

# Strategic Assessment for Israel

Following an Online International  
Security & Policy Conference On:

## Israel in an Era of Crises

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## Where Do We Go from Here?

## Insights & Recommendations

# Online International Security & Policy Conference On: Israel in an Era of Crises Where Do We Go From Here?

Was held on September 10, 2020, with the Participations  
of High-ranking International and Israeli Speakers



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# Introduction

In light of the dramatic events Israel has been experiencing, the Institute for Policy & Strategy (IPS) at the Interdisciplinary Center (IDC) Herzliya held an **online international security & policy conference** that focused on two aspects: the strategic security threats and challenges Israel is facing in this region, and the domestic risks to national resilience.

As a result of the COVID-19 crisis, Israel is grappling with a potential **multisystem disaster** as well as a severe risk to its resilience and endurance. Beyond the said challenge, which reflects negatively on Israel's image and deterrence, the conference has focused on and analyzed four core issues that will impact **national security** most significantly in the near future: **the Iranian threat; the Palestinian challenge; the U.S.**, its regional status and relations with Israel; and **the era of upheaval in the Middle East**.

In recent years, Israel's security has been relatively stable. Yet the **combination** of a weakening socio-economic resilience within, and heightened strategic threats in the Middle East are turning **2021 into a year that could pose a crucial challenge to Israel's security and strength**.

The paper provided constitutes **the IPS strategic assessment**, and is based on all conference sessions held, as well as top knowledge and assessments presented by a host of experts, government officials and leading media personnel from Israel and elsewhere. Its key insights and recommendations reflect the statements made during the conference, but do not presume to include all that has been said, nor bind participants or speakers.

I hope that **the analysis, insights and recommendations** will contribute to a profound and educated public debate, as it is more vital than ever under the current difficult circumstances in Israel.



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Chairman of the Annual Herzliya Conference Series  
IDC Herzliya



# The Main Challenges Israel is Facing

Traditionally, Israel is facing four spheres of threats – conventional (armies); sub-conventional (terror organizations), unconventional (nuclear), and cyber.

In light of the COVID-19 crisis, and the socio-economic shockwaves it caused, a **fifth threat** sphere has emerged – a potential multisystem disaster and severe risk to national resilience. Such a disaster **could convey weakness, and have a negative effect on Israel's security and image as a regional power**, both inwardly and outwardly.

**In light of the COVID-19 crisis, and the shockwaves it caused, a fifth threat sphere has emerged – a potential multisystem disaster and severe risk to national resilience.**

Alongside the Coronavirus crisis, the conference has outlined four core issues that are expected to significantly impact **Israel's national security** in the long range: **the Iranian threat; the Palestinian challenge; the US** and its relations with Israel following the presidential elections; and **the era of upheaval in the Middle East**.

# 1

## The COVID-19 crisis and Israel's national resilience

Israel has **failed miserably** to address the COVID-19 crisis. It has revealed **significant gaps in its national resilience**, casting a heavy shadow on its strength and endurance, as well as on Israeli society's ability to cope with internal and external threats in routine and emergency times, or recover from them.

The COVID-19 challenge has led to a systemic crisis in multiple dimensions – health, economic, social – due to an acute leadership and governance vacuum, as well as the absence of strategy. Under such circumstances, the public has developed a **crisis of trust** in Israel's national institutions and systems, and **the local authorities** were forced to fight in the front lines against the pandemic.

**The COVID-19 challenge has led to a systemic crisis in multiple dimensions – health, economic, social – due to an acute leadership and governance vacuum, as well as the absence of strategy.**

Moreover, the normative state system and gatekeepers, responsible for the rule of law, are indiscriminately attacked as part of a destructive delegitimization and incitement campaign that is detrimental to Israel's functioning. The backdrop for these offensive measures is a loss of leadership and path, the absence of a clear policy, and **an oversized divided government** that has failed to manage its counter-COVID19- campaign.

Large parts of society are at an impossible dead end financially, their ability to sustain themselves is now under threat, and they have lost all hope, feeling that no one cares about them. This is a dangerous reality that leads to **non-compliance, disobedience, a lack of enforcement**, and the general sense that violence alone can achieve anything.

## How can we recover from this crisis?

- **A leadership-oriented solution** is urgently required. Israel's leaders and elected officials must regain their composure, Israeli society must begin to display mutual responsibility and solidarity as it plays its crucial role in mitigating social deterioration, and the public's trust must be regained. An inner cabinet is required to focus on addressing the crisis by **adopting an apolitical state approach, and following an organized strategy that would direct it while creating hope and a clear horizon for the public**. The latter needs to receive unambiguous messages about the exit plan from this crisis, and to participate in its execution. At the same time, ongoing, unequivocal, uniform enforcement is required in all sectors and across the board.
- Instead of raising false hopes of an impending vaccine, which lead to complacency and exacerbate the issue, the Israeli leadership should explain to the public that **there will not be a vaccine readily available to all within the next 12 months**, even in an optimistic scenario.
- There is no alternative to **selective self-isolation and social distancing according to morbidity levels**, protective measures, and determined actions to break the chain of infection, while utilizing each state arm according to its relative edge in an organized, transparent, controlled, and synchronized fashion that is unbiased, devoid of irrelevant political considerations, and based on proper preparation and groundwork.
- Conventional economic measures designed to cope with a recession – the worst since the 1930s Great Depression – are ineffective during a pandemic, as public conduct neutralizes their effect. In lockdown, personal and business demand in the economy is reduced, and consumption cannot be increased by encouraging disposable income. Thus, **reducing taxes, handing out generous grants etc. is "money thrown away"**.
- It is essential to **make long-term plans**, and create a clear design for the post-COVID era. **The absence of a budget is paralyzing**, creating public uncertainty and exacerbating the crisis. A budget would also enable the execution of a multiannual plan for building up the IDF's force (vital for proper military functioning), under the adjustments required in light of the changes in national prioritization.

