamzeh, 2004, pp. 15-17). The obsession with defending the community emerges clearly from the names of Shiite military organizations. The name “Amal” is the Arabic acronym for “Afwāj al-Muqāwama al-Lubnāniyya” (the Lebanese Resistance Regiments), and the military wing of Hezbollah is called “Al-Muqāwamah Al-Islāmīyah fī Lubnān” (the Islamic Resistance in Lebanon). However, though we cannot separate this militarization from the sociopolitical crisis that prevailed in Lebanon during the period preceding the Second Civil War, we must examine the harbingers of this process.

The Palestinian guerilla organizations and other left-wing parties attracted many young Shiites, who found an answer to the hardship they faced in anti-establishment revolutionism. The roots of the connection between the Shiites, who come from underprivileged and marginalized classes, and the leftist and Palestinian forces, reach back to the 1960s and the mass Shiite migration from areas far from Beirut. Rural Shiite migrants and members of the lower-working class in Beirut were detached from their social surroundings, constituting what Michael Johnson has referred to as a “belt of misery.” They were excluded from the city's institutionalized systems of patronage after they were ejected from the existing systems in their original places of residence in the periphery. They therefore sought not only to overcome their socioeconomic misery but also to cause the collapse of the political status quo. Motivated by the revolutionary program of the anti-establishment left, young Shiites joined various Palestinian organizations and anti-establishment leftist militias (Hamzeh, 2004, p. 14; Johnson, 2001, p. 158; Norton, 1987, p. 38).

The PLO's continuing military activity in southern Lebanon on the one hand, and Israel's intensifying reprisal operations on the other hand, exposed the Shiite civilians of southern Lebanon to an increasing threat to life and property. Against this background, in consideration of the chronic weakness and inferiority of the Lebanese army, Imam Musa al-Sadr founded the Amal militia three months after the outbreak of the Second Civil War.⁵ Despite the new militia's claim that it was established to defend the Shiites of southern Lebanon from Israeli attacks, the Amal movement was actually formed to provide the Shiite community with an armed force of its own as a weight against Palestinian hegemony and Palestinian leftist opponents in the south (Norton, 1987, pp. 47-48; Ajami, 2006, pp. 168-169).

The Shiite community's need to arm itself became more urgent following the ethnic

The Shiite community's need to arm itself became more urgent following the ethnic cleansing that the Christian militias began to conduct in the poor Shiite neighborhoods of East Beirut. Moreover, Amal's establishment was an attempt to curb the growing influence of the leftist forces among the Shiites, particularly that of the Communists.

cleansing that the Christian militias began to conduct in the poor Shiite neighborhoods of East Beirut. Moreover, Amal's establishment was an attempt to curb the growing influence of the leftist forces among the Shiites, particularly that of the Communists. The fact that the Shiites sustained extremely heavy losses in the years 1975 and 1976, provided al-Sadr with a reasonable basis to believe that the anti-establishment front led by Druze leader Kamal Jumblatt had taken advantage of the Shiite public in its fight against the Christians (Norton, 1987, p. 42; Ajami, 2006, p. 178). Although Amal's establishment was an important step in the militarization of the Shiite community, Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon was undoubtedly the most important factor in this process. Many Shiites welcomed the Israeli army in 1982, viewing its arrival as a sign of the end of PLO control of the region. However, Israel's unconditional support for the Falangist government (whose militias eradicated the Shiite suburbs of East Beirut) and the ongoing military occupation transformed Shiites into opponents of "the new liberators."

Here, it is important to also mention the revolutionary regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran as a key force in the Shiites' mobilization against Israel, whose invasion of Lebanon ironically created fertile ground for the establishment of Hezbollah. It's obvious that Hezbollah's emergence was inspired by the Islamic Revolution. But what new studies do show without a shadow of a doubt, is that the revolutionary regime was decisively involved in the development that led to the creation

of Hezbollah's organizational structure and the shaping of its ideology (Chehabi, 2006, pp. 209-220; Hamzeh, 2004, pp. 19, 24-26).

Since its establishment, Hezbollah has engaged in guerilla warfare against the Israeli army, and from the outset, it was established as a Jihadist-Islamist organization aimed solely at waging bitter war against the West and its proxies in the region, meaning Israel. In the eyes of Hezbollah and many others in the Arab world, Hezbollah's obstinate guerilla war is what caused the IDF to withdraw from southern Lebanon in May 2000, unconditionally and without any political or security settlement. Hezbollah touted the Israeli withdrawal endlessly, proclaiming it an unprecedented military victory. For the first time in the Israeli-Arab conflict, it had succeeded in forcing Israel to withdraw from occupied Arab territory unconditionally, without a peace agreement, and without security arrangements (Nicholas, 2007, pp. 232-243; Norton, 2000, pp. 22-35). In addition to the Israeli withdrawal of May 2000, Hezbollah's impressive military accomplishments in the Second Lebanon War (that broke out in July, 2006) resulted in a major increase in its political prestige both within and outside Lebanon. It also contributed to the crystallization of the Shiite political outlook while locating it at the center of the decision-making process (Hamzeh, 2004, p. 95; Shaqur, 2009, pp. 124-125).⁶ Some strategic analysis experts hold that Hezbollah's military strength has become a strategic component that needs to be taken into account in any future regional conflict.

Shiite military force has not yet been used to seize power or to impose an Islamist regime (in the case of Hezbollah), although both dominant parties have used their armed militias from time to time to achieve limited, short-term political goals. In 1984, Amal seized control of West Beirut, bringing about the collapse of the government of Amine Gemayel. A year later, Amal openly declared war against the Palestinian camps (1985-1987) in an effort to uproot the PLO from Lebanon. Some have

depicted Amal's seizure of Beirut in 1984 as an event that fundamentally changed the way the Sunni leadership saw the Shiite community, transforming it from a marginal political actor in their eyes into a major actor that cannot be ignored in any settlement (Norton, 1987, p. 117; Shaery-Eisenlhor, 2008, p. 22). In May 2008, the militias of both parties seized West Beirut, the stronghold of the Sunnis led by Saad Hariri, to break the stalemate that had paralyzed Lebanon since the Second Lebanon War. This was the first time since the end of the Second Civil War (1989) that Lebanon experienced such levels of intercommunal violence. However, their scope was geographically limited, and the short duration of the altercations ensured that the Shiite leadership was aware of the limitations of converting a military force into a political force in the existing domestic and regional conditions.

Although it has been two decades since Simone Haddad carried out his quantitative study, it nonetheless showed us that a large majority of the Shiite community in Lebanon supported Hezbollah's military wing and the party's right to continue bearing arms with no time limitation. Still, only 54 percent of the respondents supported the party's right to use armed force against the state (Haddad, 2006, p. 29).

There is no denying that Hezbollah's inception provided the greatest momentum for the militarization of the Shiite community in Lebanon. In a sense, despite the Shiite discourse of resistance and the defense of Lebanon, the Shiite public has viewed Hezbollah as the community's private army (Abdulghani, 2013, p. 77). Still, it is important to emphasize that the increasing strength of the Shiite military force in Lebanon stems not only from the military capabilities of Iran, but also from the prominent Shiite presence in the Lebanese army on both the command level and in the soldiers' ranks. During the Second Civil War, the Lebanese army consisted of 2,833 Lebanese officers, 20.9 percent of whom were Shiite (compared to

15.3 percent between 1958 and 1978). After the Taif Agreement of 1989, the number of officers stood at 2,292, with a breakdown of 26.8 percent Shiite, 30.3 percent Maronite, 16.1 percent Sunni, and nine percent Druze (Barak, 2006, pp. 87-88). The percentage of Shiite officers in the Lebanese army has almost doubled, from 15.3 percent before the Second Civil War to 26.8 percent during the first decade following the Taif Agreement, so that the army's ethnic constitution reflects the social and political changes that Lebanon has experienced since 1943 (Barak, 2006, p. 91). Similarly, the Shiites are the largest ethnic group of army conscripts, accounting for between 35 and 40 percent of the regular force (Berkovich, 2006, p. 29). Other sources indicate that close to 60 percent of all soldiers in the Lebanese army are Shiites (Gaub, 2007, p. 17).

It is important to emphasize that the increasing strength of the Shiite military force in Lebanon stems not only from the military capabilities of Iran, but also from the prominent Shiite presence in the Lebanese army on both the command level and in the soldiers' ranks.

Hezbollah's Defensive Discourse: Resistance Not Against the Army but "Hand-in-Hand with it"—Is This Truly the Case?

Hezbollah's political and ideological discourse has undergone three stages of development since the 1980s. In its early days, the organization employed a discourse that drew inspiration from the Islamic Revolution in Iran. This discourse was accurately reflected in the document that Hezbollah presented in 1985, which related to three primary aspects. The first was full and unreserved allegiance to the ideology of the "guardianship of the Islamic Jurist." The second was uncompromising commitment to the war of Jihad against the enemies of Islam, most prominently the West and its proxy in the region, Israel. The third was rejection of the ethnic

regime in Lebanon and the commitment to replace it with the rule of Islam. Hezbollah's military activity, which included suicide attacks, was loyal to this ideological agenda (Hamzeh, 2004, pp. 36-39; As-Sayid, undated, pp. 35-51).

Toward the second half of the 1980s, a change began to take place in Hezbollah's discourse and modes of action, with a focus on limiting resistance to within the sovereign territory of Lebanon. Until Israel's withdrawal from the Security Zone in 2000, Hezbollah portrayed its struggle as Jihadist-nationalist resistance aimed at liberating the territory of an occupied homeland (Hamada, 2001, pp. 99-100).⁷ This discourse was consistent with the view of scholar Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah, whose ideas helped Hezbollah make the theoretical and ideological transition from universal Jihad to the sphere of delineated territorial Jihad. In his work *Kitab al-Jihad* (The Book of Jihad), Fadlallah argues that Islam's treatment of the Other is based first and foremost on coexistence and neighborly relations, and that Jihad is defensive in essence (Fadlala, 1996, pp. 220-225). Similar thinking was presented by Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi in his work *Fiqh al-Jihad* (The Jurisprudence of Jihad), in which he claims that, since the days of its birth, the Jihad of Islam has been defensive, including the battles fought by the Muslims during the period of Muhammad the Prophet (Al-Qaradawi, 2009, p. 239). According to this logic, Muslims are obligated to wage a war of Jihad in one of three cases: tyrannical rule, foreign aggression, or foreign occupation. This line of thought provided Hezbollah with the theoretical conceptualization it needed to reduce the scope of its Jihad.

For approximately a decade and a half, Hezbollah portrayed itself as an Islamic resistance waging Jihad against a foreign occupier. The new discourse lost its charm after the IDF withdrew from southern Lebanon in May 2000, which was a formative historical event in the history of the conflict in the region. Although this withdrawal was a distinct outcome

of internal dynamics within Israeli society in the neoliberal age, this does not negate the fact that this was the first Israeli withdrawal without conditions, without a settlement, and without a peace treaty. Hezbollah channeled this to portray Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon as a victory for the resistance. It obligated Hezbollah to reshape its discourse to justify the fact that it continued to bear arms, despite Israel's withdrawal. In this context, the organization began to emphasize its defensive doctrine and to argue that it continued to bear arms in order to defend the homeland against "Israeli aggression" (Kana'ana, 2019, pp. 227-231).

The discourse of defensive resistance became a guiding concept in Hezbollah's political and ideological discourse, recurring in almost all the speeches of Secretary General Nasrallah (Soubrier, 2013, p. 101). Naim Qassem also offered a political-constitutional justification for the dual reality existing in Lebanon and the essential need to exclude Hezbollah from the authority of the Lebanese state. Subordinating the resistance to the direct authority of the Lebanese state, he argued, would tie the hands of the resistance, robbing it of its capacity to struggle against Israel. An act of subordination or integration of the resistance in the country could expose Lebanon to external pressures and place responsibility for any act against Israel on the Lebanese state in terms of international law, when the international arena is biased in Israel's favor in any event. Continuing the dual reality of resistance-versus-state releases the former from the political obligations of the state and provides it with freedom of action (Qassem, 2009, pp. 166-167).

Due to Israel's unilateral withdrawal from southern Lebanon and the Second Lebanon War, Hezbollah developed a national discourse consisting of three components: "The people, the army, and the resistance" (Al-Qays, 2022; Bazzi, 2006, p. 658). The new national discourse placed the resistance to Israel at the heart of the political consensus in Lebanon, while also

positioning it alongside popular legitimacy (al-Muqawamah) and institutional legitimacy (the army). Based on an awareness of the fears existing among the *fellahin* of Lebanese society regarding both Hezbollah's military consolidation and the Islamist doctrine, the organization crafted a new discourse that allayed these fears, strengthening the defensive component and the apparent shared fate of the Lebanese People and its army. These three components—the people, the army, and the resistance—complete one another. Mohammad Raad, a member of the Lebanese parliament for Hezbollah's parliamentary faction, justifies a dual defensive reality due to the pluralist structure of Lebanese society. In his view, this structure does not allow for external intervention or alliances with strong states; rather, the dualism of the defensive doctrine of the army, in conjunction with the readiness of the resistance, is a proven recipe for maintaining the independence of Lebanon and the ability to stand strong against “both the concrete and potential Zionist threats” (Raed, 2008, p. 133). Therefore, Hezbollah developed three courses of action:

- a. Suspension of the goal of establishing an Islamic state in Lebanon at this stage. This change in position found expression in a formative “political document” issued by Hezbollah in 2009, which does not address the establishment of an Islamic state—whether by force or through a gradual process.
- b. Openness to the Christian community in Lebanon, particularly the Maronites, to alleviate its fear of an Islamic alternative. In this context, it is important to remember the historical encounter between the Maronite patriarch and Hezbollah, and the inclusion of Christian candidates in the party list—measures whose crowning achievement was the signing of an agreement of understandings with President Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement and the alliance with the Marada movement led by Suleiman

Frangieh. In this context, Naim Qassem notes that the document of understanding that was signed in 2006 between the Free Patriotic movement under Aoun's leadership and Hezbollah, built bridges between the two large communities and provided the resistance with legitimacy in recognizing it as an integral part of the national strategy for defending the homeland (Qassem, 2009, pp. 250-251).

- c. An emphasis on Hezbollah's national role as a form of resistance aimed primarily at ensuring peace in the Lebanese homeland—first and foremost by means of all-out war against the Israeli occupation, and then through its functioning as a defensive wall against “Israeli aggression.” Since Israel's withdrawal from southern Lebanon, the task of the resistance has been to defend the homeland and to serve as a deterrent for Israel. Even when popular uprisings erupted in Syria and the Jihadist organizations began to flourish, Hezbollah positioned itself as a shield of coexistence in Lebanon against the Jihadist threat (Kana'ana, 2019, pp. 237-241).

As a political movement and a military organization, Hezbollah represents an ideological-religious totalitarian Jihadist movement whose worldview is the core of its existence. The organization's Lebanonization since the 1980s does not contradict its devotion to its two overarching goals: a decisive battle against the state of Israel and the establishment of an Islamist regime within Lebanon's borders. Relinquishing the overarching goals of the organization would have meant erasing the essence of Hezbollah itself as a totalitarian Islamist movement. Therefore, the pragmatism that characterizes Hezbollah, both in giving up the goal of establishing an Islamist state and in defining the purpose of the organization's immense arsenal of weapons as defensive, required considerable sophistication. According to Faez Kazi, the 2009 political document created the reality that was agreed in the Doha Agreement of 2008. The document conditioned

the establishment of true democracy on the termination of the ethnic index system and held that, until the conditions for this are achieved, a consociational democracy should be established in which Hezbollah is given the privilege to halt any act of the central government that contains a threat to the organization's standing in the country. Hezbollah never disavowed the desire to establish an Islamist regime, and it certainly never disavowed its ideological and political commitment to the doctrine of the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist. Rather, the organization conditioned the establishment of an Islamic regime upon the existence of a majority that was in favor of it, or, as stated in 1985: If the members of our Nation are given the opportunity to freely choose the form of government in Lebanon, it will want no alternative to Islam (Kazi, 2013, pp. 65-67).

Documents that Hezbollah issued between the years 1985 and 2009 stated explicitly that there was only one goal in the struggle against Israel—its destruction. The 1985 document portrays Israel as “the spearhead of the United States in our Muslim world, an enemy that must be fought... The confrontation with the entity must end in its eradication from existence.”

This effort was aimed first and foremost at neutralizing Hezbollah's domestic rivals, who fear theocracy, and at justifying the continued bearing of arms outside of state authority. The strategy of balances that has been espoused by Hezbollah since the end of the Second Lebanon War may reflect a process of pragmatism; however, it does not signify actual moderation. In the same breath, the continued bearing of arms is a powerful statement indicative of Hezbollah's devotion to its goals. The balance between maintaining the existence of the Lebanese state and continuing to bear arms is a pragmatic equation resulting in chronic fragility, although it would be difficult

to view this as an abandoning of the conflict against the State of Israel (Belkaziz, 2006, p. 46).

Omission of the demand to establish an Islamist regime in Lebanon also does not reflect an abandonment of Islamist ideology on the part of Hezbollah, as such an act would go against its very essence (Kana'ana, 2019, pp. 236-237). Pan-Arabist scholar Abdullah Belkaziz, whose writings do not hide his regard for Hezbollah, confirms that the pragmatism demonstrated by the organization in both its patterns of political behavior and its military activity does not indicate an abandonment of the ideological foundations on which the organization was established. Hezbollah remains committed to two ideas: the establishment of an Islamist regime, and the doctrine of the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist, also regarding the conflict with Israel (Belkaziz, 2000, pp. 58-60). The struggle against Israel is a civilizational, religious, and national struggle aimed not only at liberating southern Lebanon, but also at rejecting all political settlements and destroying the Zionist enterprise. Belkaziz determines that these are conventions anchored in Hezbollah's very existence and that the pragmatism reflects no moderation or fundamental revisions, but rather pragmatic consideration of the existing reality (Belkaziz, 2000, pp. 60-61).

The totalitarian ideology, the obsession with weapons, and the arsenal that Hezbollah built leaves no room for doubt regarding the organization's ideological commitment to the struggle against Israel. This context reminds us of the importance of the document that Hezbollah issued in 2009, known as the “political document.” The revision that was made to the document pertained to the question of the alternative to the ethnic consociational regime in Lebanon; however, it made no change regarding the struggle against Israel. In addition, documents that Hezbollah issued between the years 1985 and 2009 stated explicitly that there was only one goal in the struggle against Israel—its destruction. The 1985 document portrays Israel as “the spearhead of the United

States in our Muslim world, an enemy that must be fought... The confrontation with the entity must end in its eradication from existence” (As-Sayid, n.d, p. 44). The language of the 2009 document is no different: “The historic responsibility to not recognize this entity, no matter what the pressures and challenges, rests on the shoulders of the Nation and its peoples, as does continuing the struggle for the liberation of all the occupied land and the restoration of stolen rights, no matter how long it takes or how great the sacrifices (Qassem, 2009, pp. 496-497).⁸ Qassem’s quotation only provides further support. In this spirit, he says that the resistance came into existence in reaction to the Israeli occupation and will continue to struggle as long as the occupation continues. After all, the resistance was established on the foundation of the belief that the occupation can be defeated. Qassem clarifies that the resistance would continue to bear arms as long as Israel exists, for even after Israel’s withdrawal from southern Lebanon, it remains a current and future threat to the country (Qassem, 2009, p. 450).

In this spirit, Nasrallah has, on several occasions, articulated a similar view. In a speech delivered on the day of remembrance for Samir Kuntar in 2015, he advanced two logical arguments relating to Israel. The first was that Israel is an unavoidable fact whose existence must be accepted, and that there is no choice but coexistence and all that this implies in terms of surrendering to it and accepting its dictates. On the other hand, there is the logic of resistance, which he refers to as “deterministic logic,” according to which the destruction of Israel is a deterministic outcome of history, as every occupation, no matter how long it’s duration, reaches its end.⁹

Although deterrence of Israel is a doctrinal element in the struggle against it, it is not the only consideration. The continuation of resistance is inherently linked to a principled commitment to the Palestinian people, as this guiding doctrine defines Israel as a

current and future threat to Palestine and the entire region; thereby obligating resistance against it until it is defeated (Qassem, 2009, p. 448). This unshakeable commitment to the struggle against Israel is faithfully reflected in the training of Hezbollah fighters, which is based on religious, ideological, and military foundations. Hezbollah’s fighting force receives more than just military training, which occurs after a methodical process of coherent religious-ideological indoctrination and a nurturing of the inspirational, practical model of Husayn’s martyrdom. Such training and modeling rests on an identification with the Palestinian’s plight and the struggle for the holy sites. The conflict with Israel, the restoration of rights to the Palestinian people, and the liberation of the holy places, most importantly Jerusalem, are the contemporary equivalents of the struggle of Husayn, son of Ali, against tyranny, despotism, and exploitation (Belhaziz, 2006, pp. 44-45; Fiad, 2000, pp. 69-74).

Another extremely important aspect of the shaping of the political and ideological world of Hezbollah that cannot be ignored, is the messianic aspect of its struggle against Israel. As an Islamist movement devoted to the revolutionary ideology of the Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist, Hezbollah is committed to what its former General Secretary Abbas al-Musawi called “paying the tax burden of preparations for the coming of the Mahdi,” and Jihad against Israel is what will prepare the ground for the coming of the Mahdi. “Islamic resistance” in Lebanon is an enterprise that prepares the ground for the return of the Mahdi, whose return will provide him with a powerful point of departure—embodied in the Islamic resistance—for realizing the messianic vision in its entirety. Therefore, all harm to or weakening of the resistance is like weakening the messianic enterprise of the Mahdi (Majalat Baqiat Allah, 2023, pp. 64, 82).

Three trends prepare the ground and portend the coming of the Mahdi: the appearance of the Islamic resistance in Lebanon, the awakening

of hostility to Jews, and the abandonment of neutrality and passivity. Al-Musawi wrote that he who desires to swear allegiance to the Mahdi must, from a religious and moral perspective, abandon passivity and neutrality and take their places beside the oppressed; he also wrote that he who does not adapt himself to Jihad in this world will not have the privilege of being among the supporters of the Mahdi in this world (Majalat Baqiat Allah, 2023, p. 83). This approach was a formative component of the shaping of the deterministic view of Israel. In one of his speeches in 2024, Nasrallah related dismissively to the messianic aspect of the struggle against Israel.¹⁰ In the same breath, he emphasized the obligation to continue the struggle against Israel until it is destroyed, with no connection to an eschatological or prophetic conception. Nasrallah described Israel as a cancerous tumor that by nature creates pain and wars. The source of all the *fitan* (pl. of *fitna*: temptation or trial) that this region has known is actually Israel, making it necessary to work day-and-night to uproot this tumor.¹¹ In light of these insights, the struggle against Israel is indeed a tool for political mobility; however, it remains a foundation stone in the existence of Hezbollah and its ideological and religious vision of the Shiite organization.

For Hezbollah, the discourse of “spider webs” (to describe Israel as weak and fragile) is not a form of psychological warfare but rather an expression of the organization’s internal certainty of its ability to strike Israel with an overwhelming blow (Harel & Issacharoff, 2008, p. 443).¹² This trend is reflected more intensively in Naim Qassem’s approach to the intermediate period of the struggle against Israel. In addition to portraying the Israeli withdrawal as achieving the goal of liberating the occupied homeland, Qassem enumerated five additional accomplishments of the resistance against Israel, in the following order: 1) Highlighting the nation’s potential ability to resist the occupation; 2) Raising morale in the face of the frustration and the loss of faith in its abilities,

which characterized this region for decades; 3) Reviving the spirit of resistance among the Palestinian people; 4) Causing the failure of the “new Middle East”; and 5) Transforming Lebanon from a weak state into a strong state (Qassem, 2008, p. 11).

Hezbollah’s refraining from starting a total war against Israel during the present confrontation also echoes an ideological and strategic worldview based on the premise that continuation of the struggle against Israel will ultimately lead to the internal collapse of Israel’s state, army, and social fabric. Like other Islamist movements, Hezbollah believes that the demise of Israel is a matter of divine determinism and a natural historical development. The ongoing struggle against Israel, with the help of its structural internal weaknesses, will ultimately lead to its collapse. The idea of the internal weaknesses and the spontaneous collapse of Israel is not new; it has been raised in the past in Pan-Arabist circles, as it is currently being raised by Islamist circles (Al-Tamimi, n.d., pp. 28-29). What was new was Nasrallah’s conviction that perseverance in the struggle against Israel and continuous strikes would accelerate the country’s spontaneous collapse. According to this analysis, Israel’s internal weaknesses are not the product of its existential dependence on a foreign power or the fact that it is a state devoid of state foundations due to the militaristic nature of society; rather, they stem from a series of changes that accelerate internal dissolution. These changes are related to Israel’s inner essence and to its struggle with the Palestinian people. In this internal Israeli context, Nasrallah identified four changes: the crisis of leadership that has plagued Israel since the death of Ariel Sharon, the internal fragmentation of Israeli society, loss of the Zionist patriotic spirit, and loss of the deterrence of the IDF.¹³ As for the struggle with the Palestinians, both trends—changing the demographic balance in favor of the Palestinians, alongside the steadfast perseverance of the Palestinian people (Al-Khudari, 2007, p. 164)¹⁴—create momentum,

maintains Nasrallah, in the unavoidable internal collapse of the state of Israel. This view certainly contributes to the continuation of Hezbollah's bearing arms and fighting Israel, as the ultimate result of this struggle is to be the defeat of Israel.

Along with emphasizing the guiding concept of the defensive weapon, bearing arms was portrayed as a necessity derived from the weakness of the state, but also as an alternative to the absence of the desired state—that which protects its citizens and maintains the rule of law.¹⁵ This approach, more than anything else, reflects the organic link between the feelings of oppression and exclusion that surges through Shiite society and Hezbollah's obsession with arms. Linking the bearing of arms to the nonexistence of a proper and just state clearly reflects the feelings of frustration that has been the lot of the Shiites since the signing of the Taif Agreement. The Shiites ended the Civil War as the most powerful community—demographically, militarily, and in terms of political mobility—; however, none of these strengths translated into success in the institutional politics of Lebanon. This approach, which links the continuation of bearing arms to the establishment of a strong, just state, was presented by Sheikh Naim Qassem, who stressed that resistance does not contradict the army or the state, but rather completes the army and serves as support for the state. Qassem suggests that the condition for relinquishing the military power of the resistance would be Lebanese agreement to the establishment of a strong, just state (Qassem, 2008, p. 12).

One day after Hamas' murderous attack of October 7, 2023, Hezbollah launched a limited campaign of attrition against Israel, with no provocation and in total contradiction of the defensive doctrine on which it bases the legitimacy for the continued bearing of arms outside of state authority. The argument that Hezbollah's participation in the fighting is lip service to the Palestinian struggle, is more wishful thinking on the part of those making the claim than it is the essence of

Hezbollah involvement. Joining the fighting is an unequivocal and distinct statement regarding Hezbollah's commitment to the struggle against Israel and devotion to fulfilling the mission of handing Israel a systemic defeat.

The process of Lebanonization experienced by Hezbollah has not necessarily diluted the ideological commitment to all-out war against Israel. The internal considerations pertaining to the Lebanese state do indeed exist, but they do not undermine the religious commitment. The campaign that Hezbollah launched against Israel was meant to convey three messages both to its supporters, the supporters of the ideological struggle against Israel, and to Hezbollah's enemies alike. First, that Hezbollah is fundamentally committed to the struggle against Israel and that this commitment stems from the view that the struggle against Israel is one that must be won. Second, that Hezbollah at this stage is not interested in a total war with Israel due to the internal Lebanese constraints, and that it therefore launched a campaign of attrition, which aimed to offer a supportive front to the Palestinians while exhausting the Israeli army and economy. Third, that the option of total war on the part of Hezbollah would be a response to a total Israeli attack.¹⁶ Hezbollah's role in the campaign is not symbolic, as indicated by the number of casualties it has sustained thus far and by the extent of the destruction of south Lebanon villages. The toll in blood and destruction on southern Lebanon leaves no room for doubt about Hezbollah's commitment to the continuing struggle against Israel until its collapse (Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2024).¹⁷

Lebanon after 2008: Shiite Hegemony in Practice

Since the signing of the Doha Agreement in 2008, the military wing of Hezbollah has enjoyed undisputed military superiority, as reflected in the events in Beirut in May 2008. At the beginning of that month, the Lebanese government decided to do two things: to

dismantle Hezbollah's communications network and to dismiss the security officer of Beirut's airport, who was considered to have close relations with Hezbollah. In a resolute response, Hezbollah, in conjunction with Amal and the militias of the Syrian Social-National Party (PPS) seized control of Beirut and attacked Druze villages on Mt. Lebanon. It was Lebanon's most intense internal clash since the end of the Civil War in Lebanon in 1989. In addition, it was the first time that Hezbollah turned its military forces against other Lebanese communities (Abisaab & Abisaab, 2014, p. 144). Hassan Fadlala effectively described the effects of the Doha Agreement from Hezbollah's perspective. According to Hezbollah, the Doha Agreement served to correct the iniquities of the Taif Agreement of 1989 by laying the real foundations for consociational democracy. Moreover, this agreement anchored the dual reality of the "army of resistance" operating alongside the army of the state (and not in its place). It set the tripartite discourse of "army, nation, and resistance" as a hegemonic discourse in the Lebanese state, with all those who speak out against it as traitors to the state (Fadlala, 2015, pp. 202-203).

Hezbollah's seizure of Beirut in 2008 resulted in the Doha Agreement, which stated that the opposition led by Hezbollah would receive veto power over decisions of the central government. The agreement pertained to the selection of the new president and an amendment to the election law, but the important section dealt with the formation of the government, determining that Hezbollah and its allies would receive slightly more than one-third of the ministers. Hezbollah and its allies were given 11 ministerial posts, the president received three, and the coalition received 16. Accordingly, it was decided that all government decisions needed to receive a two-thirds majority, meaning that Hezbollah and its allies were given the ability to veto any government decision. Since then, precedent has developed giving Hezbollah and its allies what is known as a "blocking third,"

due to the two-thirds majority required to pass a government decision (Hajjar, 2009, pp. 270-271).

Two years earlier, during the Second Lebanon War, it had become evident that Hezbollah was a powerful military force that could withstand an onslaught by the Israeli army and fire missiles deep into northern Israel non-stop for more than five weeks of fighting. Hezbollah's military wing was the only militia that was not disarmed following the Second Civil War in 1989. Hezbollah exploited the struggle against Israel's occupation of part of southern Lebanon to justify this exceptional violation of state sovereignty. The new circumstances that arose following Israel's May 2000 withdrawal from southern Lebanon led Hezbollah to change its justification to include the liberation of the Shebaa Farms (Mt. Dov) and deterrence in the face of "Israeli aggression" (Kaufman, 2002, pp. 576-595). The IDF's withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000, along with the results of the Second Lebanon War of 2006 and the Doha Agreement of 2008, turned Hezbollah into the undisputed major power in the political arena in Lebanon. From then on, Hezbollah enjoyed power that enabled it to dictate political moves, or at least to torpedo the moves of all its rivals.

Every Lebanese government since 2008 has either been arranged around the principle of the "blocking third" or led by prime ministers backed by Hezbollah. Even during the government of Saad Hariri, Hezbollah controlled the decision-making process. Since 2005, Lebanon has had four parliamentary elections. Because two of these elections (2005 and 2009) resulted in the victory of the anti-Syrian March 14 camp, the Doha Agreement set a precedent by granting this "blocking third" to the pro-Syrian March 8 camp, led by Hezbollah. In the elections of 2005, the March 14 bloc won 67 seats, whereas the March 8 coalition won only 57.

These elections hold great importance due to three factors:

1. Security Council Resolution 1559, which called for the withdrawal of all foreign armies

from Lebanese territory and the dismantling of the militias.

2. The assassination of Rafik Hariri, which occurred later, leading to the Syrian army's withdrawal from Lebanon.
3. The withdrawal of the Syrian army and the return from exile of Christian leader Michel Aoun (Haddad, 2005, p. 306).

After the anti-Syrian March 14 camp led by Saad Hariri won 67 seats, Fouad Siniora formed a government that received the confidence of 92 parliament members, which was the first to include Hezbollah representatives since the signing of the Taif Agreement in 1989 (Haddad, 2005, pp. 327-328). This move did much more than simply create a political or constitutional change. It reflected a tangible concern regarding the effects of the Syrian army's withdrawal from Lebanon and was meant to serve as an internal brake on any decision that could challenge the "consensus" regarding Hezbollah's status as an armed organization. Siniora's government was paralyzed after two Shiite ministers resigned following the Second Lebanon War, and an ongoing strike brought the entire government to a halt until 2008 and the signing of the Doha Agreement. Every government that has been formed in Lebanon since then has been subject to the principle of the blocking third, which has ensured Hezbollah participation in the decision-making process (Berti, 2011, p. 956). The results of the election of 2009 were not significantly different, and the March 14 camp won 71 mandates, as opposed to the 57 mandates won by the March 8 coalition (Harnisch, 2009).

In the elections of 2018, Hezbollah and its allies achieved a sweeping victory, winning 71 mandates in contrast to the 48 won by the March 14 camp. In these elections, Hezbollah managed to bypass the Sunni political arena with the election of some of its Sunni allies. The elections of 2022, which were held after the civic protests that broke out in 2019, the explosion that rocked the Beirut port, and an economic crisis, reduced the strength of the Christian parties, Hezbollah's allies, while at

the same time the Shiite parties maintained their representative status among the voters. Although the civic protest strengthened the Phalanges at the expense of the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) and led to the selection of several symbolic representatives of the civic struggle, it is doubtful whether the results will change the paradigm of the Doha Agreement and facilitate the establishment of a Lebanese government that Hezbollah does not support.

Hezbollah has also proclaimed its strength through an amendment to the Lebanese election law in 2017. This amendment, which reflects the mounting political power of the Shiite community, instituted two innovations: partial relative representation and preferential voting. Preferential voting gives every voter the right to vote for a list of candidates, as well as for a "preferred candidate" in their district (as defined in the new Lebanese election law of 2017).¹⁸ It is well known that two of the Shiite parties were responsible for the amendment regarding relative representation; it was an open secret that they preferred this system, in an effort to turn Lebanon into a single electoral district that reflects their demographic advantage. Similarly, the preferential voting was supposed to enable them to influence the results in favor of the Sunni candidates in the districts in which the Shiites possessed marked electoral strength. Preferential voting also helped to relieve the fears of the Christian parties and to prevent Muslim voters from determining the outcomes of the elections in the districts with a Muslim majority. In this way, the two new components were useful to both the two Shiite parties and their Christian allies.

Michel Aoun's election as president in 2015 in itself was an important reversal achieved by Hezbollah. Sixteen months after the end of the term of President Michel Suleiman, Aoun was elected by a majority of 83 (with 127 present, 36 abstentions, and eight disqualified votes), despite the fervent opposition of the members of the March 14 camp, and after 45 sessions in which the parliament was unable to select

a new president. The stubborn persistence of Hezbollah and its allies ultimately led to Aoun's election, as the Lebanese political system faced two possibilities: Aoun as president or political paralysis (Cambanis, 2016). Hezbollah's parliamentary power lies, therefore, in its ability to paralyze the Lebanese political arena, through both military means and a national discourse that portrays any opposition to Hezbollah as an attempt to undermine the Lebanese national consensus.

The natural gas agreement of 2022, which divides the gas fields located along the border between Israel and Lebanon, was an historical watershed. Although Israel's interest in the agreement reflects its strategic and economic interests, and the agreement gives Israel clear advantages on the strategic level, this does not negate the fact that it largely reflects standards and conditions that were determined by Hezbollah. First, the agreement is based on a total disconnection between the maritime border and the land border, due to Hezbollah's reservations regarding the Blue Line that was drawn by the UN. Second, it was signed without a ceremony and will in no way constitute an initial phase of a political process leading to normalization between the two countries, like the Abraham Accords. Third, the Israelis believe that they have made greater concessions.

An analysis by researchers of the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) holds that the agreement constitutes recognition of the fact that Line 23, which Hezbollah will once again control, serves as the border. That being the case, Israel conceded control to a large majority of the 860 square kilometer area that was under dispute (unlike in the past, when it was only willing to concede 55 percent). Still, most of the area that Israel conceded is located in Israel's economic waters, and not in its territorial waters (which stretch to a distance of 12 miles from the coast). Despite Lebanon's commitment to refrain from making any changes from the border to a depth of five kilometers, and its agreement that Israel receive compensation for the production

of gas at the Qana gas field, which crosses Line 23 into Israeli territory, these two reservations were not enough to thwart the agreement. Israel accepted Line 23, as presented by Lebanon (Mizrahi & Sharvit Baruch, 2022, pp. 2-3).

The agreement, therefore, is a clear manifestation of the hegemony of the Shiite community, which has grown considerably since the signing of the Doha Agreement in 2008. To conclude this matter, we can say that all the governments that have come into office in Lebanon since the Doha Agreement up to the present day, were formed with the support of Hezbollah, or at least did not arouse its opposition. In this context, we note the government of Dr. Hassan Diab that was established at the beginning of 2020 following the outbreak of civic protest in Lebanon, in response to the government's intention to impose a tax on the WhatsApp mobile phone app. The major new aspect of his government was the unprecedented representation of women in the Arab World, with six women holding ministerial positions, all without head coverings. It was also the first time a woman was appointed to the position of minister of defense (Zeina Akar). The formation of this government of technocrats, with its distinctly female character, only reflects the pragmatism of Hezbollah, which at this stage is satisfied with control of the governing system, without any coercion of the theoretical or ideological criteria derived from the Islamist doctrine.¹⁹ The political vacuum that has existed in Lebanon since the tenure of President Michel Aoun in 2022 serves only to strengthen the hypothesis regarding Hezbollah's political hegemony in Lebanon; after all, the political system in Lebanon has only two possibilities: either election of Hezbollah's candidate or paralysis of the system itself. The same is true of the Lebanese government. The critical issue from Hezbollah's perspective is to ensure that the institutional political system does not undermine the resistance. Hezbollah does not offer an integrated view regarding the problems of the state, but rather seeks to

maintain the state's existence out of concern for the organization's status in Lebanon.

Hezbollah's political hegemony has never encountered any challenge on the part of the military or security establishment in Lebanon. The Lebanese army is located at the heart of the national consensus and is considered to be the institution that, more than anything, symbolizes Lebanon's sovereignty and statism. For this reason, the Lebanese army has never tried to challenge Hezbollah's political hegemony in Lebanon. The military strategy of the Lebanese army itself, to a certain extent, has facilitated Hezbollah's hegemony in Lebanon. Since its establishment, the Lebanese army has maintained three principles that ensured its existence and provided it with the resilience of a shock absorber vis-à-vis the vicissitudes of the area. First, the Lebanese army condemned itself to a norm that requires espousing a neutral position vis-à-vis internal conflicts and to refrain from any involvement in Lebanese domestic political disagreements, out of conviction that such intervention could result in the dismantling of the army (Freiha, 1980, pp. 118, 124-125). This has been the credo of the Lebanese army since 1952, when the commander of the army, General Fouad Shehab, refused to intervene in a political protest against the president at the time, Bishara al-Khoury, and with greater intensity during the First Civil War of 1958 (Soubrier, 2013, p. 28). This logic later proved itself, as Lebanon's Second Civil War ultimately resulted in the army's disintegration along ethnic and political lines. Second, the Lebanese army condemned itself to a neutral position on the Arab-Israeli conflict, and since then, from the 1948 war up to the present, it has not taken part in the fighting against Israel. Third, the Lebanese army has always acted to maintain ethnic balances on the command level, in addition to presenting a state national military doctrine based on two main principles: defending the homeland against all external aggression and defining Israel as an enemy

who is occupying part of the homeland and must be fought (Soubrier, 2013, p. 103).

Since the IDF's withdrawal from the Security Zone, Lebanon has faced four internally destabilizing crises stemming from incidents in which Hezbollah used its military strength both domestically and against external threats. All the crises that emerged against a background of Hezbollah's military activity between 2006 and 2023, did not dissuade the army from maintaining its neutral and passive position. The Second Lebanon War of 2006 was the first test after the IDF's withdrawal, but the aggressive seizure of the city of Beirut in May 2008 was the most important test of relations between the Lebanese army and Hezbollah, although the army did not intervene in the matter at all. The seizure of Beirut marked the first time that the military force of the resistance was directed internally, illustrating more than anything else the depth of the crisis caused by the existence of two military organizations in Lebanese territory. The move showed that the crisis was two dimensional and cannot be summed up in the existence of a military organization challenging the authority of the national army, but rather was presented by a military organization of a monolithic ethnic Shiite nature. The fact that Hezbollah is such an organization arouses antagonism because Lebanon's Sunni neighborhoods were the targets of attack, and because the move was perceived by many as the collective humiliation of the Sunnis of Lebanon (Soubrier, 2013, p. 106). The outbreak of the uprising in Syria presented Lebanon with an extremely significant crisis, and the entry of Hezbollah forces into Syria after 2013 placed civic peace under real threat. However, this measure on the part of Hezbollah also did not receive a response from the Lebanese army (Nerguizian, 2018, p. 2). The fact that Hezbollah joined the war against Israel in October 2023 and launched a limited campaign in the north has also not changed the passive approach of the Lebanese army.

