

Security & Policy Conference:

What Strategy Does Israel Need?

Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS)

Insights and Recommendations

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All conference sessions are available for viewing on the IPS website
bit.ly/IPS-ConferenceWeb2021

Foreword

We are delighted to present you with a paper containing all the key insights that emerged from the IPS conference held on November 23, 2021, at Reichman University. This document consists of statements made by the speakers at the conference, alongside policy recommendations formulated by the IPS staff, and pertaining to the strategic challenges that Israel is facing.

The conference centered on the strategy Israel needed, and, in this context, the following core issues were discussed: addressing the threat posed by Iran (both nuclear and with regard to its subversive regional policy); grappling with the complex dilemmas that accompany Israel's policy vis-à-vis the Palestinians (both in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip); responding to Washington's and Moscow's conduct in the Middle East; preparing for the next campaign in which Israel will engage; and coping with the strategic implications of the COVID-19 crisis.

The clearest message conveyed throughout the discussions, interviews, and presentations at the conference was the severity of the challenges Israel is facing domestically and internationally, which requires the formulation of an organized strategy that would generate a solution corresponding with Jerusalem's long-term national strategic needs. To do so, it is imperative that decisions be taken on several strategic issues, as the current policy seems, in effect, to be intensifying the challenges that it was designed to address, primarily those pertaining to Iran and the Palestinians.

The conference aimed to contribute to the growing public discourse in Israel on matters of security and politics, while illuminating dilemmas and controversies, as well as producing policy recommendations. It was attended by leaders, senior decision-makers from Israel and the United States in political and military areas, senior officials in the international and Israeli health systems, as well as key figures in politics, the academic world, the media and the economy.



Maj. Gen. (res.) Amos Gilead

Executive Director, Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS), Reichman University

The Iranian Threat:

Is the Strategy Effective?



"We face a complex time, we may encounter some disagreements with our best of friends, and it would not be the first time. Even if an agreement will be reached, Israel is not a party to it, and is not bound by it. The mistake that we made after the first nuclear deal in 2015 will not be repeated."

The Prime Minister of Israel,
Hon. Naftali Bennett

The Iranian strategy is consistent and actively aims to establish regional impact, undermine the American presence in the Middle East, as well as the Sunni-Israeli alliance, while becoming a nuclear threshold state de facto. The trailblazing progress made by the Iranian nuclear program, alongside the renewed nuclear talks in Vienna, pose the number one strategic threat to Israel's national security. At the same time, Iran is unrelenting in its investment in military entrenchment in the region (Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Yemen), the development of advanced firing capabilities (drones, rockets, and ballistic missiles), as well as sophisticated cyberattacking capabilities that aim to magnify the threat to Israel's first circle.

In his special address at the conference, Prime Minister Bennett noted that Israel's response must change, and that the asymmetry, whereby Israel contends with the proxy from Lebanon, Syria, or Gaza in an ongoing attrition campaign that is weakening it, must also change. The pressure has to shift to Iran itself, while utilizing Israel's competitive edges (economy, cyber, democracy, and international legitimacy) more effectively to collapse Iran's ability to lead a campaign against it for the long term. Under such an approach, the overall pressure-exerting policy, coupled with the development of effective military deterrence, will lead this current war of attrition between the two countries to end in the collapse of Iran's ability to continue sustaining its efforts of regional impact and entrenchment, as well as its

nuclear program. For such a policy to succeed, it requires vast investment in force buildup, alongside the development of independent military capabilities that, at the appointed time, would be able to push back the Iranian nuclear program, even in the absence of U.S. assistance.

However, the policy presented by the Israeli prime minister does not tally with that of the White House, as the latter is striving for the establishment of regional stability by re-signing the nuclear deal, while diverting its attention and resources to strategically contending with China and Russia. Thus, the potential for friction between the Israeli government and U.S. administration increases as the probability of signing a new nuclear deal that does not correspond with Israel's security interests rises.

Israel should try to influence the U.S. policy on Iranian nuclear, while understanding the American national set of priorities, and the possible toll on the relations between the two countries in the event that Israel should overtly object to the steps taken by President Biden.

[To watch the interview with Prime Minister Naftali Bennett , click here >>](#)

How close is Iran to a nuclear bomb?



Iran's nuclear breakout time now is three weeks.

Mr. Gideon Frank, Former Head of the Israel Atomic Energy Commission

Ms. Gili Cohen, Diplomatic and Political Correspondent, "Kan" - The Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation | Maj. Gen. (ret.) Amos Yadlin, Former Chief of IDF's Military Intelligence | Mr. Tamir Pardo, Former Head of the Mossad | Mr. Gideon Frank, Former Head of the Israel Atomic Energy Commission; Chairman of the Council, Technion, Israel Institute of Technology | Maj. Gen. (res.) Yaakov Amidror, Former Head of the National Security Council; Senior Fellow, Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security (JISS)

The nuclear deal between Iran and the great powers, signed in 2015, had extended the nuclear breakout time by 10 to 12 months. President Trump's withdrawal from it in May 2018 had accelerated the nuclear program, shortening the breakout time to three weeks. Thus, Iran has enriched uranium to the exceptional grades of 20%

and 60%, to the point that it can now enrich uranium to weapons-grade, and use it for a bomb within three weeks. Since, at the same time, the IAEA's ability to fully and independently oversee the nuclear sites has been curbed, the Iranian nuclear program is even less restrained at present.