**Conventional economic measures designed to cope with a recession are ineffective during a pandemic.**

**The absence of a budget is paralyzing, creating public uncertainty and exacerbating the crisis.**

- An inter-ministerial team must be set up to draft a **national plan for stabilizing the economy** (such as the one drafted in the mid-1980s) designed to lead Israel back to full employment and renewed growth in the post-COVID era. The plan would be implemented fully as soon as the population has been vaccinated, but must be relevant to the transition phase too.
- Budgets for **enhancing and rehabilitating the health system** must become available **immediately**, as the latter has proven itself as a key component in Israel's national resilience and endurance during a health crisis, and **certainly in the event of an attack against the home front in wartime**.
- At the same time, actions must be taken to bring **human price and harm to the barest minimum while providing tools for coping with the crisis**, such as: strengthening the welfare systems and services; increasing the aid to the unemployed, self-employed and small businesses; prioritizing the education system (continuous available education for all children); expanding access to information (internet access in every home); supporting the management of distressed cities; and vocational training about the new, post-pandemic world.

## 2 The Iranian challenge – Will Israel be left alone?

The Iranian regime will not digress from its path and objectives, whether in nuclear or in its pursuit of regional hegemony and desire to establish itself militarily across the Middle East. **It would only be willing to compromise and postpone the realization of its vision under tremendous pressure posing a threat to its survival.**

**A change in regime** is not a policy on which we can depend when making long-range plans. First, it is not clear when and if it would lead to its collapse, and therefore such a policy **does not solve the nuclear program expansion problem**, and second, the current regime may be replaced by military tyranny headed by the IRGC that would be no less extreme.

At present, the most dramatic impact on the evolving Iranian challenge, particularly in its nuclear aspect, is attributed to an event that will take place outside the Middle East – **the U.S. elections**.

The policy of both presidential candidates **could pose a difficult challenge for Israel**.

**The most dramatic impact on the evolving Iranian challenge is attributed to an event that will take place outside the Middle East – the U.S. elections.**



President Trump seems **eager to reach an agreement with Tehran** quickly, promising to do so "**within weeks**" if he is reelected. He believes that Iran realizes it cannot endure four more years of the unprecedented internal pressure caused by the sanctions. In Trump's view, Iran would be forced to return to the negotiating table at some point (a prediction shared by most experts), under terms that will be better for him. In practice, however, President Trump may find himself encountering a defiant Iranian regime, demanding compensation for its willingness to return to the negotiating table, perhaps even **accelerating the scope of its JCPOA violations** and increasing tension in the region in an effort to improve its bargaining position, and return to the negotiating table from a position of power.

Under such circumstances, Trump could ultimately choose **to compromise on the updated nuclear deal's terms**. To prove to the world (and the Nobel Prize committee?) that he can deliver on his election promise and close a deal with Iran quickly, President Trump may end up making a "**bad deal**" from an Israeli point of view. The deal would, nevertheless, be publicized by him as a dramatic improvement compared to the agreement reached by President Obama, even if **it will not**, in effect, **address the grievous flaws of the JCPOA**: the expiration of restrictions ("sunset"), advanced centrifuge R&D, and authority to oversee the arms program.

**To prove to the world that he can deliver on his election promise, and close a deal with Iran quickly, Trump may end up making a "bad deal".**

Biden, the Democrats' presidential candidate, has declared that, if Iran returns to strict compliance with the JCPOA, the US would rejoin it too, **implicitly indicating that the sanctions would be lifted**. According to Biden's plan, only then, when the sanction lever will have effectively been removed, and **his chances of success substantially diminished**, will he enter into negotiations with Iran over fixing the JCPOA flaws.

Biden's strategy could lead the U.S. administration back to the original nuclear deal, with its provisions nearing their expiration dates, and **leave it "stuck" there** in the absence of leverage over Iran after Biden will, at least partly, concede the sanction lever. Moreover, Biden is striving for as much collaboration with Europe as possible **in an effort to avoid the international isolation Trump had endured**, and is therefore expected to be more easily swayed by their unequivocal support of the original JCPOA.

Both Trump and Biden may be reluctant to pose **a credible military threat** to Iran during negotiations. Both seek to extract the U.S. from the "never-ending" wars in the Middle East, and expedite withdrawal of forces from the region – two items on the U.S. agenda that enjoy a rare consensus in its polarized system.