The Shiite community emerged from the chaos of the Second Civil War as the most powerful community in the Lebanese domestic arena. The militarization and allied relationships that were formed with Syria and Iran positioned the Shiite community at the center of political and military power in the Lebanese arena.

The Shiite community emerged from the chaos of the Second Civil War as the most powerful community in the Lebanese domestic arena. The militarization and allied relationships that were formed with Syria and Iran positioned the Shiite community at the center of political and military power in the Lebanese arena. The Taif Agreement of 1989 prevented the Shiite community from translating its power into institutional politics but excluded it from all the implications of the enterprise of rebuilding the country, leaving the ideological military arm, in particular, as a “legal” violation of state sovereignty. The militarization of the Shiite community, alongside the strategic alliance with strong regional actors, produced the powerful point of departure that allowed Hezbollah, two years after the end of the war, to acquire Lebanese and regional legitimacy for the Taif Agreement. If the Taif Agreement excluded Hezbollah from state authority, the Doha Agreement gave the Shiite community, led by Hezbollah, silencing control of the Lebanese state (Kazi, 2013, pp. 65-66). This agreement would not have been possible without the processes of consolidation of power that the community has experienced since the 1970s.

Conclusion

Since the end of the Civil War in 1989, many Shiites have felt that they were not fairly compensated for their sacrifices over 15 years of ongoing bloodshed. The Taif Agreement was far from satisfying their political demands (Kazi, 2009, pp. 58-59). For five decades, the Shiite public witnessed far-reaching social

and political changes that moved it from the margins to the center of the political arena. Some have argued that the core of Lebanese politics is demography, whereas others ascribe the Shiite rise to regional politics or religious revival (Soffer, 1986, pp. 197-205; Nasr, 2011, pp. 133-145).

The rise of the Shiites should be understood as the result of the three processes that have influenced the community since the 1960s that are analyzed above. Demographic growth, militarization, and the establishment of external patronage all reinforced one another in producing the phenomenon of Shiite political activism. This development was accompanied by rising political radicalization. Neither religious tradition nor regional politics in themselves offer a convincing explanation for this combination of empowerment and radicalization. The erosion of the Shiite commitment to the Lebanese state, reflected in militarization, political radicalization, and its allegiance to an external force, cannot be separated from the internal dynamic of exclusion, marginalization, and the state’s discriminatory treatment of the Shiites for many years. This process of erosion was worsened by the Shiites increasing awareness that they are the main and the largest ethnic group in the country in terms of demography, military strength, and political mobilization. Therefore, they do not seek to seize power or to dismantle the Lebanese territorial framework, but rather to control access to political power. In addition, they understood that advancing far-reaching demands two decades after the end of the Second Civil War could cause the formation of a coalition that could unify against their community.²⁰

Of the political developments that Lebanon has experienced since 2008, the two that stand out most clearly are the Shiite community’s status as the Lebanese political center of gravity on the one hand, and, on the other hand, Hezbollah’s political hegemony. The existence of these two factors were formally recognized in the precedent established by

the Doha Agreement of 2008. The natural gas agreement of 2022 joins a long list of cases demonstrating Hezbollah's political hegemony: from the Doha Agreement, to the election of President Aoun, to the amendment of the election laws. Every Lebanese government since 2008 has been subject to the dictates of Hezbollah, whose power is fueled by the controlling Shiite influence in the country since the 1980s, which was first expressed in the Doha Agreement.

Hezbollah is in no hurry to seize control of the Lebanese state, but this does not mean that as an Islamist organization it does not wish to rise to power. The fact that Hezbollah has refrained from seizing control of the state until now, stems from three pragmatic and utilitarian considerations. First, seizing control by force is liable to disrupt the fabric of community life and the foundations of orderly and regulated consociational democracy, on which the Lebanese system of government is based, and perhaps even to cause Lebanon to decline into a third civil war, which is a development that Hezbollah does not want. Second, seizing control of the state would require Hezbollah to contend with the challenges of administering a state that is failing both economically and functionally, and this is not consistent with its priorities. Third, seizing control of the state of Lebanon would expose Lebanon to international sanctions, deepening the crisis prevailing in the country.

Hezbollah continues to challenge Lebanese state sovereignty, but at the same time it is making efforts at maintaining the state's existence. That is the contradiction that Hezbollah created in Lebanon: challenging the state on the one hand, while maintaining its existence on the other hand. Hezbollah does not intend to relinquish its military power, and it is not integrating itself into the Lebanese army. In addition, Hezbollah continually develops its political and ideological discourse to justify its continued bearing of arms outside state authority. In this context, integration within

the political system, and defensive discourse, were meant first and foremost to maintain Hezbollah's military existence.

The obsession with weapons to some extent reflects the authentic feelings of oppression and frustration among Shiites; however, it also stems from Hezbollah's ideological doctrine regarding the uncompromising struggle against Israel. The Doha Agreement was meant to create a model for balance between this obsession and self-restraint against seizing control of the state. The constitution of 1926 gave the signal for the birth of the First Lebanese Republic under Christian leadership, referred to by many as the "Republic of Merchants." The National Pact of 1943 did something similar under cover of Maronite-Sunni partnership. The Taif Agreement of 1989 gave expression to the birth of the Third Republic—the Taif Republic—in the shadow of the hegemony of Sunni capital. The Doha Agreement of 2008 gave the signal for the birth of the Fourth Lebanese Republic: the undeclared Shiite republic operating under the hegemony of resistance, which extends a crooked hand to the Lebanese army. The republic that was established following the Doha Agreement differed from its predecessors in that the agreement did not create fundamental change in the structure of the governing system, but rather granted a political movement with a mighty military arm the ability to paralyze the governing systems of the state and expropriate political decisions from the hands of the Lebanese state. The Doha Agreement in practice provides legitimate framing for Hezbollah's political hegemony, without assigning to it the responsibility derived from it. This political reality allows Hezbollah to operate without bearing responsibility toward Lebanese society or facing the state with its international responsibility. Naim Qassem's thesis that Hezbollah's exclusion from the realm of authority of the Lebanese state exempts the latter from international pressures and responsibility before international law, paradoxically reflects the political reality in

Lebanon in the post-Doha Agreement age. The political system based on the Taif Agreement remains in place, with a fundamental and weighty change. This change finds expression not only in the total neutralization of the state's authority over Hezbollah, but also in the appropriation of political decision from the hands of the state.

Epilogue

The dramatic developments that preceded the IDF's ground offensive in Lebanon, particularly the intelligence penetration and the elimination of Hezbollah's military command and political leadership headed by Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah, struck Hezbollah a paralyzing blow. In his last speech before his assassination, Nasrallah himself acknowledged that intelligence penetration had struck the "resistance" with the most serious blow since its establishment. There is no doubt that the military setbacks that Hezbollah sustained have undermined the organization's status in Lebanon. In addition, Nasrallah's disappearance from the arena has left a real leadership vacuum with the potential to challenge Hezbollah's hegemony in the medium term. Hezbollah's political rivals can be expected to try to channel these developments to weaken its status within Lebanon, and the resumption of operation of the television station *Al Mustaqbal*, which is associated with Saad Hariri's camp, is evidence of this fact. Despite the above, the Shiite community in Lebanon is still the center of gravity of Lebanese politics, and it remains a fact that all efforts to reach a ceasefire must go through parliamentary speaker Nabih Berri.

The recent developments do not turn back the hands of time, and it is doubtful whether the Shiite community will accept any attempt to strip it of the precedents it has built since the Doha Agreement of 2008. The political constellation derived from the Doha Agreement is not being challenged in a way that could undermine its foundations. First, there is great doubt whether Israel will try to leverage its

military power to advance a political process and whether such a move would find willing Lebanese partners. Second, Hezbollah still enjoys the undisputed support of its regional patron (Iran), which acted to preserve its status and to rebuild its capabilities. Third, and perhaps most importantly, there is no apparent rebellion within the Shiite community, and Hezbollah's status within its supportive surroundings has not been undermined. This is because the community's empowerment is inherently linked to the strength of Hezbollah, making it doubtful that this approach will soon change due to the recent war between Israel and Hezbollah.

Dr. Yusri Khaizran is a senior lecturer at Shalem College and a research fellow at the Hebrew University's Truman Institute. His main area of specialization is the politico-cultural history of the Fertile Crescent, and he has published books and articles in this area. Dr. Khaizran has published many articles in respected journals in his field. His book *Palestinians in Israel after the Arab Uprisings: The Political Impact of Regional Protest and Fragmentation*, on the effects of the Arab Spring on Arab society in Israel, is scheduled to be published in 2025. yusri.khaizran@mail.huji.ac.il

References

- Abdulghani, A. (2013). *Hezbollah: The problematics of politics and the resistance in a pluralistic society*. Maktabat al-Iskanderiya [Arabic].
- Abisaab, R.J., & Abisaab, M. (2014). *The Shi'ites of Lebanon: Modernism, communism, and Hezbollah's Islamists*. Syracuse University Press.
- Ajami, F. (2006). *The Vanished Imam: Musa al-Sadr and the Shia of Lebanon* [translated by A. Shamir]. Am Oved [Hebrew].
- Alagha, J. (2006). *The shifts in Hezbollah's ideology—Religious ideology, political ideology, and political program*. Amsterdam University Press.
- Al-Khudari, A.Q. (2007). *From victory to the palace*. No publisher indicated [in Arabic].
- Al-Qaradawi, Y. (2009). *The Laws of Jihad*. Maktabat Wahba, Vol. 1 [Arabic].
- Al-Qays, B. (2022, April 22). A look at the thesis of nation, army, and resistance. *Al Akhbar*. <https://tinyurl.com/2v9az9f7>
- Al-Safa, M.J. (1958). *The History of Jebel Amal*. Dar Matin al-Lu'a [Arabic]

- Al-Tamimi, (N.D.). *The Annihilation of Israel: Koranic Determinism*. Al Mukhtar Al Islami [Arabic].
- Al-Zayn, 'I. (1973). *For the sake of the search for our history*. Dar al-Fikr al-Arabi [Arabic].
- As-Sayid, R. (N.D.). *The open letter to the oppressed: Hassan Nasrallah: A revolutionary from the south*. Dar al-Kitab al-'Arabi [Arabic].
- Asharq Al-Awsat (2024). *Ten months after "Support"... The Southern Lebanon War with no horizon*. [Arabic] <https://tinyurl.com/2huxdufu>
- Azi, A. (1998). *Hezbollah: From Ideological Dream to Political Realism*. Dar Karatas L'ilnisha [Arabic].
- Barak, O. (2006). Towards a representative military? The transformation of the Lebanese Officers Corps since 1945. *Middle East Journal*, 60(1), 75-93. DOI:10.3751/60.1.14
- Bazzi, M.H. (2006). *The kept promise: Journal of the sixth war*. Dar al-Amir [Arabic].
- Belkaziz, A. (2006). *The resistance and the liberation of southern Lebanon*. Markaz Dirasat al-Wihda al-'Arabiyya [in Arabic].
- Berkovich, D. (2006). Hezbollah's primary agent of change: The role of the Lebanese army," *INSS Strategic Update* 9(3), 28-32 [Hebrew]. <https://tinyurl.com/6sft4v4d>
- Berti, B. (2011). Armed groups as political parties and their role in electoral politics: The case of Hezbollah. *Studies in Conflicts and Terrorism*, 34(12), 942-962. DOI:10.1080/1057610X.2011.621115
- Berti, B., & Schweitzer, Y. (2013). Hezbollah in Syria: Losing the balance between 'national resistance' and sectarian interests? *Strategic Update* 16(2), 41-52 [Hebrew]. <https://tinyurl.com/bdf2py4n>
- Bullock, A., & Trombley, S. (1999). *The new fontana dictionary of modern thought* (3rd edition). Harper Collins Publishers.
- Cambanis, T. (2016, October 31). Michel Aoun rises to Lebanese presidency, ending power vacuum. *The New York Times*. <https://tinyurl.com/55s272n2>
- Chehabi, H.E. (2006). Iran and Lebanon in the revolutionary decade. In H.E. Chehabi & H. Mneimneh (Eds.), *Distant relations: Iran and Lebanon in the last 500 years* (pp. 201-230). I. B. Tauris.
- Crow, R. (1962). Religious sectarianism in the Lebanese political system. *The Journal of Politics*, 24(3), 489-520.
- Firro, K. (2006). Ethnicizing the Shi'is in Mandatory Lebanon. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 42(5), 741-759. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263200600827933>
- Fadlallah, M.H. (1996). *The Jihad Book*. Dar al-Malak [Arabic].
- Fadlallah, M.H. (2015). *Hezbollah and the State in Lebanon*. 3rd ed. Sherikat al-Matbu'at l'iltuziya w'al-nashr [Arabic].
- Fiad, A. (2000). The Islamic resistance in southern Lebanon. *Majallat al-Dirasat al-Filastiniyya* 11(43) [Arabic].
- Freiha, A. (1980). *L'Armée et L'État au Liban (1945-1980)*. Librairie generale de droit et de jurisprudence.
- Gaub, F. (2007). Multi-ethnic armies in the aftermath of civil war: Lessons learned from Lebanon. *Defense Studies*, 7(1), 5-20. DOI:10.1080/14702430601135537
- Haddad, S. (2005). The Lebanese parliamentary elections of 2005. *Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies*, 30(3), 305-332.
- Haddad, S. (2006). The origins of popular support for Lebanon's Hezbollah. *Studies in Conflicts and Terrorism*, 29(1), 21-34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100500351250>
- Hajjar, S. (2009). The convoluted and diminished Lebanese democracy. *Democracy and Security*, 5(3), 261-276. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17419160903304864>
- Halawi, M. (1992). *A Lebanon defied: Musa al-Sadr and the Shia community*. Westview Press.
- Hamada, H. (2001). *The Secret of Victory: Reading on the Background of Hezbollah's Jihadist Religious Beliefs*. Dar al-Hadi [Arabic].
- Hamzeh, A. (2004). *In the path of Hezbollah*. Syracuse University Press.
- Harel, A., & Issacharoff, A. (2008). *Spiderwebs: The Story of the Second Lebanon War*. Yedioth Ahronoth [Hebrew].
- Harnisch, C. (2009, June 12). 2009 Lebanese parliamentary elections. Critical Threats. <https://tinyurl.com/4tafwshc>
- Johnson, M. (2001). *All honourable men: The social origins of war in Lebanon*. Bloomsbury Academic.
- Kana'ana, A. (2019). *The Hegemony of the Resistance*. Dar al-Farabi [in Arabic].
- Kaufman, A. (2002). Who owns the Shebaa farms? Chronicle of a territorial dispute. *Middle East Journal*, 56(4), 576-596.
- Kazi, F. (2009). *From Nasrallah to Michel Aoun: A political reading of Hezbollah*. Riad al-Rayyes Books [Arabic].
- Maoz, M. (1988). *Asad: The Sphinx of Damascus*. Weidenfeld & Nicolson.
- Majalat Baqiat Allah. *In the fields of waiting*. Dar al-Ma'arif al-Islamiyya al-Thaqafiyya [Arabic].
- Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center. (2014, April 9). *Hezbollah's Involvement in the Civil War in Syria*. <https://tinyurl.com/4kvn76v7>
- Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center. (2024, September 2). *Spotlight on Terrorism: Hezbollah, Lebanon and Syria (August 26-September 2, 2024)*. [Hebrew]. <https://tinyurl.com/2mw6a47a>
- Mizrahi, O., & Sharvit Baruch, P. (2022, October 6). An agreement with Lebanon on the issue of gas at sea will be an important achievement for Israel. *INSS Insight*, 1650. [Hebrew]. <https://tinyurl.com/43cw5w9e>
- Nasr, V. (2011). *The Shia revival: How conflicts within Islam will shape the future* [translated by Z. Elazar]. Yediot Books [Hebrew].
- Nerguizian, A. (2018, October 30). *The Lebanese armed forces and Hezbollah: Military dualism in post-war Lebanon*. Italian Institute for International Political Studies. <https://tinyurl.com/b7wmvu7a>
- Nicholas, N. (Ed.). (2007). *Voice of Hezbollah, the statements of Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah*. Verso.
- Norton, A.R. (1987). *Amal and Shia: Struggle for the soul of Lebanon*. University of Texas Press.
- Norton, A.R. (2000). Hezbollah and the Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon. *Journal of Palestinian Studies*, 30(1), 22-35. DOI:10.1525/jps.2000.30.1.02p01053

- Norton, A.R. (2007). *Hezbollah, a short history*. Princeton University Press.
- Qassem, N. (2008). "The opening word." In N. Qassem et al., *The principles of resistance: The option of martyrdom or life* (pp. 5-12). Dar al-Hadi [Arabic].
- . (2009). *Hezbollah: The promise, the experience, and the future*. 9th ed. Dar al-Mahaja al-Bida [Arabic].
- Raed, M. (2008). "The reasons for victory in the war of July 2006." In N. Qassem et al., *The principles of resistance: The option of martyrdom or life* (pp. 127-135). Dar al-Hadi [Arabic].
- Samii, A.W. (2008). A stable structure on shifting sands: Assessing the Hezbollah Iran-Syria relationship. *Middle East Journal*, 62(1), 32-53. DOI:10.3751/62.1.12
- Schemeil, Y. (1976). *Sociologie du systeme politique Libanais*. Université de Grenoble.
- Shaery-Eisenlhor, R. (2008). *Shiite Lebanon*. Columbia University Press.
- Shaqur, R. (2009). *Hezbollah's impact on the development of the idea of resistance in the Arab region*. Jama'at al-Najah [Arabic].
- Shay, S. (2005). *The axis of evil: Iran, Hizballah, and the Palestinian terror*. Transaction Publishers.
- Sherara, W. (1996). *The Worried Nation*. Dar al-Nahar [Arabic].
- Soffer, A. (1986). Lebanon: Where demography is the core of politics and life. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 22(2).
- Soubrier, E. (2013). *Re-construire une armee nationale: L'exemple du Liban depuis 1958*. Ministre De La Defense: CDEF.
- The World Factbook (n.d.). *Lebanon*. CIA. <https://tinyurl.com/3f5nkvts>
- Wege, C.A. (2011). Hezbollah-Syrian intelligence affairs: A marriage of convenience. *Journal of Strategic Security*, 4(3), 1-14. <https://tinyurl.com/bdh6tbmw>
- Zamir, M. (1985). *The foundation of modern Lebanon*. Croom Helm.
- Zine El Abidine, M.S. (2012). *The Shiites in Lebanon*. Vol. 2. Dar al-Ghabiya [Arabic].
- Zisser, A. (2014). *Syria: Protest, revolution, and civil war*. Moshe Daya Center, Tel Aviv University [Hebrew].
- Nasrallah's speech, see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nx8KR02bVpw>
- 4 Norton, 1987, p. 47.
- 5 One year earlier, in March 1974, he proclaimed the establishment of the *Mahrumin* (Oppressed) movement.
- 6 In an article published in *Al Hayat* on December 12, 2006, well-known Egyptian intellectual Saad Eddin Ibrahim compares Nasrallah and Nasser.
- 7 In a speech following the Second Lebanon War in 2006, Nasrallah depicted the war as a divine victory (video on file with the author).
- 8 For the complete version of *Al Wathiqah Al Siyasiya*: <https://www.alahednews.com.lb/uploaded/wasika/hz-2009.pdf>
- 9 For a full version of the speech of Secretary General Nasrallah on December 27, 2015, see: <https://archive.almanar.com.lb/article.php?id=1383677>
- 10 In contrast to Nasrallah's claim, since the outbreak of the 2023-2024 war, a version of the song "ala darab Fatima" was released by Hasin Khir al-Din, which states explicitly that Jihad will continue until worship occurs in Jerusalem following the Mahdi. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x6SAJcKf4gE>
- 11 See Hezbollah General Secretary's speech of May 31, 2024, which was delivered as an evening in memory of Shiite scholar Ali al-Kourani. <https://mediarelations-lb.org/post.php?id=18137>
- 12 Amos Harel and Avi Issacharoff have defined the Second Lebanon War not as a defeat, but rather as a stinging, overwhelming failure.
- 13 See Nasrallah's speech on the annual day of commemoration for Qasem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, February 1, 2024. <https://www.almanar.com.lb/11481109>
- 14 See also the following article that analyzes Nasrallah's views, titled "How Hassan Nasrallah Sees Israel's Unavoidable Fate" (Arabic): <https://alkhanadeq.org.lb/post.php?id=805>
- 15 This idea was specifically raised in Nasrallah's speech following the Second Lebanon War, which he portrayed as a divine victory.
- 16 See Nasrallah's first speech after Hamas' deadly attack, which he delivered on November 3, 2023. For the full transcription: <https://www.almanar.com.lb/11185165>
- 17 See: Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 2024; Asharq Al-Awsat, 2024.
- 18 Website of the government of Lebanon regarding the elections: <https://tinyurl.com/4dtnk7c5>
- 19 For a report on the formation of the government of Dr. Hassan Diab, see: <https://tinyurl.com/yc57dj5d>
- 20 The statement of Nabih Berri was published in the newspaper *Al Hayat* on December 10, 2008.

Notes

- 1 Carl Wege holds that "Hezbollah has evolved into a component of the Lebanese state, facilitating both Syrian and Iranian objectives while at the same time maintaining its autonomy."
- 2 Domino theory is a term coined by US President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1954 in reference to the belief of all US governments since 1947 that the fall of one country to Communism would quickly lead to the fall of its neighbors.
- 3 In a May 2013 speech, Nasrallah described Syria as the backbone of the resistance. For an excerpt from



Environmental Diplomacy: The UAE and Israel before and after October 7

Francesca Fassbender

Tel Aviv University

Udi Sommer

Tel Aviv University & NYU

Environmental cooperation was a key component highlighted in the Abraham Accords between Israel and the UAE in 2020. However, it has since received limited attention compared to other aspects of their bilateral relations. In this article, we analyze how environmental diplomacy between the two countries has evolved using interviews, media reports, and participant observations at conferences such as COP28. We contrast this cooperation before and after the terror attacks of October 7 and the subsequent Hamas-Israel war.

Our analysis highlights the potential for environmental collaboration before October 7, not only for its symbolic, economic, and sustainability benefits for both countries but also for regional integration. We then contrast this with the post-October 7 period, showing how environmental diplomacy was used as a platform for covert diplomatic interactions and continued, though limited, collaboration.

Furthermore, we examine the factors that influence and may continue to influence the potential of environmental diplomacy, including accusations of “ecocide” and “econormalization” since the start of the war. Finally, we discuss how environmental cooperation between Israel, the UAE, the Palestinians, and other Arab states could play a crucial role in post-war recovery and regional stability. We apply the framework of environmental peacebuilding to analyze the impact of such collaboration on bilateral relations and the broader region.

Keywords: Environmental diplomacy, Abraham Accords, Environmental Peacebuilding, COP28, UAE-Israel relations, Green-tech, Hamas-Israel war, climate-resilient reconstruction, day after

Introduction

The formalization of relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) through the Abraham Accords in September 2020 is widely regarded as a transformative moment in the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East, reshaping long-standing dynamics between

Israel and the Arab world. The UAE and Israel entered into these Accords for several strategic reasons, most prominently to build a stronger regional security framework against shared perceived threats, particularly from Iran and its regional proxies (Valik et al., 2023). Beyond

security, the UAE saw an opportunity to reinforce its ties with the United States, especially at a time when American influence in the region appeared to be in flux. By aligning more closely with Israel, the UAE secured its position as a key ally of Washington, while also benefiting from the diplomatic and security advantages of this partnership. Economically, the Accords opened new avenues for collaboration, allowing the UAE to tap into Israel's advanced technology and innovation sectors—crucial for the UAE's ambitious plans to diversify its economy away from dependence on oil (Valik et al., 2023).

In recent years, much attention has been given to the political, economic, and security implications of the Accords. However, an often-overlooked aspect is the environmental diplomacy between the two nations. Collaboration on environmental and climate initiatives was explicitly mentioned as a goal in the Abraham Accords. We argue that this strategic emphasis on joint environmental projects has played a crucial role in the normalization process and in advancing several shared interests of both countries.

This article explores the effects of environmental cooperation on the relations between the two countries before and after October 7, using expert interviews and participant observations from several conferences and events, including COP28 in Dubai. Through interviews, media analysis, and press releases, we examine the tone and language surrounding these collaborations. Since the Accords were signed, numerous environmental projects and agreements have been established, ranging from high-level MOUs between officials to civil society initiatives involving academics and think tanks, as well as many private-sector climate collaborations between Israeli green-tech startups and Emirati companies. By comparing the environmental collaboration between the two countries before and after October 7, and analyzing the reactions of the international and regional communities, we can draw important conclusions about

the power and potential of environmental cooperation between Israel and the UAE and the wider region.

Climate Context

To understand the context of these environmental agreements, it is important to note that, like many countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Israel and the UAE grapple with pressing environmental issues such as water scarcity, desertification, extreme weather events, rising temperatures and biodiversity loss. Despite deploying technological solutions like desalination, wastewater treatment, challenges persist due to the arid climate, climate change, and factors like population growth and regional water allocation dynamics (Paparella & Burt, 2023; Yosef et al., 2019). Israel sustains its agricultural sector through advanced farming techniques and robust water management, while the UAE invests in food technology and supply chain diversification (Singh, 2022; Talabani, 2024). Both nations face biodiversity risks from rapid urbanization and economic expansion, with the UAE additionally contending with ecological impacts from oil production and desalination (Sale et al., 2010).

The climate targets of Israel and the UAE, outlined in their respective reports to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), reveal discrepancies between aspirations and current trajectories. Israel's renewable energy ambitions lag, while the UAE aims for "Net Zero by 2050" and has invested substantially in clean energy projects yet continues to extract large amounts of fossil fuels (Climate Action Tracker, 2023). Both nations emphasize technological solutions to mitigate and adapt to these challenges.

Interests Behind Environmental and Climate Projects

Both the UAE and Israel are home to successful environmental companies and have set ambitious climate targets, making clean and

green projects a central component of their national agendas. These initiatives are driven by a complex mix of economic, technological, and geopolitical motivations, and are critical to the economic diversification strategies of both countries. The global green tech and sustainability market—encompassing water technology, agricultural technology, and clean energy (solar, wind, and green hydrogen)—is projected to grow significantly, from \$19.83 billion in 2024 to \$83.59 billion by 2032 (Fortune Business Insights, 2024). This growth offers substantial opportunities for both nations to position themselves as leaders in the sector.

Israel's Strategic Focus on Green Technology

Israel has been at the forefront of environmental innovation, particularly in water management and agricultural technology (AgriTech). These investments are part of Israel's broader strategy to leverage advanced technologies for economic growth. Israel is recognized for its contributions to climate tech, hosting nearly 1,200 companies focused on energy storage, clean energy systems, and sustainable materials (CTech, 2021; Leichman, 2017).

In agriculture, Israeli innovations in precision farming, irrigation, and cultivated meat have significantly enhanced food production efficiency (Sune, 2023). Israeli technology in water management, including drip irrigation and desalination, is particularly noteworthy (Sune, 2023). The country's renewable energy sector is also rapidly advancing, with a strong emphasis on solar energy and energy storage technologies. This progress is fueled by substantial government and private investments (Eitan, 2021). However, Israel's focus on technological innovation sometimes overshadows the need for systemic environmental reforms, raising concerns about the broader ecological implications of its high-tech solutions.

This national commitment to climate action also enhances Israel's diplomatic relations,

particularly with Europe and North America, where climate policies are a major focus. By participating in global initiatives like the Paris Agreement, Israel bolsters its image as a forward-thinking nation while strengthening alliances with key international partners (Sommer & Fassbender, 2024).

Recognizing the volatility of oil markets and the finite nature of fossil fuels, the UAE has prioritized economic diversification through investment in renewable energy and climate technology.

UAE's Transition from Oil Dependency

Historically reliant on fossil fuel revenues, the UAE has increasingly integrated climate policies into its economic planning. Recognizing the volatility of oil markets and the finite nature of fossil fuels, the UAE has prioritized economic diversification through investment in renewable energy and climate technology. These investments aim to reduce the country's reliance on hydrocarbons and position it as a global leader in solar and clean energy technologies (Zumbraegel, 2022).

Since 2009, the UAE has invested over \$700 million in renewable energy projects in developing countries and has hosted and supported the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) to further global sustainability efforts. The UAE's diversification strategy reduces its vulnerability to global oil market fluctuations and its dependence on OPEC, thereby enhancing national energy security (Chadha, 2015; Kader & Zaman, 2018). The Emirati leadership has articulated a long-term vision that places sustainability at the core of the nation's development goals. Initiatives like the UAE Energy Strategy 2050 and green "mega-projects" such as Masdar City reflect this commitment. By championing renewable energy, the UAE seeks to enhance its global stance as a forward-thinking and responsible nation, contributing to global sustainability. This is part of a broader strategy to assert soft

power and influence international discourse on climate and energy issues (Zumbraegel, 2022).

As the first Gulf country to sign the Paris Agreement, the UAE has committed to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions, with investments in renewable energy serving as a crucial component of meeting these international obligations.

Types of Cooperation

The UAE and Israel had already engaged in a form of environmental cooperation even before formalizing their diplomatic relations in the form of the Abraham Accords. Notably, Israel had an official representative in the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), headquartered in Abu Dhabi, UAE, well before the Accords (Times of Israel, 2015). This cooperation was a significant early indicator of both nations' willingness to collaborate with each other for mutual benefits in the field of renewable energy. The renewable energy context provided the framework for a neutral, low-risk platform for Israel and the UAE to interact diplomatically, setting a precedent for the more direct collaborations that followed. From a diplomatic perspective, Israel's involvement in IRENA could be seen as a first official bridge in the otherwise estranged relations between the two countries. This cooperation likely contributed to the trust-building necessary for the eventual Abraham Accords, demonstrating how environmental and energy concerns can transcend political barriers.

This article focuses on the evolution of climate and environmental cooperation between Israel and the UAE, dividing it into three distinct periods:

2020-2022: Post-Accords Cooperation

After the Abraham Accords were signed in 2020, Israel entered a new phase of regional cooperation with the UAE. During this time, both nations prioritized environmental and climate topics, seeing these as key areas for

collaboration. The Accords opened the door for joint ventures in renewable energy, water management, and agricultural technology, aligning with Israel's broader strategy to enhance its technological exports and the UAE's goal of economic diversification. However, the emphasis on climate cooperation was more pronounced during the period when Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid succeeded Netanyahu, particularly from 2021 to 2022. Their new coalition government took a more moderate approach, placing greater emphasis on regional cooperation, including on climate issues, which led to significant advances in bilateral and especially multilateral environmental projects.

2022-2023: Netanyahu's Return and Policy Shifts

Benjamin Netanyahu's return to power in late 2022 resulted in a noticeable shift in national priorities. The importance of climate and environmental issues on the national agenda declined. The hardline stance of Netanyahu's right-wing coalition regarding settlement policies and the pursuit of annexation plans of parts of the West Bank, led to a cooling of some regional cooperative efforts, such as the Negev Forum and the water-energy exchange deal (which will be discussed later). The change in focus, particularly in multilateral settings, sparked regional criticism, most notably from Jordan and, to a lesser extent, the UAE. The heightened escalations overshadowed the earlier momentum in environmental cooperation, slowing down both bilateral projects and broader multilateral environmental initiatives.

Post-October 7, 2023: Israel's War against Hamas and Regional Tensions

The events of October 7, 2023, and the Israel-Hamas war, marked a significant shift. The war, coupled with increasing involvement in regional conflicts against Iran's proxies, further strained Israel's relations with its Arab partners, including the UAE. In this context, the nature

of environmental cooperation between Israel and the UAE took on a different character. While some bilateral projects continued, the broader regional cooperation suffered, as the UAE, along with other Arab nations, expressed growing concern over Israel's military actions.

Overview of Environmental Collaboration: 2020 to October 7, 2023

Following the Abraham Accords in 2020, Israel and the UAE engaged in significant environmental collaborations, with numerous Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) signed on climate-related topics. These agreements spanned areas like sustainable agriculture, renewable energy, and space research for environmental projects. For example, in March 2022, UAE Minister Mariam Almheiri and former Israeli Agriculture Minister Oded Forer signed an MOU focused on sustainable agriculture and food security (CFTIC, 2022). This agreement, which received considerable publicity, marked an important step in the growing environmental cooperation between the two nations.

Multilateral Environmental Projects

One of the most prominent initiatives during this period was the trilateral agreement between Israel, Jordan, and the UAE, known as the water-for-energy deal or "Prosperity Blue and Prosperity Green." This agreement, hailed as a model of regional cooperation, stipulates that Israel would purchase solar energy from a Jordanian power plant constructed by Masdar Power, the UAE's leading state-owned renewable energy company. In exchange, Jordan would acquire desalinated water from an Israeli facility on the Mediterranean coast. This deal could not only ensure water and energy security for Israel and Jordan but also bring significant economic benefits to all three nations involved.

The concept behind this agreement was initially proposed in a 2017 study by the environmental peace organization "EcoPeace Middle East." However, it was only after the UAE's involvement, facilitated by the Abraham Accords,

that the project gained momentum. Before the Accords, discussions about exchanging water for energy involving Israel had stalled due to low levels of trust and poor relations between the parties. The UAE's participation was pivotal, acting as a "confidence-building measure" that facilitated the progress of the deal. An expert closely involved in the agreement noted, "Jordan and Israel really trust the Emirati involvement—Israel because of geopolitical and security interests that align, and Jordan due to its economic ties with the UAE. Masdar is therefore seen as a fair broker, adding an additional layer of trust."

This deal was expected to be profitable for all parties involved: Israel would benefit from producing cost-effective desalinated water, while Jordan would provide the ideal conditions for solar energy production. Furthermore, the agreement could allow Masdar Power to diversify its tender portfolio, enhancing its prospects for securing similar contracts in the future. Engaging in complex projects like this one, which integrates desalination with solar energy production, may open doors for Masdar in other regions with similar climates, such as Lebanon and Syria, potentially expanding their influence and market reach (Sommer and Fassbender, 2024).

This agreement has been widely celebrated—particularly in the EU and the US, as well as in the MENA region—as a model of successful regional rapprochement and a step towards a more diplomatic and less confrontational Middle East. Notably, US Special Envoy for Climate John Kerry and Secretary of State Antony Blinken were part of the inauguration ceremony for the MOU and visited Israel and the UAE several times to support this initiative. However, the deal has faced criticism for excluding Palestinian interests, as political opposition to normalizing relations with Israel remains strong.

The implementation of the water-for-energy deal, initially expected to be reinforced at COP28 in the UAE in 2023, has been put on hold by the King of Jordan due to the ongoing Hamas-

Israel conflict. Despite this delay, the agreement has not been canceled. Jordan has requested that Israel consider extending the agreement for another year, with the Israeli government reportedly preparing to conduct consultations to determine whether the deal, which is due to expire at the end of May 2024, will be extended. As of now, no official response has been issued by the Israeli government regarding this request.

Water shortages have long been a severe issue for Jordan, contributing to significant public discontent directed at the royal family and government. As such, Jordan finds itself in a challenging position, needing to balance public opposition to the deal with Israel—especially in light of the ongoing Hamas-Israel conflict—with the urgent need for water resources. Postponing the implementation of the agreement might provide Jordan with the necessary time for the conflict to de-escalate, allowing for a more stable environment in which the deal could be reconsidered.

Another significant multilateral project was the Negev Forum. The Forum was initiated in March 2022, under the coalition government of then Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett. Senior officials from Bahrain, Egypt, Israel, Morocco, the UAE, and the United States convened to explore opportunities for advancing regional integration, cooperation, and development. One of the forum's working groups focused on food security. However, like the water-for-energy deal, the Negev Forum has faced criticism for excluding the interests of crucial stakeholders such as the Palestinians and, in the case of the Negev Forum, also the Jordanians.

The Negev Forum has been at a standstill since mid-2023. Morocco, which was set to host the next meeting, canceled it following a decision by the Israeli cabinet in June 2023 to change the authorization process for the construction of illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank. This decision was made under the new far-right coalition government led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu,

who had returned to office in December 2022 after succeeding Yair Lapid. (Lazaroff, 2023)

I2U2 Group and the IMEC

The I2U2 Group, a multilateral agreement involving India, Israel, the UAE, and the United States, represents another key initiative. Formed during a meeting of the foreign ministers of these four countries in October 2021 under the coalition government led by Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, the group's first joint statement was released on July 14, 2022, when Yair Lapid had just taken over as Prime Minister. This statement outlined their cooperation on investments and initiatives in critical areas such as water, energy, transportation, space, health, and food security.

Often referred to as the “West Asian Quad,” the I2U2 Group aims to identify and support projects that can attract joint investments in these essential sectors. The group's objectives include modernizing infrastructure, promoting low-carbon development, and improving public health by leveraging private sector capital and expertise. The first Leaders' Summit of I2U2, held virtually in July 2022, included Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India, then Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid, UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, and US President Joe Biden (Times of India, 2022).

The ongoing Hamas-Israel conflict poses challenges to the I2U2 Group but does not threaten its existence. The US-Israel bloc within the I2U2 appears to be operating more on a bilateral level, with the UAE maintaining both distance and balance. Meanwhile, India is also navigating a complex situation, balancing its foreign policy objectives with domestic political considerations (Mishra, 2024).

Building on the foundation laid by the I2U2 Group, the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) seeks to pursue a far more ambitious set of objectives. IMEC is a grand US-led connectivity project designed to link India to Europe via the Gulf, focusing on communication,

transport, and infrastructure. This initiative also emphasizes two critical global challenges—food security and clean energy—addressing these issues across local, trans-regional, and long-term dimensions. The initial memorandum of understanding for IMEC, signed in September 2023 by the United States, the European Union, France, Germany, Italy, India, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia, envisions two sections: an eastern maritime link between India and the Gulf, and a northern section connecting the Arabian Peninsula to Europe. These sections would be connected by a new railway network linking the Gulf with the Mediterranean through Jordan and Israel. Beyond transport infrastructure, undersea cables are planned to facilitate data exchange, while long-distance hydrogen pipelines would support the participants' climate and decarbonization goals (Suri & Sethi, 2023).

IMEC continues to garner significant interest, even amidst the ongoing Hamas-Israel war. However, there are increasing concerns at the political level regarding the feasibility of routing the corridor through Israel and Jordan in the face of the current escalation. The rising risks may deter potential investors, and there have been discussions at the EU level about possibly altering the route. Meanwhile, other organizations are strategizing to incorporate this initiative into broader peacebuilding efforts, including environmental peacebuilding that also involves Palestinian stakeholders, which will be discussed further in this analysis (Mishra, 2024).

Throughout the period from 2020 to October 2023, the establishment of multilateral environmental forums and projects involving Israel, the UAE, and other regional partners was notably enabled during the more moderate government periods in Israel. Initiatives like the Negev Forum and the I2U2 Group thrived under coalition governments led by figures such as Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid, who prioritized regional cooperation and recognized the strategic importance of environmental

collaboration. These governments, in conjunction with the UAE's role as a trust-building partner, laid the groundwork for significant agreements like the water-for-energy deal, which involved not just bilateral but trilateral cooperation with Jordan, enhancing regional integration.

However, the return of Benjamin Netanyahu's right-wing government in late 2022, coupled with escalating conflicts, particularly the ongoing war with Hamas, has strained these initiatives.

Ecoppia, an Israeli company that is a leader in robotic cleaning solutions for solar panels and has a manufacturing base in India, signed a landmark deal in 2021 with the UAE for a solar energy project

Private Sector Collaborations

On the private sector level, several initiatives have been developed to enhance environmental cooperation between Israel and the UAE. For instance, Ecoppia, an Israeli company that is a leader in robotic cleaning solutions for solar panels and has a manufacturing base in India, signed a landmark deal in 2021 with the UAE for a solar energy project (GN Focus, 2021). A senior economist at the Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy, highlighted the UAE's long-standing and fruitful relations with India and noted how the Abraham Accords have opened up opportunities to include Israel in such initiatives.

Bilateral projects have also been launched, such as the collaboration between EDF Israel, a renewable energy company, and Masdar, the state-owned Emirati renewable energy company. (Masdar, 2021) Experts have noted that these collaborations are not only commercially beneficial but also set precedents for both countries to explore market conditions in each other's territories.

Other smaller commercial cooperations included the application of Israeli startup Watergen in the UAE, which produces water

from air and was first implemented throughout the Emirates (Watergen, 2021). Another initiative was a collaboration between Israel's Vertical Field, a startup that has developed a vertical farming system, with the Emirati company Emirates Smart Solutions & Technologies. They piloted vertical farms in the Emirate of Umm Al Quwain ahead of a wider rollout in the UAE (Times of Israel Staff, 2021a).