Former Head of the Israel Atomic Energy Commission, **Mr. Gideon Frank**, claimed that the problem is even worse than the mere acceleration of schedules and absence of oversight. **The knowledge accumulated by Iran, alongside the development of advanced centrifuges, will not be taken away from it, even if it does sign a new deal with the great powers. Therefore, even if such an agreement is reached, its point of departure would be substantially different than that of the JCPOA signed in 2015. The knowledge, research and development, advanced centrifuges and independent capabilities developed constitute an evolved nuclear infrastructure that considerably shortens the breakout time once a decision is made.**

Not all are in agreement over the Israeli policy that should be formulated vis-à-vis the return to the nuclear deal. Those in favor argue that the main advantage of a renewed agreement (assuming Iran would even be willing to return to it) is that it "buys time", approximately 9 years, during which Iran would be limited in its accumulation of enriched fissile material. At the end of those 9 years, Iran would be a month away from nuclear breakout, much like it is now. Nevertheless, this time is crucial, and could be used to build up military force, as well as prepare for a conflict with Iran in view of the current gap between Israel's force buildup and the Iranian breakout time.

By contrast, those who object to the re-signing of the nuclear deal argue that the agreement would lead to the international legitimization of Iran, strengthening the Iranian economy so that it would enable the regime to contain the popular protests, while increasing its investment in regional entrenchment, as well as the proliferation of advanced weapons in the area. Thus, the signing of a nuclear deal could turn Iran into a regional power capable of impacting Middle Eastern dynamics, and lead to a regional conventional and nuclear arms race. Either way, Israeli strategy is trapped between two evils.

Did Israel employ the correct strategy vis-à-vis the nuclear deal?



"The mistake was not made in 2015, but in 2018, when they exited from the agreement during its good years. They should have waited and withdrawn from it in 2028 ... But in 2018, when you leave the agreement without preparing plan B, that's the huge failure."

Maj. Gen. (ret.) Amos Yadlin, Former Chief of IDF's Military Intelligence

There is a difference of opinion over whether or not Israel's strategy vis-à-vis the decision to withdraw from the JCPOA in 2018 was correct. **Maj. Gen. (res.) Yaakov Amidror**, Former Head of the National Security Council, expressed support for the American decision to exit from the nuclear deal. He claimed that it was an essential step at the time, designed to take advantage of the strategic opportunity that lay in the election of a U.S. president that was completely aligned with Israeli policy on Iran. The coordination of its policy with Washington, and exertion of overall pressure on Iran as sanctions were reimposed, while delegitimizing and tarnishing the Iranian regime in the international arena, were crucial steps that aimed to curb Iran's regional entrenchment, while nullifying the agreement that would have allowed Iran to accelerate its nuclear program in 2030 almost with no restraints. According to this school of thought, it was impossible to know whether such an opportunity would ever present itself again, and therefore, the critical theoretical argument that we should have waited for a point in time at which the agreement no longer served Israel, and only then exited it, is irrelevant.

In response, those who objected to Washington's withdrawal from the JCPOA argue that it was obvious that the United States would not have been willing to engage in yet another campaign in the Middle East, certainly not in light of the new national set of priorities, at the top of which is contending with China and Russia. Subsequently, in the absence of a tangible military threat, the overall pressure policy was doomed from the onset. Moreover, the nuclear deal was serving the purpose of keeping Iran away from the development of nuclear weapons for an extended period of time, during which Israel could have invested in military force buildup (the multiannual



Mr. Tamir Pardo, Former Head of the Mossad | Mr. Gideon Frank, Former Head of the Israel Atomic Energy Commission; Chairman of the Council, Technion, Israel Institute of Technology | Maj. Gen. (res.) Yaakov Amidror, Former Head of the National Security Council; Senior Fellow, Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security (JISS)

plan known as Gideon), while diverting its resources to other platforms and arenas, as well as preparing for the morning after the agreement.

By withdrawing from the JCPOA in 2018 without preparing an alternative plan in case the overall pressure policy should fail, the current gap was created, whereby Iran is accelerating its nuclear program undisturbed, whereas the tools available to Israel by means of curbing it are limited, to put it mildly. This current state of affairs had also led Minister of Finance, **Hon. Avigdor Liberman**, to present his pessimistic assessment during the conference that, even if the great powers and Iran should formulate a new agreement, Iran would still become a nuclear state within five years.



Hon. Avigdor Liberman, Israeli Minister of Finance, in an interview with Mr. Shimon Shiffer, Senior Political-Diplomatic Commentator, Yediot Ahronoth

[To watch the Session on The Iranian Threat: Is the Strategy Effective?, click here >>](#)

[To watch the interview with Hon. Avigdor Liberman, click here >>](#)

Is the military option on the table?