An agreement between Iran and the U.S. containing terms that Israel views as insufficient is not the only possible scenario, however, under the current circumstances, it is certainly an option for which we must prepare. Israel **will find it extremely hard to publicly object to any agreement with Iran that receives President Trump's blessing**, as well as international support. On the other hand, Biden is **expected to be highly sensitive to any Israeli interference in this matter**, since, while he was Vice President, Prime Minister Netanyahu had blatantly intervened in American politics in an attempt to thwart the nuclear deal reached by Obama.

## Policy recommendations

- Israel has a **narrow window of opportunity** in which to influence U.S. stances in preparation for negotiations with Iran. As the past has proven, once the parties begin negotiating (even clandestinely), Israel has very little effect on the course of the negotiations. Israel is therefore required to **upgrade its current channels of discourse** on Iran with both the Trump administration and Biden's foreign policy team momentarily.
- Israel must focus its efforts on reaching an understanding with the U.S. administration over the ToR of its negotiations with Tehran in advance, to ensure that Washington will insist on **rectifying the weaknesses inherent to the JCPOA, and not leave Israel alone with this problem.**
- Under the circumstances created, whereby both Trump and Biden may **be pursuing compromises** that will lead to an agreement with Tehran, Israel must also think beyond its maximal "zero Iranian enrichment" stance. Overall, a **more complex view** – consisting of priorities, areas of flexibility **alongside "red lines"** – stands a greater chance of impacting the U.S. administration, which is also in the process of forming its positions.
- Israel must also decide which is the "deal" with which it is willing to live. Will it insist upon a **"grand bargain"** that addresses both regional and nuclear components, requiring time-consuming haggling while the nuclear program expands? Or will it content itself with a **strictly nuclear deal** that does not adequately respond to Iran's problematic policy in this region?
- Finally, Israel will have to decide further down the road how far it would be willing to go, and which steps it would be willing to take, in order to thwart a "bad deal" with Iran, if such a deal would indeed emerge.
- At the same time, Israel will be required to emphasize to any administration, whether Republican or Democrat, that the most effective way of motivating the Iranian regime to compromise is to **combine** robust military presence in the region that poses a credible military threat, with sanctions, punitive measures, and heavy economic pressure.
- In any case, Israel will have to continue its **decisive prevention of Iran's military entrenchment** across the region, and particularly along **our borders**, which aims to heighten the threat to our home front.

Israel must focus its efforts on ensuring that the U.S. will insist on rectifying the weaknesses inherent to the nuclear agreement, and not leave Israel alone with this problem.

Israel must decide how far it would be willing to go, and which steps it would be willing to take, in order to thwart a "bad deal" with Iran.

## 3

## The Palestinian challenge in light of the Abraham Accords

The Palestinian system is undergoing **one of the harshest multidimensional crises** it has experienced in recent decades. The backdrop for this strategic crisis is a combination of several negative processes: the receding dream of an independent state; an internal division; resentment of the leadership in Judea and Samaria as well as Gaza; a rift with the US administration; regional and international focus on Palestinian issue lessening, overshadowed by more urgent challenges; and a decline in relations with the Arab world, as some Arab countries are inclined to promote normalization with Israel even if no arrangement has been reached on the Palestinian front.

The Abraham Accords are pushing the Palestinian Authority towards the open arms of the radical camp in the region, and it is currently getting closer to Hamas while receiving support from Iran, Turkey, the Muslim Brotherhood, Hizballah, and others.

The Palestinian Authority – which is radicalizing its stances, avoiding the civil and security coordination with Israel, and losing its *raison d'être* as the leader of the two-state solution – is **gradually fading as**

**a governing system.** Under such circumstances, the Civil Administration and IDF have already assumed some of its civic powers, and may be increasingly forced to manage the lives of millions of Palestinians on the ground.

**The Palestinian Authority is losing its *raison d'être* as the leader of the two-state solution, gradually fading as a governing system.**

**A "crawling" return to direct military control of the Palestinian population in Judea and Samaria,** ultimately leading to a de-facto **one-state** reality, would create an extremely heavy burden on the Israeli economy, while proving detrimental to the IDF's ability to address the threats posed by Iran and the northern front.

At the same time, civil conditions (including the spread of the Coronavirus) are exacerbating **in Gaza**, as Hamas continues to build up its force. The ongoing distress among civilians reflects negatively on local security and destabilizes it. In the absence of substantial change over time, potential for a rapid escalation increases, or even for **a comprehensive campaign that would draw Israel into the Gaza Strip.**