Enhancing Collaboration Through Conferences and Events

Conferences, webinars, and events have also been pivotal in connecting businesspeople, students, academics, and climate activists from both countries. Events such as the peace and environment conference and the UAE Business Council meetings facilitated these connections. The Expo 2020 in Dubai featured a designated area for sustainability, where several events were planned between Israel and the UAE, most notably the MOU between Jordan, Israel (Sommer and Fassbender, 2024).

Press and Media Analysis

An analysis of articles released by the UAE's state-owned news agency, WAM, reveals the underlying motives and purposes of environmental projects aimed at fostering relations between Israel and the UAE. These articles primarily focus on governmental exchanges and agreements on environmental collaboration. For example, an article highlighted the symbolic gesture of the UAE and Israel's ambassadors planting a peace tree for Earth Day, emphasizing their joint commitment to environmental sustainability (WAM, 2021a). The narrative often revolves around the mutual benefits of their leadership roles in green technology and their collaborative efforts to achieve climate targets by reducing emissions. As one article states, "Israel has one of the best startup ecosystems in the world, and with the AgTech sector dominated by innovation, the UAE is particularly keen to

explore collaboration in this area. Similarly, we have much we can offer by way of reciprocation" (WAM, 2021a).

Other news sources also discuss specific environmental collaborations, such as the partnership between Watergen and Baynunah, which will work closely with the Moshe Mirilashvili Institute for Applied Water Studies at Tel Aviv University (Watergen, 2021). Additionally, strategic alliances have been formed between Israeli and Emirati renewable energy companies (Masdar, 2021). Several articles explore opportunities for green tech companies in both countries to collaborate and their potential impact on the environment and economy of Israel and the UAE (al Suwaidi & Fredman, 2021; Schaefer, 2023; Shulman, 2021; Valik et al., 2023; Goren et al., 2023).

State press releases consistently emphasize themes of combating climate change together, being innovative leaders, and promoting peace and stability in the region. For instance, press releases from October 5 and 6, 2023 highlighted Israel's role in the I2U2 initiative alongside India and the U.S., aimed at enhancing global food security by investing in a food corridor in India to stabilize food prices. Another article emphasized that the Abu Dhabi International Progressive Energy Congress recognized the UAE and Israel among other countries for their contributions to the global energy industry's efforts in decarbonization and innovation. (WAM 2023a; WAM 2023b) This demonstrates that, up until early October 2023, the UAE continued to promote Israel as a climate co-leader and highlighted their joint multilateral initiatives.

All these collaborations and the narrative through which the media framed them until October 7, showcased how environmental cooperation was not just about shared initiatives but was a strategic layer in broader diplomatic and economic frameworks, shaping the relationships between Israel, the UAE, and the wider region.

Excursus: Israel's Role in the UAE-Saudi Rivalry Over Climate Leadership and Sustainability

The rivalry between Saudi Arabia and the UAE for regional leadership has expanded into the realm of environmental sustainability. Both nations are vying to position themselves as leaders in this field, using prominent initiatives and global partnerships to boost their influence. For example, the UAE hosted a climate dialogue forum featuring John Kerry and other Arab dignitaries, coinciding with Saudi Arabia's launch of the "Saudi Green Initiative." The parallel timing of these events illustrates the competitive efforts of both countries to lead the region's climate agenda (Zumbraegel, 2022).

Experts suggest that this rivalry is a key reason the UAE seeks collaboration with Israel, particularly in the environmental sphere. Israel's recognized expertise in green technology makes it a valuable partner for the UAE, enhancing its competitive edge vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia. By working with Israel, the UAE further develops its image as an innovative leader in sustainability, gaining access to new markets and support from Western allies (Sommer and Fassbender, 2024).

A clear example of this dynamic is the 2021 water-for-energy deal between Israel, Jordan, and the UAE. As a part of this deal, Israel provides desalinated water to Jordan in exchange for solar energy produced by a UAE-funded plant in Jordan. This milestone project faced opposition from Saudi Arabia, which sought to block the UAE's involvement to maintain its leadership position, as reported by the *Times of Israel* (2021a) and confirmed by sources involved in the negotiations.

Analyzing the Potential Impact of Climate Projects on Israel and UAE Relations

Primarily using the framework of environmental peacebuilding, let us analyze the potential impact of climate projects on the relations between Israel and the UAE. Through interviews

with experts and participants in environmental collaborations, along with an analysis of the tone and sentiment in press releases, we have summarized the potential effects these projects could have on binational relations.

Environmental peacebuilding is a framework that encapsulates processes by which shared environmental challenges act as catalysts for peace among conflicting factions, particularly over shared resources like land and water (Dresse et al., 2018). This framework does not need to focus solely on shared resources but can be applied more broadly to environmental collaboration that impacts relations and peace between countries that do not share resources (Sommer and Fassbender, 2024). By focusing on cooperation over shared environmental challenges, environmental peacebuilding seeks to build trust and collaboration, creating pathways for dialogue and reducing tensions. This approach can involve various mechanisms and stakeholders, including governments, communities, and international organizations, to develop practices that promote both ecological sustainability and peace.

While some might argue that there has not been a direct conflict between Israel and the UAE, and that a peacebuilding framework may seem misplaced, we contend that there have been several aspects of tension in their relations. These include the initial discontent within UAE civil society regarding the accords, as well as a lack of fully developed trust on various levels of their relationship (Valik et al., 2023). Relations also became more strained when tensions between Israel and the Palestinians further escalated, after the re-inauguration of Netanyahu in 2022, ongoing violence in the West Bank, and inflammatory comments and actions from his government that the UAE condemned (Valik et al., 2023).

Additionally, this framework offers a systematic analysis of the effects of environmental cooperation on international relations, which is crucial in this context.

Partners to Achieve National Ambitions on Climate and Environment

Drawing from the analysis of their environmental and climate initiatives, it is evident that both Israel and the UAE saw each other as beneficial partners for environmental collaboration. Both countries view each other as climate leaders in the region, possessing the economic capital, technological prowess, and political expertise necessary to implement collaborative environmental projects. Israeli stakeholders emphasize the economic and political possibilities of collaborating with the Emiratis, while Emirati experts highlight Israel's technological advancements. A Gulf expert based in the UAE remarked, "The UAE is extremely advanced as a nation. They are interested in purchasing the best technologies to thrive and strengthen their country, and they find a lot of these technologies in Israel." (Sommer and Fassbender, 2024)

Financial Aspects of Collaboration

Despite expectations of significant bilateral financial benefits from trading green technologies and collaborating on green tech, the actual gains have been modest due to small market sizes and high entry barriers in each country, particularly for Israeli startups. However, the real potential for profit lies in regional and multilateral projects, which offer broader collaboration and market access (Sommer and Fassbender, 2024).

Both Israel and the UAE are seen as complementary testing grounds for green technologies in specific fields such as archaeology, space research, and water extraction. For businesses, Israel's climate conditions are ideal for testing renewable technologies, which is challenging in neighboring countries like Lebanon and Syria due to geopolitical instability and political volatility.

Opening Doors to Multilateral Environmental Collaborations

A senior economist at the RAND Institute noted that the high intellectual property ratio of Gulf

countries attracts foreign companies. Israel's collaboration with the UAE could provide a "backdoor access" for Israel to the largest market in the MENA region, Saudi Arabia, despite the lack of formal diplomatic relations. The UAE and Israel's focus on environmental projects has fostered new possibilities for collaboration with third countries and facilitated multilateral platforms such as the Negev Forum and I2U2. Environmental cooperation has proven to be a trust-building factor in the region, as demonstrated by the UAE-Jordan solar-water-exchange deal.

Additionally, the CEO of a renewable energy company explained that Israel and the UAE are optimal business partners for regional projects compared to investors from the US or EU. Their understanding of Middle Eastern business culture and conditions allows them to navigate complexities and risks more effectively. Both countries are interested in expanding renewable energy cooperation in North Africa, a region with untapped potential.

Political Aspects

The UAE's approach to environmental and sustainability projects is intricately linked to their strategic geopolitical location and the desire to strengthen existing and foster new partnerships (Luomi, 2015; Reiche, 2010 as cited in Zumbraegel 2022). The political capital of environmental diplomacy has been increasingly recognized by the leaderships in Abu Dhabi, and Tel Aviv, who use these initiatives to pursue their political agendas. For instance, the UAE's role in brokering and financing part of the water-energy exchange plan between Israel and Jordan showcases its leadership in fostering regional collaboration on environmental sustainability (Axios, 2021; Riedel & Sachs, 2021). This move not only enhances the UAE's environmental credentials but also strengthens its geopolitical influence in the region. Moreover, the proactive role of the UAE on the international environmental front helps improve its standing in the global community and showcases its

green leadership. This strategy acts as a “trojan horse” for these ambitious states to diversify international linkages and improve their reputations (Zumbraegel, 2022).

Both the UAE and Israel leverage their expertise in multilateral institutional contexts, such as the UN. (Tal, 2020). This context underscores the significant role that climate diplomacy plays for both the UAE and Israel. It explains why both countries recognize each other as leaders in climate action in the Middle East and view each other as beneficial partners for further cooperation in this field. Multilateral projects and MOUs signed between Israel and the UAE have bolstered their standing as climate leaders, gaining endorsement from their allies in Europe and the US. The water-for-energy deal between Jordan, Israel, and the UAE is a prime example of this enhanced leadership. The UAE’s involvement in this agreement has been particularly impactful in advancing its position in the regional competition for climate leadership, especially against Saudi Arabia. The latter’s attempts to sabotage and stop the water-for-energy deal underscore how they perceive this agreement as a significant threat to their own ambitions of being the leading climate authority in the region. This competitive dynamic underscores the strategic importance of environmental collaborations for both the UAE and Israel in solidifying their roles as key players in the regional (climate) agenda.

Regional Collaboration and International Support

Regional collaboration in the MENA area is highly valued by US and EU leaders for several reasons. Firstly, it is perceived to promote regional stability by fostering cooperation among countries that might otherwise be in conflict. Secondly, these collaborations align with global climate goals, contributing to the collective effort to combat climate change. Thirdly, regional collaboration creates new economic opportunities by pooling resources and expertise to develop innovative technologies.

For Israel and the UAE, this international support enhances their legitimacy and standing on the global stage, presenting them as proactive leaders in the fight against climate change. This recognition can attract foreign investment, boost tourism, and open doors to further international cooperation. Additionally, aligning with US and EU climate goals strengthens their political alliances, securing support in other areas of international diplomacy.

Building Trust

Building trust between Israel and the UAE had been challenging at both the civil society level and among elites, due to the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict and previous setbacks in security-related projects. However, up until October 7, environmental collaboration had emerged as a promising path for trust-building. Interviews indicated that this approach had been effective in reestablishing trust across various segments of society, including businesspeople, students, professors involved in academic exchanges and projects, as well as experts from think tanks, non-profits, and government officials.

Environmental cooperation had served as a neutral and non-controversial channel for collaboration. Unlike defense or other security-related projects, which were often fraught with political sensitivities, environmental initiatives were seen as more inclusive and could engage many parts of society. This inclusivity, along with the less controversial nature of environmental projects, made them a beneficial medium for dialogue and engagement, allowing both countries to collaborate without provoking political tensions (Ide, 2019; Sommer and Fassbender, 2024).

Experts had highlighted that these environmental initiatives brought together individuals with shared visions and missions, particularly concerning climate change, creating common ground for understanding and collaboration. These initiatives often involved well-educated scientists, academics,

and businesspeople with similar worldviews and strong English skills, facilitating effective communication and the development of joint projects. These individuals often acted as multipliers within their societies and networks (Sommer & Fassbender 2024).

In the UAE, the renewable energy sector is closely tied to political elites, particularly through figures like Sultan al-Jaber, who holds key roles as CEO of ADNOC, chair of Masdar, and leader of the country's climate initiatives. His influence across both energy and political spheres had helped ensure that environmental cooperation not only fostered trust within business and technical communities but also strengthened political relationships, further solidifying ties between the collaborating nations.

Impact of the October 7 Hamas Attack on Israel-UAE Environmental and Political Collaboration

The October 7 attacks on Israel by Hamas and the ensuing war in Gaza affected the diplomatic and political dynamics between the UAE and Israel, with implications also for environmental and regional collaboration. This analysis draws on geopolitical assessments, academic literature, expert interviews, and observations from international conferences, including COP28, to explore these complex developments.

In response to the conflict, the UAE has carefully navigated a treacherous diplomatic landscape. While initially condemning Hamas' attacks, the UAE has also expressed concern over what it views as Israel's disproportionate military response, urging de-escalation and renewed efforts toward a two-state solution. This diplomatic stance reflects the UAE's attempt to balance its relationships with both Israel and the Palestinians while addressing regional and domestic pressures.

The Abraham Accords, which have boosted the Emirati political capital in Washington, improved its international image, and bolstered

trade and defense ties, have faced increased scrutiny in the context of the Gaza conflict. The war has heightened regional and domestic criticisms of Emirati policies, particularly as Emirati citizens have experienced harassment, and frustration has grown within the UAE over the government's perceived inaction regarding the impact of the war in Gaza (Esfandiary & Jandali, 2024).

Despite these challenges, the UAE has maintained its cooperation with Israel, engaging in mediation efforts in the current conflict, including planning for post-war reconstruction (CSIS, 2024, Mladenov, 2024). The UAE's humanitarian efforts have been particularly notable; since October 7, 2023, it has delivered nearly 39,000 tons of humanitarian supplies, provided a floating hospital to treat wounded, and deployed a field hospital in the region (Ignazius, 2024).

From an environmental perspective, to supply Gaza with clean water, the UAE has built six desalination plants in Egypt since the war began. This initiative also aims to reduce the risk of waterborne diseases, a major concern in Gaza. While these efforts seem to focus on UAE-Palestinian cooperation, they are often closely coordinated with Israel's COGAT (Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories). The role of the Emiratis in Gaza highlights not only a commitment to humanitarian aid but also the trust and willingness to collaborate with Israel, even during an ongoing conflict (Esfandiary & Jandali, 2024).

This balanced approach is designed to sustain the UAE's regional sway, support Palestinian rights, and preserve the strategic benefits of the Abraham Accords. The UAE emphasizes that its relationship with Israel is being used to positively impact the humanitarian situation in Gaza (Esfandiary & Jandali, 2024). Moreover, the UAE has signaled its readiness to participate in a temporary international mission in Gaza to ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid and to help establish stability, contingent on meaningful reforms by the Palestinian

Authority and progress toward a viable two-state solution (Middle East Monitor, 2024; New Arab Staff, 2024).

Continuation of Projects Amidst Reduced Public Visibility

Similar to economic cooperations, post-October 7, environmental initiatives between the UAE and Israel continued at an operational level, though there was a noticeable reduction in new high-profile projects. As late as on October 5 and 6, 2023, there were press releases and articles from the UAE news agency WAM highlighting the environmental cooperation between the two nations. However, these announcements abruptly ceased, with the exception of mention of COP28. Previously, new environmental initiatives were celebrated and often publicized through Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs), press releases, and public events, showcasing the growing ties between the two nations. After the attack, the emphasis on public displays of new agreements diminished, reflecting a strategic, more cautious approach due to heightened political sensitivities.

However, this does not mean that cooperation has ceased. Key ongoing initiatives include Aquestia's water management solutions and IDE Technologies' desalination and water treatment projects. Additionally, the partnership between Israel's Watergen and the UAE's Ma Hawa, utilizing technology to generate drinking water from the air, has led to the widespread installation of Watergen machines across the UAE. Netafim's drip irrigation technology continues to be implemented in UAE agriculture, in collaboration with government agencies, research institutions, and private companies (Aviad, 2024).

Nonetheless, the Hamas-Israel conflict has reportedly impacted the dynamics of many ongoing collaborations and the likelihood of new ones. A delegation of Israeli businesspeople who attended a conference in the UAE reported receiving significant recognition for and

interest in their AI-based environmental tool. However, they were indirectly informed that Emirati investments were mostly divested from Israeli companies due to the political circumstances. Nonetheless, there was ongoing dialogue and positive interactions between the businesspeople, demonstrating that certain channels are still open.

The UAE has signaled its readiness to participate in a temporary international mission in Gaza to ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid and to help establish stability, contingent on meaningful reforms by the Palestinian Authority and progress toward a viable two-state solution.

The outbreak of the conflict on October 7 also negatively impacted the I2U2 group, consisting of the US, India, the UAE, and Israel, which had reportedly experienced a short-term loss of momentum and pause in joint initiatives. Nonetheless, experts from the Observer Research Foundation commented that this period of tension could serve as an opportunity for the I2U2 to demonstrate resilience by working with existing regional forums to maintain its effectiveness (Taneja, 2023). Reports suggest that the US-Israel bloc within the I2U2 is now operating more bilaterally, with the UAE taking a balanced stance and India managing its own foreign policy challenges. Despite the pause in new collaborations, such as those between the UAE and Israel, ongoing projects like the food park investment in Gujarat indicate a sustained commitment to the group's long-term objectives (Mishra, 2024). The Biden administration has reiterated its dedication to the I2U2, underscoring its significance for enhancing food and energy security, space operations, and other initiatives (NDTV, 2024).

Other multilateral collaborations, like the Negev Forum, have also been affected, with activities still on hold. Additionally, the Water for Energy deal between Jordan, Israel, and the UAE, intended to be finalized at COP28

in December 2023, has been temporarily put on hold by Jordan due to the war. However, the deal has not been canceled, and experts believe that Jordan remains interested in the agreement, given its critical need for water. Civilian pressure, particularly from Jordan's large Palestinian population, has influenced the government's current stance on collaboration with Israel. (New Arab Staff, 2024)

The Hamas-Israel conflict has underscored the importance of addressing regional issues, such as the Palestinian question, which remains central to future economic or political strategies in the Middle East. Observers speculate that regional cooperation will need to engage with these underlying issues to achieve lasting progress.

Strategic Use of International Conferences

International environmental and climate conferences have become strategic platforms for managing nuanced diplomatic relations amidst broader regional tensions for the UAE and Israel. These events are leveraged to showcase commitments to normalized relations between the countries while simultaneously supporting broader regional stability and acting as mediators in ongoing conflicts. This strategic approach is exemplified by significant conferences like COP28, which serve as prominent venues for these efforts.

The Conference of the Parties (COP) is the supreme decision-making body of the UNFCCC. It brings together representatives from nearly every country in the world to discuss and negotiate global climate policies and actions. Held annually, the COP aims to review the implementation of the UNFCCC, assess progress in dealing with climate change, and establish legally binding obligations for developed countries to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. The COP meetings are pivotal in shaping international climate agreements and fostering cooperation among nations to combat climate change. COP28, held in Dubai

from November 30 to December 12, 2023, was the largest COP ever, with over 80,000 participants from 197 countries, including more than 150 Heads of State and Government. This unprecedented level of participation highlights the growing global commitment to addressing climate change (World Economic Forum, 2023).

In the lead-up to COP28, several related events also served as platforms for delicate diplomacy. One such conference took place in Europe, shortly after October 7, with the backdrop of the upcoming COP28. This event brought together high-ranking officials, including an Emirati ambassador, an Israeli representative, and representatives from regional environmental organizations, and was organized by a European MP from a green party. The gathering allowed Emirati officials to voice their nation's condemnation of recent conflicts, particularly the events of October 7, while emphasizing future environmental cooperation, with a focus on renewable energy as essential for regional stability. Discussions highlighted that climate challenges are existential and that collaboration between nations with advanced technological solutions is both logical and necessary. Officials framed their participation in terms of their broader roles. The Emirati ambassador stressed his engagement due to the upcoming COP28, which the UAE was hosting. The Israeli official remarked, "We didn't just join for climate reasons but to show both logos of the countries next to each other at a joint event," emphasizing the symbolic importance of the event.

The event was carefully designed to avoid controversies. The Emirati ambassador and Israeli official did not appear on stage together. Instead, the ambassador spoke first and left before the Israeli official took the stage, a deliberate move to manage sensitivities and avoid direct joint appearances. Still, the event underscored that by late 2023, it remained possible for both countries to participate in shared forums, as long as environmental collaboration or climate action served as the framework.

In preparation for COP28, Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen highlighted the strategic role of foreign relations in the climate conference, stating, “The Abraham Accords signed three years ago, and the bilateral relations between Israel and the UAE, form an important layer of Israel’s foreign relations, especially now. The Israeli delegation’s presence at the conference is further proof of the strength of these ties” (gov.il, 2023).

COP28: The Interplay of Environmental Initiatives and Political Diplomacy

COP28 served as a significant platform where the intricate dynamics of environmental initiatives and political strategy were prominently displayed. The UAE and Israel utilized this conference to sustain and expand their diplomatic engagements within the realms of environmental and climate policy.

Strategic Pavilion Placement

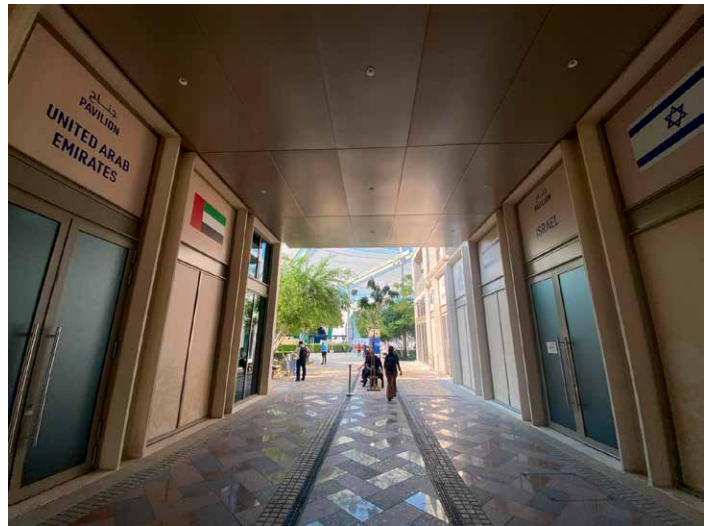
A pivotal and highly symbolic act at COP28 was the strategic placement of the Israeli pavilion next to the UAE pavilion. This arrangement, within a venue spanning an area comparable to Central Park in New York and encompassing hundreds of national pavilions, was highly strategic. The UAE’s pavilion, centrally located according to its status as the host country, was positioned next to the conference’s main architectural landmarks, highlighting the prestige of the event. The pavilions of Israel and the US were placed directly adjacent to the UAE’s, underscoring the close proximity of these nations’ representatives at the conference.

This placement demonstrated in a subtle diplomatic way the UAE’s support for its relationship with Israel. An Israeli delegate highlighted the importance of this gesture:

“The placement next to the UAE pavilion provided an extra layer of security and demonstrated a strong public commitment to our partnership. Given the small size of our delegation during this difficult time, this gesture was profoundly meaningful to us.”

The Palestinians had their first-ever pavilion in the Blue Zone at COP28, though it was not situated close to the UAE’s.

Fig. 1. The UAE and Israel Pavilions at the COP28 in Dubai 2023, picture: Francesca Fassbender



Bilateral Discussions and Private Meetings

In response to the evolving dynamics of the Hamas-Israel war, the Israeli delegation significantly reduced its size from what was initially planned, opting to bring only a dozen people. An Emirati delegate intimated that although climate events had been planned between the UAE and Israel, they were canceled due to the Israeli side scaling down their participation and resources.

Nevertheless, high-ranking Israeli delegates visited the UAE, indicating the enduring significance they attached to the COP28 conference. An Israeli delegate explicitly shared that the Israeli delegation decided to come to show presence and strength in the international arena, Israel’s commitment to climate targets, and in support of the Abraham Accords, thereby also supporting UAE-Israel relations (gov.il, 2023). President Herzog attended COP28, instead of Prime Minister Netanyahu, a move seen by experts as strategic due to Herzog’s less controversial stance in the Arab world and greater engagement in climate issues.

Minister of Environmental Protection, Idit Silman, highlighted, “The climate crisis persists even during these challenging times for Israel. Participating in COP is crucial, and Israel will be represented by a senior professional delegation from the Ministry of Environmental Protection and the Foreign Ministry” (gov.il, 2023). Foreign Minister Eli Cohen expressed pride in the Foreign Ministry leading the Israeli delegation, despite the ongoing conflict, and stressed the political significance of participating in COP28. He emphasized Israel’s commitment to climate action and the importance and gratitude of cooperation with the UAE, stating, “The Abraham Accords and bilateral relations with the UAE are vital in Israel’s foreign relations, especially now. The arrival of the Israeli delegation at COP28 proves the strength of these relations” (gov.il, 2023).

Political Leaders’ Engagement

The summit facilitated substantial political dialogue among Israel, the UAE, and various global figures. Reports from Politico highlighted discussions between U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Vice President Kamala Harris regarding the Hamas-Israel conflict. (Dewan, 2023; Weise et al., 2023)

President Herzog used the X social media platform to detail his engagements with numerous global leaders. These discussions, while private, likely focused on soliciting support—or at least tolerance—for Israel’s actions in the conflict with Hamas and efforts to secure the release of the remaining 136 hostages abducted by Hamas on October 7.

It can be assumed that such a political use of the event was facilitated by the Emirati organizers, since they were part of some of these conversations and explicitly invited President Herzog to the conference. (Weise et al., 2023)

Controversies and Absences

President Herzog did not deliver his scheduled address on the climate crisis. His speaking slot elapsed without a presentation. Instead,

President Herzog was engaged in meetings with global dignitaries, including King Charles III and leaders from the UAE, Qatar, the European Union, the UK, India, and the United Nations (Weise et al., 2023). The absence of other key leaders such as Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas from their scheduled talks reflected a contentious atmosphere, largely attributed to ongoing political tensions with Israel over the war in Gaza. The Iranian delegation’s walkout over Israel’s presence, coupled with criticisms from Iran’s energy minister about Israel’s politically charged participation, highlighted the complex political dynamics of the summit (Al Jazeera, 2023; Harb, 2023).

While the UAE apparently facilitated Israeli use of COP28 to push forward their political stance, COP28 was also used by Israeli critics to bring forward their concerns. Several leaders openly used their platforms to make political statements against Israel and the war in Gaza. King Abdullah II of Jordan underscored the interconnectedness of climate change and regional humanitarian crises. The King emphasized that the conference must recognize the link between climate change and unfolding humanitarian tragedies. He highlighted the plight of the Palestinian people in Gaza. On several occasions during COP28, the UAE, despite its reputation for suppressing protesters and activists and limiting the freedom of speech, permitted pro-Palestinian and ceasefire demonstrators to gather in a prominent and significant area near the pavilion designated for global climate negotiations (Al Jazeera 2023; Dewan, 2023). This demonstrated a complex diplomatic balancing act: on one hand, the UAE showed support for the Palestinian cause, while on the other, it continued to strengthen its relations with Israel. The Israeli delegation also noted that at smaller events at COP28, where they participated in other countries’ pavilions, there were instances where other participants boycotted or canceled their participation due to the war in Gaza.

On a more interpersonal level, the Israeli and Emirati delegations engaged in several private encounters with the Emiratis, among others providing a private tour of their pavilion and discussing political issues beyond environmental concerns. This engagement showed, according to an Israeli delegate, the Emiratis' extraordinary accommodation. However, some Emirati delegates from the environmental sector, were very critical of Israel's war in Gaza, focusing on the humanitarian situation it causes and the destruction of infrastructure funded by the Emirates, such as desalination plants, solar panels, and the contamination of groundwater. This criticism highlighted the dual nature of the interactions, where high-level politics facilitated numerous meetings, but there was also a clear expression of concern about the environmental and human impact of the war in Gaza.

Press Releases and Framing

Before and after COP28, several articles were published that highlighted Israel's participation in the conference and various initiatives, demonstrating that the UAE was still open to positively acknowledging Israel's role in such efforts. For instance, Israel was part of a global initiative, spearheaded by the UAE and the US, announcing a significant expansion at COP28 — more than doubling its investments, partners, and Innovation Sprints in climate-smart agriculture and food systems innovation (WAM, 2023b). Additionally, COP28 saw the launch of a partnership to support women's economic empowerment, with Israel among the countries joining this effort. Furthermore, the UAE President welcomed the heads of delegations at COP28, which included Israeli representatives, indicating continued diplomatic engagement (WAM, 2023b).

In contrast, more than 95% of other articles published by WAM (the Emirates News Agency) between October 2023 and May 2024, that mentioned Israel in some way (numbering around 50), were in the context of condemning its actions in the war in Gaza. These articles

predominantly displayed support for the Palestinians, offering humanitarian aid, and endorsing a two-state solution along with peace and mediation efforts, but with a mostly negative framing of Israel. Therefore, environmental and economic collaboration, such as that highlighted in the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements (CEPA) signed between the states, was one of the few frameworks in which the relationship was still portrayed in positive terms. This dichotomy illustrates the complex dynamics at play, where environmental and economic initiatives served as rare positive counterpoints in the broader narrative.

Sustainability Discourse in the Hamas-Israel Conflict

Numerous NGOs, climate activists, experts, and scholarly journals discuss the environmental and sustainability aspects of the conflict between Hamas and Israel, along with potential peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts. Such perspectives can fall into one of two primary groups. The first uses climate and environmental issues to hold Israel accountable for the conflict's impact on Gaza's environment. Since COP28, there has been an increase in discussions focused on the war's effects on climate and the environment, critically assessing Israel's environmental relations with regional actors such as the UAE and portraying Israel's environmental actions as oppressive. Focusing on post-war Gaza, the second asserts that environmental and climate considerations should feature prominently in reconstruction. This approach aims to rebuild all critical infrastructure in a sustainable and resilient manner, necessary for Palestinians to restore their livelihoods and access their human rights. These efforts should involve the support of Israelis and other regional actors like the UAE, using the environment as a tool for peacebuilding.

Both groups influence the future role of the environment in UAE-Israel relations.

Israel's Green Tech Image Under Fire: Environmental Initiatives and Regional Criticism

Not only during the COP28 conference did environmental activists and scholars increasingly scrutinize Israel's role in the sustainability sphere, pointing out a pattern of behavior that they described as "green colonialism," especially in the context of the ongoing conflicts in Gaza, Lebanon, and the wider Middle East.

Eco-Normalization and Green Colonialism

Scholars and activists have recently begun to frame Israel's environmental and climate projects with countries in the region as eco-normalization. This refers to the strategic use of environmental cooperation and projects to normalize relations between Israel and Arab states under the guise of environmental stewardship, without adequately addressing underlying political and human rights issues, especially those of the Palestinians. This concept has been highlighted in the context of the Abraham Accords, where Israel and several Arab states, including the UAE, Jordan, Morocco, Bahrain, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt, have engaged in numerous environmental initiatives. (Shqair, 2024)

These initiatives, including renewable energy projects and agreements on water management, are often presented as mutual efforts to combat climate challenges. For example, Israeli companies like Enlight Renewable Energy and NewMed Energy have launched a renewable energy project across several Arab countries. Critics argue that while these projects are marketed as steps toward regional sustainable development, they serve to mask or divert attention from Israel's policies, particularly in Gaza.

Environmental collaboration can sometimes impair action to resolve underlying injustices, a problem widely recognized in the field of environmental peacebuilding and thereby divert from peacebuilding efforts. For further

reading on the subject, see "The Dark Side of Environmental Peacebuilding" by Ide (2020).

Criticism and the Accusations of Greenwashing

Critics argue that Israel's environmental initiatives in the region are a form of greenwashing, where environmental efforts are used to improve the country's global image while continuing policies that oppress Palestinians and exploit natural resources. This criticism is particularly pointed regarding water resources and renewable energy projects that involve Israeli companies operating in disputed or occupied territories, such as the Golan Heights and parts of the West Bank (Shqair, 2023). The term "green colonialism" specifically refers to the accusation that Israel uses environmental initiatives as a cover for territorial annexation and resource exploitation. For instance, Israel's involvement in water deals, such as the exchange of desalinated water for energy with Jordan, is seen by some as a continuation of its control over regional water resources, further deepening Jordan's water crisis while deflecting responsibility (Shqair et al., 2023).

The Gaza Context and Accusations of Ecocide

Since the war between Hamas and Israel in Gaza begun, there have been alarming reports of what some scholars and activists describe as "ecocide"—the deliberate destruction of the natural environment as a strategy of war. Israeli military actions are said to have severely damaged Gaza's water infrastructure, including desalination and wastewater treatment facilities, leading to a humanitarian and environmental crisis. The contamination of water sources, combined with restrictions on electricity and fuel, has exacerbated the spread of waterborne diseases and made large swathes of agricultural land unusable. (Shqair et al., 2023)

This destruction of environmental infrastructure in Gaza is used by critics to argue that Israel's image as a green technology leader

is fundamentally at odds with its actions. The damage to the environment in the Gaza Strip is viewed as part of a broader strategy that undermines the prospects for sustainable development and environmental recovery in Palestinian territories.

Implications for Regional Relations and Israel's Green Tech Image

The juxtaposition of Israel's leading role in green technology with its actions in Gaza and the more loudly voiced framing of environmental cooperation with Arab states as negative eco-normalization is causing a significant reputational risk. Critics argue that by pursuing environmental projects that fail to address or even exacerbate underlying injustices between Israelis and Palestinians, Israel risks losing its credibility as a genuine leader in climate action. Especially after October 7, there have been a number of conferences where these arguments have been voiced, such as at the "Second Annual Conference on Conflict Climate Change and the Environment in the Middle East and North Africa Region" organized by the Arab Reform Initiative (2024), and in articles and books about Israel's practices. These discussions often analyze and criticize the Oslo Accords and the water agreements within them. (Gause & Daoudy, 2023)

This growing criticism could affect Israel's ability to maintain and expand its environmental footing in the region. There is a call among activists and some regional players for projects to genuinely serve the interests of all parties, including Palestinians, and to not be used as a tool for political normalization that ignores deeper injustices (Shqair, 2024; Gause & Daoudy, 2023). Comparing the environmental projects and agreements between Israel and the UAE with former agreements between Israel and regional countries, especially Jordan, the Palestinians, and Oman, it can be said that all these environmental collaborations were deeply affected by the unresolved nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Before October 7, it seemed that environmental relations held potential for the UAE and Israel to expand their cooperation mostly independent of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But since the world has turned its eyes back to the Palestinian issue, the pressure on and criticism of relations between Israel and the UAE have grown. Environmental relations and projects have already been affected and as the impact of the war grows and the longer it continues, the UAE's view of Israel as a regional partner in climate action comes under strain.

Environmental Peacebuilding Potential of Climate Cooperation Between Israel and the UAE

The enduring Hamas-Israel conflict has compromised regional environmental sustainability. However, it has also prompted initiatives that leverage environmental cooperation as a peacebuilding tool. Various regional organizations are developing strategies to foster cooperation among Palestinians, Israelis, Jordanians, and the wider region, including the UAE. They aim to address ecological challenges while building trust and stability.

The UAE, with its established diplomatic ties with Israel and humanitarian involvement with the Palestinians, has already demonstrated its capacity to contribute to peacebuilding efforts. Its participation in projects like desalination plants in Gaza and current ones in Egypt that provide water to Gaza shows how environmental cooperation can directly address urgent needs while fostering collaboration. Through these concrete initiatives, the UAE plays a key role in promoting stability and building trust between conflicting parties in the region.

The Water and Sanitation Crisis in Gaza

The ongoing conflict in Gaza has precipitated a severe crisis in water and sanitation services, impacting the Gazan residents. The destruction of vital infrastructure has rendered most water systems damaged or inoperative. Prior to the conflict, water supply in Gaza depended on

desalination plants, wells, and connections provided by the Israeli Water Authority (Mekorot). The war, however, has drastically impaired these systems, reducing Gaza's water production capacity to just 20% of pre-war levels. The population now faces a drastic reduction in water availability, heightening the risk of waterborne diseases (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2024).

Advocacy for Immediate and Long-term Solutions

International organizations, including UNICEF, are urgently advocating for immediate access to critical supplies needed to restore essential water and sanitation services. They emphasize the urgency of addressing immediate needs, such as electricity and fuel, which are crucial for operating infrastructure. However, the scale of destruction demands more than just temporary fixes; a comprehensive overhaul of Gaza's water and sanitation systems is imperative. This reconstruction must prioritize resilience to future conflicts and include redundant systems to prevent total collapse during crises. Such an approach, supported by the environmental peacebuilding organizations EcoPeace and the Arava Institute, international donors and development agencies, will likely be crucial for ensuring long-term sustainability (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2024).

Sustainable Reconstruction and Regional Cooperation

EcoPeace Middle East advocates for an ecologically sustainable reconstruction of post-war Gaza. Initiatives like the water-for-energy deal, initially agreed upon by Israel, Jordan, and the UAE, highlight the Emirati interest in regional cooperation on water and renewable energy infrastructure. Though paused due to the conflict, this plan demonstrates the UAE's commitment to complex regional projects that address both environmental and geopolitical interests.

EcoPeace stresses the importance of including Palestinian interests in these initiatives. Their Green Blue Deal for the Middle East supports large-scale desalination projects and improved electricity transmission from Israel to Gaza, benefiting not only Palestinians but also the broader region, including Israel and Jordan (Bromberg et al., 2020). Expanding the water-for-energy deal to fully integrate Palestinian concerns is crucial. EcoPeace warns that environmental issues, like sewage contamination, impact the entire Mediterranean region, affecting Israel and Egypt. Regional cooperation is essential for addressing these challenges.

The UAE is ideally positioned to play a leading role in advancing these initiatives. Its involvement in humanitarian aid for Gaza, close ties with both Palestinians and Israelis, and experience with desalination projects—such as those in Egypt that now serve Gaza—equip the UAE with the expertise and influence to drive these efforts forward. By leveraging its regional standing and technical capabilities, the UAE can help facilitate sustainable water solutions that are vital for both Gaza and the broader region.

The Arava Institute, an environmental research organization, plays a crucial role in promoting collaboration between Palestinians, Jordanians, and Israelis. Experts Tahani Abu Daqa and Yosef Abramowitz advocate for rebuilding Gaza in a more sustainable and climate-resilient way, reducing its heavy reliance on diesel generators and fuel from Israel, which leaves critical infrastructure like hospitals, sewage systems, and desalination plants vulnerable. They propose localized sustainable solutions, such as installing solar panels on hospitals and developing small-scale, locally operable desalination plants. One suggestion includes deploying Israeli air-to-water generators to provide freshwater for Palestinians. This vision for a post-conflict Gaza emphasizes rebuilding with a focus on climate resilience and local governance of essential infrastructure, including desalination,

freshwater production, and solar energy. This approach would reduce dependency and increase resilience to future conflicts and environmental challenges. Israel, the UAE, and other actors can support these efforts by funding green technologies. Locally managed solutions not only enhance resilience but are easier to implement without a functioning government, offering immediate benefits to Palestinian civilians (Abramowitz & Abu Daqa, 2023).

Integrating the Peace Triangle into IMEC

EcoPeace's "Peace Triangle" proposal seeks to incorporate the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) into a broader regional framework that includes Palestinians, Israelis and Jordanians. The IMEC, part of the I2U2 initiative, involving US, India, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, the EU, France, Italy and Germany, is designed to facilitate the transportation of critical resources, including food, water, energy, and infrastructure. By establishing stronger links between the Middle East and Europe—where demand for renewable energy is growing—IMEC has the potential to create significant incentives for the development of renewable energy projects, particularly solar and hydrogen, in the Middle East.

Expanding this corridor to include Gaza could provide opportunities for sustainable energy investments that meet both local needs and broader European market demands. The integration of Gaza into the IMEC framework would not only enhance regional economic interdependence but also encourage investment in renewable energy infrastructure in the Palestinian territories. This would allow the region to leverage Europe's demand for clean energy, fostering economic development while advancing environmental sustainability goals. In this way, the IMEC could serve as a strategic platform for promoting renewable energy, benefiting both the local economies and the wider region.

The international community, including actors such as the World Bank and the

European Parliament, has shown considerable interest in expanding the IMEC. While the full implementation of such a large-scale project may be a long-term goal, such a strategic vision is crucial for post-war reconstruction. These projects align with both economic and sustainability goals, offering spillover benefits in peacebuilding. The UAE's involvement in such initiatives not only enhances its regional leadership but also reinforces the benefits of the Abraham Accords. By advocating for Palestinian inclusion, the UAE and Israel could strengthen their role in regional cooperation and ensure broader regional support for the corridor, which is crucial for the UAEs political and economic ambitions, particularly in the emerging hydrogen market.

The UAE's role in financing and supporting desalination plants and other environmental projects is critical. The initial agreement between Jordan and Israel demonstrated the UAE's interest in such cooperation. Expanding this agreement to include the Palestinian side would further enhance the UAE's standing as a climate leader and a supporter of Palestinian civilians. By engaging the UAE not only as a financial contributor but also as a strategic partner in regional development, both Israel and the UAE could find compelling incentives for deeper cooperation. This approach positions the UAE as a leading force in climate efforts, protecting Palestinian interests, and contributing to regional de-escalation.

The Importance of Accountability and Structural Reform

While reconstruction is essential, experts and environmental scholars stress the importance of addressing underlying political and structural issues. Without accountability mechanisms, both legal and political, reconstruction efforts risk being temporary fixes that do not prevent future crises. Ensuring accountability and upholding international norms protecting civilian infrastructure are vital for creating a sustainable future for Gaza. This approach is

not just about rebuilding physical structures; it's about fostering resilience and integrating Gaza into a broader regional framework for stability and peace (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2024).