## Policy recommendations

- Despite the normalization, Israel must realize that the Palestinian issue is not going anywhere, but exacerbating. Ignoring it to the point of abandoning it while turning its attention to the Arab world could "**blow up in Israel's face**".
- Israel is required to leverage its normalization accords to **advance the Palestinian issue**; announce that the dangerous **annexation plan** is off the table for good (for it poses a risk to the essential strategic relations with Jordan too); renew its peace negotiations with the Palestinian Authority and revive the **two-state solution**, even if, under the current circumstances, the chances of reaching it are extremely low. All in an effort to, first, return to full coordination with the PA, and second, **strengthen it as much as possible as the governing system** responsible for managing the lives of the Palestinian population in Judea and Samaria.
- If we look at the long-range picture, Israeli society must decide today whether it prefers the vision of a **strategic**, geographic, infrastructural and economic **separation** of the two national movements, or the current dynamics leading to a "**one-state**" **scenario**, literally. The Palestinians are heading for such a reality because they have lost all hope of an independent state and collective aspiration to improve their living conditions, whereas the Israelis are indifferent and constantly delay their strategic decision, thereby **creating a threat to Israel's existence as a Jewish and Democratic state**.
- The chances of resolving the Gaza problem are extremely low as long as no alternative has been presented for Hamas rule, which denies Israel's right to exist, and embraces armed resistance. Nevertheless, Israel has a **profound interest to ensure that the civil conditions in Gaza do not slip down the slippery slope towards a humanitarian crisis** that would inevitably cross over into its territory. It is therefore in Israel's best interest to reach a long-term arrangement with Hamas whereby **the Gaza Strip will be opened** to broad and diverse aid, under security limitations, as well as to export, **while avoiding recurrent restrictions to civil conditions**.

Israel is required to take the dangerous annexation plan off the table for good, for it poses a risk to the essential strategic relations with Jordan too.

Israeli society must decide whether it prefers the vision of a strategic separation or the current dynamics leading to a "one-state" scenario.



## 4

## The Middle East at a time of upheaval – Key trends, risks, and opportunities

As this decade is coming to a close, the revolutionary era in the Middle East has not yet been exhausted, and we are still in the midst of it. This region is prone to rapid, unexpected strategic change that could challenge Israel, and spill over into its territory, while also spurring positive trends and providing some opportunities.

**The Abraham Accords** normalizing relations with the UAE and Bahrain indicate **growing acceptance of Israel in the region**, while reflecting **the magnitude of the interests it shares with Sunni Arab states**. The most prominent is the strong front against the Iranian threat as well as the challenge posed by Islamic extremism and terrorism. The accords could also potentially lead to economic, technological, security-related, medical, and scientific collaborations.

The profound normalization process with the Gulf States is unlikely to lead to warmer peace relations with **Egypt and Jordan** in the foreseeable future, as the **local public and intelligentsia are still hostile toward Israel**. If and when **Saudi Arabia** would join the normalization trend, this dramatic development would clearly indicate a change in "world order" with respect to Israeli-Arab relations.

**Israel's relations with Jordan** are being put to the test. The Annexation Plan, which Amman fears has yet to be removed from the Israeli agenda for good, stands to cause detrimental harm to both relations and strategic collaboration. The latter provides Israel with **huge advantages** (strategic depth, a quiet border) **that save voluminous resources as well as lives**. The normalization accords provide Israel with the **opportunity** to harness the Gulf states, particularly the UAE and Saudi Arabia, **to expand the economic and security aid to Jordan, as the latter is at a vulnerable and fragile juncture**. Destabilization in Jordan would be a negative development on the regional level, certainly for Israel, the security of which relies on its cooperation with the Hashemite Kingdom.

**Fear over the growing shadows of two non-Arab powers – Turkey and Iran – is increasing** in the Arab world. The threat they pose was a key topic of discussion during the recent Arab League Summit sessions, and even overshadowed the deliberations on normalization with Israel.

After the "green wave" of the Muslim Brotherhood was stalled in 2013 by the toppling of Mohamed Morsi in Egypt, it seemed that **the Turkish-Qatari axis** is now promoting its return to a position of impact, making **the Arab world react**. At the same time, **the anti-Iranian sentiment in the region** is also increasing, even in traditional arenas

**The Middle East is prone to rapid, unexpected strategic change that could challenge Israel, and spill over into its territory, while also providing some opportunities.**

**Fear over the growing shadows of two non-Arab powers – Turkey and Iran – is increasing in the Arab world.**



of Iranian influence, against the backdrop of the Iranian regime's involvement in the brutal suppressing of civil protest, not only in Iran itself, but **in Iraq and Lebanon** too. Is the Iranian regime which, to date, was mainly perceived as a threat to Arab regimes, becoming **an enemy of the people in the region and their pursuit of liberty**?

**The power of the "moderate Sunni front", and its ability to inhibit Iranian impact in the region, should not be overrated.**

Be that as it may, **the power of the "moderate Sunni front"**, and its ability to inhibit Iranian impact in the region, **should not be overrated**. The Sunni camp is incohesive, suffering from disputes and internal division, and some of the countries comprising it have far more urgent priorities than the Iranian threat, such as **the Muslim Brotherhood challenge**. The UAE and Saudi Arabia probably will not dare to use force against Iran (as demonstrated in the aftermath of the crushing Iranian attack against the Saudi oil infrastructure), and the deterrence relationship between these parties is decisively in favor of Tehran. Under such circumstances, **the Gulf states' security is entirely dependent upon U.S. presence in the region** and the defense umbrella it provides them.

**Lebanon** – The instability in Lebanon is exacerbating, **and may spill over into Israel**. It is paralyzed and at a deadlock. The corrupt sectarian elites object to the public demand to change the system of government, as it is the basis of their power, but cannot govern or sustain their country. France warns that **Lebanon is on the brink of the abyss** and, in the absence of reforms, will not be eligible to aid, thereby leading to its potential collapse as a state.

**France warns that Lebanon is on the brink of the abyss, and may collapse.**

Due to the instability and uncertainty in the Middle East, Israel must retain **its qualitative military edge (QME)** more than ever before **vis à vis any possible combination of adversaries**, while preserving its image of deterrence and power in the region.

## Preserving Israel's qualitative military edge (QME)

The normalization accords with the UAE are a historical and strategic accomplishment. The UAE is an important player displaying regional leadership that shares many interests with Israel, primarily vis à vis the Iranian threat.

Nevertheless, what appears to be **Israel's consent** to the sale of the advanced American aircraft, **the F-35**, to the UAE has some problematic strategic repercussions for it.

Losing the monopoly over the F-35 – a sophisticated multidimensional fighter system that provides Israel with a crushing edge alongside other elements of power – gnaws at Israel's air supremacy and freedom of action in the region, both of which are key components in the quality gap in its favor within the regional balance of power. Israel's strength and quality edge in the region **enhance its image of deterrence in a hostile environment**, and the fact that it has retained them over time has gradually allowed the realization that "it is here to stay" to seep into Arab awareness. This realization has played a key role in their decision to forge relations with it, and pursue peace.

There are two well-known foundations in the realm of intelligence: **the other side's intentions and capabilities**. Threatening capabilities are built slowly, but could become a significant threat when coupled with a change in intention, as the latter is more fluid, and prone to shifts. **Turkey** was a sister state of Israel, and is now a strategic adversary; **Iran**, a former close friend of Israel, is now a bitter and dangerous enemy that could pose an existential threat to it; in **Egypt**, the Muslim Brotherhood has taken over abruptly, and almost formed a hostile block against Israel with Turkey. Had President El-Sisi failed to thwart the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood, Israel would have faced a broad and substantial strategic threat.

Israel must not forget, even for a moment, that if its power were to be weakened, the rug would be pulled from under its feet in the long range.

Therefore, maintaining its **qualitative** edge is an overriding principle. Israel has always viewed its military supremacy as a top strategic asset that ensures regional stability. It has been persistent in its objection to the provision of tiebreaking weapons, even to non-enemy states, by way of protecting itself against shifts and turning points "on a rainy day".

**Losing the monopoly over the F-35 will harm Israel's air supremacy and freedom of action, both of which are key components in the quality gap in its favor as well as its image of deterrence.**

**Threatening capabilities are built slowly, but could become a significant threat when coupled with a change in intention, as the latter is more fluid, and prone to shifts.**

**The sale of F-35 aircraft to the UAE will lead to a regional arms race, and reduce the U.S. commitment to preserving Israel's qualitative edge, as anchored in U.S. legislation.**

The sale of F-35 aircraft to the UAE is expected to lead to "the breaking of barriers". It will set a problematic standard from two aspects: all the Gulf States and Egypt will demand to purchase this fighter jet from the U.S.; and any arms system of lesser quality compared to the F-35 and its associated systems will become an "obvious" item up for sale in the region. Such dynamics are expected to lead to **a regional arms race**, and reduce the U.S. commitment to preserving Israel's quality edge, **as anchored in U.S. legislation**.

## Policy recommendations

- Israel must take steps **to ensure that the U.S. will help to maintain its QME fully and unquestionably**, and that **the Arabs' buildup of force will not cross red lines**.
- Due to the COVID-19 crisis, the IDF must progress in **the implementation of its multiannual plan for the buildup of its force**, based on an approved **state budget**, adjusted for the new socio-economic reality, and while **fully utilizing U.S. foreign aid funds**. The multiannual plan forms a significant part of preserving Israel's QME, and is vital for the IDF to properly function.
- Israel's considerations and interests on the issue of selling F-35 aircraft to the UAE are undoubtedly strategic and cardinal to its national security. It is inconceivable that such a decision, with such far-reaching implications, would be made in a democratic country without consulting or including the relevant professionals and establishments: the government, cabinet, Ministry of Defense, IDF, Knesset and its committees, etc. The exclusion of these agencies is detrimental to the democratic process, as well as to national security.

**The IDF must progress in the implementation of its multiannual plan for the buildup of its force, based on an approved state budget while fully utilizing U.S. foreign aid funds.**

**It is inconceivable that strategic decisions would be made in a democratic country without consulting or including the relevant professionals and establishments.**

## 5

## U.S.-Israel relations in a changing reality

The special relations and alliance between Israel and the U.S. are robust. They are based on shared values such as freedom and democracy, an immigrant society, equal opportunity, initiative and innovation, as well as similar interests. **The U.S. will not abandon its strong commitment to Israel's security and economic flourish.**

**Israel's status as a bi-partisan consensus is undergoing dangerous erosion.**

Nevertheless, **Israel's status as a bi-partisan consensus is undergoing dangerous erosion** as it is gradually becoming a partisan issue and a point of political dispute in light of deepening U.S. polarization.