Environmental and Climate Diplomacy as a Medium for Navigating Complex Relationships

In light of previous discussions on the environmental peacebuilding framework, we now examine how climate diplomacy has impacted UAE-Israel relations following the October 7 Hamas attacks and the ensuing war in Gaza.

Environmental diplomacy now functions as a form of “diplomatic cover,” allowing both nations to engage in dialogue without attracting the controversy that comes with overt political or military discussions.

Shifting Role of Environmental Cooperation

Despite the heightened tensions and deteriorating public relations between Israel and the UAE, environmental and climate diplomacy continues to serve as a key channel for maintaining a dialogue. However, the function of environmental cooperation has evolved. Before October 7, environmental initiatives were highlighted as a symbol of regional cooperation and leadership. In its aftermath, these collaborations are less visible, serving more as a discreet diplomatic tool rather than a public relations asset. Joint environmental projects, while still ongoing, now occur off the radar, with far fewer publicized initiatives.

For instance, COP28 saw only a limited number of Israeli delegates compared to earlier plans, with interactions now confined to high-level officials and technical experts. Instead of using environmental collaboration as a central theme to promote bilateral ties, the UAE and Israel now frame their interactions in a more

cautious, subdued manner, reflecting current geopolitical complexities.

Environmental Diplomacy as a Diplomatic Cover

Environmental diplomacy now functions as a form of “diplomatic cover,” allowing both nations to engage in dialogue without attracting the controversy that comes with overt political or military discussions. Climate issues, by their nature, transcend national borders and provide a neutral space for collaboration, making them less politically charged. Forums like COP28 offer a platform where political discussions can take place in the context of global climate challenges rather than direct conflict-related issues. This framework enables Israel and the UAE to maintain communication and cooperation, even if these efforts are downplayed or even camouflaged in public discourse.

Additionally, the environmental arena continues to attract educated, liberal participants, providing a more favorable setting for the UAE to engage with Israel. This carefully maintained engagement allows both countries to sustain diplomatic relations in a more palatable form.

Multilateral Interest and Broader Acceptance

Another important shift in environmental diplomacy between Israel and the UAE is the increasing emphasis on multilateralism. Climate and environmental issues are of high international interest, with significant backing from Europe, the US, and global institutions. Such multilateral collaboration provides a broader base of support for environmental cooperation between Israel and the UAE, making such collaboration more feasible, even under duress. For instance, European Green Party MPs and international think tanks have continued to organize forums where UAE-Israel environmental cooperation is discussed, highlighting the universal importance of climate challenges.

Strategic Engagement with Global Allies

COP28 became a strategic venue for both nations to engage with their global allies, reinforcing the use of environmental diplomacy to secure broader geopolitical interests. Israeli President Herzog and UAE officials used the platform to engage not only on climate matters but also on shared security concerns regarding Hamas and Iran, effectively tying environmental cooperation to wider diplomatic efforts.

Challenges and Limitations

Nevertheless, environmental diplomacy faces notable limitations. The war has exposed the fragility of these channels, as high-profile absences at COP28, such as Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Palestinian Authority leader Mahmoud Abbas, signaled growing divisions. Moreover, protests, including Iran's walkout at the conference, underscore the complications of using environmental platforms for broader diplomatic purposes in such a charged political context in the region.

Additionally, there is increasing scrutiny from academic and activist communities, who argue that environmental collaborations between Israel and the UAE cannot be separated from the broader political context, especially in relation to Palestinian suffering in the current Hamas-Israel war. This critical perspective challenges the ability of the UAE and Israel to use environmental diplomacy as a prominent public tool for branding purposes post-October 7, limiting its visibility.

Conclusions: The Evolution of Environmental Relations Between Israel and the UAE

The environmental relations between Israel and the UAE have evolved significantly since the signing of the Abraham Accords, with notable transformations following the events of October 7, 2023.

Pre-October 7: A Period of Promising Collaboration

Prior to the conflict, environmental cooperation served as a key trust-building tool between Israel and the UAE, fostering diplomatic ties through shared environmental, economic and political goals. Both countries leveraged their technological expertise and economic strength to address issues such as water scarcity, sustainable agriculture, and renewable energy. This collaboration was not only a means for addressing environmental challenges but also a way to strengthen geopolitical relations. Key developments included:

- 1. Technological Synergy:** Israel and the UAE collaborated on advanced technologies in renewable energy and water management, aiming to position themselves as regional climate leaders.
- 2. High-Profile Engagements:** Bilateral meetings and multilateral forums—such as the Negev Forum and the I2U2 initiative—highlighted their commitment to international cooperation in environmental and climate issues. Projects such as the trilateral water-energy deal with Jordan demonstrated their potential to foster regional integration and sustainability.
- 3. Trust-Building Tools:** Environmental initiatives showed the potential for building trust between the two nations, allowing them to cooperate on shared interests while laying the groundwork for deeper diplomatic and economic ties.
- 4. Widespread Support:** These partnerships drew broad support from governments, private sector leaders, and civil society, cementing a narrative of joint leadership in environmental innovation.

Post-October 7: Strategic Recalibration and Diplomatic Subtlety

The Hamas attacks on Israel on October 7 dramatically altered the dynamics of Israel-UAE environmental relations. Amid rising political

and military tensions, both countries reassessed their approach to environmental diplomacy:

- **Reduced Public Profile:** While some environmental projects continued, the visibility of these initiatives significantly decreased. For instance, Israeli participation at COP28 was scaled back, reflecting the sensitivities surrounding the conflict.
- **Environmental Diplomacy as a Diplomatic Channel:** Platforms like COP28 allowed Israel and the UAE to maintain diplomatic engagement through environmental cooperation, a less controversial avenue during tense political times. However, these interactions became more subtle and less publicized as both nations navigated the political turmoil in the region.

While environmental diplomacy remains a valuable tool, it also poses reputational risks, particularly for the UAE. Increasing scrutiny of Israel's role in regional environmental issues, along with accusations of "green colonialism" and "econormalization," may deter the UAE from publicly aligning with Israel on environmental issues. Critics argue that Israel's environmental initiatives sometimes overlook or even exacerbate the injustices faced by Palestinians.

The Path Forward: Credibility and Inclusivity

Uniquely positioned as both a regional actor and a mediator, the UAE, can leverage environmental diplomacy to foster regional collaboration and perhaps even environmental peacebuilding. However, for these initiatives to be effective, they must be inclusive and address the broader needs of Palestinians and other regional stakeholders.

For Israel, the credibility of its environmental diplomacy—to the extent that this remains a national priority—hinges on acknowledging and addressing environmental damage resulting from its policies, especially in Gaza. While Israel is not solely responsible for the region's environmental attrition, taking responsibility for its role would likely be essential for maintaining

its reputation as a leader in green tech and climate action. Such accountability, alongside ensuring equitable access to resources like water and energy, would not only be a matter of strategic importance but also a morally sound approach. Failure to do so would likely risk undermining Israel's long-term partnerships, including key aspects of the partnership with the UAE, and its standing in the climate arena.

True progress will require initiatives that are not only geopolitically strategic but also rooted in justice and inclusivity. Addressing these concerns will be crucial for sustaining environmental cooperation and ensuring that, rather than exacerbating tensions, it contributes to peacebuilding.

It would be hard to overstate the importance of the pre-October 7 period in demonstrating the immense potential of environmental cooperation between Israel, the UAE, and the region writ large. By integrating inclusive partnerships into future initiatives, both nations could capitalize on environmental diplomacy as a powerful tool for advancing development, and regional stability.

Francesca Fassbender is a PhD candidate at Tel Aviv University's Center for the Study of Conflicts and their Resolution. Her research focuses on environmental peacebuilding. Under the supervision of Dr. Udi Sommer, her first paper, *'Environmental Peacebuilding: Moving Beyond Resolving Violence-Ridden Conflicts to Sustaining Peace'*, was published in *World Development* and explored how the framework of environmental peacebuilding could be expanded beyond countries that share natural resources. Currently, Francesca is researching conflict-sensitive programming for renewable energy projects in fragile states. She divides her time between Berlin and Tel Aviv. franci.yahoo@gmail.com

Udi Sommer is the Founding Head of the Barak Leadership Center at Tel Aviv University and Professor at the School of Political Science, Government and International Relations. He was the Founding Head of the Center for the Study of the United States at TAU. He has been a member

of the Global Young Academy since 2019 and of the Scientific Council of the Blavatnik Interdisciplinary Cyber Research Center. Additionally, he is a research fellow at John Jay College of Criminal Justice at the City University of New York and was Chairperson of the Israel Young Academy from 2018-2019 and co-chaired the Israeli Cyber Forum at Columbia University, while teaching political science at Columbia from 2016-18. udi.sommer@gmail.com

Bibliography

- Abramowitz, Y., & Abu Daqa, T. (2023, November 29). *We will build back a better, more resilient Gaza*. Newsweek. <https://www.newsweek.com/we-will-build-back-better-more-resilient-gaza-opinion-1848186>
- Al Jazeera. (2023, December 7). Clashes over fossil fuels, Gaza war at COP28 climate summit. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/1/clashes-over-fossil-fuels-gaza-war-at-cop28-climate-summit>
- Al Suwaidi, O. M. K., & Fredman, A. (2021, June 7). *UAE-Israel greentech collaboration can transform the post-corona world*. JPost.com. Retrieved November 10, 2021, from <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/uae-israel-greentech-collaboration-can-transform-the-post-corona-world-670307>
- Axios. (2021, November 24). *Scoop: Saudis tried to stop UAE-Israel-Jordan solar energy deal*. <https://www.axios.com/saudis-uae-solar-farm-israel-d836a165-b901-4cc7-a929-377555784ec6.html>
- Ellingsen. (2024, January 29). *UAE & Israel's innovations to conquer water scarcity*. <https://itrade.gov.il/uae/2024/01/29/uae-israels-innovations-to-conquer-water-scarcity/>
- Bromberg, G., Majdalani, N., Abu Taleb, Y., & EcoPeace Middle East. (2020). *A green blue deal for the Middle East*. EcoPeace Middle East. <https://ecopeaceme.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/A-Green-Blue-Deal-for-the-Middle-East-EcoPeace.pdf>
- Center for Strategic and International Studies. (2024, July 26). *Gaza's water crisis—what can be done*. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/gazas-water-crisis-what-can-be-done>
- CFTIC. (2022, March 16). *Unit Center for Foreign Trade and International Cooperation Ground breaking agricultural technology from Israel to the rest of the world*. gov.il. Retrieved June 30, 2022, from https://www.gov.il/en/departments/news/uae_israel_agreement
- Chadha, M. (2015, January 26). *UAE & France announce partnership to jointly fund renewable energy projects*. CleanTechnica. <https://cleantechnica.com/2015/01/25/uae-france-announce-partnership-jointly-fund-renewable-energy-projects/>
- Climate Action Tracker. (2023, July). *Climate action tracker UAE country summary*. <https://climateactiontracker.org/countries/uae/#:~:text=In%20July%202023%2C%20the%20UAE,power%20from%20its%202050%20target>
- CSIS. (2024, July 23). *Hasan Alhasan: The strategies of Gulf States*. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/hasan-alhasan-strategies-gulf-states>
- CTech. (2021, December 22). *Israeli climate-tech companies raise \$2.2 billion in 2021, 57% higher than 2020 record*. CTECH – www.calcalistech.com. <https://www.calcalistech.com/ctech/articles/0,7340,L-3925582,00.html>
- Dewan, A. (2023, December 2). *No-shows and walkouts as Israel-Hamas war looms over crucial climate talks*. CNN. <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/12/02/climate/cop28-israel-hamas-war-talks-climate-intl/index.html>
- Dresse, A., Fischhendler, I., Nielsen, J. S., & Zikos, D. (2018). *Environmental peacebuilding: Towards a theoretical framework*. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 54(1), 99–119. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836718808331>
- Eitan, A. (2021). *Promoting Renewable Energy to Cope with Climate Change—Policy Discourse in Israel*. *Sustainability*, 13(6), 3170. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13063170>
- Esfandiary, D., & Jandali, D. (2024, June 17). *The UAE, Israel and a test of influence*. Crisis Group. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/united-arab-emirates-israel/palestine/uae-israel>
- Fortune Business Insights. (2024, August 26). *The global green technology and sustainability market size is projected to grow from \$19.83 billion in 2024 to \$83.59 billion by 2032, at a CAGR of 19.7%*. <https://www.fortunebusinessinsights.com/green-technology-and-sustainability-market-102221>
- Gause, F. G., III, & Daoudy, M. (2023). *Climate change and regional instability in the Middle East*. Center for Preventive Action.
- GN Focus. (2021, May 6). *Israeli robotic solar cleaning company, Ecoppia, signs first landmark deal in the UAE with the support of IFIICC*. Business – Gulf News. Retrieved June 30, 2022, from <https://gulfnews.com/business/israeli-robotic-solar-cleaning-company-ecoppia-signs-first-landmark-deal-in-the-uae-with-the-support-of-ifiicc-1.1620281182686>
- Goren, N., Winter, O., & Negev, M. (2023, July 13). *Regional environmental cooperation between Israel and its neighbors*. Middle East Institute. <https://mei.edu/publications/regional-environmental-cooperation-between-israel-and-its-neighbors>
- Gov.il. (2023). *Preparing for the opening of the COP 28 Climate conference in Dubai tomorrow (November 30th, 2023)*. <https://www.gov.il/en/pages/cop-28-dubai>
- Harb, M. (2023, December 5). *At COP28 summit, activists and officials voice concern over Gaza's environment, devastated by war*. AP News. <https://apnews.com/article/gaza-environment-climate-justice-cop28-summit-f494a53cbfb6ff1d8ca81801384cd750>
- Ide, T. (2019). *The impact of environmental cooperation on peacemaking: Definitions, mechanisms, and empirical*

- evidence. *International Studies Review*, 21(3), 327–346. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viy014>
- Ide, T. (2020). The dark side of environmental peacebuilding. *World Development*, 127, 104777. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2019.104777>
- Ignazius, D. (2024, July 23). *The UAE tries to pull off an 'Abraham Redux' in Gaza*. Washington Post. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2024/07/23/uae-israel-hamas-palestinian-authority-gaza-ceasefire-plan/>
- Kader, B. A., & Zaman, S. (2018, October 29). *UAE gives over \$700m for renewable energy*. Environment – Gulf News. <https://gulfnews.com/uae/environment/uae-gives-over-700m-for-renewable-energy-1.1442588>
- Lazaroff, B. L. H. T. (2023, June 21). *Negev Forum Summit called off due to expedited settlement proposal*. JPost.com. <https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/article-747072>
- Leichman, A. K. (2017, July 25). 5 Israeli precision-ag technologies making farms smarter - ISRAEL21c. ISRAEL21c. <https://www.israel21c.org/5-israeli-precision-ag-technologies-making-farms-smarter/>
- Luomi, M. (2015). The international relations of the green economy in the Gulf: Lessons from the UAE's state-led energy transition. OIES Paper 12. Retrieved September 2024 from <https://www.oxfordenergy.org/publications/the-international-relations-of-the-green-economy-in-the-gulf-lessons-from-the-uaes-state-led-energy-transition/>
- Masdar. (2021, January 21). *Masdar and EDF Renewables enter strategic alliance to explore renewable energy opportunities in Israel*. <https://masdar.ae/en/news/newsroom/masdar-and-edf-renewables>
- Middle East Monitor. (2024, July 26). *UAE proposes temporary international mission to restore order in Gaza*. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20240726-uae-proposes-temporary-international-mission-to-restore-order-in-gaza/>
- Mishra, A. R. (2024, January 1). *Israel-Hamas war may impact future I2U2 project collaboration efforts*. www.business-standard.com. https://www.business-standard.com/india-news/israel-hamas-war-may-impact-future-i2u2-project-collaboration-efforts-124010100839_1.html
- Mladenov, N. (2024). *The Arab Approach to Mediation—Reshaping diplomacy in a multipolar world*. The Washington Institute. <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/arab-approach-mediation-reshaping-diplomacy-multipolar-world>
- NDTV. (2024, February 29). *I2U2 continues to be priority for Biden administration: White House*. NDTV.com. <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/i2u2-continues-to-be-priority-for-biden-administration-white-house-5147555>
- New Arab Staff. (2024, March 4). *Despite Gaza tensions, Jordan requests Israel to extend water deal by a year: Kan*. The New Arab. <https://www.newarab.com/news/jordan-requests-israel-extend-water-deal-year-kan>
- Paparella, F., & Burt, J. A. (2023). *Climate of the United Arab Emirates: Present, past and impacts on life*. In Burt, J.A. (Eds) *A Natural History of the Emirates* (pp. 65–94) Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-37397-8_3
- Reiche, D. (2010). Energy policies of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries: Possibilities and limitations of ecological modernization in rentier states. *Energy Policy*, 38(5), 2395–23403.
- Sale, P. F., Feary, D. A., Burt, J. A., Bauman, A. G., Cavalcante, G. H., Drouillard, K. G., Kjerfve, B., Marquis, E., Trick, C. G., Usseglio, P., & Van Laveren, H. (2010). The growing need for sustainable ecological management of marine communities of the Persian Gulf. *AMBIO*, 40(1), 4–17. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-010-0092-6>
- Schaefer, P. (2023, March 30). *Climate change as an opportunity for cooperation in the Middle East*. Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung | Tel Aviv - Israel. <https://il.boell.org/en/2023/03/30/climate-change-opportunity-cooperation-middle-east>
- Second annual conference on conflict climate change and the environment in the Middle East and North Africa Region*. (2024, March 20). Arab Reform Initiative. <https://www.arab-reform.net/event/second-annual-conference-on-conflict-climate-change-and-the-environment-in-the-middle-east-and-north-africa-region/>
- Shqair, M. (2023, November 30). *Cop28: "Eco-normalisation" goes ahead in Dubai despite Israeli war crimes*. Middle East Eye. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/israel-uae-cop-28-eco-normalisation-despite-war-crimes>
- Shqair, M. (2024, November 16). *Arab-Israeli eco-normalisation*. Transnational Institute. <https://www.tni.org/en/article/arab-israeli-eco-normalisation>
- Shqair, M., Hamouchene, H., & Rabhi, H. (2023, December 12). *How Arab eco-normalisation of Israel covers up its crimes*. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2023/12/12/how-arab-eco-normalisation-of-israel-covers-up-its-crimes#:~:text=It%20effectively%20maintains%20the%20same,to%20these%20already%20marginalised%20communities>
- Shulman, S. (2021, July 16). *"We're both nations of problem-solvers," says UAE minister*. CTECH - www.calcalistech.com. <https://www.calcalistech.com/ctech/articles/0,7340,L-3912604,00.html>
- Singh, M. (2022). *Agri-tech and Israel*. In Kumaraswamy, P.R. (Eds.), *The Palgrave international handbook of Israel* (pp. 1–17). Palgrave Macmillan, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-2717-0_62-1
- Sommer, U., & Fassbender, F. (2024). Environmental peacebuilding: Moving beyond resolving violence-ridden conflicts to sustaining peace. *World Development*, 178, 106555. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2024.106555>
- Staff, N. A. (2024, July 19). *UAE could join Gaza multinational force, official says*. The New Arab. <https://www.newarab.com/news/uae-could-join-gaza-multinational-force-official-says>

- Sune, L. (2023, February 14). *The Israeli Green Paradox: A Global Cleantech Hub Catching up with Climate Change*. IPPi. <https://www.ippi.org.il/the-israeli-green-paradox-a-global-cleantech-leader-catching-up-climate-change/>
- Suri, N., & Sethi, H. (2023, February 27). *The I2U2: Where geography and economics meet*. Observer Research Foundation. <https://www.orfonline.org/research/the-i2u2-where-geography-and-economics-meet>
- Tal, N. (2020). Not Just Tolerated—A Global Leader: Lessons Learned from Israel's Experience in the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. *Israel Studies*, 25(1), 122. <https://doi.org/10.2979/israelstudies.25.1.06>
- Talabani, A. A. (2024). A review of food security in the United Arab Emirates. In Salman, A., Tharwat, A. (Eds.), *Digital Governance & Security. AUEIRC 2020. Advances in Science, Technology & Innovation* (81–84). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-49302-7_10
- Taneja, K. (2023, November 23). *The Gaza crisis and challenge to future-proof I2U2*. Observer Research Foundation. <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/the-gaza-crisis-and-challenge-to-future-proof-i2u2>
- Times of India. (2022, July 14). *PM Modi to participate in first I2U2 Leaders' Summit virtually*. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/pm-modi-to-participate-in-first-i2u2-leaders-summit-virtually/articleshow/92865077.cms>
- Times of Israel. (2015). *In diplomatic first, Israel to open mission in Abu Dhabi*. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/in-diplomatic-first-israel-to-open-mission-in-abu-dhabi/>
- Times of Israel Staff. (2021a). *Israel's vertical field inks deal to deploy its farming system in UAE*. Times of Israel. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israels-vertical-field-inks-deal-to-deploy-its-farming-system-in-uae/#:~:text=Vertical%20Field%2C%20a%20startup%20that,in%20a%20statement%20on%20Wednesday.>
- Times of Israel Staff. (2021b). *Saudis attempted to block UAE-Israel-Jordan deal on energy, water — report*. Times of Israel. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/saudis-attempted-to-block-uae-israel-jordan-deal-on-energy-water-report/>
- Valik, S., Sanam, E., & Quilliam, N. (2023, March 28). *The Abraham Accords and Israel–UAE normalization*. Chatham House. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2023/03/abraham-accords-and-israel-uae-normalization>
- WAM. (2021a, April). *UAE, Israeli ambassadors plant peace tree for Earth Day*. <https://wam.ae/en/article/hszrc65r-uae-israeli-ambassadors-plant-peace-tree-for-earth>
- WAM. (2021b, July). *Mariam Almheiri explores cooperation in food and water security with Israel officials*. <https://wam.ae/en/details/1395302953504>
- WAM. (2023a, October 6). *UAE as hub will help 'I2U2 food security corridor in India' control global food prices: Indian Minister*. <https://wam.ae/en/details/1395303206533>
- WAM. (2023b, December 4). *COP28 launches partnership to support women's economic empowerment, ensure gender-responsive just transition during Gender Equality Day*. <https://wam.ae/article/apysqj-cop28-launches-partnership-support-women%E2%80%99s>
- WAM. (2023c, December 9). *Agriculture innovation mission for climate more than doubles investments to \$17 billion at COP28*. <https://wam.ae/a/aq1tyfv>
- Watergen. (2021, June 1). *Watergen, UAE and TAU Sign 3-Way water research partnership*. Retrieved November 11, 2021, from https://www.watergen.com/news_item/water-research-institute-partnership-between-israel-and-uae/
- Weise, Z., Mathiesen, K., Cooper, C., & Lynch, S. (2023, December 3). *Renewed Israel-Gaza war crowds out climate at COP28*. POLITICO. <https://www.politico.eu/article/israel-hamas-war-diplomacy-united-nations-climate-summit-cop28-dubai/>
- Weiss, M. (2017). *Arab League Boycott of Israel*. Congressional Research Service, pp. 1–8. <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/mideast/RL33961.pdf>
- World Economic Forum. (2023, December 1). *COP28 agrees to establish loss and damage fund for vulnerable countries*. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/12/cop28-loss-and-damage-fund-climate-change/#:~:text=URL%3A%20https%3A%2F%2Fwww.weforum.org%2Fagenda%2F2023%2F12%2Fcop28>
- Yosef, Y., Aguilar, E., & Alpert, P. (2019). Changes in extreme temperature and precipitation indices: Using an innovative daily homogenized database in Israel. *International Journal of Climatology*, 39(13), 5022–5045. <https://doi.org/10.1002/joc.6125>
- Zumbraegel, T. (2022). Political power and environmental sustainability in Gulf monarchies. In *Contemporary Gulf studies*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-4431-4>



Europe's Response to the War in Gaza: Capabilities and Actorness

Maya Sion Tzidkiyahu

Mitvim Institute – Hebrew University –
Tel Aviv University

Azriel Bermant

The Institute for National Security Studies –
Tel Aviv University

The European Union's response to the war in Gaza has been widely criticized as irrelevant and incoherent, casting doubt on its ability to become a credible player in the region. While the EU is indeed incoherent, it is not entirely irrelevant. Its chief relevance lies in the civil sphere, mainly through its efforts to sustain and encourage reforms in the Palestinian Authority, and its role as a capacity builder. These EU actions and capabilities have political significance for the “day after” the war. The EU has many tools it can use in the region but has yet to show a collective willingness to fully employ them, because of internal divisions and the multiplicity of voices within it. The paper reviews these spheres of cacophony and maps the realignment of camps within the EU in response to the war in Gaza.

Keywords: Europe, EU, Israel, Gaza, Palestinians, Hamas

Introduction

Less than a week after October 7, some analysts were quick to argue that “the Israel-Hamas war exposed the EU's irrelevance” (Karnitschnig, 2023). “No one cares what Europe thinks” continued the harsh assessment. “Europe has been relegated to the role of a well-meaning NGO, whose humanitarian contributions are welcomed but is otherwise ignored.” Many in Israel, Europe and around the world would agree, yet we wish to present a more nuanced picture. Unlike in Ukraine, Europe struggles to find a strong, united voice regarding the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza. The EU's incoherence significantly reduces its capabilities as a credible player and prevents it from taking a meaningful role while the war expands. Yet Europe is relevant as a mid-level player in the reform of the Palestinian Authority, the rebuilding of

Gaza, and in wider efforts to resolve the Israeli Palestinian conflict.

In 2018, then president of the EU Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, asserted that it was not enough for Europe to exert its financial muscle. It also had to learn to act on the global stage: “The EU is a global payer, but must also become a global player” (European Parliament, 2018). Josep Borrell, the High Representative (HR) of the EU for Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), argued in 2019 that Europe “must learn quickly to speak the language of power,” and not only rely on soft or normative power as it used to do (European Union External Action, 2020). Over the past three decades, the EU has been one of the main donors to the Palestinians. It became a significant actor in the civilian sphere, but not a meaningful political player in the

Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and certainly not in the realm of security (See Hollis, 1997; Bouris, 2014 for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. On the EU's lack of actorness, see Toje, 2008). What has changed (if at all) since October 7?

This paper focuses on the European response to the war in Gaza and the hostilities towards Israel in the wider region. Although it concentrates on the EU, there is also a brief discussion of actions taken by other European countries, mostly the United Kingdom (UK). It aims to give an empirical description and analysis of Europe's responses, capabilities and actorness in this regional war. The article begins with the shifting European positions from strong support and solidarity with Israel after the October 7 massacre, to fierce criticism of Israel and its government. The second section maps where the EU is a mere payer and where it is a player. It reviews the EU's decisions and actions in the humanitarian field, Palestinian state-building, the diplomatic arena, its employment of "sticks" and sanctions and the military sphere. The third section discusses the divisions afflicting the EU which have hampered its ability to act as a meaningful player in the region. It reviews the instances of discordant voices within the European Commission, between heads of EU institutions and mostly between member states on multiple issues, and maps the realignment of camps in Europe on the conflict. In the conclusions, the article evaluates the EU's response to the war in Gaza, its capabilities and actorness in the Gaza war. It argues that the EU has been able to chalk up some accomplishments in less sensitive areas, most noticeably as a capacity builder in the Palestinian Authority. Its financial muscle has come to the fore in important humanitarian activity and especially in working to prevent the financial collapse of the PA. Europe has also carried out operations to enhance maritime security in the wake of attacks by the Houthis. Despite divisions which prevent it from becoming an effective actor in the Israeli-Palestinian arena, it still has an important role to play.

The EU and the War in Gaza: From Support to Criticism of Israel

Europe's solidarity with Israel in the wake of the Hamas massacre of October 7 and kidnapping of more than 250 civilians and soldiers, was remarkable. It was immediate, extensive, and strong. Political support came from across Europe. There was fierce condemnation of Hamas from across the board. All EU member states supported Israel's right to defend itself. The strong solidarity with Israel was demonstrated through numerous declarations, visits, and actions.

For a few weeks, the Gaza war took precedence over the war in Ukraine on the EU's agenda. Manifold statements, speeches, Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) declarations, and European Council conclusions condemned the Hamas attack in the strongest terms

For a few weeks, the Gaza war took precedence over the war in Ukraine on the EU's agenda. Manifold statements, speeches, Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) declarations, and European Council conclusions condemned the Hamas attack in the strongest terms (European Council, 2023). An unprecedented European Parliament (EP) resolution called for the elimination of Hamas with 500 votes in favor and 21 against (European Parliament, 2023a). These verbal expressions of support were important to Israel and gave it legitimacy for the war against Hamas.

Many heads of state as well as foreign and defense ministers from all across Europe visited Israel within a matter of weeks in an impressive show of solidarity. They travelled to the south of Israel to witness the devastated communities, they met with relatives of the hostages and restated Israel's right to exercise self-defense. Among the first to arrive, on October 13, were the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, and the President of the European Parliament, Roberta Metsola.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and French President Emmanuel Macron all visited Israel between October 17-24 to express their solidarity with the Israeli people. Several weeks later HR Josep Borrell visited. This was his first visit to Israel since he assumed his mandate in 2019 (Lis, 2023). Between October 7, 2023 and May 2024, about 80 out of 100 high level visits to Israel were from Europe (Meeting at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Europe Division, June 23, 2024). Israelis felt they were not alone.

Yet, as the war in Gaza continued, European support for Israel gradually declined. Support for Israel's right to defend itself is on condition that civilians are afforded protection in accordance with international law and international humanitarian law (IL & IHL). Amid the growing number of Palestinians killed in Gaza and the increasingly acute humanitarian situation there, the mood in Europe gradually turned against Israel. In addition, the refusal of Netanyahu's government to accept a cease-fire, or discuss plans for the "day after" the war, its outright rejection of a role for the Palestinian Authority (PA) as an alternative to Hamas in Gaza and its fierce opposition to the possible establishment of a Palestinian State in the long run, have created great difficulties for Israel's friends in Europe, since both the EU-27, the UK and Norway support the establishment of a Palestinian State.

The international legal cases against Israel make it more difficult for Europe to support it, especially under its current extreme right-wing government. In December, South Africa petitioned the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which is now investigating claims that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza. In May, the International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutor applied for arrest warrants for Prime Minister Netanyahu and Minister of Defense Gallant. In July, the ICJ published its advisory opinion on Israel's ongoing occupation of the Palestinian territories (case opened in 2022). IL & IHL are normative pillars of the EU's foreign policy.

Moreover, in view of Europe's position on the Russia-Ukraine war, where it has demanded that Russia adhere to IL & IHL and has imposed extensive sanctions on Moscow, and despite the major differences between the war in Ukraine and that in Gaza, the EU has been accused of applying double standards regarding Israel's conduct in Gaza. This harms the EU's reputation and interests in the Global South.

Europe's solidarity with Israel and its delayed call for a ceasefire have strained its relations with countries in the Global South. Europe has worked hard since February 2022, reaching out to these countries in order to mobilize support for Ukraine. The alarming death toll in Gaza and the severe humanitarian situation sabotaged Europe's efforts. Equating these two wars is problematic (Navon, 2024), but this doesn't prevent some in the Global South and in Europe from doing so. As Konečný (2024) points out:

Efforts to convince [the Global South] that Europe's... support for Ukraine against Russian aggression was based on universal principles of international law rather than the West's geopolitical agenda, were squandered when the West veered off those same principles in Gaza.

Borrell concedes that this is a problem for the EU, and that he is regularly confronted with accusations of double standards:

What is now happening in Gaza has portrayed Europe in a way that many people simply do not understand. They saw our quick engagement and decisiveness in supporting Ukraine and wonder about the way we approach what is happening in Palestine... The perception is that the value of civilian lives in Ukraine is not the same as in Gaza, where more than 34,000 are dead, most others displaced, children are starving,

and the humanitarian support [is] obstructed. The perception is that we care less if United Nations Security Council resolutions are violated, as it is the case by Israel with respect to the settlements, [as opposed to] when it is violated by Russia. (EEAS Press Team, 2024a).

Europe's credibility and its ability to forge a wide international coalition against Russia is undermined by the perception of countries in the Global South that Europe's attitude towards the war in Gaza is an embodiment of its double standards. Support for Israel by some European countries exacts a price for the whole EU, impacting its relations with the Global South, and its case for and reputation as a supporter of Ukraine.

The EU's Role—From Payer to Player?

The EU has taken concrete steps in several fields in an attempt to transform itself from a mere payer in the conflict to an actual player. It seeks to intervene and influence by applying leverage on some actors, especially by exerting its financial muscle. In addition, the EU has conducted a defensive operation to intercept Houthi attacks on ships, and has taken steps to crack down on the financing of Hamas. It adopted sanctions against violent Israeli settlers aimed at impacting the wider Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But its main intervention comes in its significant role in financially sustaining the PA and conditioning its contributions on substantial and comprehensive PA reforms, alongside agreed US-EU conditions for the PA to return to rule in Gaza (see below).

The Humanitarian Field: Significant Payer, Attempts as a Player

There is no doubt that the EU is a significant payer. Humanitarian aid provided by the 27 member states to the Palestinians from October 7 until September 2024 was more than

quadruple its level in the equivalent period preceding the war, reaching €678m, while EU aid increased ninefold from €28m to €262m (European Parliament, 2023b; Reuters, 2023). For comparison, in the same period the US donated \$1 billion to the Palestinians. (USAID, 2024b).

The European Commission and a number of EU member states also tried to become more actively involved, by forging a multilateral force which facilitated a new pathway for humanitarian aid. In March, the European Commission, Cyprus, the US and the United Arab Emirates launched the *Amalthea Initiative*, operating a maritime route for emergency assistance from Cyprus to the northern part of the Gaza Strip. The initiative was proposed by Cyprus less than three weeks after October 7 (Politico, 2023) but was implemented only in March 2024 amid an increasingly acute humanitarian situation in Northern Gaza. The US was the key player in implementing the project in Gaza, building the jetty, while Europe established the Joint Rescue Coordination Center in Larnaca. Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands and the UK all participated in the operation (ECHO – European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, 2024).

The gap between expectations and implementation of the Amalthea Initiative was considerable. There were high expectations that at full capacity, the route could facilitate the transfer of humanitarian assistance for at least 500,000 people (USAID, 2024a), yet the quantities of aid delivered were very small (7000 tons, equivalent to only 350 trucks, or a day and a half of aid transferred by land). Between May and July, the jetty operated for only 12 days due to bad weather and the need for repairs, while its building costs were over \$230 million. Several European ships delivered cargo to the jetty, which was distributed by aid organizations in the Strip. The jetty was eventually dismantled by the US at the end of July (Cleaver, 2024). The maritime route was diverted to Ashdod port and aid continued to enter Gaza via land crossings.

In effect, the Amalthea initiative made only a cosmetic difference to humanitarian efforts and contributed little to Europe's actual role.

Palestinian Statehood—Significant Payer and Possibly a Significant Player

The EU's financial assistance to the Palestinians testifies to its potential to become a more significant player. In addition to humanitarian aid, the EU is the biggest provider of external assistance to the PA, with over €1.2 billion originally planned for 2021-2024 (European Commission, 2023). This gives the EU potential leverage over the PA. While it has been reluctant to use it in the past, this now appears to be changing.

The EU's financial assistance to the Palestinians testifies to its potential to become a more significant player. In addition to humanitarian aid, the EU is the biggest provider of external assistance to the PA

The PA depends upon Israel to collect import taxes on its behalf, which constitute 64 per cent of the Authority's total income. The EU's increased payments to the PA are an attempt to counter the Israeli government decision to confiscate parts of Palestinian tax revenue. This policy, led by Finance Minister Smotrich, dates back to January 2023 and is justified as a consequence of PA payments that incentivize terror by rewarding families of Palestinians in Israeli jails and those who killed Israelis. After October 7, the part of the budget that the PA routinely transferred to Gaza was also confiscated by Israel (Times of Israel, 2023; Gal, 2024). The PA has been in a dire financial situation for many years and the confiscation of funds could bring about its collapse. This would destabilize the West Bank and the region even further. After the EU and its member states invested so much in building the PA as the institutional backbone of a future Palestinian State and enhancing systems of governance,

their role as payer has come to the fore and heightened their significance as a player.

In July, the Directorate-General for Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), which oversees support programs in Europe's Eastern and Southern areas, signed a "Letter of Intent" to the PA, announcing a €400m emergency package of aid to it, to be paid until September, conditioned upon reforms in eight fields (DG NEAR, 2024a,b). In addition to playing a significant role in preserving the PA, the EU is using its financial leverage to pressure the PA to carry out reforms by employing conditions to the funding (as it does with states seeking to join the EU). The EU has significant experience and expertise in state building in general and with the PA in particular. It could use its financial muscle to help restore the independence of the Palestinian judicial system and de-radicalize and reform its education system (Tzoreff, 2024); although the latter is best done in cooperation with the UAE and Saudi Arabia. If its efforts to revitalize the PA succeed, the EU's credibility as a player in the region would be strengthened. Such careful conditionality can build trust with Israel and could therefore enable the EU to play a more meaningful role not only vis à vis the PA, but also in the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Capacity Builder for the Day After the War—Established Player

The EU has been advancing Palestinian statehood via capacity building for a few decades. A month after October 7, the US, EU and UK were aligned regarding the basic conditions for a ceasefire leading to a long-term sustainable plan for the day after the war in Gaza. It included the return of the PA to Gaza (Gal and Sion-Tzidkiyahu, 2024). To date, the Israeli government has not agreed to their proposals, but preparations on the European side have begun nevertheless. For example, on May 27, the FAC agreed in principle to reactivate the civilian Border Assistance Mission for the Rafah Crossing Point (EUBAM Rafah), which

operated out of Rafah until Hamas took over the Strip in 2007. The EU appeared to be willing to reactivate it, but needs the approval of and coordination with the PA, Egypt and Israel (FAC 2024). According to reports, Israel rejected this option (Barel, 2024). To gain agency, the EU needs to prove itself as a credible player, and to engage and build trust with Israel.

The mandate of the EU police and rule of law capacity building operation in the PA (EUPOL COPPS), already includes the Gaza Strip but it too has stopped operating there since Hamas took over. Its operative plans may be expanded as part of the PA revitalization process ahead of its possible return to the Gaza Strip (Sion-Tzidkiyahu 2024a). Through such missions, the EU can function not only as a payer but also a mid-level player. These missions can be a core component of EU civil boots on the ground in the Palestinian arena.

The (Failed) Diplomatic Front

Europe has been active on the diplomatic front, proposing several initiatives, none of which was acted upon. Only one tool was adopted by the European Council. On October 27, Spain pushed to include in the European Council conclusions support for convening a peace conference (European Council, 2023). Although the move appeared disconnected from reality on the ground, it was in accord with Borrell's diplomatic objectives. Indeed, Borrell was the source of several diplomatic initiatives. They should be viewed in the context of his *Peace Day Effort Initiative*—trying to incentivize the resumption of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process—that was launched in September 2023 but halted by the war (Sion-Tzidkiyahu 2024a).

In January 2024, Borrell put forward a twelve-point non-paper for “creating a comprehensive peace plan,” proposing to hold a preparatory peace conference which would involve the pragmatic Arab states (Psara & Liboreiro, 2024). On January 22, Borrell invited the foreign ministers of four Arab states, Israel and the PA for separate discussions at the FAC. His

initiative was discussed, but did not progress. Facing internal objections by member states, the initiative failed to get off the ground. In addition, the Biden Administration stayed silent regarding the plan, probably in part due to Israel's rejection of the initiative. It didn't help that Borrell was perceived as being strongly pro-Palestinian to the extent that some heads of state told him that he did not represent them (Moens et al., 2024), while others described him as “obsessed” with the issue.

In another diplomatic initiative on May 27, Borrell invited the foreign ministers of Egypt, Jordan, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Qatar (known as the “Arab Quint”) to the FAC. The discussion focused on finding a political solution to the conflict and potential pathways of cooperation as a means to resolve it. Borrell used these meetings and initiatives to strengthen EU-Arab relations, seemingly to enhance the EU's actorness, though it was clear in advance to all sides that nothing concrete would come out of these sessions.

The next meeting took place in Madrid on September 13. It aimed to discuss “the need to reinforce the engagement of the international community on peace and security in the Middle East, and the challenge of creating an international consensus on a way forward based on the Two-State solution” (EEAS Press Team, 2024c). In effect, it demonstrated the lack of consensus, as only four European foreign ministers participated (Spain, Ireland, Slovenia and Norway) along with the PA and five Arab countries.