Israel seems to share the Trump administration's apparent approach, placing the normalization accords with the Arab states on a pedestal, important though they are, while setting aside the Palestinian issue. Thus, **a growing gap is forming between Israel and the Democrats.** In the absence of any progress with the Palestinians, and certainly in view of the exacerbating crisis with them, Israel may find that, in future, it will only be supported by the Republicans.

**The level of solidarity with Israel is also dropping, even among U.S. Jewry**, particularly the younger generation, being increasingly replaced by distancing and alienation trends.

**The next generation of leaders among U.S. Jewry has not experienced the Zionist miracle, and does not sympathize with Israel as it once did. Many among its ranks even regard it as reactionary.**

**The next generation of leaders among U.S. Jewry** – the educated young adults currently attending ivy league colleges – have not experienced the Zionist miracle, and do not sympathize with Israel as they once did. Many of them even regard it as **a reactionary player in the Middle East.** There are also rising power groups in the U.S., such as African Americans and Hispanics, who do not automatically identify with Israel and its Zionist vision, and may even go as far as to define it as an occupier violating the Palestinians' rights.

These problematic trends are **sensitive issues crucial to Israel's national security**, a significant factor in which is U.S. support and the special relations between the two parties.

**The US expects Israel to help it retain its qualitative technological edge (QTE) versus China.**

**Another challenge that may cast a shadow over Israel-U.S. relations is China.** The U.S. view China as the greatest threat to its national security and to liberal values these days. Despite the close dialog on China between Israel and the U.S., both the administration and non-governmental think tanks accessible in Washington continue to convey their deep concern over Israel's conduct, and that of its apparatuses', in Chinese investments, particularly in technology.

One of the messages conveyed during the conference in this context was that **the U.S. expects Israel to help it retain its qualitative technological edge (QTE) versus China.** The question of limiting China's access to new technology when it is searching for it in Israel after being turned away elsewhere will remain on the table in Israeli-American relations, regardless of who will be elected to the White House.

## What should Israel do?

- Israel is not doing enough to gain American solidarity. The Israeli government must urgently address its relations with the U.S., and consolidate a strategic political and diplomatic plan containing clear and required objectives and accomplishments **pertaining to its conduct vis à vis the next U.S. administration, whether Republican or Democrat.** In this context, its top priority should be **retaining bi-partisan support of Israel**, and the Iranian nuclear challenge.
- The establishment of an inter-ministerial team is recommended for the consolidation of **a detailed plan promoting stronger ties between Israel and U.S. Jewry, as well as a shared vision.**
- Israel must **fortify its public diplomacy agencies** assigned with promoting its image **as a democratic, pluralistic and liberal state** in their campaign against anti-Israeli propaganda in the U.S.. Israel should set the goal of deeply rooting the idea that it is every Jew's national home as a constant and unabating factor in American Jewish identity.
- At the same time, it is important to incorporate content in the Israeli education system that would enable learners to gain a more profound understanding of American Jewry, and the Jewish world in general. The education system does not tell the story of Diaspora Jewry enough, nor does it emphasize its invaluable contribution to Israel's resilience and security.
- **As for the issue of China**, to avoid a crisis in its relations with the U.S., Israel must enhance its oversight mechanisms on Chinese investments **in coordination with the U.S., while acting in full transparency** to ensure that it meets the American standard. This way, the U.S. administration could determine that China's activity in Israel does not pose a risk to U.S. interests.

**The Israeli government must urgently address its relations with the US, and consolidate a strategic political and diplomatic plan aimed at strengthening them.**

**The education system does not tell the story of Diaspora Jewry enough, nor does it emphasize its invaluable contribution to Israel's resilience and security.**

**To avoid a crisis in its relations with the U.S., Israel must enhance its oversight mechanisms on Chinese investments in coordination and complete transparency with the U.S..**



## U.S. Leadership in the Middle East, and the Latter's Rank on its List of Priorities<sup>1</sup>

In the event that President Trump is reelected, he is expected to continue the **conflict and decoupling process with China**, leading to the formation of two economic poles. Some fear that, in hindsight, this move would be viewed as **a historical strategic error**, that could lead to **conflict between the two powers**, and prove detrimental to global security as well as stability. Even if Biden would win the elections, the rivalry and competition with China will remain on the agenda.

Despite increasing focus on Asia in light of the growing Chinese challenge, **the U.S. is not withdrawing from the Middle East**, and is expected to maintain its regional military presence. It still has **vital interests** in the region, even if its dependence on the energy produced there has lessened. The U.S. is committed to its strategic alliance with Israel, the safety of its Gulf partners, and free flow of oil – to Europe and across Asia, particularly India. It is determined to prevent turmoil in the world economy, stop Iran **from becoming nuclear**, and thwart the establishment of terror networks and organizations.

Nevertheless, the US is seeking to reduce the scope of its forces in the Middle East, and redeploy in an effort to lower the level of resources (money and human lives) it invests in the region to a tolerable one, while maintaining a relatively high ratio of cost effectiveness. The need to recover from the blow sustained by the U.S. economy during the COVID-19 crisis, will limit U.S. capabilities, whether under Trump's or Biden's leadership, with regard to overseas presence and alternatives. The American public anticipates as much, and will object to any reentry to regions such as Syria and Iraq.

Moreover, the U.S. expects its allies in the region to carry more of its security's weight, and is often critical of their conduct (the steps taken by Saudi Arabia in Yemen, human right issues, involvement in Libya, etc.). The U.S. regards the agreements signed between Israel and the UAE and Bahrain as a devolvement that may enable the adjustments in its Middle Eastern presence, while **narrowing down the questions pertaining to its leadership in the region**.

**The need to recover from the blow sustained by the U.S. economy during the COVID-19 crisis will limit U.S. capabilities with regard to overseas presence and alternatives.**

<sup>1</sup> The conference did not focus on **Russia and its Policy in the Middle East** – a subject due to be explored separately in an upcoming paper.

## Policy recommendations

- Israel must make the analysis of shared implications and preparations for the repercussions and challenges associated with minimizing U.S. military presence in the region, central in its dialog with the U.S. administration.

## To conclude

Although Israel's security has been relatively stable in recent years, the combination of a weakened socio-economic national resilience domestically, and exacerbating strategic threats externally – two processes that could feed one another in a vicious circle – makes **2021 a year that may pose a crucial challenge to Israel's national security and strength.**

### Online International Security & Policy Conference On: Israel in an Era of Crises - Where Do We Go From Here?

Was held on September 10, 2020, with the Participations  
of High-ranking International and Israeli Speakers

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discussions and sessions:

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# Conference Program

## Opening Remarks:

Prof. **Uriel Reichman**, President & Founder, IDC Herzliya

## Israel in an Era of Crises - Where do we go from here?

### Conversation:

Lt. Gen. (res.) **Gadi Eisenkot**, Former Chief of the IDF General Staff

with: Maj. Gen. (res.) **Amos Gilead**, Executive-Director, IPS, IDC Herzliya

## U.S.-Israel Relations in a Changing Reality

### Our Vital Israeli-American Relationship

#### A Personal Interview:

Ms. **Irina Nevzlin**, Author of the Book: *The Impact of Identity - The Power of Knowing Who You Are*; President of the NADAV Foundation; Chair of the Board of Directors of The Museum of the Jewish People at Beit Hatfutsot

with: Mr. **David Horovitz**, Editor of *The Times of Israel*

### The Normalization of UAE-Israel Relations: Where Will This Lead?

Mr. **Haim Saban**, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Saban Capital Group, LLC ("SCG")

Maj. Gen. (res.) **Amos Gilead**, Executive-Director, Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS), IDC Herzliya

### U.S. Leadership in the Middle East - Threats and Challenges

#### Online Strategic Arena:

Hon. **Mary Beth Long**, Former U.S. Assistant Secretary of Defense

Hon. **John C. Rood**, Former U.S. Under Secretary of Defense for Policy

Mr. **David Makovsky**, Director of the Project on Arab-Israel Relations, The Washington Institute

Amb. **Daniel Shapiro**, Former U.S. Ambassador to Israel; Distinguished Visiting Fellow, INSS

Moderator: Mr. **David Horovitz**, Editor of *The Times of Israel*

### U.S. Priorities in a Changing Middle East

Gen. **John R. Allen**, USMC (ret.), Former Commander, U.S. and International Forces - Afghanistan; President, The Brookings Institution

### U.S.-Israel Relations: A New Era?

Mr. **Jeffrey Goldberg**, Editor in Chief, The Atlantic

# Israel, the Palestinians and the Middle East: The Writing Is on the Wall!

## Israel and the Palestinians: What Lies Ahead?

### A Personal Interview:

Mr. **Yoram Cohen**, Former Director of the Israeli Security Agency (SHABAK)

with: Col. (res.) **Michael Milstein**, Head, Palestinian Studies Forum, Moshe Dayan Center, Tel Aviv University

## The Changing Middle East: A View from Paris

### Conversation:

Hon. **Philippe Errera**, Director-General for Political Affairs and Security, French Foreign Ministry

with: Maj. Gen. (res.) **Amos Gilead**, Executive-Director, Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS), IDC Herzliya

## Judea & Samaria under Israeli Direct Control: How Much Will It Cost?

Prof. **Avi Ben-Bassat**, Prof. (Emeritus) of Economics, Hebrew University; Former Director-General of the Israeli Ministry of Finance; Senior Director of the Research and Foreign Currency Departments at the Bank of Israel

Col. (res.) **Michael Milstein**, Head, Palestinian Studies Forum, Moshe Dayan Center, Tel Aviv University

## Two Peoples, One State: Can It Remain Jewish and Democratic?

### Moderated Discussion:

Dr. **Micah Goodman**, Author

Ms. **Zehava Gal-On**, President, Zulat - Equality and Human Rights; Former Meretz Chairperson; Former Israeli MK

Mr. **Oded Revivi**, Mayor, Efrat Municipality

Moderator: Ms. **Lucy Aharish**, Journalist, DemocraTV

## Regional Turmoil: The Jordanian Perspective

### A Personal Interview:

H.E. Dr. **Jawad Anani**, Former Deputy Prime Minister and Former Foreign Minister, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

with: Ms. **Ksenia Svetlova**, Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS), IDC Herzliya