More serious efforts were made to prevent military escalation between Israel and Hezbollah. France played a leading role working for de-escalation. Europe has an interest in preventing Lebanon from becoming a failed state. It also wants to prevent the expected refugee flows resulting from a war between Israel and Lebanon. On June 13, President Macron said that France and the US had agreed in principle to establish a trilateral group with Israel to “make progress” on a French proposal

to end the violence on the Lebanese border (Boxerman et al., 2024). Yet Israel has not always been willing to accommodate French or European diplomatic engagement in this sphere. Over the past year, Hezbollah argued that the key to ending the battle in Lebanon was the achievement of a ceasefire in Gaza, which in turn depends largely on agreement between Hamas and Israel on the release of all hostages. Later in the war in Lebanon, Israel sought to break this linkage. In summary, Europe is on the sidelines of diplomatic initiatives to resolve the war in Gaza and in Lebanon. What France and Europe did demonstrate was their financial role, gathering \$1 billion for Lebanon in October 2024.

Employment of Sticks and Sanctions Regimes

President Macron's proposal to build an international coalition against Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ), along the lines of the coalition against ISIS, did not gain traction (France 24, 2023). Yet France hosted a multilateral meeting in Paris on December 13, to enhance the financial war against them, by targeting the sources of their funding, and took action to stem the spread of terrorist content online (France Diplomacy, 2023). After the EU designated Hamas and PIJ as terrorist organizations in 2003, on January 19, 2024, the Council of the EU adopted a package of additional sanctions against them, including a freeze on the assets of several of their military leaders, among them Yahya Sinwar (Council of the EU, 2024a). This decision allowed the EU to take actions against additional individuals and entities supporting, facilitating, or enabling violent actions by Hamas and the PIJ. Yet enhancing its role through further intervention, for example, against straw companies in Turkey, did not ensue.

The EU did extend the sanctions list in June, adding six individuals and three entities (Council of the EU, 2024b). For the first time, sanctions were also imposed against violent Israeli settlers and some of their organizations in the West

Bank. The process of imposition proved slower and more complicated politically for the EU than for its counterparts or its member states. The US imposed a first round of these sanctions on February 1, expanding them on March 14. The UK and France followed suit a couple of weeks later. It took the FAC until March 18 to cross the high threshold of unanimity and overcome Czech and Hungarian opposition. When the list of sanctions was published by the Council on April 19, it included four individuals and two organizations (Council of the EU 2024c,d). The second round of EU sanctions came only on July 15, adding five individuals and three organizations (Council of the EU, 2024e). Those listed under the EU sanctions regime are "subject to an asset freeze, and the provision of funds or economic resources, directly or indirectly, to them or for their benefit, is prohibited." Additionally, the EU imposed a travel ban on the sanctioned individuals. The slow pace of the sanctions adopted is indicative of the EU's political difficulties in crossing what was considered a red line in its policy vis à vis Israel. Yet it was crossed.

The EU has considerable economic leverage with Israel as its largest trading partner. So far, the EU has shown little willingness to use its leverage vis à vis Israel inside the 1967 lines as the threshold of unanimity for such action in the FAC or European Council is too high (see disagreement regarding the Association Agreement below). The war has prompted the re- or over-politicization of relations in all areas of cooperation, in addition to the rise of anti-Semitism and anti-Israeli attitudes, including latent or vocal grassroots boycotts and lost opportunities. For example, it is unlikely that the EU would be able to sign a Partnership Priorities agreement with Israel anytime soon. It is also probable that a new UK-Israel trade agreement, currently under negotiation, would pose greater political challenges for the Labour government to sign.

The relative ease of taking decisions at the national level, in comparison to the EU

level, is noticeable. Some European countries have shown greater readiness to impose bans on arms sales to Israel. In February, a Dutch court ordered the government to block the delivery of US-made F-35 fighter aircraft parts to Israel, over concerns they were being used to violate international law. Yet the government appealed, and meanwhile sent the parts to the US, where they were sent to Israel. Three European states took steps to fully suspend military exports to Israel: Spain, Italy and the Walloon part of Belgium. The UK, Denmark and Germany examine the export licenses on a case-by-case basis. Of the above, Germany's stance is most significant: 30 per cent of Israel's arms were imported from Germany and 69 per cent from the United States between 2019 and 2023 (Bermant 2024a; Sion-Tzidkiyahu 2024d). Therefore, the damage caused by other European countries' arms ban is felt less in the military-security sphere and much more in the political and diplomatic domain. This is illustrated by President Macron's call in early October 2024 for a weapons embargo on Israel, although he referred only to the war in Gaza, not the one with Hezbollah and other Iranian proxies. In addition, France prevented Israeli companies from participating in the June 2024 Eurosatory international arms fair, although a number of Israeli companies did participate in the Euronaval defense exhibition which took place in November 2024.

Defensive Military Role

To the extent that Europe is even playing a military role, there is a clear distinction between the UK and the EU. Right after October 7, Britain joined the US in dispatching military forces to the Eastern Mediterranean to support Israel and deter Hezbollah and Iran from a full-scale attack on Israel. In addition, both Britain and France were involved in the interception of Iranian attacks against Israel in April and later in October (Times of Israel, 2024).

The EU's military role emerged in response to the Houthis' trade route disruption in the Red

Sea. Since the Houthis began their offensive on November 19, they have attacked over forty ships in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. Targeted strikes by the US and the UK against Houthi bases began on January 11. The EU launched operation EUNAVFOR Aspides on February 19. However, unlike the US and UK, the EU's rules of engagement are defensive. They aim only to protect merchant shipping and restore freedom of navigation and exclude direct attacks on Houthi positions. This sea route from Asia through the Suez Canal to Europe accounts for twelve percent of global trade and is of special significance to Southern European Mediterranean countries. Alternative sea routes double shipment costs at a time when inflation has already been high in the EU and the cost of living is a sensitive social and political issue.

As of July, five European frigates had escorted over 170 merchant ships and intercepted nineteen Houthi missiles and drones (Al-Batati, 2024; EEAS Press Team, 2024b). By aiming to secure the Suez Canal route, the EU's operation is also crucial for Egypt and the region's economy. Through this operation, the EU enhances maritime security, furthers the protection of European, regional and international commercial interests, or at least mitigates to some extent the economic damage caused by the Houthis, while strengthening its joint military cooperation capabilities under EU command (Matoi & Caba-Maria, 2024). The success of the EU military operation as well as that of the US and the UK, is limited at best. Maritime traffic has stabilized since January at 50-60% of levels in equivalent months in 2023 (Gard, 2024).

Europe's Tendency for Cacophony

Immediately after October 7, alongside the strong and widespread demonstrations of European solidarity with Israel and fierce condemnation of Hamas, there were many issues where the EU did not speak with one voice. The cacophony started within the European Commission, followed by open disagreement

The cacophony started within the European Commission, followed by open disagreement between heads of EU institutions and then between member states on issues such as funding for the Palestinians, calls for a ceasefire, recognition of a Palestinian state, South Africa's ICJ case against Israel and the issue of payments to UNRWA.

between heads of EU institutions and then between member states on issues such as funding for the Palestinians, calls for a ceasefire, recognition of a Palestinian state, South Africa's ICJ case against Israel and the issue of payments to UNRWA. This cacophony hampers the ability of the EU to play a meaningful role.

Within the Commission, the difficulties started with the Hungarian commissioner for neighborhood policy, Olivér Várhelyi, who tweeted on October 9 that aid to the Palestinians would be cut. A few hours later, the Slovenian Commissioner for crisis management, Janez Lenarčič, tweeted that humanitarian aid would actually be doubled. He was echoed by HR Borrell who asserted that the EU should support the Palestinians "more, not less," stating that this is the position of 95 percent of EU member states. Borrell stressed that the EU differentiates between terror organizations such as Hamas and the PIJ, and the PA and Palestinian civilians. Later that day, the Commissioner spokesperson clarified that there would be no aid cuts. Instead, the Commission decided to review its payments to the Palestinians, in order to ensure that no funding was reaching Hamas or the PIJ (Moens et al. 2023). This review process ended in November 2023 with the decision to continue payments and, as mentioned, increase them (European Commission, 2023).

Between Heads of EU Institutions

The president of the European Council, Charles Michel, criticized the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, for stating in her press conference with Israel's Prime Minister

Netanyahu in October 2023 that Israel had the right to defend itself, without adding that it must be done in accordance with IL & IHL. According to Michel and others, this failure to state the EU's core values was a reflection of her pro-Israeli stance. She was accused of overstepping her powers, not representing the EU's interests properly, "undermining the position of the EU as credible actor and honest broker between Israeli and Palestine," projecting the image of double standards to the Global South (Borges de Castro, 2023). Also, in an unusual move, 850 employees of EU institutions published a letter complaining about von der Leyen's omission (Agence Europe, 2023).

There are also significant differences between EU member states. On the issue of a ceasefire, on October 27, the heads of 27 member states in the European Council agreed on phrasing that called on Israel to allow "humanitarian corridors and pauses for humanitarian needs" (European Council, 2023). It took them hours to reach an agreement on "pauses," in plural, to avoid the impression that they were calling for a permanent pause. On that very same day, the EU member states split into three camps over a UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution, calling for an "immediate, durable and sustained humanitarian truce leading to a cessation of hostilities" and condemning terrorism. Eight member states voted in favor, fifteen abstained and four voted against the text, as it did not mention Hamas or the October 7 massacre (UNGA, 2023; Alessandri & Ruiz, 2023). These divisions demonstrated once again the difficulties for the 27 member states to speak with one voice on the details of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Analysis of the EU's UNGA voting on the Palestinian issue shows unanimous agreement among the 27 member states and the UK on the end goal of the "right of the Palestinians to self-determination" and "on permanent sovereignty of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories" (two decisions adopted on December 19). Yet when it came to the

more practical vote calling for a ceasefire on December 12, or the admission of Palestine as a UN member state on May 10, the EU was split again into three camps. Overall, on eight resolutions between October 7 and May 10 relating to the Palestinian issue and the war in Gaza, the EU stayed united on only three occasions (Sion-Tzidkiyahu, 2024b). As this analysis suggests, Europe is united when it comes to supporting the two-state solution, yet it is divided on the translation of that goal into concrete policy.

In the wake of Israeli charges that some of UNRWA's employees participated in the attacks of the October 7 massacre (UNRWA, 2024), EU member states were also split on the question of whether to freeze UNRWA's funding. The EU and eleven European countries (among them the UK) briefly suspended the funding, while eight did not (Sion-Tzidkiyahu, 2024c). Further cacophony continued upon the resumption of funding. The EU attached three conditions to renewed UNRWA funding, which could have served to apply its normative power, or at least lead a united voice for all the funders of UNRWA. Yet, the EU was unable to put its own house in order, the conditions adopted by each member state were different, and most did not adopt any.

South Africa's case against Israel in the ICJ is another example of division. Germany announced it would intervene on Israel's behalf as a third party. Another five EU member states (Austria, Czech Republic, Italy, Hungary and France) expressed their support for Israel. The UK joined them. Ireland, Slovenia, Belgium and Spain joined in support of South Africa. Other member states only called on Israel to comply with its rulings and with IL and IHL (Sion-Tzidkiyahu 2024c).

On February 14, the prime ministers of Spain and Ireland sent a letter calling on von der Leyen to carry out an urgent review of whether Israel was complying with its obligations to respect human rights, which constitute "an essential element" of the EU-Israel Association Agreement. They requested that appropriate

measures be taken if Israel was found to have breached them (Lynch, 2024). The Association Agreement is the basis for EU-Israel relations in all fields: trade, economic, political dialogue and participation in different EU programs, such as Horizon Europe and Erasmus. This was the first time such a demand had been made at the level of prime ministers. Nevertheless, differences of opinion meant that the request was shrugged off at the FAC which met on March 18.

The recognition of a Palestinian state is a major point of division in Europe. While there is consensus on the two-state solution, opinions differ on how and when to advance it.

On May 27, 2024 the FAC for the first time engaged in a "significant" discussion on steps against Israel if it didn't comply with IHL (Weatherald, 2024). That was after the ICC submitted applications for arrest warrants against Netanyahu and Gallant on May 20, and the ICJ intermediate ruling on May 24 that Israel should adhere to IHL in its operation in Rafah. According to the foreign minister of Ireland, Micheál Martin, "there was a very clear consensus about the need to uphold the international humanitarian legal institutions," i.e. the ICJ and ICC. Yet the FAC's sole conclusion was to hold an EU-Israel Association Council meeting with Foreign Minister Katz to address the EU's serious concerns and seek Israel's response on ICJ compliance. Despite the calls from Ireland and other member states, no sanctions paper against Israel was drawn up. So far, the letter achieved little more than headlines and an unpleasant invitation to Katz.

The recognition of a Palestinian state is a major point of division in Europe. While there is consensus on the two-state solution, opinions differ on how and when to advance it. On January 30, British Foreign Minister Cameron was the first to publicly consider recognizing a Palestinian state since October 7. French President Macron, Italian Prime Minister Meloni,

and senior heads in Germany also indicated they were considering it, but no actions were taken. On May 28, Spain, Ireland, and Norway recognized Palestine, followed by Slovenia on June 5, making it the 147th state and the 11th in the EU to do so (excluding Sweden's 2014 recognition, earlier recognitions date back to 1988 and were by former Communist states, and Cyprus which was not an EU member then). Belgium and Denmark chose not to recognize Palestine. While such recognition can yield domestic and international political benefits, it is largely symbolic for Palestinians and leave realities on the ground unchanged. This cacophony demonstrates again that Europe agrees on the concept of two states for two peoples, but remains divided on how and when to pursue this goal.

Realignment of Camps

A year after October 7, the Czech Republic and Hungary continue to express strong support for Israel. The UK, Germany, Greece, Cyprus, and some Central European countries, which offered firm support for Israel, adopted a more nuanced stance in the months that followed. All stressed the importance of complying with IL & IHL in the Gaza Strip. When Israel's security was on the line, as happened in mid-April and again in early October, the UK and France actively participated in thwarting Iran's missile attacks, underlining their position that Israel has the right to defend itself.

Spain, Ireland, Belgium, Slovenia, and Malta were quick to restate their critical position of Israel, with Spain and Ireland calling for a reassessment of the EU-Israel Association Agreement. Both formally recognized the Palestinian state with Norway and Slovenia.

Germany's long-standing historic responsibility to Israel's security, Germany's *Staatsraison* or *raison d'état*, is being tested. This commitment has been inserted in coalition agreements in Germany since 2008, including by the current SPD-Green-Liberal government. Despite criticism of Israel, Germany has

maintained support for the country. However, amid accusations that Israel has breached IL and IHL, Germany has shown a readiness to reexamine its continued sale of military exports to Israel, including the possibility of delaying the supply of certain items.

Ultimately, the normative traditions and narrow self-interests of the government in each European state are what count in the formulation of policy towards Israel and the Palestinians, rather than the need to maintain a united harmonious and coherent European response. Given the mix of normative and interest-based approaches, consensus has been hard to achieve in the FAC or European Council. This represents the "old" CFSP, in contrast to the brisk and assertive EU response to Russia's war on Ukraine.

Alignments may shift due to elections, as was seen in Belgium in June and the UK in July, where the new Labour government under the leadership of Keir Starmer has already dropped its opposition to an international arrest warrant for Netanyahu and Gallant. His government has also suspended 30 out of 350 arms export licenses to Israel (Bermant, 2024b). However, Starmer has ruled out a complete ban on UK arms exports to Israel, saying it "would be the wrong position for this government" (Hardman, 2024).

In the past years, under Netanyahu, Israel has strengthened ties with Greece, Cyprus, and some Central and Eastern European countries, such as the Baltic states, Romania and Bulgaria, using these alliances to counter unfavorable EU votes. Netanyahu's "divide and thwart" diplomacy harnessed the support of friendly member states to block or soften anti-Israel decisions (Sion-Tzidkiyahu, 2021). This tactic has been effective when the Israeli-Palestinian conflict featured less prominently on the global agenda, or when initiatives with considerable implications come to the fore, such as reassessing the EU-Israel Association Agreement. However, during the war in Gaza, this strategy has been effective only up to a

point. For example, it did not prevent sanctions on violent Israeli settlers and their organizations. The EU's emphasis on IL & IHL is highlighted by the Russia-Ukraine conflict. With the ICJ's judgement on Israeli occupation, South Africa's proceedings on Gaza, and the ICC request for warrants against Netanyahu and Gallant, the EU and its member states' room for maneuver vis à vis Israel in the Gaza war is shrinking.

The result, one year after the war is the following continuum, from the most critical of Israel to the most supportive.

The current realignment of camps regarding Israel is much more complicated than it was before October 7. It reflects not only the lack of an Israeli-Palestinian peace process, Israeli occupation and settlement building; but now encompasses Israel's security, its right to defend

Table 1. Realignment of European camps—2019 versus 2024 as “most critical” or “more aligned” “of/with the government of Israel”

EU member states' positions on the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict, according to M. Asseburg (2019). → indicate direction of changed position			
	Most critical of the government of Israel	Balancers	Most aligned with the government of Israel
Remainers (in bold)	France →← Belgium →* Spain Ireland Luxembourg Malta Slovenia Portugal	*← UK ← ← Germany (from strong support to milder one) Italy The Netherlands	Hungary Czechia Austria
Changed camp since 2019 →	Sweden → Denmark → Finland →		← Cyprus ← Greece ← Romania ← Bulgaria ← Croatia ← Latvia ← Lithuania ← Estonia ← Poland ← Slovakia

* Change after general elections

Table 2. Current state of European camps towards Israel, one year after October 7

Most critical of Israel	Moderately critical	Critical -leaning middle	Israel -leaning middle	Moderate aligned with Israel	Most aligned with Israel
Ireland Spain Slovenia	FR (shifting) Luxembourg Portugal Malta Belgium*	Finland Denmark Poland Estonia Latvia Greece Cyprus	Netherlands Sweden Slovakia	Germany Italy Romania Bulgaria Croatia Latvia	Czech Rep Hungary Austria
3	5	7	3	6	3

itself against Iran and its proxies, and its struggle for legitimacy.

Conclusions

In the aftermath of October 7, the EU initially showed strong solidarity with Israel in its darkest hour. Yet as the civilian death toll in Gaza rose and the humanitarian situation deteriorated, most of Europe's leaders began distancing themselves from the Israeli government and expressed increasing criticism. Despite general agreement on the two-state solution, the divisions on how and when to proceed in this direction paralyze the EU. The Gaza War demonstrated once again the difficulties of the 27 member states in speaking with one voice on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Gaza war has revealed once again the divisions, cacophony and ponderous decision-making characteristics of the EU in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Due to the need for consensus, the only agreed action by the EU was to impose sanctions on violent Israeli settlers and their organizations. The rest of the moves were taken by small groups of member states: some joined South Africa's ICJ case against Israel, four countries recognized Palestine as a state and a couple requested a reassessment of the EU-Israel Association Agreement.

The Gaza war has revealed once again the divisions, cacophony and ponderous decision-making characteristics of the EU in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In August, Borrell conceded that "the Palestine-Israel conflict is one of the most difficult issues to build EU27 consensus on, probably more than on any other issue" noting it as the stumbling-block to effective intervention (Scheindlin, 2024).

So what has changed (if at all) since October 7 in the EU's actorness? Seemingly not much. The EU has a range of financial and civilian tools to offer today and for the day

after the war. It is a considerable humanitarian payer, though less of a player on the ground. It is a significant actor in Palestinian capacity and state building, willing to reactivate EUPOL COPPS in Gaza and EUBAM at the Rafah border crossing. Their renewal could enhance the EU's role alongside its participation in the rebuilding of the Gaza Strip the "day after".

The EU is already playing a significant role in the West Bank. At a time when elements in the Netanyahu government are acting openly to bring about the financial collapse of the PA, the EU's role as a stabilizer in funding the PA and preventing its collapse is vital. This is essential for preserving the two-state solution and helping to prevent a major conflagration in the West Bank.

Taking into consideration that the EU's diplomatic initiatives have all failed internally and were usually ignored by the US, the EU should think anew about how to strengthen its actorness. The EU's most significant potential leverage stems from being the largest donor to the PA. By using its financial muscle to revitalize the PA through conditionality, DG NEAR, which has the ability to act consistently, could strengthen the EU's role and credibility. This is the EU's main potential leverage asset, depending on the scope and depth of the implementation of PA reforms and could make the EU a more credible player in Israeli eyes.

It remains to be seen how powerful and effective this conditionality will be under the next European Commission. If successful, the EU could be viewed in time as a more significant player, which would prompt Israel to take Europe more seriously and pay more attention to European concerns, rather than dismissing them. However, for this to happen, the EU would also need to engage more positively and directly with Israel's government. The new European Commission, which took office on December 1, appears better placed to do this.

The EU has potential leverage with Israel, as its biggest trade partner, yet divisions among member states have hampered its ability to use

this effectively. The war caused a considerable realignment, and many European governments have distanced themselves from the current Israeli government. The proceedings in the ICJ and ICC are raising serious questions over whether Israel's actions in Gaza comply with IL & IHL. Rulings against Israel would reduce Europe's room for maneuver in supporting Israel, let alone advance relations. Indeed, this support is likely to shrink further as Europe's normative emphasis on IL & IHL aligns with its geopolitical interests relating to the Russia-Ukraine war.

In the wider regional conflict, the EU is more than just a humanitarian actor or a payer. It also acts as a modest security provider, as in the EUNAVFOR Aspides operation, where the EU attempts to restore maritime security and freedom of navigation, operating as a defensive rather than offensive player, protecting its own economic interests and those of Egypt as well as other developing countries on this trade route.

This paper analyzed Europe's attempts to develop its actorness in relation to the Gaza war and hostilities in the wider region. These efforts have been only partially successful, and have been achieved mainly on the sidelines of the Gaza war. As the EU navigates an increasingly unstable multipolar world, it is still searching for ways to align its political influence with its economic and financial weight. Unlike the geopolitical awakening prompted by the Russia-Ukraine war, the Gaza war has not triggered a similar response. Despite the region's security challenges and the destabilizing actions taken by Iran, its proxies, and Israel, the war in Gaza does not pose a strategic threat to Europe as does Russia's war in Ukraine.

The EU has sought support from the Global South for Ukraine against Russia, yet the war in Gaza has undermined these efforts, amid mounting criticism of perceived European double standards towards Israeli actions in Gaza. One way to restore credibility is by laying the groundwork for the eventual establishment of a future Palestinian state. By revitalizing the

PA, the EU can also strengthen its credibility and regional influence. However, the EU's incoherence regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict reduces significantly its credibility as an actor, yet accusations that it is an irrelevance in the Middle East are wide of the mark.

Dr. Maya Sion Tzidkiyahu is the Director of the Israel – Europe Program at the Mitvim Institute and a lecturer at the European Forum at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and at the European Union study program at Tel Aviv University. maya.sion@mail.huji.ac.il

Dr. Azriel Bermant is a senior researcher at the Institute of International Relations, Prague and a visiting researcher at The Institute for National Security Studies, Tel Aviv University. azrielb@inss.org.il

References

- Agence Europe. (2023, October 21). *Almost 850 European officials criticize Ursula von der Leyen's biased stance on Middle East crisis*. Europe Daily Bulletin No. 13276. <https://agenceurope.eu/en/bulletin/article/13276/19>
- Al-Batati. S. (2024, May 19). EU Red Sea mission says it defended 120 ships from Houthi attacks. *Arab News*. <https://www.arabnews.pk/node/2513266/middle-east>
- Alessandri. E. and Ruiz. D. (2023, November 14). *The EU and the Israel-Hamas war: A narrow but important niche*. MEI. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/eu-and-israel-hamas-war-narrow-important-niche>
- Asseburg M. (2019). *Political Paralysis: The Impact of Divisions among EU Member States on the European Role in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*. Mitvim, SWP & PAX.
- Barel Z. (2024, May 30). The Rafah Crossing May be Israel's Way Out of the [Gaza] Strip. *Haaretz* (Hebrew). <https://www.haaretz.co.il/news/politics/2024-05-30/ty-article/.premium/0000018f-c5d8-db12-a3ff-c7fe77e70000>
- Bermant. A. (2024a, August 1). The UK's arms sales to Israel are tiny – but here's why Netanyahu's government is panicking about a possible ban. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/article/2024/aug/01/uk-arms-sales-israel-netanyahu-panicking-ban-starmer>
- Bermant. A. (2024b, September 4). If the UK really wants to stop Netanyahu's aggression, here's what it should do. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/article/2024/sep/04/uk-benjamin-netanyahu-labour-israel>

- Borges de Castro R. (2023, October 15). *From a geopolitical to a 'geo-damaged' Commission*. Euractiv. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/opinion/from-a-geopolitical-to-a-geo-damaged-commission/>
- Bouris D. (2014). *The European Union and Occupied Palestinian Territories*. Routledge.
- Boxerman. A., Breeden. A., Ward. E. (2024, June 14). Israeli Defense Chief Rebuffs French Effort to End Israel-Hezbollah Fighting. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/06/14/world/middleeast/israel-hamas-hezbollah-lebanon.html>
- Casey. R. (2024, May 24). How Germany Lost the Middle East. *Foreign Policy*. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/05/24/germany-israel-gaza-palestine-war-middle-east-politics-soft-power-speech/>
- Cleaver T. (2024, July 10). Gaza aid jetty 'to be permanently removed.' *Cyprus Mail*. <https://cyprus-mail.com/2024/07/10/gaza-aid-jetty-to-be-permanently-removed/>
- Council of the EU. (2024a, January 19). *Council Decision (CFSP) 2024/385 establishing restrictive measures against those who support, facilitate or enable violent actions by Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dec/2024/385/oj>
- Council of the EU. (2024b, June 28). *Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad: Council adds six individuals and three entities to the sanctions list*. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/06/28/hamas-and-palestinian-islamic-jihad-council-adds-six-individuals-and-three-entities-to-the-sanctions-list/>
- Council of the EU. (2024c, April 19). *Council Decision (CFSP) 2024/1175*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32024D1175>
- Council of the EU. (2024d, April 19). *Extremist settlers in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem: Council sanctions four individuals and two entities over serious human rights abuses against Palestinians*. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/04/19/extremist-settlers-in-the-occupied-west-bank-and-east-jerusalem-council-sanctions-four-individuals-and-two-entities-over-serious-human-rights-abuses-against-palestinians/#:~:text=The%20listed%20entities%20are%20Lehava,Elisha%20Yered%2C%20are%20also%20listed.>
- Council of the EU. (2024e, July 15). *Extremist Israeli settlers in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem, as well as violent activists, blocking humanitarian aid to Gaza: five individuals and three entities sanctioned under the EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime*. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/07/15/extremist-israeli-settlers-in-the-occupied-west-bank-and-east-jerusalem-as-well-as-violent-activists-blocking-humanitarian-aid-to-gaza-five-individuals-and-three-entities-sanctioned-under-the-eu-global-human-rights-sanctions-regime/>
- DG NEAR. (2024a, July 17). *Letter of Intent between the Palestinian Authority and the European Commission*. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/letter-intent-between-palestinian-authority-and-european-commission_en
- DG NEAR. (2024b, September 5). *EU proceeds with the disbursement of further emergency financial support to the Palestinian Authority*. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-proceeds-disbursement-further-emergency-financial-support-palestinian-authority-2024-09-05_en
- ECHO (European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations). (2024, March 8). *Joint Statement endorsing the activation of a maritime corridor to deliver humanitarian assistance to Gaza*. <https://tinyurl.com/3e9ce2m7>
- EEAS Press Team. (2024a, May 3). *Speech by High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell at Oxford University about the world confronted by wars*. EEAS. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/united-kingdom-speech-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-oxford-university-about-world_en
- EEAS Press Team. (2024b, July 5). *Press Statement by High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell during his visit to the Operational Headquarters in Greece*. EEAS. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eunavfor-operation-aspidess-press-statement-high-representativevice-president-josep-borrell-during_en?s=410381
- EEAS Press Team. (2024c, September 12). *Israel/Palestine: High Representative Josep Borrell travels to Madrid for meeting on the implementation of the Two State solution*. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/israelpalestine-high-representative-josep-borrell-travels-madrid-meeting-implementation-two-state_en
- European Commission. (2023, November 21). *European Commission: Review of Ongoing financial assistance for Palestine*. <https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/Communication%20to%20the%20Commission%20on%20the%20review%20of%20ongoing%20financial%20assistance%20for%20Palestine.pdf>
- European Council. (2023). *European Council Conclusions, 26 and 27 October 2023, Art. 16*. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/67627/20241027-european-council-conclusions.pdf>
- European Parliament. (2018, September 12). *State of the union debate: Strengthen EU as a global player*. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20180906IPR12102/state-of-the-union-debate-strengthen-eu-as-a-global-player>
- European Parliament. (2023a). *Resolution of 19 October 2023 on the despicable terrorist attacks by Hamas against Israel*. <https://tinyurl.com/2up79348>
- European Parliament. (2023b). *EU financial assistance to Palestine*. European Parliamentary Research Service. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/754628/EPRS_BRI\(2023\)754628_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2023/754628/EPRS_BRI(2023)754628_EN.pdf)

- European Union External Action. (2020, October 29). *Europe Must Learn Quickly to Speak the Language of Power*. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/several-outlets-europe-must-learn-quickly-speak-language-power_und_en
- France Diplomacy – Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Fight against terrorism - Meeting on combating Hamas (2023, December 13, Paris). <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/israel-palestinian-territories/news/2023/article/fight-against-terrorism-meeting-on-combating-hamas-paris-13-dec-2023>
- France 24. (2023, October 24). *Macron calls for anti-IS group international coalition to fight Hamas*. <https://www.france24.com/en/middle-east/20231024-macron-calls-for-anti-is-group-international-coalition-to-fight-hamas>
- Gal Y. (2024, June 16). Folly and fraud: Smotrich works to crush the PA and endangers Israel's future. *The Marker*. (Hebrew). <https://www.themarker.com/blogs/2024-06-16/ty-article/.premium/00000190-2097-d4b4-a7d6-e8f799cb0000>
- Gal Y. and Sion-Tzidkiyahu M. (2024). *A Vision for Regional – International Partnership for Gaza Rebuilding and Palestinian Economic Leap*. Mitvim Institute. <https://mitvim.org.il/en/a-vision-for-regional-international-partnership-for-gaza-rebuilding-and-palestinian-economic-leap/>
- Gard (2024). *Red Sea, Gulf of Aden and Persian Gulf—situation update 30 September 2024*. Published in April, updated in September. <https://www.gard.no/articles/red-sea-situation-update/>
- Hardman. I. (2024, October 7). Starmer insists he hasn't stepped back support for Israel. *The Spectator*. <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/starmer-insists-he-hasnt-stepped-back-support-for-israel/>
- Hollis. R. (1997). Europe and the Middle East: Power by stealth? *International Affairs* 73(1), 15-29.
- Karnitschnig, M. (2023, October 12). Europe's power outage. *Politico*. <https://www.politico.eu/article/israel-hamas-war-europe-eu-power-irrelevance/>.
- Konečný M. (2024). The EU's response to the Gaza War is a tale of contradiction and division. *The Cairo Review of Global Affairs*. <https://www.thecairoreview.com/essays/the-eus-response-to-the-gaza-war-is-a-tale-of-contradiction-and-division/>
- Lis J. (2023, March 15). Israel blocks EU's foreign minister from visiting over comments on settlements. *Haaretz*. <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-03-15/ty-article/.premium/israel-blocks-eus-foreign-minister-from-visiting-over-comments-on-settlements/00000186-e3e4-d8aa-a996-f7ef9b140000>
- Lynch S. (2024, February 14). Spanish, Irish leaders call on Ursula von der Leyen to review EU-Israel trade accord over human rights concerns. *Politico*. https://www.politico.eu/article/call-for-eu-review-eu-israel-trade-accord-over-human-rights-concerns-rafah/?utm_medium=social&utm_source=Twitter
- Matoi E. and Caba-Maria F. (2024). *European Union's security perspectives in the context of conflict zones multiplication: The Red Sea crisis*. MEPEI Institute. <https://mepei.com/european-unions-security-perspectives-in-the-context-of-conflict-zones-multiplication-the-red-sea-crisis/>
- Meeting at Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Europe Division. (2023, June 23 2024) – One of co-authors, Maya Sion-Tzidkiyahu, was present at the meeting.
- Moens. B. et al. (2023, October 10). Europe struggles to present consistent messaging on Palestinian aid. *Politico*. <https://www.politico.eu/article/europe-battles-to-present-common-front-on-palestinian-aid/>.
- Moens B. et al. (2024, April 16). Germany's Scholz lashed out at EU foreign policy chief over Gaza stance. *Politico*. <https://www.politico.eu/article/olaf-scholz-josep-borrell-benjamin-netanyahu-karl-nehammer-lashed-out-at-eu-foreign-policy-chief-on-gaza-stance/>
- Navon E. (2024, August 26). Europe can condemn Russia while supporting Israel. *Times of Israel*. <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/europe-can-condemn-russia-while-supporting-israel/>
- Politico. (2023, October 26). *Cyprus Proposes to Send Humanitarian Aid to Gaza Via Sea*. https://www.politico.eu/article/european-council-summit-eu-leaders-israel-palestine-hamas-ukraine-war-migration/?utm_source=email&utm_medium=alert&utm_campaign=European%20Council%20summit%20live%3A%20EU%20leaders%20meet%20amid%20Israel-Hamas%2C%20Ukraine%20wars
- Psara M. and Liboreiro J. (2024, January 19). Revealed: Josep Borrell's 10-point peace roadmap for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. *Euronews*. <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/01/19/revealed-josep-borrells-10-point-peace-process-for-the-israeli-palestinian-conflict>. Also published [here](#).
- Reuters (2023, December 22). *EU adopts 118 million euros aid plan for Palestinian Authority*. <https://www.reuters.com/world/eu-adopts-118-million-euros-aid-plan-palestinian-authority-2023-12-22/>
- Scheindlin. D. (2024, August 29). "Israel's right to defend itself has a limit": Top EU diplomat Borrell on Israel, Netanyahu and the Gaza War. *Haaretz*. <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2024-08-29/ty-article-magazine/.premium/israels-right-to-self-defense-has-a-limit-top-eu-diplomat-on-netanyahu-settlers-gaza/00000191-9e18-d453-ab9f-fe9cfc570000>
- Sion-Tzidkiyahu M. (2021). *The lost decade: EU-Israeli relations 2010-2020*. Mitvim Institute. <https://mitvim.org.il/publication/hebrew-the-lost-decade-israel-eu-relations-2010-2020-dr-maya-sion-tzidkiyahu/>
- Sion-Tzidkiyahu M. (2024a). *The EU contribution to the day after the war in Gaza* (tentative title, forthcoming). Mitvim Institute.
- Sion-Tzidkiyahu M. (2024b). <https://x.com/MayaSionT/status/1808052449225179201>
- Sion-Tzidkiyahu M. (2024c). <https://x.com/MayaSionT/status/1823736434278478240>
- Sion-Tzidkiyahu M. (2024d). <https://x.com/MayaSionT/status/1842856675839025228>

- Times of Israel. (2023, January 8). *Withholding millions from PA, Smotrich says he has “no interest” in its existence.* <https://www.timesofisrael.com/withholding-millions-from-pa-smotrich-says-he-has-no-interest-in-its-existence/>
- Times of Israel. (2024, April 14). *US, UK and Jordan intercept many of the Iranian drones headed to Israel.* <https://www.timesofisrael.com/us-uk-and-jordan-intercept-many-of-the-iranian-drones-headed-to-israel/>
- Toje A. (2008). The Consensus—Expectations gap: Explaining Europe’s ineffective foreign policy. *Security Dialogue* 39(1), 121-141.
- Tzoreff Y. (2024). *What is a revitalized Palestinian Authority?* Mitvim Institute and Berl Kzenelson <https://mitvim.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/English-What-is-a-Revitalized-Palestinian-State-Yohanan-Tzoref-January-2024-final.pdf>
- UNGA. (2023). *Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 27 October. ES-10/21. Protection of civilians and upholding legal and humanitarian obligations.* https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4025940/files/A_RES_ES-10_21-EN.pdf?ln=en
- UNRWA. (2024, August 5). *Investigation completed: allegations on UNRWA staff participation in the 7 October attacks.* <https://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/official-statements/investigation-completed-allegations-unrwa-staff-participation-7-october>
- USAID. (2024a, May 29). *Administrator Samantha Power at a donor governments discussion on the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.* USAID. <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/speeches/may-29-2024-administrator-samantha-power-donor-governments-discussion-humanitarian-crisis-gaza>
- USAID. (2024ba September 30). *The United States announces nearly \$336 million in humanitarian assistance to support Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank.* <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/press-releases/sep-30-2024-united-states-announces-nearly-336-million-humanitarian-assistance-support-palestinians-gaza-and-west-bank#:~:text=This%20funding%20will%20also%20support,%241%20billion%20since%20October%202023.>
- Weatherald, N. (2024, May 27). *EU foreign ministers discuss sanctions against Israel.* Politico. <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-foreign-ministers-sanctions-against-israel-micheal-martin/>



Shall the People Dwell Alone? Israel between Unprecedented Isolation and Precedent-Setting Partnerships

Jonathan Nevo-Abitbol

The Swords of Iron War has exposed a duality in Israel's relations with the international community. While it has been subject to severe criticism and mounting political isolation in its first multi-arena war against Iran and its partners, it has also received unprecedented cooperative support against threats. Israel can and must overcome its internal systemic limitations to identify opportunities for partnerships and ensure success in its efforts to form a coalition against Iran.

Introduction

The Swords of Iron War has been characterized by significant ambivalence in the treatment of Israel by the international community and the region.¹ On the one hand, Israel received remarkable sympathy and political and military support, but at the same time, severe and unprecedented displays of hostility and pressure. This detailed article, which examines the character of this duality, presents the processes that created opportunities for cooperation, the risks involved in increasing the cooperative efforts, and several suggestions for intensifying cooperative efforts as an instrument of national security. It considers the defensive framework led by the United States, in which Arab armies also participated, but goes beyond this—outside the Middle East and beyond the narrow realm of the security sphere.

Israel has a host of opportunities for cooperation to contend with its security and strategic challenges, particularly vis-à-vis Iran and its partners in the region. Some of these opportunities are missed due to obstructions related to the nature of the Israeli system and its conception of self-reliance. Despite the limits of

cooperation, Israel must actively pursue it, even if some efforts will only bear fruit in the future.

The Complexity of International Treatment of Israel

The nature of the beginning of the war—a surprise attack involving the mass slaughter of civilians—resulted in exceptional international support, including protests of support for Israel and visits of support by heads of state. Particularly prominent was American support for Israel's goals during the initial days of the war, which included the deployment of an aircraft carrier to the region as deterrence against Iran and Hezbollah, logistical assistance, and a speedy declaration of the intention to increase defense aid. In the context of the American presence, the following months saw clear signaling of red lines to Iran and its proxies, through attacks in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen against groups that attacked US forces or harmed US interests.

In addition, the war had a deep impact on the internal political environment in several countries, as it sparked a wave of antisemitism and anti-Israeli and anti-Western protests, but

also an opposing wave of solidarity against what was perceived as an extremist ideological threat. During the initial days of the war, the president of France even proposed the formation of a coalition of support for Israel.² In addition, one must consider the results of the cooperative effort between the IDF, the US military, and other armies, the most visible expression of which was its repelling of the attack against Israel launched by Iran and its proxies on the night of April 13-14, with the assistance of European and Arab armies.

The war has set a precedent in the level of international pressure on Israel combined with security challenges, and marks the end of the [country's security "golden age"](#)—a period characterized by a limited, single-arena threat; American hegemony in the Middle East and broad American support; and an internal ethos that facilitated social mobilization and cohesion. In contrast, the war featured intermittent attacks in seven arenas: Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Iran, and cyberspace. This is all in addition to the continuation of terrorism from Judea and Samaria.

In the political realm, following initial support in the early days of the war, pressure increased to end the campaign without achieving its goals, due to resulting humanitarian hardships and a number of incidents that led to the killing of journalists and international aid workers. During the war, sanctions were instituted against Israeli extreme settlers for the first time, based on the claim that Israel was not preventing violence against Palestinians. The suit lodged by South Africa and other countries before the International Court of Justice in the Hague, arrest warrants against Israel's prime minister and defense minister, and accusations that Israel has committed genocide, together dealt a severe blow to Israel's reputation, which has also impacted the realms of culture, tourism, and academia. All this has been in addition to the political support of Iran provided by Russia, China, North Korea, and other countries, due, inter alia, to a conception of the war as part

of the struggle between the major powers. Russia and China have also strived to intensify their role in the Palestinian arena, adopting a narrative similar to that of Hamas. Israel's [political isolation](#) was impacted by its bitter public disagreements with the United States at various stages of the fighting and by friction with other traditional partners. This, in addition to the deep American involvement (signified by a meeting with the war cabinet at the IDF's high command post), also demonstrates the intensification of America's leverage with Israel. The combination of these factors (a multi-arena threat, political pressure, economic pressure, and clear exercise of American leverage) has had a psychological effect, which finds expression in the public discourse that portrays Israel as an isolated pariah state in a more vulnerable situation than ever.

The Israeli ethos stresses the principle of self-reliance, even at the cost of political isolation. Leaders in recent years have also confirmed this principle, in explicit reference to the Iranian challenge.³ The current war illustrates the increasing complexity of actualizing this ethos, in addition to the opportunities presented by cooperation in the face of mutual threats. Based on this ethos, Israel has in the past adopted strategies that incorporated cooperative efforts (including a willingness to consider the concerns of the major powers, in order to acquire backing and support)⁴, cooperation with local actors to create a buffer zone,⁵ and assistance to minorities challenging states from within or through wars of intervention.⁶ In the more distant past, Israel also strived to establish regional alliances. One example was the concept of the ["Alliance of the Periphery,"](#) which included cooperative efforts with Türkiye, Ethiopia, and Iran and was born of the need to contend with the mutual threat of Egypt's Nasser.

The ethos of self-reliance played a role in mobilizing Israeli society on October 7, 2023. It was reflected in the speed of response, the scale of the reserve enlistment, and civil society's contribution to the war effort and to

national resilience, particularly at the outset of the war.⁷ The scope of external pressure on Israel and the conflicting interests of some of her allies, requires that Israel maintain a strong army and a capacity for strong, ongoing, and independent action. At the same time, Iran presents Israel with a challenge on a different scale, particularly the more the encounter becomes one of attrition, in which the need for external support grows. An asymmetry in size and scale exists between Iran and its proxies on the one hand, and Israel on the other, and the challenge is only growing due to the large range of arenas and the absence of Israeli strategic depth. Therefore, despite the desire for independence and the advantage of the ethos of self-reliance that facilitates popular mobilization, the challenge that Iran and the Iranian axis poses requires Israel to improve its capacity to engage in cooperative efforts on both a bilateral and a multilateral basis, to the point of forming or establishing a coalition.

How Did the Opportunities for Cooperative Efforts Against Iran Arise?

The end of the Trump administration in 2020 saw two events that enabled cooperative efforts between the IDF and Arab armies. The Abraham Accords resulted in normalization between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Morocco, which was followed by a decision by the US administration to move the IDF from the responsibility of the United States' European Command (EUUCOM) to its Central Command (CENTCOM). This created an incentive for the Arab armies to intensify their cooperation with the IDF as part of the Middle Eastern security architecture, an incentive for the IDF to expand its cooperative efforts with the aim of improving its strategic depth, and an incentive for CENTCOM to lead the process of seeking stability for the United States in the region as part of an integrated response to the threats. In a Congressional hearing held in March 2023, CENTCOM commander Michael

Kurilla portrayed the “race” to further integrate militarily with its partners in the Middle East [as a response to the Iranian challenge and to strategic competition with China](#).

Whereas the United States is essential for the advancement of cooperation between the IDF and the armies of the region, it appears that the fear that the Americans will ultimately “abandon the region” is also pushing some Arab countries to join Israel. This stems from the perception of Iran as a mutual threat and the assessment that the United States will not ultimately be willing to take care of it.

The discovery of natural gas deposits in the Mediterranean Sea and Israel's emergence as an exporter of natural gas had enhanced its regional status. This process increased Israel's independence in the realm of energy and intensified its strategic importance for Jordan, Egypt, Cyprus, and Greece, resulting in the establishment of a regional forum.

Prior to this, the discovery of natural gas deposits in the Mediterranean Sea and Israel's emergence as an exporter of natural gas had enhanced its regional status. This process increased Israel's independence in the realm of energy and intensified its strategic importance for Jordan, Egypt, Cyprus, and Greece, resulting in the establishment of a regional forum: the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF). Although this cooperative effort is civic in essence, it is easy to imagine how it will also impact security aspects, as its implementation will require the safeguarding of the freedom of shipping and the defense of critical facilities.

Two wars have further increased the status of Israel and its value as a military and political partner outside of the Middle East. Russia's invasion of Ukraine led to a rebirth of NATO and a shrinking of the gap between Israel and the positions of some European countries on Iran. This was due to Iran's military aid to Russia in the war that highlighted the mutual challenge

facing Israel and the countries of Europe. For many countries, the war increased political interest in security and heightened the focus on national military investment. Several of the threats during the war (missiles and UVAs, in particular) prompted special interest in Israeli weapon systems and cooperative work with the IDF. However, the deeper change stemmed from the manner in which the war changed strategic perceptions. Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz demonstrated this dynamic when he discussed the watershed that developed in German thinking⁸ and similar processes of change of view also occurred in other countries, such as Japan, France, and Italy.⁹ These approaches reflect concepts that are closer to that of Israel—such as deterrence, defense, and military alliances, as opposed to past concepts of collective security by means of cooperation and trade.¹⁰

Azerbaijan holds importance from Israel's perspective due to its role as an oil provider, as a customer of the defense industries, and the fact that it is a secular Shiite country competing with the ideological model of the Islamic Republic. Azerbaijan may have the potential to impact the Azeri minority in Iran.

Another development that strengthened Israel, even if it drew limited international attention, is the Second and Third Nagorno-Karabakh Wars. These wars changed the balance of power in the Caucasus,¹¹ that had been achieved with the help of security relations with Israel. The wars accelerated the public component of Israel-Azerbaijan relations and created an interest on the part of central Asian countries in relations with Israel. Azerbaijan holds importance from Israel's perspective due to its role as an oil provider, as a customer of the defense industries, and the fact that it is a secular Shiite country competing with the ideological model of the Islamic Republic. Azerbaijan may have the potential to impact

the Azeri minority in Iran.¹² Although the crises in Iran-Azerbaijan relations in 2022-2023—which included public military exercises, terrorist attacks, and belligerent declarations—remain isolated incidents, they also demonstrated the possible damage to Iran should relations with Azerbaijan deteriorate.¹³

Another contributing factor in the security cooperation against Iran, was the development of the Biden Administration's approach to national security. This regarded cooperative efforts and alliances as an asymmetric American advantage over the powers competing with the US, which also enabled it to reduce its involvement in regional clashes.¹⁴

The Opposing Process: Development of the Iranian Threat Against Israel

Even prior to this process, the strategic threat that Iran and its partners posed to Israel was on the rise. This threat includes the development of the Iranian nuclear program, intensification of Iran's missile and UVA capabilities, the dissemination of these capabilities to terrorist organizations, and continued efforts to carry out attacks against Israeli and Jewish targets around the world. Over the past two decades, the threat posed by Iran increased due to the mounting instability in the Middle East following the toppling of the regime of Saddam Hussein (2003), the upheaval in the Arab world and the civil war in Syria (2011), and the rise of ISIS (2014). The Western and Israeli response—whether in the form of sanctions, diplomatic agreements, or kinetic action against Iran and its forces—succeeded only in limiting and delaying the increased threat.

We cannot assume that the threat will remain in the already existing arenas (Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen, and Iran itself). Iran is intensifying its presence elsewhere, using various models of intervention and expanding its influence. While the level of Iranian influence in Iraq and Lebanon is unparalleled in other countries, changes can occur quickly and threaten additional Israeli interests, although this may not necessarily

lead to an additional arena of military action. From an Israeli perspective, it is prudent to consider Iran's support for the Polisario Front in Algeria and its effect on stability in Morocco; its closer relations with the Burhan faction in Sudan, which could lead to improved smuggling capabilities into the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip; and the efforts to undermine stability within the Hashemite Kingdom in Jordan and their impact on Judea and Samaria. All of this continues as Iran persists in its slow, systematic efforts to increase its influence in the Shiite populations in Africa and Latin America.

The Iranian threat leaves Israel with a security deficit. Such an imbalance, in a rivalry with a nation whose population is ten times the size of that of Israel, combined with the expanded threat of Iran's proxies and partners across the region, leaves Israel in an inferior position in terms of population numbers, space, and the economic and social ability to support a military campaign over time. Although China and Russia have refrained from direct involvement, their diplomatic and economic support for Iran has allowed it to avoid international isolation, which in the past was critical to restrain its behavior. If the relations between Iran, China, and Russia improve, they could act as sources of military supplies and support a major qualitative leap in the building of Iranian power.

Contending with a state of military inferiority is reminiscent of the State of Israel's first thirty years under the constant threat of Arab armies. The Israeli response to this challenge was based on developing a qualitative advantage, on defeating each enemy separately as quickly as possible on their own territory, and on creating deterrence that allowed extended periods of calm in order to absorb immigrants and develop the economy, society, and the state. In the face of today's threats, it is not obvious that this strategy is still the most appropriate. The idea of achieving a quick victory in the enemy's territory is considered to be impossible to implement even in Lebanon, in light of the [development of military methods](#) facilitating the use of low-

cost, precision fire, and then "vanishing" of the enemy into the civilian surroundings.¹⁵

In this light, another possible response includes cooperation with other countries against some of the threats emanating from Iran and its partners in the region. Various ideas for creating a security framework, alliances, coalitions, and cooperative systems have been discussed in Israeli and Western discourse for some time now, in [Israeli and international institutes](#), and in the writings of [IDF officers dealing with Iran](#). The interception of the Iranian missile attack of April 14 illustrated the advantages and the disadvantages of this approach. The discourse tends to concentrate on the system of cooperative efforts between the United States, the Arab states, and Israel, with a focus on the gaps in the goals and the margins of security of each of the parties in the process, and on ways to bridge these gaps.

The success in defending against the Iranian attack demonstrated the direct operational benefits of cooperative efforts against Iran, including the formation of a coalition, which provided strategic depth, defensive assistance, and access to regions located far from Israel. These factors in themselves result in closer foreign relations and strengthens Israel's perceived power. Some also see this as a model for creating deterrence, based on the understanding that it is harder to harm an Israel protected by an alliance led by the United States. The delay in Iran's retaliation for the assassination, on its soil, of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, which was attributed to Israel, supports this approach. In a broader perspective, events of this type have the potential to increase cooperative security efforts to build strength, to strengthen the leadership of the American defense establishment, and to intensify the dilemma faced by Iran, which will need to take into consideration increased friction with the world powers and the countries of the region when using force against Israel.

In the long-term, a network of partnerships also offers the additional advantage of reducing

the resources required for contending with long-term threats by supporting Israeli defense industries and expanding the scope of resources used for research and development.

Although a coalition did indeed act on the night of April 14, it is still unclear whether this was a specific cooperative-defensive effort or part of broader political, intelligence, and security (military or technological) foundation that will be able to be built upon in the future

However, although a coalition did indeed act on the night of April 14, it is still unclear whether this was a specific cooperative-defensive effort or part of broader political, intelligence, and security (military or technological) foundation that will be able to be built upon in the future. If a coalition is taking form, its limitations are easy to identify. The effort of April 14 was limited to a defensive goal, and no other country joined Israel in its military retaliation against Iran. In addition, every coalition depends on political agreement, which can be fragile, as reflected in the internal criticism in Jordan regarding its alleged participation in the defense of Israel. Moreover, participation in the coalition may have costs, such as harming Israeli freedom of operation. It is difficult to determine what the political price tag will be for forming a coalition against Iran. The broad cooperation on April 14, without concessions on the Palestinian issue, reflects that this was not a necessary condition for any cooperation; and flexibility in the Palestinian arena may have facilitated the formation of a broader framework and perhaps even deterred Iran. The depth of the American commitment and the ability to forge effective operational connections between the IDF, the Arab armies, and the United States play a central role in producing such deterrence.¹⁶

One weighty dilemma faced by Israel in encouraging the formation of a regional security partnership is the extent of its willingness to leverage its technological

and security advantages. Israel has always aspired to maintain a qualitative military edge (QME), and this goal has been grounded in agreements with the United States and in Congressional legislation. Today, however, with many countries in the region capable of contributing to security, strengthening these countries may actually promote Israeli interests. If Arab militaries assisted in intercepting the Iranian attack and may do so in the future, would it not be preferable for them to be equipped with the best defensive capabilities possible? On the other hand, the decision to allow other countries in the region to engage in military buildup, including technology from an Israeli source, will also expand weapons sales by the United States, impede Israeli superiority, and lead to the sharing of sensitive information. No one can promise that secrets will not fall into enemy hands, or that a country that is currently cooperating with Israel will not change its policy in the future.¹⁷

The greatest danger stems from the erosion of the ethos of self-defense (“defending ourselves by ourselves”). The willingness of civilians to mobilize for the war effort (whether by paying high taxes for security, or by actually enlisting in the military) is an important element of how Israel contends with the threats it faces. If erosion occurs, it will be difficult to re-create this level of civic commitment. This is illustrated by the reality of many Western countries in which it is politically difficult to increase investment in security and to draft civilians into the army, despite the growing and concrete threat from Russia. Assistance from a coalition also presents other challenges, such as a reduction in Israel’s political freedom of action and potential limitations on independent action against Iran, Israel’s ability to receive aid and build up forces etc.

Despite its international isolation and the external pressures exerted on it, Israel has never been assisted by others in meeting its defense needs in such an extensive manner as it was during this war. As a result, and due

to the asymmetry of the struggle against Iran, it is imperative that Israel try to develop ways of expanding the role of cooperative efforts in Israeli national security.

How and With Which Countries Can Israel Increase Cooperation in a Manner That Will Enable it to Contend with Iran?

Strengthening Security Architecture with the United States and the Arab Countries

In addition to the example of the air-defense capabilities, other areas of cooperation should be considered, such as cyber defense and border security. The Abraham Accords have thus far remained a strategic choice of the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain, and some regard them as a [cooperative effort for advancing deradicalization in Palestinian society](#), as suggested in [Israel's proposals](#).

Cooperative Effort with Alliances and Western Organizations

Initial steps regarding this issue were taken before the Swords of Iron War in conjunction with the European Union and [NATO](#), with increased recognition of Israel's strategic importance for European countries in the fields of energy, security, climate, and technology, and in light of the link between these fields. Therefore, cooperative efforts that focus on distinctly civic aspects can influence Israel's security relations with these organizations, or at least with their major member states. In addition, closer Iran-Russia relations will also help secure the commitment of these organizations (civic or military) to action against Iran, even if it is limited to softer measures such as sanctions, denunciations, and international isolation. However, every cooperative effort between Israel and Western countries will be impacted by criticism in the realms of human rights and international law, which frequently deviates from the standards applied to other countries. In most of these organizations,

decisions are taken through consensus, which makes it easier for Israel to evade punishment (given the support of countries like Germany, the Czech Republic, and Hungary—all European Union member states), but makes it harder for it to strengthen cooperative efforts (given Turkey's reluctance within NATO).

In the face of Turkey's call for cooperation with Iran to consolidate Muslim unity against Israel, strengthening Israel's enduring relations with Greece and Cyprus could create a counterbalance

Freedom of Shipping

During the Swords of Iron War, a coalition was formed to maintain the freedom of shipping in the Red Sea, as well as a coalition against the Houthis in Yemen, who pose a major threat to the Bab al-Mandab Straits. In the future, Israel can play an unofficial role in these coalitions or create a similar framework in the Mediterranean, which would also promote the interests of countries in North Africa and in Europe. In the face of Turkey's call for cooperation with Iran to consolidate Muslim unity against Israel, strengthening Israel's enduring relations with Greece and Cyprus could create a counterbalance. This "Hellenic Bloc" also has the potential to influence the Middle East: Greece and Cyprus host bases for Western military activity, own a large commercial fleet that is negatively impacted by Iran's activity, and already engage in important cooperation with the Gulf states, including the provision of mutual military assistance.

Instead of focusing only on the Middle East, it's also worth considering whether it would be preferable to expand influence in geographical proximity to Iran.

Central Asia and the Caucasus

Instead of focusing only on the Middle East, it's also worth considering whether it would be

preferable to expand influence in geographical proximity to Iran.¹⁸ These areas, which were once part of a region of Soviet influence, are increasingly playing an important role in the great power contest, in part through competition over influence and infrastructure for the transmission of energy and minerals. From an Israeli perspective, Azerbaijan stands out in that its relationship with Israel has become strategic. Meaningful advancement in the region is limited by the fact that most countries are not interested in a rivalry with Iran, and some have considerations that will limit Israeli involvement, such as Turkish pressure. In any event, progress in specific contexts, even non-security related, will create dilemmas for Iran, who will lose from an Israeli role in that region.

Israel enjoys a technological, industrial, security, and military advantage that—if directed towards changing the military balance against Iran and its partners and not only building up the local industry—could support a broader strategy based on cooperation

The Indo-Pacific Region

Countries in this region are choosing to gradually increase their expenditure on security to strengthen deterrence. Some have extensive defense industries, which are at the focus of the competition between the United States and China. Israel can establish closer security relations in the region by sharing the experience of the IDF and the Israeli security establishment, or, alternatively, by joining forces with other countries, as the [I2U2 framework](#) attempts to do in the civic realm. Iran's relations with North Korea and China may play an accelerating role in producing this cooperative effort. In the security dimension, these partnerships could assist in Israel's force buildup; in the economic-commercial dimension, they are critical to creating an alternative to the geopolitical role of Iran in various halls of commerce.

The scope of opportunities for action against the Iranian challenge is not static and will not necessarily be as broad if Israel does not act to maximize them. These measures will also require adaptations, first and foremost in strengthening the ability to conduct cooperative efforts, including within multilateral frameworks. Calls in a similar direction have been [issued in the past](#) and have led to organizational changes in the IDF in recent years, particularly in its [foreign relations array](#).

An important asset that Israel can leverage is its abilities in the realm of intelligence gathering, access to extensive intelligence regarding Israel's warfare against Hamas and Hezbollah, training, and other relevant knowledge.¹⁹ Another layer in the building of partnerships against Iran will be the ability to assist in the buildup of armies and other security bodies—the sale of weapons, joint exercises, as well as training and funding. Israel enjoys a technological, industrial, security, and military advantage that—if directed towards changing the military balance against Iran and its partners and not only building up the local industry—could support a broader strategy based on cooperation. If Israel chooses to proceed down this path, it may find opportunities for the deployment of forces in partner countries located in close proximity to Iran or its proxies. Possibilities include various models, such as building bases, the joint use of Israeli capabilities, and the use of force from within a partner country. A forward deployment would improve Israel's monitoring, offensive, and defensive abilities and increase its strategic depth.

Factors Delaying Change

Although there are certain limitations to the development of cooperative efforts (gaps in interests, the need for American leadership, for example), the most important obstruction to the establishment and reinforcement of cooperative efforts is conceptual and is rooted in the blessing (or curse) of the biblical Balaam, which has become in modern times a political philosophy:

“Behold, the people [of Israel] shall dwell alone and will not be reckoned among the nations.” There are also other constraints: building partnerships requires time, and the benefit is not always immediate. Whereas it is easier to point out the advantage stemming from the acquisition of a software platform or the training of troops, strengthening relationships with another country or army can be viewed as a luxury.

A second delaying factor, which is particularly relevant to the bold ideas regarding the sharing of capabilities or their deployment outside the country’s borders, stems from the risks to security and to information security. Leaving Israeli territory would expose any force to threats of harm, as well as to limitations imposed by the hosting party on IDF activity on its soil.²⁰ Another delaying factor that is technical in nature is the absence of military and security interoperability with other countries, meaning adaptation in communications and weaponry, a common operational language, and mechanisms for coordination and deconfliction. This challenge is not unique to Israel, but it may intensify due to limited Israeli experience participating in coalitions. Perhaps a way of contending with it will be found through cooperation via CENTCOM, for which enhancing interoperability with its partners and between the partners themselves, is a high priority.

Israel does not have a tradition of relying on coalitions and lacks national synchronization mechanisms to connect cooperative civic, political, technological, economic, and security efforts. Throughout this article, we discussed opportunities regarding different aspects of the foreign relations arena, but creating a connection between these cooperative initiatives in practice could encounter bureaucratic difficulties, as well as differences in priorities and in the allocation of resources.

Finally, we note the capacity limits of the IDF, the security establishment, and the intelligence community—it simply does not have infinite ability to engage in strengthening

partnerships, including building up partners’ forces, concurrent with fighting and preparing for war. Investing in cooperative initiatives to create coalitions will require an altogether different approach from Israel: one of expanding departments and processes dealing with cooperative efforts in the security establishment, strengthening the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, strengthening the connection between security and civic cooperative efforts and the willingness to make certain compromises regarding principles that were defined in the past, such as creative solutions regarding the sharing of knowledge and technology. These changes do not come at the expense of Israel’s ability to operate independently, but rather create a force-multiplier for independent efforts and will provide Israel with an opportunity to contend with Iran in a more successful manner in the long-term.

Conclusion

The Iron Swords War has intensified the calls for security independence in the spirit of the ethos of self-reliance. Israel, however, is dealing with a major challenge for which cooperative efforts will be essential to success. Several processes occurring in recent years have led Israel into a situation in which it possesses substantial assets that could be leveraged to mobilize countries into cooperative efforts against Iran. But capitalizing on the opportunities will require an element of development in the approach of Israeli’s national security, as well as that of the IDF and Israel’s defense establishment. If Israel rises to the challenge, it will be able to decide whether Balaam’s “blessing” regarding “a People that dwells alone” is eternal fate or a curse that Israel can overcome.

Major Jonathan Nevo-Abitbol holds a BA in Middle East Studies and International relations from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and an MA in Security and Diplomacy Studies from Tel Aviv University. nevo.jonathan@gmail.com

Notes

- 1 As we will see below, some of this duality found expression in processes that began prior to the war, but to which the war gave visible and meaningful expression.
- 2 Macron compared it to the American-led coalition against ISIS (“Inherent Resolve”), and France also initiated several political moves to increase the economic and political pressure on Hamas in support of Israel’s war goals.
- 3 See the [remarks of the Prime Minister](#) from the last Holocaust Commemoration Day, “If We Must Stand Alone – We Will Stand Alone.”
- 4 The Sinai Campaign of 1956 (“Operation Kadesh”) demonstrated this vis-à-vis Britain and France. In the decision-making process of the “waiting period” that preceded the Six-Day War and during the Yom Kippur War, Israel gave great consideration to American interests, including a willingness to pay a high price to maintain American support (a restriction on violating the terms of the agreement that ended the War of Attrition and refraining from preventative strikes in the Yom Kippur War). In single-arena, limited campaigns, Israel considered American concerns: in suppressing the Second Intifada, Israel conducted a stubborn political struggle to accrue legitimacy; and in the Second Lebanon War, Israel agreed to a 48-hour ceasefire following the Kafra Qana incident.
- 5 This idea can be seen in Lebanon, in the establishment of the South Lebanese Army after Israel’s withdrawal to the security strip; in the Syrian civil war, where providing aid to wounded Syrians also justified a security presence on the border; and in Judea and Samaria, with the maintenance of security coordination with the Palestinian Authority.
- 6 Examples of this include the aid to the Kurds in Iraq against the regime of Saddam Hussein, the assistance to monarchs in Yemen against Nasser’s Egyptian army, and aid to the rebels in Syria, which was attributed to Israel, during the civil war.
- 7 It should be noted that the scope of the mobilization deviated substantially from the “mobilization around the flag” effect, as during the initial weeks of the war, civil society assumed distinct roles of government institutions. These included determining the status of the missing, providing logistical assistance to the forces, and providing assistance to evacuees.
- 8 Scholz used the term *Zeitenwende*, which can be translated literally as “the changing of times,” in his [speech](#) of February 27, 2022. Since then, this expression has received many interpretations and continues to play a role in the German and the global public discourse. See Scholz’s [follow-up article](#) from early 2023.
- 9 Based on a personal conversation with counterparts who were involved in the development of a national strategy of defense in the Italian army.
- 10 The change developing in European thinking can be demonstrated through comparison of the concept articulated by Scholz with the older concepts that prevailed in Germany regarding the Russian threat, also during the Cold War, and particularly ideas regarding “change via closer relations” (*Wandel durch Annäherung*), and the like.
- 11 Some regard the changes in the Caucasus as also constituting an opening for greater change in the regional balance of power, due to the importance of the region in the “big game” between Turkey, Russia, Iran, and China in the region.
- 12 This finds some expression in the demonstrations of support in Azerbaijan during the Nagorno-Karabakh War and in the participation of many Azeris in the 2022 protests in Iran. Nonetheless, the Azeris are well-integrated in Iran (the Supreme Leader himself is half-Azeri), and despite the existence of a separatist ethos that sometimes elicits public sympathy, they should not be regarded as a group with irredentist aspirations.
- 13 The crisis included attacks on the Azeri embassy and the attempted assassination of a parliament member, mutually threatening statements, and military exercises in the border area, including Turkish intervention on the side of Azerbaijan. Today, the two countries are in a process of re-establishing closer relations, due in part to an Iranian effort to ensure that a change in the balance of power does not harm Iranian interests.
- 14 This insight is a second thread running through the national security conception of the Biden Administration (October 2022): “Our alliances and partnerships around the world are our most important strategic asset and an indispensable element contributing to international peace and stability.” It should be noted that whereas the Trump Administration did not necessarily operate in this manner, the national security strategy that his administration developed placed alliances and cooperative efforts front and center (they were mentioned approximately 75 times in the document).
- 15 In the absence of a quick defeat, we must also reexamine the other components of the approach, which, from an Israeli perspective, no longer addresses the problem of asymmetry vis-à-vis the enemy.
- 16 A different perspective is offered by the possibility of forming a [formal defensive alliance](#) with the United States, or a limited security alliance that includes additional countries.
- 17 For more on this, see the report composed by Congress when the United States intended to sell advanced planes to the United Arab Emirates. [Israel’s Qualitative Military Edge and Possible U.S. Arms Sales to the United Arab Emirates](#)
- 18 Another potential idea that will not be expanded upon here is Israel’s relations with minorities in the Middle East, particularly in the Kurdish region of Iraq, and with the Druze minority in Syria. Iran contains a variety

of ethnic groups and groups that may view ties with Israel as part of a struggle against the regime where they live.

- 19 The phenomenon of synthetic drugs, especially Fenethylline, has gone from being a social nuisance to a genuine threat to stability in the region. Syrian and Lebanese involvement in the smuggling of Fenethylline

may help solidify cooperative efforts to defend the borders between the countries.

- 20 This can be compared to a mirror-image of the risks that Iran took upon itself when it tried to establish itself near Israel and suffered ongoing losses in the Syrian arena.



How China is Acquiring Control of Global Metal & Mineral Markets

Yehoshua Kalisky

The Institute for National Security Studies – Tel Aviv University

The Chinese government recently announced that rare minerals are a national asset, and that organizations and individuals are prohibited from taking control of such resources. The announcement was accompanied by the introduction of a program to track and control all the rare mineral resources at China's disposal, including their **production, processing and export**. The announcement links to the fact that the Chinese regime, which is striving for political and financial dominance largely because of its **internal needs** but also due to its **global vision**, has identified the decisive importance of the market for metals and minerals—including nickel, copper, cobalt, magnesium, rare earths metals and rare ores and as well as others—for both the Chinese and the global economy, and as an engine of growth in the twenty-first century.

The importance of minerals, including rare earth elements, lies primarily in their uses for green energy, the electric vehicle industry, electronic products, medicine, lasers, optical fibers, magnets in the motor industry, various aspects of the security industry, and the global microchip industry. These minerals are the building blocks for all branches of modern industry, and therefore control of their chain of supply is essential for the economic development of China itself, as well as a means to position China as an important player in the global economy, with considerable capabilities that can be leveraged for political influence. Over the past thirty years, China has made huge investments in mines and plants that process and refine critical minerals in Africa, and in some markets it has absolute dominance, up to 90 percent in the case of certain products. This fact has economic and political implications, particularly for China's relations with the United States, and with countries in Africa, Europe, Asia and Southeast Asia.

Israel's knowledge-intensive industries (hi-tech) and its security industry must limit their exposure to the risk of a global shortage or political or economic restrictions on the imports of special critical minerals, by developing confidential contacts and partnerships in countries with the relevant natural resources in Europe and in Africa.

Keywords: minerals, metals, rare earth elements, lithium, antimony, magnesium, electric vehicles

Introduction

The metals and minerals market are critical factors in the global economy, since these metals have unique properties that make them essential in various branches of industry worldwide. This fact is true for both traditional industries, which rely on strong and heat-resistant metal products, and for high tech industries in the civilian and the security sectors based on microchips, an essential component in most modern industrial products. Some rare metals have unique properties that are essential to the function of microchips, but a country that wishes to control the metals and minerals market must also control not only the mining sites but also the technologies for their purification, separation and processing. These metals are natural minerals found deep in the earth, which must be extracted in dedicated mines or by drilling in deep quarries. They are not found in a pure state but in mixtures or chemical compounds, requiring specialized factories and the use of chemical and physical processes that are hazardous to workers and the environment, for their production, purification and separation. For these reasons, it is vital for every country with an interest in these metals and minerals to have some control of their sources, particularly those required for the production of consumer goods, such as [iron](#), copper, platinum, gold, magnesium, lead, cobalt, lithium and derivatives of these compounds, as well as the rare metals professionally referred to as “rare earth elements.”

Background

More than four decades ago the Chinese government identified the importance of the minerals market for the country’s internal needs and economic development, and also as a political means to control certain consumer industries, such as electric vehicles and communications. It aimed to strengthen its economy by **stockpiling strategic quantities of these resources**. China’s dominance in this field has the potential to create **global shortages**

of products essential to the automobile and microchip industries, magnets for engines and various sensors, giving it [economic and military superiority](#).

Africa is home to [30 percent of the metals and minerals](#) critical for modern industry, and China has gradually taken over mines with practical potential all over Africa. Chinese intervention in Nigeria, for example, is accompanied by investments of some three billion dollars in infrastructure as a lever for economic development, creating 4,000 jobs and tax revenues of 125 million dollars.

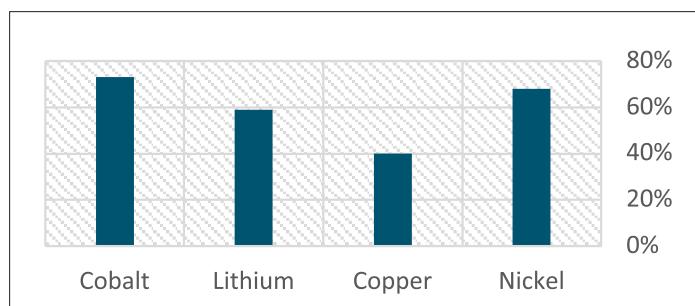
Such control of the minerals market in Africa and investment in infrastructure, reflects China’s aims of establishing its geostrategic status as a leading power, both politically and economically.

The Chinese are acquiring control of critical metals and minerals infrastructure in African countries—mines and raw material processing factories—without imposing financial or political conditions, together with investments in the development of additional civilian infrastructure such as [railways](#), which in future could be used to transport goods of importance to the Chinese government. Such control of the minerals market in Africa and investment in infrastructure, reflects China’s aims of establishing its geostrategic status as a leading power, both politically and economically, while creating [mutually beneficial](#) partnerships. The process [largely consists of](#) investments in cobalt and copper mines in Congo and Zambia, and lithium mines in Zimbabwe, as well as in rare earth element mines. It is accompanied by massive monetary investments while [exploiting workers and ignoring extensive environmental damage](#). Control of the rare earth elements market is essential for the development of the next generation of smart chips and advances relating to green energy, such as solar panels and batteries for electric vehicles. Microchips are central components in consumer products of a

modern economy—computers and telephones, as well as advanced weapons systems. The Chinese government is well aware of the power afforded by its control of the supply chain of minerals essential to chip production, particularly when the centers of chip production in South Korea (Samsung) and Taiwan (TSMC Ltd.) are located in an environment hostile to China and North Korea. Ironically, although the first microchips were developed in the United States, the American chip industry **currently supplies only 10 percent of global consumption**, and the country's reliance on external suppliers is a considerable cause for concern in the US administration.

China's massive investments and dominance of the mining market enable it to regulate the supply and demand of components vital to the production of products forming the cornerstone of a modern economy. Its control of the supply chain of the basic raw materials needed in a wide range of industries has significant **geopolitical effects**. As of 2022, the Chinese share of global supplies of metals essential to the production of components for various technology industries is shown in the following chart, based on **market data**:

Figure 1. Chinese Share of the Global Supply of Metals



China has acquired mines and REE refineries and cleaning plants and currently controls some 85-98 percent of the industry associated with REE and the products based on these elements, many of which are imported to China.

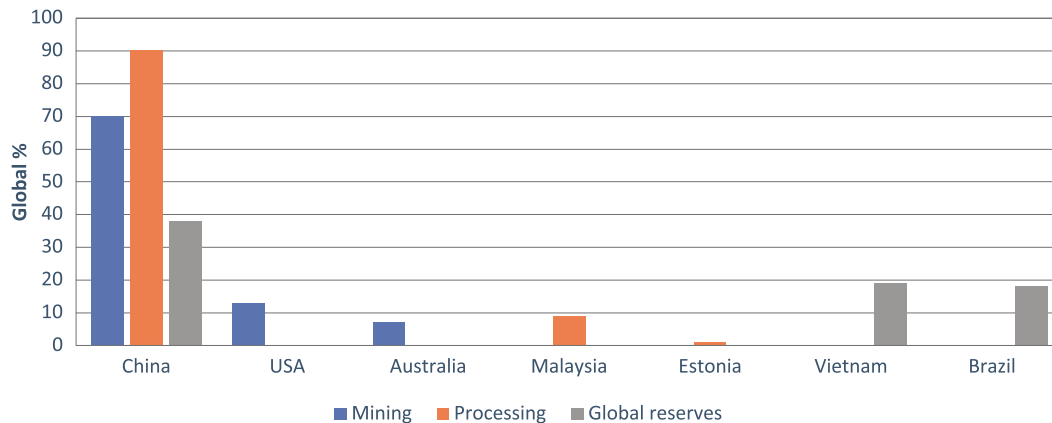
Chinese investments around the world amounted to about **1.34 trillion** dollars in the years 2000-2023. It should be noted that out of this amount, a total of **403.740 billion** dollars was channeled into mining and infrastructure construction projects worldwide. 11.3 percent of this amount (45,190 billion dollars) was invested in 224 projects in Africa dealing with the exploitation of various natural resources, such as mining and processing minerals, drilling and producing crude oil and gas.

Chinese Activity in the Field of Critical Minerals

Rare Earth Elements (REE)

REE are metals and minerals that are found in very small quantities deep in the earth. Producing the highly purified minerals required for knowledge-intensive industries is a complex process that can only be done in specialized factories. REE are used mainly in the vehicle industry (catalytic converters, magnets for electric engines), lasers and lighting, and the forecast is for **exponential growth** in market demand for REE uses. The world's main REE reserves are estimated at **110 million tons**, of which 44 million tons (about 40 percent) are owned by China, although not necessarily located in that country. China has acquired mines and REE refineries and cleaning plants and currently controls some 85-98 percent of the industry associated with REE and the products based on these elements, many of which are imported to China.

China recognizes the enormous importance of rare earth elements, and therefore recently imposed restrictions on their trade. It is not satisfied with the REE deposits **recently discovered** within its territory, and is busy accumulating reserves of these minerals through extensive imports from all over the world, in order to dominate the supply chain. The breakdown of the main countries involved in mining, processing and stocking reserves of strategic metals is shown in the following

Figure 2.

chart, based on the [most recently published data](#) (Fig. 2).

Recently, the United States and European countries have led a joint technological effort to limit Chinese dominance of the rare earths market, by expanding their purification, cleaning and processing capabilities. The [accepted assumption](#) is that by 2030 China will be the world leader in this field, due to its current control of the supply chain and the processes of extraction (60 percent) and processing (90 percent) of rare earths, relative to the five leading countries in this field, which in addition to China are Chile, Indonesia, Congo and Australia.

The Lithium Market

[Lithium](#), which is also known as “white gold,” is an essential component of rechargeable batteries for various applications relating to the production of green energy such as [nuclear fusion applications](#), particularly for use in electric vehicles, mobile computers, cellular communications and solar panels. A further economic benefit of lithium-based batteries is that they [can be recycled](#): The volume of the lithium battery recycling market was 6.5 billion dollars in 2022 and it is expected to reach about 35 billion dollars by 2031, with average annual growth of 20.6 percent. At present the Chinese control the global market for lithium-based batteries; they have completed the construction

and upgrade of lithium processing facilities in [Zimbabwe](#) and in [Mali](#), and have purchased lithium mines for hundreds of millions of dollars. The total investment by Chinese companies in the [acquisition of lithium mines](#) in Zimbabwe and the construction of processing plants for lithium metal in the period 2021-2023 amounted to 1.409 billion dollars. According to the [latest figures](#), the Chinese currently control 65 percent of all the world’s large plants for the processing of raw lithium.

Other Metals

Since the 1980s and 1990s China has made a consistent diplomatic effort to dominate the mining of other metals in Africa, mainly in [Zimbabwe](#), [Mali](#), [Ethiopia](#) and [Congo](#). This is because the continent is the source of a considerable proportion of global supplies of critical metals, such as cobalt (70 percent), platinum (90 percent) and manganese (50 percent). Cobalt is critical to the battery industry, and by taking over cobalt mines in Africa, China has become the [world’s number one producer of cobalt](#). China has also acquired control of the global graphite market and currently holds about 90 percent of graphite production in the world, though in order to secure full and lasting control, it imports large quantities of graphite from Mozambique and Madagascar. For [purposes of comparison](#), the United States produces 13 percent of its cobalt consumption

and produces no graphite at all, and in the view of the US Administration, this represents a danger to its national security.

Chinese control of various kinds of critical minerals (including but not limited to cobalt, graphite and manganese) is a cause of deep concern in the United States in the context of national security, due to the almost absolute American dependence on imports of essential components from China.

The Consequences of Chinese Domination of the Minerals Market

Rare Earth Elements

Control of the critical mineral markets enables the Chinese government to impose trade restrictions and leverage pressure to realize political gains by economic means. For example, [in 2010 and 2014](#) the Chinese tried to force Japan to change its policy towards China by preventing the supply of critical minerals to Japanese industry, causing severe damage to the Japanese automobile industry. [During the period 2009-2020](#), the Chinese government tightened the restrictions on exports of critical minerals to various countries, including a ban on the export of the technologies involved in the extraction and separation of rare earths, an essential element for the semiconductor and microchip industries, with all that entails. For example, the Chinese imposed restrictions on [the export of gallium and germanium](#), rare metals of crucial importance for the global chip industry and the production of fiber optics for broadband communications. Chinese exports of gallium in January-February 2024 amounted to 2,700 kg, compared to 8,800 kg in the same period in 2023. China is responsible for some [60 percent of the global production of these rare metals](#) and controls 90 percent of the factories engaged in processing them. Its actions created a shortage of gallium, causing its price to double to 575 dollars per kg in March 2024.

Lithium

Chinese control of the lithium market has dual significance with regards to essential components for the global vehicle industry: it affects both the chain of supply and the market of lithium for rechargeable batteries for electric vehicles; and it also impacts the supply of microchips needed for computers and processors in new vehicles, including electric ones.

Antimony

The Chinese government recently announced (in August 2024) the imposition of [export restrictions on an expensive metal called antimony](#) and its compounds, starting on September 15. Antimony is needed for many security and civilian applications, and China is considered the world's largest producer of the metal—48 percent of the antimony mined worldwide. These restrictions are in addition to the restrictions that the Chinese government imposed last year on gallium and germanium, both crucial to the microchip industry.

[As of 2019](#) China's relative share of the global extraction and production of critical metals and minerals ranges from 50 percent for copper and nickel, to 90 percent in the case of REE.

Response from Competitors

It is important to note that Chinese control of various kinds of critical minerals (including but not limited to cobalt, graphite and manganese) is a cause of deep concern in the United States in the context of national security, due to the almost absolute American dependence on imports of essential components from China. The Biden Administration wishes to increase the purchase of critical minerals from countries in Africa, both for reasons of national security, that is, control of the supply chain and reduction of dependence on Chinese imports, and as a geopolitical lever to encourage political stability, accelerate economic development, ease political tensions, and promote government transparency and prosperity in those countries.

This is being done largely by bolstering American involvement and the development of infrastructure and business partnerships with countries and companies in Africa. For example, to facilitate its entry into the lithium market in Zimbabwe, the United States [recently lifted the sanctions](#) imposed on Zimbabwe and began to invest in civilian infrastructure designed to create a “transport corridor” for the export of lithium through ports in neighboring countries. The [US is also investing](#) in local infrastructure and lithium reserves in order to erode the Chinese monopoly in this field and leverage its lithium energy independence for strategic and geopolitical achievements. The [US Administration is worried](#) that Chinese control of the market for vital vehicle components is damaging both to its national security and its automobile industry, and indirectly causing environmental damage by raising the price of electrical vehicles, thus encouraging drivers to stick with gasoline-powered vehicles and their high greenhouse gas emissions. Not only that, following rumors of Chinese intentions to purchase lithium, its price rose by six percent compared to early 2024, contrary to the sharp drop in prices in 2022 and 2023.

Chinese control is also a source of concern in [Australia and in the European Union](#), and they are in the process of looking for partners to develop their own technologies and resources in order to strengthen their economies and minimize the Chinese monopoly over various metals and minerals (such as its [94 percent share of total world magnesium exports](#)). Due to the importance of the issue, the EU decided to limit its dependence on external suppliers of critical metals and minerals, including rare earth elements, and to set up a large plant in [Estonia](#). Large [deposits of REE were recently discovered](#) in Norway, and—with the combined efforts of the United States, Canada and Australia—a considerable reduction (the report does not specify the quantity) is expected in Chinese control of the [REE chain of supply by 2030](#).