## Israel, the Palestinians and the Middle East: The Writing Is on the Wall!

### Commentators Talk:

Mr. **Roi Kais**, Arab Affairs Correspondent, Kan 11

Mr. **Oded Granot**, Senior Middle East and Arab World Commentator, *Israel Hayom*

Ms. **Smadar Perry**, Senior Middle East Editor, *Yedioth Ahronoth*

Moderator: Col. (res.) **Udi Evental**, Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS), IDC Herzliya

## The Israeli-Iranian Conflict: Will Israel Be Left Alone?

### Heads Together:

Dr. **Raz Zimmt**, Research Fellow, INSS; Editor of “Spotlight on Iran”

with: Col. (res.) **Udi Evental**, Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS), IDC Herzliya

### Coping with the Iranian Challenge

Gen. (ret.) **David H. Petraeus**, Former Director of the CIA; Former Commander of U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM); Partner & Chairman, KKR Global Institute

### The Israeli-Iranian Conflict: Will Israel Be Left Alone?

#### Online Strategic Arena:

Dr. **Dalia Dassa Kaye**, Director of the Center for Middle East Public Policy, RAND Corporation

Amb. Dr. **Dennis Ross**, Former Special Assistant to President Obama and White House Coordinator for the Middle East and the Persian Gulf Region; Distinguished Fellow, The Washington Institute

Maj. Gen. (res.) **Nitzan Alon**, Former Project Director for Iran; Former Head of Operations Directorate, IDF

Maj. Gen. (res.) **Amos Gilead**, Executive-Director, Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS), IDC Herzliya

Moderator: Mr. **Udi Segal**, Chief Political Analyst; Anchor of the Evening News, Reshet 13; Sammy Ofer School of Communication, IDC Herzliya

## The Coronavirus: Between a Health Pandemic and Socioeconomic Virus

### Moderated Discussion:

Prof. **Joshua (Shuki) Shemer**, Chairman, Assuta Medical Centers

Prof. **Jonathan Gershoni**, Tel Aviv University

Prof. **Rafi Melnick**, Provost, IDC Herzliya; Former Member of the Monetary Committee, Bank of Israel

Moderator: Ms. **Tal Schneider**, Diplomatic & Political Correspondent, *Globes*

### Mayors at the Forefront of the Coronavirus Pandemic

#### A Personal Interview:

Mr. **Moshe Fadlon**, Mayor of Herzliya

with: Ms. **Tal Shalev**, Political Correspondent, *Walla! News*



## Upholding Israel's Qualitative Military Edge (QME)

### Personal Interview:

Maj. Gen. (res.) **Amos Gilead**, Executive-Director, Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS), IDC Herzliya  
with: Dr. **Ronen Bergman**, Senior Correspondent Yedioth Ahronoth; The New York Times;  
The Author of the Book: *Rise and Kill First*

## Great-Power Competition and the Middle East

Hon. **Michèle Flournoy**, Former U.S. Under Secretary of Defense for Policy; Co-Founder and Managing Partner, WestExec Advisors

### A Conversation with Deans:

Prof. **Boaz Ganor**, Founder and Executive-Director, Institute for Counter Terrorism (ICT); Former Dean, Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy & Strategy, IDC Herzliya

Prof. **Assaf Moghadam**, Dean, Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy & Strategy, IDC Herzliya

Moderator: Dr. **Dana Wolf**, Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy & Strategy, IDC Herzliya

### Closing Remarks:

Maj. Gen. (res.) **Amos Gilead**, Executive-Director, Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS), IDC Herzliya

### Comments & Commentaries

Ms. **Ksenia Svetlova**, Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS), IDC Herzliya

Col. (res.) **Udi Evental**, Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS), IDC Herzliya

Col. (res.) **Michael Milstein**, Head, Palestinian Studies Forum, Moshe Dayan Center, Tel Aviv University

## About the Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS)

The Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS) at IDC Herzliya, the convener of the Annual Herzliya Conference Series, aspires to contribute to Israel's national security and resilience. To that end, the Institute conducts integrative and comprehensive policy analysis on the national challenges, produces strategic insights and policy recommendations for decision-makers, and informs the public and policy discourse. The Institute's policy agenda consists of two main pillars – Israel's national security and societal resilience.

The Institute's policy analysis and deliberations on Israel's national security assesses key processes shaping the Middle East and the global arena and identifies strategic opportunities to mitigate and offset critical threats and risks. The Institute's policy work on societal resilience stems from the understanding that internal weakness could harm Israel's overall ability to tackle strategic challenges, thus making societal resilience a key building-block of Israel's national security. Connecting both pillars, the Institute also addresses the growing gap between Israel and Jewish communities around the world – and with American Jews in particular.

**Maj. Gen. (res.) Amos Gilead** heads the Institute, serves as its Executive Director, and chairs the Annual Herzliya Conference Series. General Gilead led a distinguished career for more than three decades in the IDF and in the Defense Establishment, his last position being Director of Policy and Political-Military Affairs at the Ministry of Defense. In addition, General Gilead served as Chief of the IDF Intelligence Research and Analysis Division, Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories, IDF Spokesperson, and Military Secretary (Aide de Camp) to Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, Yitzhak Rabin.