Significance and Recommendations for Israel

Israel must prepare for the possibility of an embargo, including a ban on exports of critical minerals to Israel. In addition to preparing for such a situation, Israel must also be ready for possible global shortages or restrictions on critical minerals, or damage to the chain of supply—events that could deal a fatal blow to its high tech and security industries, and particularly the manufacture of **microchips for military and civilian uses**. Minerals, certain metals and rare earth elements are **vital components** of various solid-state devices made in Israel, such as sensors, chips for civilian and military purposes, magnets for engines of all kinds, lasers for medicine and security applications and more. This matter is crucial since Israel manufactures many devices for its own use that it cannot purchase abroad and therefore must have access to the necessary minerals.

The preparations must include first of all a definition of the critical minerals, and a mapping of the essential purposes for which they are required. The supply of critical minerals must be secured by developing confidential ties and partnerships with countries that have natural reserves in Europe, Asia, Africa, the United States, and particularly in [South America](#). Another direction is economic development with the focus on the African continent, investment in infrastructure and generous investments (taking account of Israel’s budgetary constraints) with smaller profit margins in joint ventures in countries with natural resources, similar to [China’s current policy in Africa](#) and Israeli activity on the African continent in the 1960s.

Conclusion

Since the early 1980s the Chinese government has been investing in infrastructures used in the mining and processing of minerals in several countries in Africa, such as Congo, Mali, Ethiopia, Zimbabwe and Zambia, as well as investing in civilian infrastructure indirectly linked to this

field. Extensive Chinese investments in Africa and elsewhere offer a **combined response to both domestic and political-strategic needs**. The vision of the combined purpose is the development of the Chinese economy by means of accumulating strategic stocks of critical metals and minerals, or controlling the supply chain of certain consumer goods that are of crucial importance of the Chinese economy and the global economy. This meshes with the vision of Chinese President Xi Jinping, who speaks about controlling the microchip industry (which relies on critical minerals) as an **essential component of Chinese national security**. In parallel to its efforts to take control of mineral reserves in Africa, the Chinese government is also focusing on developing local natural resources and on massive imports of minerals for processing in China, in order to accumulate large quantities of essential raw materials and thus gain control of the global consumption

and supply chain of vital components. **The main lesson for Israel is that it must make urgent preparations to handle the risk of a global shortage or restrictions on the import of critical minerals—events that could be fatal to Israel’s high tech and defense industries.**

Dr. Yehoshua Kalisky is a senior researcher at the Institute for National Security Studies. He is currently technology director of a VCSEL consortium to develop unique diode lasers, and was formerly a director of an ALTIA consortium to develop fast and powerful fiber lasers. Prior to that he was a senior researcher in the defense establishment. Dr. Kalisky holds a doctorate from the Department of Physical Chemistry at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and a post-doctoral degree from the Xerox Research Center in Rochester, New York. He has initiated and led research on lasers that led to the development of advanced laser systems for industrial and medical applications. yehoshuak@inss.org.il



Light in the Darkness: How Can Israel-Egypt Energy Relations be Strengthened?

Ofir Winter

Institute for National Security Studies – Tel Aviv University

The energy crisis that struck Egypt in the summer of 2024, causing frequent power outages, highlighted Israel's importance as a natural gas supplier to the Egyptian economy. Energy cooperation between the two countries, which constitutes approximately 86% of their total trade, has mostly continued uninterrupted since the outbreak of the war on October 7, 2023, despite threats from Iran and its proxies against Israeli gas facilities. Given the tensions in relations between the two nations due to the war, the energy sector has the potential to serve as a central lever for strengthening and rebuilding their ties. This can be achieved through four measures: expanding Israeli gas exports to Egypt; developing the "Gaza Marine" gas field as part of efforts to rehabilitate Gaza under alternative Palestinian leadership to Hamas; enhancing the role of the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF) as a mechanism of regional dialogue to address political, security, and energy challenges; and expanding Israel-Egypt cooperation into the field of renewable energy.

Keywords: Egypt, Israel, energy, gas, Operation Iron Swords, peace, normalization, EMGF

Introduction

Egyptian Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly made an extraordinary public [apology](#) this past June, addressing the Egyptian people and asking for their forgiveness over the widespread power outages that afflicted the country for several hours each day. These outages sparked significant [public anger](#) against the Cairo authorities for the second consecutive summer. He assured the public that his government had developed a plan to overcome the crisis by the end of 2024.

The energy shortage in Egypt [stems](#) from several factors. First, there has been a decline

Egyptian Prime Minister Mostafa Madbouly made an extraordinary public apology this past June, addressing the Egyptian people and asking for their forgiveness over the widespread power outages that afflicted the country for several hours each day

in the output of local gas fields. For example, production at the Zohr gas field [dropped](#) by more than 40% in 2024 compared to its peak production in 2021. Currently, gas accounts

for 51% of Egypt's energy production and is responsible for 76.8% of its electricity generation. Second, Egypt's growing debt to foreign gas companies has led to reduced investments in developing gas fields in Egypt, negatively impacting local gas production. Third, there are high levels of electricity theft from Egypt's power grid, which in some areas reach 45%. Fourth, electricity consumption in Egypt has doubled over the past two decades

due to population growth and peaks during the summer months, when temperatures in some parts of the country soar to 47°C. Fifth, there is a slight but expected seasonal decline of about 8% in Israeli gas exports to Egypt due to increased domestic consumption in Israel during the summer.

The depth of Egypt's energy crisis is reflected in several metrics. Egyptian Petroleum Minister Karim Bedawi noted in October 2024 that Egypt's gas production had declined by 25% over the past two years. In the first half of 2024, domestic gas production in Egypt decreased by approximately 15% compared to 2023, with the second quarter of 2024 being the worst in terms of gas production in the country since 2017. At the same time, electricity consumption in 2024 surged by 12% compared to 2022. The situation reached a point where Egypt lost its energy independence for the first time since 2018 and was forced to import fuels at a cost of approximately \$1 billion per month to meet the demands of its power grid.

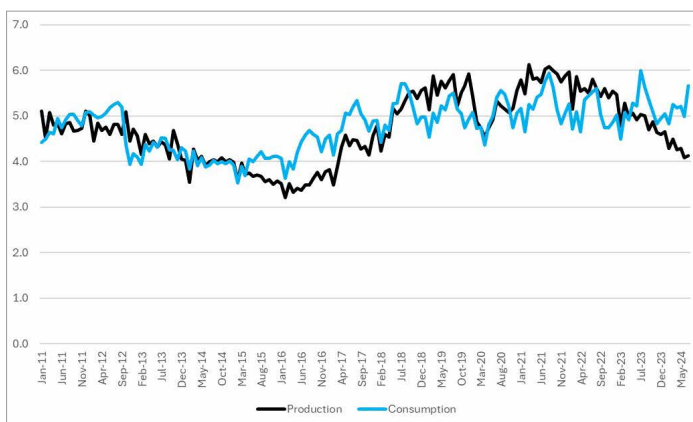
Furthermore, Egypt has transitioned from being an exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG) to an importer of it. In 2022, Egypt produced LNG at an export value of \$8.4 billion. In 2023, the economic value of gas exports amounted to just around \$2.7 billion (part of the difference stems from gas prices rather than available export reserves). By May 2024, Egypt was forced to suspend LNG exports to meet domestic market demands. As of September, Egypt had even signed contracts to import 50 LNG cargoes for internal use. To Cairo's misfortune, the loss of LNG exports as a source of foreign currency coincided with a more than 60% decline in traffic through the Suez Canal and a total revenue loss exceeding \$6 billion due to Houthi attacks in the Red Sea.

Gas Relations Between Israel and Egypt Amid the War

The gas shortage presents Cairo with significant energy and economic challenges, but it also offers an opportunity to strengthen Egypt-Israel

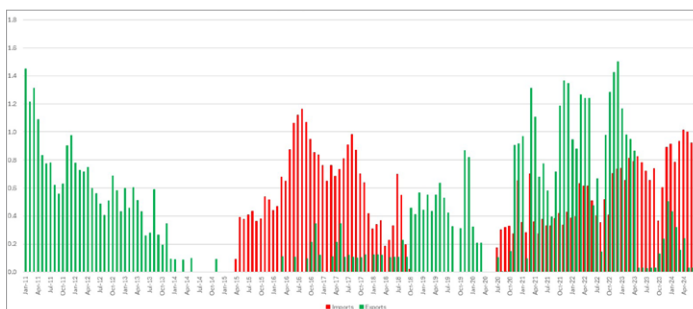
The situation reached a point where Egypt lost its energy independence for the first time since 2018 and was forced to import fuels at a cost of approximately \$1 billion per month to meet the demands of its power grid.

Figure 1. Monthly Gas Consumption vs. Monthly Gas Production in Egypt, monthly BCM, 2024–2011



Source: Joint Organizations Data Initiative (JODI)

Figure 2. Monthly Gas Imports vs. Monthly Gas Exports in Egypt, monthly BCM, 2024–2011



Source: Joint Organizations Data Initiative (JODI)

relations. In recent years, Israel has become an important gas supplier to the Egyptian economy. According to the [Energy Security Report](#) of the Israeli Natural Gas Trade Association from September 2024, Israel exported 8.7 billion cubic meters (BCM) of gas to Egypt in 2023, accounting for one-sixth of Egypt's gas consumption—a notable increase from 6.3 BCM in 2022. Gas now constitutes approximately 86% of the total trade between Israel and Egypt. The volume of gas exports to Egypt last year amounted to about seven billion shekels and is expected to grow with the development of transmission infrastructure in the coming years.

The relative stability of natural gas trade between the two countries during the war is remarkable, despite tensions over various issues such as the Philadelphi Corridor, the Rafah crossing, and the prospective role of the Palestinian Authority in Gaza. The main disruption occurred during the first five weeks of the war when gas supplies to Egypt were [reduced](#) by more than 50%. Gas extraction from the Tamar field, located about 20 kilometers off the coast of Gaza, was halted to protect the platform and its workers from missile strikes, and the operation of the EMG pipeline from Ashkelon to El-Arish was suspended due to sabotage concerns. Conversely, Israeli gas flowing to Egypt via Jordan continued uninterrupted since the onset of the war.

Amid the intense clashes between Israel, Lebanon, and Iran, Egypt's concerns over further disruptions to the flow of natural gas from Israel have grown. The Egyptian Prime Minister [warned](#) in October 2024 that a regional war could disrupt Egypt's regular energy supply and push the country into a state of emergency, which he termed a "war economy." The likelihood of this scenario increased following Iran's explicit [threat](#) to attack Israeli energy facilities in response to a potential Israeli strike on Iran's oil industry.

In practice, the impact of the regional escalation on the energy market has so far been limited. The Iranian missile attack on

October 1 [temporarily](#) halted production at the Tamar and Leviathan gas fields, but [operations](#) were quickly resumed. Efforts to increase gas exports from Israel to Egypt are continuing as planned. However, the ongoing uncertainty surrounding the war and its end date is affecting foreign gas partnerships and delaying regional development plans. In October, Chevron [announced](#) at least a six-month delay in laying an additional underwater pipeline to transport gas from the Leviathan field to the production platform. Ahmed Bayoumi, an economic and energy researcher at the Egyptian Center for Strategic Studies (ECSS), [warned](#) that due to the situation, international companies are suspending existing projects and are reluctant to invest in new ones in the Eastern Mediterranean.

According to the Energy Security Report of the Israeli Natural Gas Trade Association from September 2024, Israel exported 8.7 billion cubic meters (BCM) of gas to Egypt in 2023, accounting for one-sixth of Egypt's gas consumption

Conclusions and Recommendations

Egypt and Israel have managed to maintain gas as a stable and ongoing channel of cooperation throughout most of the war, remaining resilient against security threats and political pressures. This was achieved with the understanding that gas is a strategic asset for both sides. Decoupling gas from military events and political disputes has ensured a steady energy supply for Egypt, supported its political stability and economic well-being, and provided a market for Israeli gas, generating revenue for the Israeli economy. The shared interest in energy has so far outweighed the gaps between the two countries during the war, slightly easing tensions and offering them a constructive dialogue channel during a period of strained overall relations.

At the same time, the war has raised questions about the future of the Eastern Mediterranean as an energy hub, an attractive destination for international capital investments, and a

stable, reliable, and competitive gas source for the European Union, the United States, and international energy companies amidst the region's many geopolitical challenges. The war also led to the downplaying of gas ties between the countries, contrasting with the relative openness that had characterized previous years.

While the picture of Israel-Egypt relations regarding energy is encouraging compared to other aspects of their ties, the potential in this field remains far from fully realized. To strengthen and expand the positive trends, the following actions are recommended for both nations, during the war if possible, and certainly in its aftermath:

1. Promoting projects to increase Israeli gas exports to Egypt.

The planned gas pipeline from Ramat Hovav to Nitzana, approved in August 2024, is a step in the right direction, but accelerating the development of additional gas transportation infrastructure should be prioritized. According to the Natural Gas Association (representing the operators of the Leviathan and Tamar gas fields), delays in constructing the Ashalim-Nitzana and Ashdod-Ashkelon gas pipelines cost the Israeli economy approximately 2.35 billion shekels annually. These projects' importance is underscored by Egypt's gas shortages and increased electricity consumption, presenting an opportunity to deepen bilateral relations.

2. Israeli support for Egypt's aspiration to develop the Gaza marine gas field after the war.

This support should be conditional on it contributing to establishing an alternative to Hamas for Palestinian rule in Gaza and facilitating its reconstruction. In February 2021, Egypt and the Palestinian Authority signed a memorandum of understanding to cooperate in developing the field and transporting gas to Gaza and Egypt for liquefaction and domestic use. The estimated gas reserve in the field is 30 BCM, with an annual production potential of 2 BCM, most of which would be sold to Egypt, providing

the Palestinians with an estimated total profit of \$2.7 billion. In July 2023, Israel agreed to advance the project under the condition that its security and political interests were preserved, but the war has since suspended it. Renewing support for the project could alleviate Egypt's gas shortage, help stabilize Gaza, and uproot conspiracy theories prevalent in Arab and Western media alleging Israeli intentions to seize Palestinian gas resources.

3. Transforming the Eastern Mediterranean gas forum into a more significant regional framework,

leveraging it as a dialogue channel for addressing political, security, and energy challenges in times of crisis. The forum, which already includes eight full members (Israel, Egypt, France, Greece, Cyprus, Italy, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority) and three observers (the European Union, the United States, and the World Bank), is a unique platform for advancing gas cooperation. The war has highlighted that safeguarding regional energy security requires member states to work together on political and security levels to de-escalate tensions and resolve conflicts, establish a stable regional order, and protect strategic infrastructure from military and terrorist threats. Moreover, global and regional energy needs underscore the forum's interest in expanding its scope to include renewable energy to maintain its international standing, enhance its long-term relevance, and maximize potential cooperation among its members. In the future, admitting new members such as Turkey, Lebanon, and Libya could be considered if political conditions permit.

4. Developing joint Israeli Egyptian programs to diversify energy sources, with an emphasis on renewable energies.

Cooperation in this field, particularly in solar energy, would reduce mutual dependence on natural gas and enhance the energy security of both nations. Such programs would

benefit from combining their comparative advantages, such as Israel's technological expertise and Egypt's favorable geographical and climatic conditions. Joint projects in this direction could attract international capital investments and strengthen Egypt and Israel's standing in the global energy market, subject to improved security conditions and risk mitigation in the region.

In conclusion, despite the increasing geopolitical challenges since October 7, 2023, natural gas remains a stable anchor in Israel-Egypt relations. Expanding joint energy projects could serve as a lever for strengthening bilateral ties and returning them to a trajectory of cooperation, integration, and regional prosperity. At the same

time, it is crucial to pursue stable political and security arrangements in the Palestinian and Lebanese arenas to create a supportive climate necessary for realizing the energy and economic interests of both sides.

* The author thanks Amira Oron, former Israeli Ambassador to Egypt, for her kind assistance.

Dr. Ofir Winter is a senior researcher at the Institute for National Security Studies and a lecturer in the Department of Arabic and Islamic Studies at Tel Aviv University. His research focuses on Egypt and Jordan and their relations with Israel. He is the author of the book *Peace in the Name of Allah: Islamic Discourses on Treaties with Israel* (De Gruyter, 2022). ofirw@inss.org.il



From Curiosity to Skepticism: Israeli Public Opinion on China

Roy Ben Tzur

Institute for National Security Studies – Tel Aviv University

Israeli public opinion on China shows a dynamic and complex picture of relations between the two countries that varies according to local and global political and economic contexts. Support for China among the Israeli public has changed dramatically over recent years. The Israeli Chinese rapprochement that began in 2013 induced most Israelis to adopt a positive attitude towards China. Starting in 2020, and especially after October 7, 2023, support for China has fallen steeply. Israelis' perception of China is affected by factors such as the policy pursued by Israeli governments, people-to-people ties, the extent and character of media coverage of China, and Israel's relations with the US and China. At the same time, over the years, Israeli public opinion on China has differed from that of other developed and democratic countries—the decline in support for China in Israel began several years later than in those countries. This article reviews the figures for public opinion in Israel on China. It examines the changes that have occurred, the factors that brought about these changes, and how these changes may be expected to indicate a deterioration in Israel's future relations with China.

Keywords: public opinion, Israel-Chinese relations, the Israeli public, public opinion surveys, international image, superpower competition, global trends

Introduction

After Deng Xiaoping, the preeminent leader of the People's Republic of China, initiated the era of reforms and the opening of China to the West in 1978, the establishment of a positive global image became an important element in China's strategy as a foundation for promoting its worldwide interests. China aimed to become a strong economic power that was not politically identified with other countries and did not interfere in their internal affairs. In recent decades, the Chinese government has focused its efforts on "soft diplomacy," designed to achieve its objectives through

attraction and persuasion, rather than through the exercise of force. This effort developed into a formal doctrine of influence mechanisms operated by the Chinese Communist Party throughout the world, through the formation of a network of connections and the development of frameworks for cooperation, while applying economic, political, and military means of pressure.

The results of China's public relations efforts can be seen in surveys conducted by the Pew Research Center, which has been surveying global public opinion on China for the past two

decades. Pew has reported dramatic changes in recent years in China's international image—a major drop in sympathetic public opinion towards China. However, the perceptions of China vary between regions, and are shaped by economic ties, diplomatic relations, and regional security anxieties. A positive view of China has been maintained in both many of the developing countries and countries enjoying friendly relations with China, such as Indonesia (49% support in 2023) and Mexico (56% support in 2024). In contrast, positive views of China in Western democracies such as the US, European countries, Canada, and Australia have diminished sharply. The proportion of Americans holding a positive view of China shrank from 52% in 2006 to only 16% in 2024. Positive attitudes towards China also dropped acutely in European countries, e.g. from 56% in 2006 to 20% in 2024 in Germany. In the democracies located near China, such as Japan, rates of support remained low in all the surveys, reaching as low as 12% in 2024.

Starting in 2013, when Chinese President Xi Jinping took office, regional tension mounted as a result of China's growing aggressiveness and territorial demands in the South China Sea, coupled with continual modernization of the Chinese People's Liberation Army. In the global sphere, China expanded its involvement in cyberattacks, thefts of intellectual property, espionage, and interference efforts in media, higher education, and other sectors. These efforts, together with China's lack of transparency, generated increased suspicion and uncertainty about its intentions, and aggravated political tension between China and many countries.

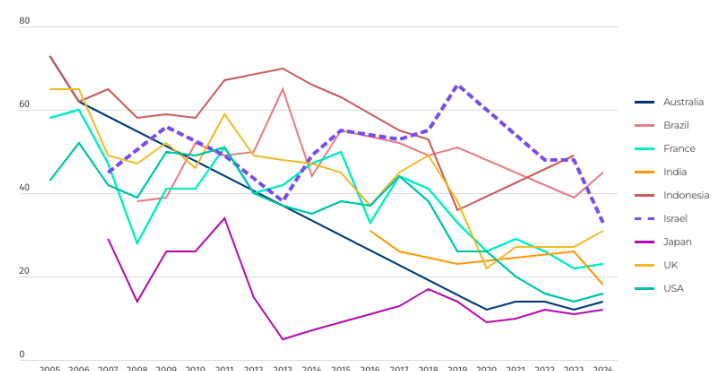
Chinese activity in Israel

China has consistently made an effort to acquire a favorable image in Israel. Its primary interests are Israel's advanced capabilities in science, technology, and arms. Its main targets are Israeli government figures and wealthy people in various industrial sectors. The

Chinese Communist Party operates channels of influence, primarily in the Hebrew language media. For example, the Chinese Ambassador to Israel frequently publishes articles in Hebrew in the local Israeli media, and the Chinese Embassy conducts tours in China for media figures (Karash-Hazon, 2020; Linn and Yaish, 2023; Cai, 2022, 2024). In addition to “soft” propaganda, the Chinese Embassy in Israel has sent a number of letters in recent years to Israeli media outlets, criticizing them for publishing reports it regarded as damaging to Chinese interests. For example, in 2022, following the publication of an interview with the Taiwanese foreign minister, *The Jerusalem Post* received a [request to delete](#) the article because it allegedly distorted the situation.

One familiar prominent example in Israel is “Chinese Itzik” (Chinese name Xi Xiaoqi), who broadcasts on China Radio International (CRI)—as a Chinese citizen who speaks fluent Hebrew, talks about China “from the inside,” and portrays it to the Israeli public in a positive light. He entered the consciousness of the Israeli public in 2012 when he began appearing in media channels in Israel, in advertisements, and on social media. However, an attempt at cooperation with “Kan” public broadcasting corporation in 2017 revealed the challenges involved in joint ventures with Chinese government affiliated media. An [investigation](#) by *The Seventh Eye* magazine revealed that

Figure 1. Percentages of support for China in selected countries (2005-2024), Pew Research Center Survey



editors of the “Kan” digital division had signed a contract committing to avoid offending “cultural sensitivities,” which was liable to be interpreted as the exercise of self-censorship. Moreover, Chinese Itzik and CRI are affiliated with the Chinese Communist Party and its influence campaigns. A 2017 article by the deputy head of CRI discussing the use of “foreign mouths and eyes” in advertising the Belt and Road Initiative and the approach of President Xi Jinping, [singled out Chinese Itzik for great praise](#). Also in 2017, Chinese Itzik was invited as a keynote speaker to an event staged by the central propaganda department for journalists [who “fulfill” Xi Jinping’s instructions](#) to the media and who “are winning the confidence of the Party and the people.” Although changes in Israeli public opinion obviously cannot be attributed with certainty and exclusively to Chinese Itzik, improved public opinion figures in Israel do correspond to the years of his activity.

Public Opinion on China in Israel

The Pew Research Center has been surveying public opinion in Israel since 2007. According to its findings, Israeli public opinion in the first decade of the twenty-first century was mostly neutral towards China, and half of Israelis held positive views about China. China’s public standing in Israel took a turn for the worse in 2013, with the proportion of Israeli’s holding positive views about China declining to 38%.

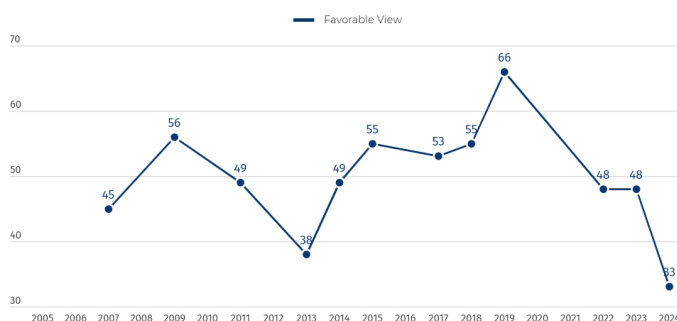
The trend in Israeli public opinion reversed in 2013-2019, with favorable attitudes towards China reaching a peak of 66% at the end of this period—making Israel one of the five countries in the world with the highest proportion of public support for China. This support has since waned, however, and plummeted drastically this year to only 33% support—half of the 2019 level.

The fluctuations in Israeli public opinion can be linked, inter alia, to the policies pursued by governments in Israel and the character of its diplomatic relations with China. Official relations with China were established in 1992, but underwent a crisis early in the first decade of the twenty-first century after Israel canceled the sale of Phalcon aircraft to China and its upgrade of China’s Israeli-manufactured Harpy drones, under pressure from Washington, as the tension between the two superpowers intensified. An upward trend in support for China among Israelis began to manifest beginning in 2007, possibly because of increased participation by Chinese companies in huge projects in Israel, such as the digging of the Carmel Tunnels by the China Civil Engineering Construction Corporation (CCECC) and the acquisition of Israeli company Makhteshim Agan by Chinese corporation ChemChina. Other possible reasons for this increase in support were China’s positive global image resulting from the hosting of the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing and its effective handling of the global economic crisis that year.

The trend in Israeli public opinion towards China did not remain positive, however, and began moving in the other direction starting in 2009. A renewed rise in support began in 2013, corresponding to the warming of relations under the Netanyahu governments and the stepped-up cooperation between Jerusalem and Beijing. This began with government decisions on increased cooperation and the Prime Minister’s visit to China, portraying China as a country with enormous potential for cooperation with the “Startup Nation.” In tandem with these closer ties, the proportion of positive views towards

Figure 2. Israeli public support for China 2007-2024

Please tell me if you have a very favorable, somewhat favorable, somewhat unfavorable, or very unfavorable opinion of China - **Israel**



Source: [Pew Research Center](#)

regime, and another 22% to China’s violations of human and civil rights.

The 2023 survey also examined the Israeli view of the Israel-China-US triangular relationship. Most of the Israelis questioned said that Israel should take US needs and interests into account in setting its policy in order to preserve the special relationship. At the same time, it was revealed that the Israeli public was aware of the growing tension between the US and China, but did not regard this as a direct and substantial threat to Israel’s national security. 44.4% of those questioned gave a medium response (3 on a scale of 1 to 5) when asked

to what degree the competition between the US and China was affecting Israel’s national security. 40% of those questioned believed that Israel should trade with China with no restrictions except for defense and advanced technology, while 23.3% believed that Israel should make it clear to the US that Israel was an independent country acting according to its interests. Together with its identification with the US, when it came to tension between the two superpowers, the Israeli public exhibited a pragmatic approach to foreign relations that sought an equilibrium between economic interests in cooperation with China and the strategic importance of the US. This reflects a wish to maintain room for independent action vis-à-vis the great powers, while realizing the importance of the balance between the economy and security.

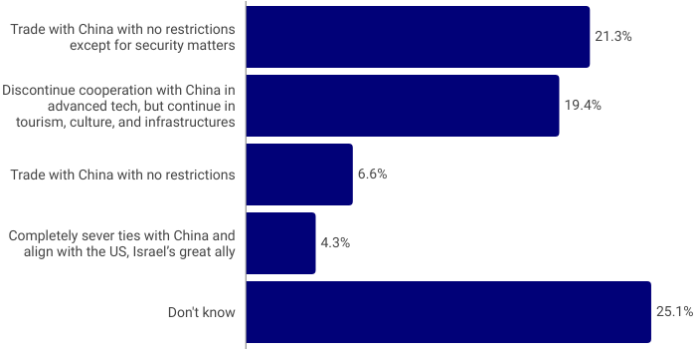
The steepest decline in Israeli support for China was observed after the massacre on October 7, 2023, following which China consistently expressed criticism of Israel and unequivocal support for the Palestinians and indirect support for Hamas. A [survey](#) conducted by INSS in May 2024 showed that 35% of those questioned said that their opinion of China had changed for the worse since October 7, 2023, while only 1.3% said that their opinion had changed for the better. A Pew Research Center survey in July 2024 reported that only 33% of those questioned had expressed a positive opinion of China, 15% less than in the preceding year (before October 7). A [Swords of Iron survey](#) conducted by the INSS Data Analytics Center in September 2024 indicated that 10% of the Israeli public regarded China as a hostile country, 40% as an unfriendly country, 15% as a friendly country, and only 1% as an ally. The remaining 34% said that they did not know enough to answer the question. China, which has traditionally supported the Palestinians, has not condemned the Hamas massacre to this day. It has also called for an investigation of Israel’s “crimes” and vetoed American proposals in the UN Security Council. Chinese rhetoric

The steepest decline in Israeli support for China was observed after the massacre on October 7, 2023, following which China consistently expressed criticism of Israel and unequivocal support for the Palestinians and indirect support for Hamas.

Figure 5.



Figure 6. Public opinion in Israel about the effect of China-US Relations on Israel



Source: INSS National Security Index – Public Opinion Survey 2022-2023

against Israel has been vitriolic throughout the war, with an emphasis on the Palestinian right to “armed struggle.” China also cites the right of return as a fundamental Palestinian right.

Surveys continue to show significant differences of opinion between Jewish and Arab populations in Israel on China. According to Pew Research Center figures, only 25% of Jews held positive views about China in 2024, while the corresponding figure among Israeli Arabs was 61%. As noted, the percentage of support for China among Jews was 18% lower than in the preceding year, while the decline in positive views among Arabs was smaller—only 7%. The gap between Jewish and Arab public opinion in Israel with respect to China is probably due to the differences between the two communities in political, cultural, and ideological identity—the Arab public in Israel is likely to be more tolerant of China’s views, mostly because of China’s traditional support for the Palestinians. The negative effect of China’s recent stance on Israel in the wake of the Swords of Iron war is therefore less pronounced among the Arab public.

A Comparative Look at Public Opinion in Israel

The Pew Research Center figures show that Israeli public opinion differs from that of other developed countries around the world. It appears that support for China in Israel declined several years later than elsewhere: the downturn in support for China in democratic and Western countries began in 2017, at which time the trend in Israel was in the opposite direction, with sympathy for China reaching a peak and declining only in 2022. Trump’s entry into the White House in 2017, the escalating trade war, the campaign against the threat posed by transfers of technologies to China and Chinese thefts of intellectual property, aggravated the rivalry between the superpowers and cost China support in global opinion. The proportion of sympathy in the UK and the US, for example, was halved from 2017-2020 (45%

support in 2017 and 22% support in 2020 in the UK). Similar figures were reported in the European Union: a decline in support of 18% in France, 9% in Germany, and 6% in Greece.

In addition to reflecting the quality of diplomatic relations between Israel and China at the time, the Pew Research Center figures show a difference in the Israeli public’s moral priorities. While a majority of the public in European countries and North America regards the issue of human rights as more important than economic cooperation with China, 57% of Israelis exhibit a more utilitarian attitude, preferring advancement of economic ties with

It appears that support for China in Israel declined several years later than elsewhere: the downturn in support for China in democratic and Western countries began in 2017, at which time the trend in Israel was in the opposite direction, with sympathy for China reaching a peak and declining only in 2022.

Figure 7.

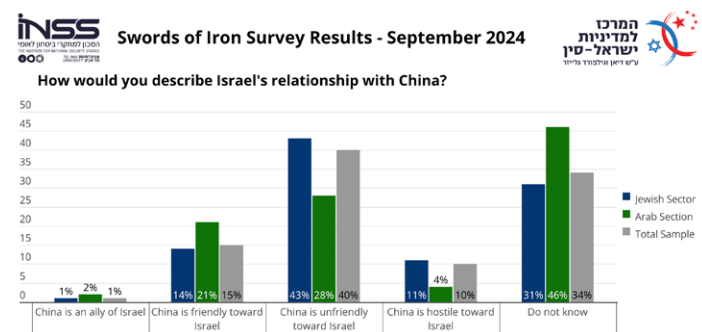
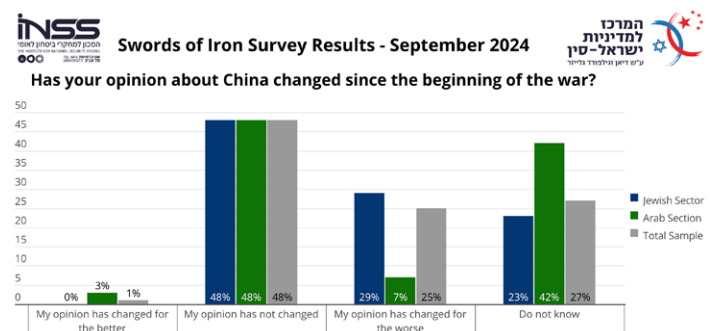


Figure 8.



China to the promotion of human rights in that country.

Summary and Conclusions

The figures presented in this article indicate that the policy pursued by Israeli governments and the quality of Israeli Chinese diplomatic and economic relations have had a major impact on fluctuations in Israeli public opinion towards China. When economic cooperation prospered, agreements were being signed, and tourism was increasing, sympathy for China rose; and fell in the absence of these factors. Another factor was the portrayal of China in popular media in Israel and how it was covered by those media.

The analysis also shows that China's direct actions and its policies, especially since October 2023 and during the Swords of Iron war, have had a major impact on Israeli public opinion. China's position during this period, which featured no condemnation of Hamas' attacks and a critical stance towards Israel in international forums, exacerbated the negative perceptions of China, in contrast to the previous positive or neutral opinions about China held by many Israelis.

Israeli public opinion on China reflects a limit interested in global affairs; the local public is preoccupied with urgent local concerns and is less worried about broader geopolitical changes. It is reasonable to assume that this disassociation delayed the Israeli public's response to significant global changes, such as China's growing international power and its strategic consequences. The competition between the US and China penetrated Israeli public consciousness at a relatively late stage, and it appears that the Israeli public is taking a pragmatic view of Israel's triangular relationship with the US and China. A degree of unfamiliarity with the geopolitical rivalry is discernable, due to different priorities in Israel and the media focus on other acute issues.

It is plausible to suggest that the feelings of the Israeli public will influence the future desire for collaborations with China and will be reflected in the ties between the two peoples as

well as the level of academic and commercial cooperation. China has enormous economic power and is an important geopolitical player whom Israel must not ignore or regard as its enemy. If the Israeli government wishes to continue enjoying positive relations with China after the war ends, it must promote understanding of the communist country among the public, the business sector, and in institutions of higher education, for the purposes of both advancing essential cooperation and instilling caution and skepticism in meeting the challenges to be faced.

Roy Ben Tzur is a research assistant at the Diane & Guilford Glazer Israel-China Policy Center at the Institute for National Security Studies. He holds a BA in East Asian studies and political science from Tel Aviv University. He was demobilized with the rank of captain from the IDF, where he served as an international relations officer and led operational campaigns in the Israeli Intelligence Corps. roybnz@inss.org.il

Sources

- Cai, R. (2022, August 26). 3 Key Facts about the Taiwan Question. *Israel Hayom*. <https://www.israelhayom.com/opinions/three-key-facts-about-the-taiwan-question/>.
- Cai, R. (2024, February 20). Year of the Dragon: Economic Recovery in China is Creating an Opportunity for Close Cooperation, with Israel and the World. *Israel Hayom* <https://www.israelhayom.co.il/news/world-news/article/15296210> (Hebrew).
- Israel Hayom. (2017, March 21). Israel-China Economic Cooperation 'A Match Made in Heaven.' <https://www.israelhayom.co.il/article/462049>.
- Karash-Hazon, H. (2020, April 16). Chinese Ambassador to Israel: The World is Searching for a Scapegoat. *Makor Rishon* http://il.china-embassy.gov.cn/eng/sgxw/202004/t20200417_1873909.htm.
- Linn, E. and Yaish, S. (2023, January 4). Chinese Ambassador in an Interview to Israel Hayom: The Chinese and Israeli Peoples Have Demonstrated that a Friend in Need is a Friend Indeed. *Israel Hayom*. <https://www.israelhayom.com/2023/01/04/the-chinese-and-israeli-people-have-demonstrated-vividly-that-a-friend-in-need-is-a-friend-indeed/>.



Symposium: The Role of Ideology in the Conduct of Islamist Actors

Raz Zimmt*

Institute for National Security Studies – Tel Aviv University

Hamas' attack on October 7, 2023, reopened the debate on the role of revolutionary ideological conceptions in the decision-making of radical Islamic actors. On November 6, 2024, the Institute for National Security Studies held a symposium to discuss lessons, insights, and implications of the conduct of Islamist actors during the multi-front campaign in the past year concerning the function of revolutionary religious ideology in their policy. Although the symposium expressed broad consensus regarding the importance of ideology in the conduct of these actors, disagreements emerged regarding the need for a paradigm shift on this issue in light of the lessons of the war and the impact of the regional war's implications on how to deal with revolutionary ideological actors.

Introduction

Hamas' murderous attack from Gaza on October 7, 2023, reopened the debate on the role of revolutionary ideological conceptions in decision-making processes among radical Islamist actors. The public and academic discourse that arose following the attack repeatedly raised the question of whether the intelligence agencies, commentators, and academic researchers had not underestimated the importance of religious ideology in the conduct of Islamist entities, movements, and organizations. To examine this issue, on November 6, 2024, we held a symposium with the participation of academic researchers with the aim of examining three main issues:

1. Does the October 7 attack and the lessons of the multi-arena campaign in the past year require a reassessment of the weight of religious and ideological conceptions in

the conduct and decision-making processes of Islamist actors, as opposed to pragmatic interests and considerations?

2. Can we identify shared characteristics and/or differences in the conduct of different regional actors, with an emphasis on Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran, concerning the role of ideological or religious conceptions in their decision-making? What explains these differences?
3. Policy recommendations regarding how to adequately address Islamist actors operating under a religious and revolutionary worldview.

The meeting was held virtually (on Zoom) and facilitated by Dr. Raz Zimmt. Prof. Meir Litvak, Dr. Dina Lisnyansky, Dr. Sarah Feuer, Dr. Daniel Sobelman, Dr. Michael Milshtein, and Yohanan Tzoreff participated.

* The author wishes to thank Dr. Gallia Lindenstrauss and Revital Yerushalmi for their great assistance in organizing, managing, and summarizing the meeting.

Methodological issues

One of the issues that stood out during the meeting was the methodological dimension. Some of the participants emphasized that there is no contradiction between ideology and pragmatic conduct based on interests (“both,” not “either-or”). It is impossible to treat ideology and pragmatism separately because understanding the interests of a specific actor is subject to interpretation based on that actor’s ideological worldview.

Furthermore, framing the distinction between ideological conduct and pragmatic or rational conduct does not help us understand the reality. When we encounter a certain kind of conduct that does not apply all of the ideological elements, we might conclude that it is a pragmatic movement, but this is not necessarily a correct understanding of the nature of the actor. For example, on several occasions, the Hamas movement declared a change in its definition of the Israeli Palestinian conflict, so some concluded that it was a pragmatic movement, ignoring the fact that it operated according to a firm ideology whose importance was not sufficiently understood. An ideological movement can be pragmatic without relinquishing its ideological conceptions, while waiting for the opportunity to implement them. Pragmatism means finding the best way to achieve the goal, which in itself can be morally abhorrent. The greatest murderers in history were sometimes pragmatic, so this term has no significance.

Some of the discussion’s participants pointed out a methodological flaw on the part of academia and intelligence agencies in treating ideological ideas seriously. One of the researchers even expressed remorse for a mistaken understanding of the ideological worldview and its importance. It was noted that many academic and intelligence researchers do not understand ideological people. Academia is overly influenced by Marxist and post-modern conceptions that lead to the mistaken assessment that people do not really believe

in the ideas they present, and that this is just a pretense for attaining material interests and power.

Moreover, the difficulty in deciphering Hamas reflects deep problems in Israeli society, as fewer and fewer Israelis, including those in academia, the media, and even the intelligence community, have a good command of the region’s languages, understand its culture in depth, or know its history. In the background are the low status of the social sciences and humanities, the collective veneration of studies and professions that produce fast money, and the idolization of the information and cyber revolution, Google Translate, artificial intelligence, and big data. In the current era, those who set the tone in government, academia, and defense are analysts who rely on Western logic. They present absolute and supposedly precise quantitative data, usually without being proficient at the language, culture, and history of the “other,” and there is a constant decline in the stature of the “Arabists,” content experts who, in many cases, hold the keys to deciphering the logic of those who are not members of our culture. There is no way around it: those who are not proficient at the research object’s language and the intricacies of its culture cannot claim to understand it and should feel deep discomfort when presenting analyses of it. This position also led to disagreements, with some claiming that several very good researchers of Islamic movements are not proficient at Arabic.

Furthermore, many secular researchers find it very difficult to understand religious ideology. For example, some have difficulty understanding the conduct of the Islamic Republic, whose basic need for deterrence also stems from ideology and from a Shiite worldview in which Iranian Islamic culture is threatened by the West, especially the United States. This influenced Iran’s unwillingness to pursue cooperation with the Americans, due to the constant fear of Western influence. Hezbollah and Hamas also acted based on ideology in their enormous investments in

military infrastructure over the years. Even when these actors take pragmatic steps, this does not mean that they have relinquished their ideological vision, for example, regarding fulfilling the long-term vision of destroying Israel. This is not just rhetoric and must be taken seriously.

According to some of the participants, the Israeli analysis of the reasons for the October 7 attack also reflects a misunderstanding of Hamas. One conspicuous such misunderstanding is an attempt to find reasons from the realms of Western political realism: the claim that Hamas leader Yahya Sinwar sought to prevent normalization between Israel and Saudi Arabia (even though the idea arose in his mind a decade before discussion of normalization began), to strengthen Hamas' standing in the internal arena, and to bring about the release of prisoners. In practice, his logic was based on an ideological motive: jihad was the essence. The campaign was his life's mission and was perceived as the divine will or a divine command that could not be evaded, contrary to some Israeli figures wondering whether Hamas could have been dissuaded from carrying its plan if a political initiative or economic gestures had been put forward. At the root of the October 7 debacle is an inability to decipher Hamas' logic, particularly the weight of the movement's ideology in its considerations, and the tendency to assume that extremists who come to power gradually become more moderate. As modern history has taught us, a process of moderation is possible. For example, the Soviet Union became more moderate between Stalin's rule and Brezhnev's rule. However, this is not inevitable (Hitler and Saddam Hussein, for example, did not become more moderate). Additionally, extremists usually move in the opposite direction: they accumulate more resources that enable them to instigate even more violent actions than in the past, to fulfill their ideological vision. While being in government forces them to provide civil services and develop the population's

quality of life, it simultaneously enables them to accumulate and develop weapons, shape the cognition of the societies they rule, and enlist them in the struggles that they wage. Contrary to this claim, one of the participants in the discussion pointed out that the trigger to Hamas' decision to carry out the October 7 attack emerged only following the failure of Operation Guardian of the Walls and the final formation of the "convergence of the arenas" concept. Hence, ideological movements also consider capabilities and are not committed to implementing their ideological views at all costs.

In attempting to understand the methodological failure, it was also claimed that the methodological blindness is partly the result of a psychological failure: we have difficulty dealing with and accepting the idea that there is someone who wants to destroy us. Consequently, even when we found signs that the Islamist actors mean what they say, there was a tendency to diminish the importance of these statements and to claim that they do not have the ability to carry out their ideology-based intentions. Not accepting the idea that the other wants to destroy you is a mechanism for coping with helplessness. In contrast, it was claimed in the discussion that over the years, the Arabs had provided Israel with many reasons to take their threats lightly, because they made baseless boastful and vain statements and sometimes even became the objects of ridicule and scorn in the eyes of their own people (as Fouad Ajami put it: "bloated clichés."). Thus, not every statement should be taken literally.

Does the October 7 attack require a paradigm shift?

The discussion on the significance of the October 7 attack with respect to the need for a reassessment of the role of ideology among Islamist actors sparked debate. According to some of the researchers, even today, we can argue that the conduct of these actors is based mainly on a strategic, not an ideological, dimension. Although there was consensus that

ideological conceptions must not be ignored, especially among actors with a revolutionary religious worldview, actors operating in the framework of the pro-Iranian axis (the “resistance front”) in the region also make decisions in a cold and utilitarian manner based on strategic considerations. According to this approach, even Sinwar acted in accordance with a strategic plan, which ultimately did not succeed, but could have succeeded under certain conditions. Hamas believed that if it did not act soon via a regional campaign against Israel, the Israeli government’s policy would create irreversible facts on the ground. From this perspective, there was a strategic and regional decision here to act in October 2023. The motives for the October 7 attack were thus thoroughly nationalist and aimed to create shock on the ground that would restore the Palestinian issue’s central place on the agenda. It is not certain that the motives for the decision to carry out the attack were related to an ideological vision of destroying Israel, because Hamas itself did not really believe that it was capable of doing so. In contrast with this approach, some indicated other evidence from the past year proving that Sinwar actually did believe that it was capable.

According to this approach, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah’s decision to join the campaign against Israel was also based on strategic and pragmatic considerations. While he built up his organization’s military capabilities over the years, unlike Sinwar, he would not have carried out the plan to “conquer the Galilee” except in a scenario in which he believed it was likely that he could defeat Israel. Furthermore, the actors in the “resistance axis” are motivated by a strategy of asymmetric deterrence, and this is a common thread in the discourse of all of these actors, which reflects in-depth thoughts about the rules of the game, rounds of fighting, equations, deterrence, and winning on points. The struggle over the regional order is also the result of strategic considerations related to reshaping the Middle East, and it could even reflect “Kissingerian” thinking. This does not mean that

the ideological dimension is unimportant, but according to some participants, there is no need to reassess its weight. And if a reassessment of this dimension is needed, this also demands relating to its place in the decision-making process in Israel.

In contrast with this approach, some argued that the events of the past year demand that we take the role of ideology among regional Islamist actors more seriously. One of the participants argued that the history of Western contention with Islamic fundamentalism is saturated with a severe lack of understanding, which has sometimes caused strategic disasters. This deficiency has lasted half a century and stems from several characteristics of Western culture, especially the political, military, academic, cultural, and media establishment. The lack of understanding is the result of many people’s tendency to decipher a foreign reality without being familiar with its unique characteristics, or even a recognition of this conceptual gap, as well as the profound impact of worldviews and wishful thinking. This has created a situation where, for decades, the discussion taking place has been based on conceptualizations that do not match the unique reality of the world of Islam. A clear distinction between extremists and pragmatists is presented as an example of this, as in practice, there is no contradiction between them, and pragmatism is not a synonym for moderation. This has been proven for decades by the calculated behavior of Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas, which prioritize ideological interests but know how to be flexible in the face of constraints and dangers. Another confusion is between messianism and irrationality. With respect to this, intelligence bodies in Israel before October 7 described Sinwar and Iran’s former president, Ebrahim Raisi, as out of touch with reality, without understanding that a yearning to fulfill the end of days here and now is their logic.

In this context, the conflict between Israel and Hamas is a unique case study of the Western difficulty in reading foreign culture

in general, and modern Islam in particular. This is an experience that illustrates a variety of fundamental problems, including projecting my logic on the other, in particular, the belief that there is a universal human desire for a “good life”; analyzing new challenges according to old thought paradigms and criteria that are based on past experience and the familiar world; difficulty for a society in which the weight of ideologies is decreasing to understand a society in which they still have considerable power and influence; and an inability to decipher a society whose fundamental conceptions, including the dimension of time, the value of life, the relation between the individual and the collective, and the concept of the “other,” are totally different. The conflict with Hamas over the years has reflected an inability to interpret the structural ambiguity that is inherent in many Islamic movements. The questions regarding Hamas that have arisen in Israel in the past 35 years and the basic assumptions that have been formulated regarding the movement demonstrate the fundamental gaps between Israel’s perception of reality and that of the Palestinian side: Is Hamas a terrorist organization, a political party, or a social movement (all three, of course)? Is it more Palestinian or Islamic (both equally)? What is the difference between “political Hamas” and “military Hamas” – a misleading distinction that the movement helps create?

According to this approach, Hamas’ updated 2017 charter should also be seen as an act of deception. As October’s events show, the movement was never really interested in shaping Palestinian society or concern for its welfare. When the updated document was published, Hamas’ television station preached killing Jews. The document did not express a Hamas desire for gradual change and reconciliation, but rather a desire to take over the Palestinian Authority. According to this conception, neither can Nasrallah’s decision to join the war be understood except via ideological considerations. Hezbollah’s leader

understood well that its joining would have a cost, but nevertheless, he decided to join the campaign due to his ideological commitment.

Differences between different actors

The discussion’s participants agreed that whether ideological conceptions influence the various actors to a greater or lesser degree, there are differences between different actors. Each, whether a state or a sub-state actor, has a different rationale. In general, non-state actors are more willing to sacrifice and to pay heavier prices, because they are more influenced by ideology than state actors.

In addition, even when actors have a shared interest, interests in general do not entirely overlap. For example, it is clear that there are differences between Hamas and Hezbollah: Hamas relates to Palestine as an area that is almost completely occupied. In contrast, Hezbollah, in its view, has succeeded in liberating Lebanon from Israeli occupation. For an actor like Iran, there is more time to fulfill its ideology, in contrast with Hamas, which believed that it did not have time to wait before carrying out the October 7 attack, due to the erosion of the Palestinian issue’s importance.

Other issues

In the discussion, it was argued that pragmatism sometimes expresses the beginning of ideological change. Ideologies can only be fulfilled in a utopian era; they are written in order to set a goal. One of the participants argued that Hamas is an example of a pragmatic movement that adapts its policy and conceptions in accordance with reality. Islamic movements worldwide face a harsh reality of persecution and suppression, so they sometimes need to obscure the religious dimension. Hamas also tried to reach out to the Palestinian Authority and to integrate within the framework of the Oslo process, despite its opposition to the process. Pragmatism does not necessarily herald ideological change, but it indicates a desire to integrate in a way that will change the

reality in the long term. This is apparent, one participant argued, in Hamas' 2017 document, which redefines the conflict in a much more nationalist and less Islamist manner. Other participants rejected this argument.

It was also argued in the discussion that it is a mistake to see Hamas as part of the Muslim Brotherhood camp. While Palestinian nationalism has played a certain role with Hamas (similar to other Muslim Brotherhood movements in the region), it is closer to jihadist movements. Contrary to this argument, one of the participants stated that after the fall of former Egyptian president Mohamed Morsi, Hamas largely abandoned its Islamic identity and focused on being Palestinian more than Islamic.

Another issue that was discussed is the need to reassess the Sunni-Shiite rift as a factor shaping the region. For example, the Houthis are not a typical Shiite group, and they have elements that are very reminiscent of Sunni jihadist movements, as well as an emphasis on Palestine as a religious issue (and not just a nationalist one). Turkey's conduct since the beginning of the war is also more similar to that of the Shiite axis than one would have thought if the Shiite-Sunni rift had been a dominant factor in shaping the region.

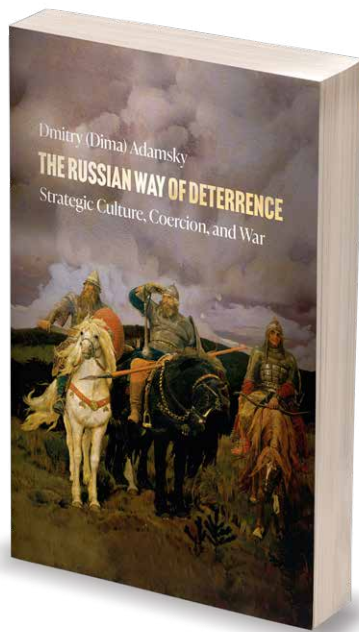
Policy recommendations

The discussion participants noted that struggles with ideological movements can last for many,

many years. Consequently, Israel must defend itself until the hoped-for ideological change occurs. This does not mean that diverse forms of action should not or cannot be taken against an ideological actor, but we must recognize the limits of arrangements with such actors. Meanwhile, Israel should operate with alternative actors, such as the Palestinian Authority; doing so could weaken Hamas.

In the opinion of some participants, recognizing the importance of ideology requires urgent action, given the threats from Islamist actors, while striving to eliminate the military capabilities of Hamas and Hezbollah. The Iranian ideological vision of destroying Israel should not be taken lightly, even if it is not necessarily a work plan for the short or medium term. To this end, Israel should exploit the current opportunity and the fast changes in the region by pursuing military and political measures in Lebanon and in the Palestinian arena.

Some participants argued that it is too early to draw unequivocal operative conclusions from the October 7 attack and the multi-arena campaign that broke out following it, without a sufficient basis of knowledge and understanding of the events and developments of the past year. Additionally, Israel cannot afford to focus only on intentions, without a sober assessment of the other side's capabilities, because this could lead to out-of-control defense spending that takes an unbearable economic and social toll.



How Can “Deterrence à la Russe” Explain Israel’s October 7 Failure?

Daniel Rakov

Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security

The Russian Way of Deterrence: Strategic Culture, Coercion, and War

Author: Dmitry (Dima) Adamsky

Publisher: Stanford University Press

Year: 2024

Number of pages: 214

This new book by Israeli scholar Dmitry (Dima) Adamsky provides a broad and piquant review of deterrence and coercion research, as he dives into what he calls “Deterrence à la Russe” (Russian-style deterrence). The author endeavors to describe the current state of Russian thinking about deterrence and coercion, and to highlight its uniqueness in comparison to the Western understanding of these concepts. In this context, he addresses the deterrence maintenance problem—the tension between achieving one’s goals without driving the enemy into escalation.

From an academic perspective, the book systematically amalgamates the deterrence and coercion literature with that of strategic culture. He uses both of these to reconstruct the intellectual history of the Russian understanding of coercion. Adamsky’s analysis of the Russian case, strengthens his argument that an actor’s coercion strategy cannot be understood without viewing it through the prism of its strategic culture.

The widely used concept of deterrence is generally researched within the disciplinary framework of international security studies. Deterrence is one of the sub-categories of the broader concept of coercion, which refers to the effort to influence the enemy’s calculus by means of threats or limited use of force to avoid a full-scale war. Whereas deterrence seeks to prevent aggression, compellence (the second sub-category of coercion) aims to force the enemy to comply with the compeller’s demands.

Western deterrence theory holds that in order to influence the enemy and deter him, it is necessary to signal to him what the red lines are. The deterring power must convince its enemy that it is able to cause enough damage to make the enemy’s aggression counterproductive, and also that the deterring power has sufficient resolve to use the necessary force. This persuasion process entails the art of signaling and exchange of messages, and is prone to communication failure. The addressed power may miss or misunderstand the message conveyed either in words or actions, and may also interpret the message in a different way than that intended by the deterring power. Escalation into full-scale warfare is regarded as deterrence failure.

The first chapter in the book outlines the theoretical background to deterrence and strategic culture. The second chapter reviews the development of Russian thought about deterrence. Unexpectedly, this section indicates that the Soviets rejected Western deterrence theory, did not act in accordance with it, and

adopted it as a basis for the development of their strategic thinking only after the collapse of the Communist bloc. Adamsky asserts that while Western deterrence theory stagnated for 25 years following the Cold War, the Russian theoreticians took advantage of this time to develop highly advanced, sophisticated and innovative thinking. The third chapter discusses Russian strategic culture and its influence on thinking about coercion. The fourth chapter analyzes the differences between the Russian theory of coercion and the many practical difficulties encountered by the Putin government in its effort to force its will on its enemies. The fifth chapter discusses the ideas presented throughout the book in the context of the current war in Ukraine. In Adamsky's opinion, these are merely preliminary thoughts; more profound insights must wait until the conclusion of the war.

Adamsky explains that in contrast to the Western deterrence theory, the Russians have a holistic view of coercion with no clear separation between deterrence and compellence, or between defense and attack. The Russian term "strategic deterrence," which covers a whole spectrum of coercive actions, is viewed as a continuous and incessant action (before, during, and after the conflict). Escalation into a war is therefore not considered a failure of deterrence, but merely a transition to another level of conflict. Similarly, coercive acts during peacetime are aimed at improving the conditions for war. From the Russian perspective, embarking on a "special military operation" in Ukraine in 2022 was not necessarily a failure of deterrence; it was a transition to another level—from non-military to military coercion. The Russian coercive toolbox extends to three interdependent and mutually reinforcing dimensions: nuclear, conventional, and informational (cross-domain coercion).

The book discusses in depth the informational coercion—the innovative and less familiar of the three dimensions—including both threats to use informational tools and

their limited employment. According to the Russian definitions, informational tools include everything that does not shoot, e.g. cyberwarfare, electronic warfare, psychological-consciousness warfare, subversion, and even diplomatic activity. The informational dimension is the glue holding together the three coercive dimensions, because it involves communication and cognition. Coercive signals in the nuclear and conventional domains are issued through it. "Non-military" informational coercion facilitates constant friction with the enemy during peacetime with reduced risks, because it bypasses the accepted legal definitions of a war threshold.

The book discusses extensively the difference between the Russian theoretical constructs concerning deterrence and their application in practice. Adamsky suggests that in December 2021 Putin did not want the war in Ukraine (and especially not the kind of war that has actually occurred), but tried to coerce the Western powers into reconsidering the European security architecture by issuing them an ultimatum. If this is true, then Putin achieved the exact opposite. The Kremlin's overuse of threats in the decade preceding 2022 meant that the West perceived his ultimatum as aiming to legitimize a declaration of war, not to prevent one.

Adamsky attributes this colossal error by the Kremlin to an ineffective mechanism for deciphering coercive signals and assessing the effectiveness of their influence. Yet, he asserts that this is not a unique Russian weakness, but a universal problem that also affects the West, Israel, and others. It is too easy for the deterring party to assume that its message has been understood and has had the intended effect, without giving adequate weight to the complexity of the prisms that process the message and might potentially distort it on its way to the receiving end. Adamsky believes that over the past decade (since the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014), the Russians have had trouble (and at best mixed success)

in maintaining deterrence. They have done this either too weakly or too strongly, and have repeatedly undershot or overshot around the culmination point of coercion, beyond which coercive measures produce a negative effect, leading to escalation into a war, instead of preventing one. The numerous informational coercive measures against the West (interfering with elections, cyberattacks, influence campaigns, threats to use conventional and nuclear force) have led to the imposition of painful sanctions on Russia. For example, the invasion of Ukraine, which was designed to thwart NATO’s proximity to Russia’s borders, has led Finland and Sweden to join NATO, thereby doubling the length of Russia’s border with NATO countries. On the Russian side, the price that Russia has paid for its coercive measures is justified by arguing that these measures are improving Russia’s deterring and threatening reputation in the long run. They see Russia’s return to the top of the list of threats (right after China) in the white-papers of the Trump and Biden administrations as proof that this goal has been achieved.

The latest revisions in the book were made before October 7, 2023. Israel is mentioned in the book as having a unique approach to coercion embedded in its strategic culture, based on the concepts of accumulated deterrence and the war between wars (*mabam*). Adamsky, who also writes a great deal about Israeli deterrence (Adamsky, 2016), says that these concepts are similar to Russian thought on coercion. He claims that the Israelis have also endeavored to develop operational procedures intended to identify the culmination point of coercion, thereby making it possible to avoid escalation into an unplanned war. As he sees it, success in this undertaking depends on the ability to draw conclusions from past failures, and to be self-critical for this purpose—something in which neither Russia nor Israel excels.

Using the same reasoning as Adamsky in his book, it can be argued that before

October 7, 2023, Israel expected its limited coercive operations against the Axis of Resistance to underscore its ability to inflict damage and its determination to use force. Israel convinced itself that its coercive messages were indeed deterring its enemies. The actual result was the exact opposite: the belligerent messages were interpreted by Hamas, Iran and Hezbollah as fear of a large-scale war. Israel passed the culmination point of coercion without being aware of it: rather than reducing the risk of escalation, its use of force increased the risk of a war. The large number of military interactions between Israel and its enemies eroded the red lines that Israel had sought to establish, and gave its enemy an opportunity for operative learning of Israel’s weak points.

Using the same reasoning as Adamsky in his book, it can be argued that before October 7, 2023, Israel expected its limited coercive operations against the Axis of Resistance to underscore its ability to inflict damage and its determination to use force. Israel convinced itself that its coercive messages were indeed deterring its enemies. The actual result was the exact opposite: the belligerent messages were interpreted by Hamas, Iran and Hezbollah as fear of a large-scale war

The questions raised in the book correspond to writing in Israel about the lessons of the October 7 deterrence failure. Uri Bar-Joseph addresses the roots of this failure through a study of the intellectual history of the place of deterrence in the Israeli security doctrine (Bar-Joseph, 2024). Amir Lupovici believes that engaging in deterrence has become part of the Israeli strategic culture and an end in itself, which made it difficult for Israel to question the validity of the assertion that “Hamas is deterred” (Lupovici, 2024). Moni Chorev attributes the failure to the vagueness of the Israeli deterrence concept and the failure to learn from the rounds of limited warfare (Chorev, 2024). He rejects the

popular conclusion that the idea of deterrence should be abandoned by Israel and replaced by decisive victory (Dostri, 2023).

Adamsky's critics disagree with his strategic culture theoretical framework, arguing that it is rather vague and fails to meet the falsification test. They also assert that the principles of deterrence theory are universal, and that particular national interpretations of deterrence and coercion do not alter the actual dynamic between the warring parties (Van Dyke, 2024; Wirtz, 2024). On the other hand, other leading scholars believe that the analytical framework of strategic culture is useful, and praise Adamsky for it (Kofman et al., 2024; Stent, 2024). The author of this review concurs with the latter ones, but this academic dispute appears to be far from resolved.

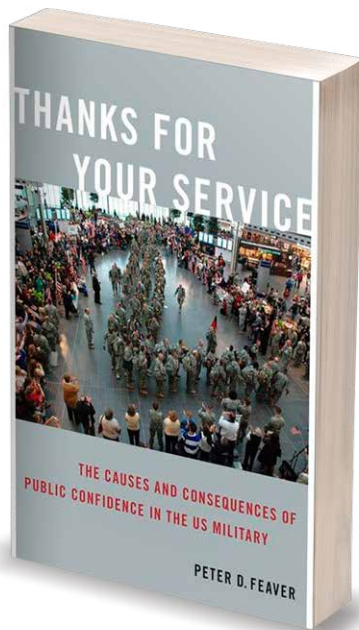
In the real world, however, it is impossible to understand the enemy's perception of the situation and its goals and messages without taking into account the cultural differences between them and us. This is emerging as one of the painful lessons of October 7 and the dynamic of the Iron Swords War.

In his book, Adamsky emphasizes the instability of the use of force and the need for a clear concept of deterrence management and intellectual honesty in analyzing its failures. As Israel is reassessing fundamental pillars of its national security and the practical ways of pursuing them, the ideas presented in the book are relevant for members of its strategic community (officials, academics and laymen alike) to study and to reflect upon.

Lt. Colonel (res.) Daniel Rakov is a senior fellow at the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security (JISS) specializing in Russian policy in the Middle East and great power competition in the region. drakov@jiss.org.il

Sources

- Adamsky, D. (2016). From Israel with deterrence: Strategic culture, intra-war coercion, and brute force. *Security Studies* 26(1), 157-184. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2017.1243923>.
- Bar-Joseph, U. (2024, January 12). A series of failures proves that Israel's security concept is obsolete. *Haaretz*. <https://tinyurl.com/yp7n5vx9>
- Chorev, M. (2024, April 3). "Failure of the 'Deterrence Doctrine' against asymmetric enemies – was there really a doctrine?" IDF Dado Center journal *Bein Ha-Ktavim (Between the Poles)*. <https://tinyurl.com/2dmc97v8> (Hebrew).
- Dostri, O. (2023, November 30). Opinion: Failure of the Deterrence Strategy – and the switch to the Doctrine of Victory. *Israel Defense and Security Forum*. <https://tinyurl.com/5n8797re> (Hebrew).
- Kofman, M., Massicot, D., Roberts, C. and Petersen, M.B. (2024, September 10). "Book Review Roundtable: Russian Ways of Thinking About Deterrence," *Texas National Security Review*. <https://tnsr.org/roundtable/book-review-roundtable-russian-ways-of-thinking-about-deterrence/>
- Lupovici, A. (2024) Israeli deterrence and the October 7 attack. *Strategic Assessment* 27(1), 48-63. https://www.inss.org.il/strategic_assessment/deterrence/.
- Stent, A. (2024). Russia and Eurasia. *Survival* 66(1), 153–158. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2024.2309083>.
- Van Dyke, C. (2024). Book Review of "The Russian Way of Deterrence: Strategic Culture, Coercion, and War: Dmitry Adamsky, Stanford University Press, 2024." *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 37(2), 255–257. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13518046.2024.2375158>.
- Wirtz, J.J. (2024). Book review of "The Russian Way of Deterrence: Strategic Culture, Coercion, and War: Dmitry Adamsky, Stanford University Press, 2024." *Comparative Strategy* 43(4), 435–437. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01495933.2024.2363740>.



Nothing Lasts Forever: On the Fragility of Civil Society's Confidence in the Military

Kobi Michael

National Institute of Security Studies –
Tel Aviv University and the University of
South Wales

Thanks for Your Service: The Causes and Consequences of Public Confidence in the U.S. Military

Author: Peter Feaver

Year: 2023

Publisher: Oxford University Press

Number of pages: 310

Peter Feaver, a professor of political science and public policy at Duke University, is one of the most important and prominent scholars of civil-military relations in the United States and the entire research community. Beyond his academic and research experience, he also served as a special advisor on the National Security Council under President Bill Clinton

and President George W. Bush. In his many publications, Feaver has developed a series of theoretical frameworks and innovative conceptualizations, some of which even challenge the doctrine of his mentor, Samuel Huntington, who, along with Morris Janowitz, was among the founders of the research discipline of civil-military relations. Feaver has written several seminal papers on the subject and has coauthored many more with prominent colleagues such as Richard Kohn. His 2003 book, “Armed servants—agency, oversight, and civil-military relations,” is one of the most important contributions to the field and set the standard for his impressive research work. In his writings, Feaver has developed a new and challenging theoretical framework in the field of civil-military relations, while adopting the agency theory. He introduced a new model through which he attempted to provide an answer to some of the weaknesses that he identified in Huntington’s theoretical framework, alongside weaknesses in other theoretical frameworks from the same field of research.

In his latest book, Feaver focuses on the issue of the American public’s confidence in the U.S. Army. According to Feaver, the American people’s confidence in the military is vitally important and perhaps even acute in the world of civil-military relations in democratic countries in general and the United States in particular, and the issue has remained something of a lacuna in the professional literature (p. 11). In this comprehensive book, crammed with details, graphs and surveys, Feaver maps out the six factors which influence the level of civil society’s confidence in the army. He identifies political affiliation and the need for social approval as the two most problematic factors:

1. Patriotism
2. Performance – the military’s ability to do its job
3. Professional ethics
4. Political affiliation (party)

5. Personal contact – having a direct connection to the military through family or friends

6. Social approval (public pressure) (p. 2)

After detailing and conceptualizing these factors, Feaver seeks to find a basis for the argument and his conclusions about the fragility of confidence in the military—which he calls “hollow confidence”—in a profound analysis of public opinion polls conducted in the United States since the 1970s by the Gallup polling company and others, as well as two focused internet polls that he conducted himself. Evidence of this fragility can be found in fluctuations in public confidence in the military, as seen in the graph that the author presents (p. 16), showing confidence levels from 1970 to 2021.

Feaver argues that many of the respondents express confidence in the military because they think it is the right answer or what is expected of them by the pollsters, and that their responses are not an accurate reflection of the confidence they actually have.

The influence of political affiliation he ascribes to the acute political polarization in the United States, as expressed by a high level of confidence among Democrat voters when the Democratic Party is in power and a lower level of confidence among the same people when the Republican Party is in power. The same applies in the opposite direction for Republican voters. Moreover, Feaver points to an overall higher level of confidence among Republican voters and therefore, according to his interpretation, when a Republican administration or Republican elites are critical of the military, it has a broader and more profound impact on the overall confidence of the American people in the military.

Feaver’s explanation of public pressure, as manifested in opinion polls in general and particularly those dealing with public confidence in the military, bolster the argument

about the fragility of confidence in the military or its hollowness. Feaver argues that many of the respondents express confidence in the military because they think it is the right answer or what is expected of them by the pollsters, and that their responses are not an accurate reflection of the confidence they actually have. His working assumption, which he based on several questions in the internet poll he conducted, is that the level of confidence in the military is lower than the polls suggest.

The book is divided into three main sections. In the first section, Feaver deals with the question of who has confidence in the military. This section contains a historical oversight of the standing of the military in the eyes of civil society in the United States and the question of confidence. In this context, he also addresses the issue of confidence and the gaps between knowledge about the workings of the military, how the military is dealt with in American educational institutions, its place in a democratic, civilian society, the influence of the media and to what extent having a friend or relative serving in the military influences respondents’ level of confidence in it. In the second part of the book, the author addresses the question of why people have confidence in the military. In this section, he details the factors influencing confidence in the military and analyses the data from his selected opinion polls. In the third part of the book, which includes the conclusion, Feaver presents a coherent and detailed theory about the importance of civil society’s confidence in the military and says that follow-up studies are needed.

It is impossible to ignore Feaver’s deep concern when it comes to societal confidence in the military, even though that confidence has been at a high and relatively stable level since the early 1990s, after a marked drop after the Vietnam War and throughout the 1970s and 1980s. When it comes to war-like situations, there is a marked increase in confidence in the military, due to performance, to which the

public tends to react positively. This also squares with the patriotism factor, since rallying round the flag is a phenomenon that is familiar from other societies during times of war. This might not last forever, however, and Feaver warns that confidence is fragile and that there are elements which could undermine it—especially given the social and political situation in the polarized United States and the social alienation of the military in a reality where there are fewer and fewer Americans with relatives, friends or acquaintances serving.

The public tends to believe that the military has a high level of professional ethics, which increases the level of confidence in it, certainly when compared to other institutions, with the emphasis on the political establishment. This, it seems, is a universal phenomenon, which is certainly true in the Israeli case. Therefore, Feaver calls on the military to be very careful when it comes to professional ethics and to come down hard on any violations of these ethics in order to guarantee public confidence. Feaver explains how violations of professional ethics, like, for example, treatment of women and behavior that does not adhere to its apolitical nature, have undermined public confidence in the military.

The book is well constructed and filled with details and figures. The plethora of graphs and data can sometimes interfere a little with the reading experience, but Feaver has organized the book well, allowing readers to quickly take in the data and the conclusions he reaches. Given that he is a didactic and meticulous lecturer, he is at pains to structure and present his arguments cogently, guiding the reader through the intricate statistics covered in each chapter, presenting his methodology and succinctly showing his conclusions at the end of each chapter.

This book will not only interest researchers in the field of civil-military relations, but also members of the military, politicians and the general public. The findings, the analysis, the conclusions and the recommendations (which

are more general than the rest of the book) provide a profound and important insight into the field, including the challenges facing the military, the political establishment and civil society. Feaver highlights the lack of knowledge among large parts of society about the military, though he also finds that similar gaps exist in relation to the political establishment, as well as in the military regarding civil society. Therefore, he recommends educating military leaders, politicians and the general public, by exposing them to the values and norms needed in order to ensure a healthy relationship between the military and civil society. Feaver's approach is an analytical one, which also contains just a hint of a normative approach.

The results of the surveys and the level of analysis that Feaver presents cover a wide and diverse demographic range and allow for a detailed understanding of the dynamics that characterize the growth and erosion of confidence. Feaver moves from the particular to the general and uses highly detailed data, such as race, political affiliation, gender and economic situation to form a general argument regarding confidence in the military. Even if readers may sometimes feel that they have lost their way among the details and the graphs, the author never allows them to wander too far, by expertly condensing and summarizing the information and its significance in every chapter.

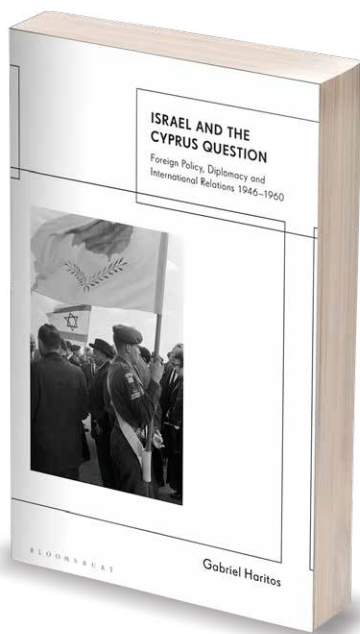
Feaver's main message to the military is that it cannot afford to rest on its laurels. It must ensure that it remains moral and safeguards its values and its professionalism, since these are important for building public confidence. His primary message to politicians is that it is their responsibility to safeguard this important asset and to value it by teaching about the military and protecting its honor, while ensuring that its activities remain apolitical, and that as an institution it is not used for political means. Feaver also has an important message for the public about the need to become much more familiar with the military and especially

respecting those who serve. This, of course, is reflected in the title of the book: “Thanks for Your Service.” The U.S. Army is a volunteer army, unlike the compulsory service model used in Israel, which means that many members of American society do not have a direct connection to the military through a friend or relative in service, which in turn leads to a certain distance between society and the military.

Feaver does not pretend to be able to generalize his findings and conclusions, and even calls for follow-up studies in other countries in order to validate or refute his conclusions (p. 282), but it seems that some of those conclusions and insights can certainly also be applied to civil-military relations and to

the factors that influence public confidence in the military in other democracies. Therefore, Peter Feaver’s book is not only important and recommended reading for anyone interested in a more profound understanding of the reality of civil-military relations in the United States and the factors that influence public confidence in the military there, but also in order to reach insights relevant to civil-military relations in any democracy.

Prof. Kobi Michael is a senior researcher at the Institute for National Security Studies and a visiting professor at the International Centre for Policing and Security University of South Wales, United Kingdom. kobimichael24@gmail.com



Israel and the Island Next Door

Gallia Lindenstrauss

The Institute for National Security Studies –
Tel Aviv University

***Israel and the Cyprus Question:
Foreign Policy, Diplomacy, and
International Relations 1946-1960***

Author: Gabriel Haritos

Publisher: Bloomsbury

Year: 2023

Number of pages: 321

This new book by Gabriel Haritos—who is currently a Visiting Professor at Panteion University, Athens, a Research Fellow at the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP) and a media commentator — addresses Israel's relations with Cyprus and the Cypriot question between 1946 and 1960. These were the formative years for Cyprus, before it gained independence until immediately after the establishment of the Republic of Cyprus. This comprehensive book is based on Haritos' doctoral dissertation written at the University of

Macedonia in Thessaloniki, which was published as a book in Greek and is already in its second edition. The book is largely based on diplomatic documents, most of them from Israel's State Archive and some of which were revealed for the first time thanks to the author's interest in them.

The book is structured chronologically for the most part. The first chapter discusses the factors that shaped Israel's foreign policy in the first years after its establishment and how the pro-Western alignment that emerged would later lead to Israeli concern over a possible British withdrawal from Cyprus, which it had controlled since 1878. The second chapter addresses the period between 1946 and 1949, during which time the British operated detention camps in Cyprus to imprison illegal immigrants and to limit Jewish immigration to Mandatory Palestine —and how the existence of these camps influenced the relationship between Jews and Greek Cypriots. It also addresses the informal plebiscite that was conducted in 1950 over the issue of *Enosis* (the union of Cyprus with Greece), in which the vast majority of Greek Cypriots voted in favor of the proposal and on which Israel needed to establish its position. The third chapter deals with the Israeli stance on Greek efforts to raise the Cypriot issue for discussion at the United Nations. The Greek Cypriot demand for independence from Great Britain and Turkey's concern over a union between Cyprus and Greece (concern that was sparked, in part, because of the existence of a Turkish Cypriot minority on the island, constituting around one fifth of the population at that time) led to direct contact on the Cypriot issue between Greece, Turkey, Britain, a representative of the Greek Cypriot community and a representative of the Turkish Cypriot community. These negotiations eventually led to the London and Zurich Agreements, which in turn paved the way for Cypriot independence. In the context of the growing likelihood that Cyprus would, indeed, gain independence,

the fourth chapter deals with Israel's efforts to ensure that both the Greek Cypriot community and the Turkish Cypriot community would support diplomatic relations with the State of Israel. The fifth chapter deals with the transition period between the signing of the London and Zurich Agreements and Cyprus' declaration of independence, as well as the assessments and concerns over the orientation of regional foreign policy of the soon-to-be independent state. The sixth chapter deals with the period between Cyprus gaining independence and the new state establishing diplomatic relations with Israel, as well as efforts by the United Arab Republic and by Lebanon—efforts that were ultimately unsuccessful—to sabotage bilateral relations. The seventh chapter is a summary of the book.

The fact that Greek Cypriots helped the Jews being held in British detention camps—and even cooperated with them so that representatives of the Jewish undergrounds were able to secretly train detainees to be ready to take part in the war effort as soon as they arrived in Mandatory Palestine/Israel—contributed to a fundamentally positive public attitude among the Jews when it came to Greek Cypriot aspirations for independence from Great Britain.

The choice of 1946 as the starting point for this book is unconventional since, at that time, neither Israel nor Cyprus were independent states. It does, however, touch on an important element in the author's thesis: the significance of the detention camps on how the approach of the pre-State Jewish community in Mandatory Palestine and, subsequently, the State of Israel, toward the Cypriot issue developed. The fact that Greek Cypriots helped the Jews being held in British detention camps—and even cooperated with them so that representatives of the Jewish undergrounds were able to secretly train detainees to be ready to take part in the war effort as soon as they arrived

in Mandatory Palestine/Israel—contributed to a fundamentally positive public attitude among the Jews when it came to Greek Cypriot aspirations for independence from Great Britain. There was also a high level of solidarity with Greek Cypriots in light of “their shared desire to be free of the British presence” (p.28). At the same time, as the years passed, the official Israeli position became less sympathetic toward the Greek Cypriot position due to concern over the ramifications of the British leaving the island, and especially if Cyprus were to adopt a pro-Arab line—something that seemed possible in Israeli eyes given the cool relationship between Greece and Israel and the parallel improvement in relations with Turkey. For example, there was genuine concern that Cyprus would fall under the influence of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, especially after the union between Egypt and Syria and the establishment of the United Arab Republic in 1958 (p.152). Having said that, the process was not entirely linear and, as the documents that Haritos uncovered show, there were many deliberations within Israel, which led to the divergent voting patterns of Israel in the United Nations when it came to the Cyprus issue. In this regard, the book's focus on the period when the foreign policy of both Israel and Cyprus was in its formative stage is thought-provoking, since the deliberations at that time raise questions about what would have happened had both countries opted for a different pattern of alignment in the international system than they eventually chose.

In many respects, many of the dilemmas that Israel faced during that period in terms of its relations with Cyprus are still valid today, albeit at varying levels. For example, the difficulty in disconnecting from the zero-sum-game approach to the eastern Mediterranean, given that any rapprochement with Turkey or the Turkish Cypriot community could negatively influence relations with Greece and the Greek Cypriot community, and vice versa. The recognition of the importance of Cypriot airports and seaports to Israel's commercial

ties and to the early waves of immigration—an understanding which led Israel, despite the financial difficulties at the time, to open a consulate in Nicosia as early as 1950 (p.33)—still exists to a large extent (although today the perception of Cyprus as assisting Israel in times of emergency and as a kind of backup is much more developed). Cyprus’ strategic importance is also very obvious—whether in regard to the period that the book is analyzing with Egypt’s nationalization of the Suez Canal, or with regard to current events, with the war since October 7 last year and the international coalition that was formed to thwart Houthi attacks that impinge on freedom of navigation in the Red Sea. On the one hand, this importance draws Western actors to the island, but it is also what encourages actors who are not necessarily friendly toward Israel to seek to interfere in the island’s affairs. Israel understood and apparently still understands relations with Cyprus as an integral part of its wider Middle East strategy. This is despite the fact that, from Cyprus and Greece’s perspective, developments in the eastern Mediterranean are their primary consideration in their relations with Israel.

The significant improvement in relations between Israel and both Greece and Cyprus since 2010 stems from the crisis in the Israeli-Turkish relationship (and, as such, is similar to the patterns described in Haritos’ book); but is also thanks to the reserves of natural gas that have been found in the eastern Mediterranean and the fact that, since 2004, Cyprus has been a member of the European Union and Israel needs allies within that bloc. It is not surprising, therefore, that given Israel’s warmer relations with Greece and Cyprus, there has been increased interest in the early, formative years of those relations. This could explain why the Greek-language edition of Haritos’ book is already in its second reprint. The Cyprus issue and the profound dispute between the Greek

and Turkish side of the island still exist, and Israel has been asked to take a stand on the issue over the years. Due to the failure thus far to reunite the island—which was effectively split in two in 1974, when Turkey invaded and occupied around 40 percent of the island—Turkey has publicly demanded since 2020 that Cyprus be officially divided into two countries. It is almost certain that Jerusalem is far more receptive than in the past to Greek Cypriot concerns that such a partition would create a Turkish puppet state, given the increased tensions between Israel and Turkey.

Like other diplomatic history books, “Israel and the Cyprus Question” is full of details and names—which can sometimes be confusing. It would have been useful if the author had added tables, especially when it comes to the various United Nations votes on the Cyprus issue, in order to make reading easier. Having said that, the relatively structured style of the book, especially the conclusions, helps convey the main points that the author seeks to stress. Particularly impressive is how Haritos manages to get inside the heads of Israeli decision-makers from that period and to accurately present the Israeli perspective. The book not only contributes to our understanding of the formative period in Israeli-Cypriot relations, but also to that of other bilateral relations, such as Israel-Great Britain, Israel-Turkey and Israel-Greece. For this reason, it is an important addition to scholarly literature covering Israel’s foreign policy in the first decades following independence.

Dr. Gallia Lindenstrauss is senior research fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies and co-editor of the institute’s journal, *Strategic Assessment*. Among her areas of expertise are Turkish foreign policy, the eastern Mediterranean, the Kurdish issue, and Israel-Azerbaijani relations. gallia@inss.org.il

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.

In the spirit of the times, *Strategic Assessment* is shifting its center of gravity to digital presence and access. Articles approved for publication, following the review and editing process, will be published in an online version on the journal's website in the format of "online first," and subsequently included in the particular issues.

Strategic Assessment publishes articles in four categories:

Research Forum—academic articles of a theoretical and research nature on a wide range of topics related to national security, of up to 8000 words in Hebrew or 10,000 words in English, 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.

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*