“ I won’t go into the operational plans, but if there’s one thing everyone would agree on – it’s that a military option must be on the table. The IDF is building its plan in collaboration with the political echelon. ”

Maj. Gen. Amikam Norkin,
Commander of the Israeli Air Force (IAF)

[To watch the interview with Maj. Gen. Amikam Norkin, click here >>](#)

The Abraham Accords were a gamechanger in the Middle East. The newly-forged warm and overt relations, alongside the profitable economic collaboration that includes joint financial projects, memorandums of understanding (MOUs), mass tourism, joint conferences, etc., have demonstrated the potential of enhancing the strategic cooperation between Israel and the Arab World. However, the underlying foundation for economic and civilian collaboration is security-military by nature, in view of the increasing severity of the threat to regional stability posed by Iran.

Thus, the Campaign Between Wars still constitutes the key vehicle by which to curb Iranian entrenchment in Syria, and establish Israeli deterrence, while strengthening Israeli valuableness in the campaign against Iran in the regional arena. **Maj. Gen. (res.) Amos Gilead**, Executive Director of the Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS), has noted that the Israeli campaign designed to curb Iranian military entrenchment in Syria has gone up a notch in recent months, according to foreign press, and corresponds with the Russian interest, seeking to limit Iranian clout in Syria. Thus, the success of the Campaign Between Wars depends, to a large extent, on Israel’s coordination with Russia, and, in this context, **Prime Minister Bennett’s** recent visit to Moscow was of strategic importance in view of the need to maintain the IDF’s freedom of action in Syria via the friction prevention mechanism. The Israeli Campaign Between Wars bolsters Israeli deterrence, but has little effect on the system-wide regional force buildup processes led by Iran.

The Commander of the IAF’s publicized visit to the UAE several weeks ago, as well as the Minister of Defense’s visit to Morocco for the signing of a security memorandum of understanding last month, and the overtly warming of relations between Israel and Egypt, Jordan, and the Gulf States, all demonstrate the leap in strategic and security relations between Israel and the Arab World, illuminating the potential in promoting regional collaboration in the campaign to curb Iran.

During the conference, Israeli Minister of Defense, **Lt. Gen. (res.) Benjamin Gantz**, underscored the need in developing an alternative plan to the diplomatic effort, consisting of political, economic, and military tools alongside the enhancement of strategic collaboration with the United States. According to this approach, the threat of using military force coupled with paralyzing economic sanctions would lead Iran to an agreement that corresponds with Israel's national security interests. Israel's strategic alliance with the United States is crucial; however, Israel cannot rely on its greatest ally and the international community to remove the threat for it, it must invest in force buildup, and develop independent military preparedness for the appointed time.

Meanwhile, Former Head of the Mossad, Mr. **Tamir Pardo**, presented a more critical view on the feasibility of a military operation against Iranian nuclear sites.



Hon. Lt. Gen. (res.) Benjamin Gantz,
Israeli Minister of Defense

[To watch the interview with
Hon. Lt. Gen. \(res.\) Benjamin Gantz,
click here >>](#)

“ The complexity of a future strike against the Iranian nuclear facilities is greater and more meaningful than that of past attacks against nuclear facilities in Iraq and Syria. If we will not be able to actualize a significant achievement using a kinetic attack, we will be required to engage in profound contemplation of the best strategy for curbing the nuclear program, in view of the possible price of failure that would have implications for Israel in both the regional and international arenas. ”



Mr. Tamir Pardo, Former Head
of the Mossad

But Iran does not only pose a nuclear threat. Recently, it has broadened the scope of its attacks, which have also become bolder, and began to use explosive drones either via its proxies or from its own soil. In February 2018, Iran launched a Shahed 141 drone from Syria's T-4 airbase, which was intercepted in Israeli airspace, near Beit Shean, and was supposed to help terrorists in the West Bank. During Operation Guardian of the Walls in May 2021, a UAV was shot down on Israel's northern border,

as were seven drones launched from the Gaza Strip. The threat of unmanned aerial vehicles has exacerbated and become regional; it must be addressed. The drone strike at the American military base at Al Tanf, and the attempted assassination of the Iraqi Prime Minister using a suicide UAV have showcased the magnitude of the Iranian threat to countries in the region, as well as the potential of its exacerbation.

IAF Commander, Maj. Gen. Amikam Norkin, spoke of the strategic opportunity offered by the aggravated aerial threat, namely the development of a regional air defense plan that would alert to, identify, and intercept these drones. In this context, Israel could become a key, valuable player for countries threatened by Iranian UAVs, while developing the necessary strategic depth in an ongoing campaign against Iran.

MK Nir Barkat, former Mayor of Jerusalem, also addressed the regional threat Iran poses to Israel, underscoring that the next campaign, to which he referred as "the First Iran War", would center on an acute struggle against Hizballah, requiring Israel to strike Iran directly, and prepare the Israeli public for the dimensions and repercussions of such a future conflict.

To conclude, despite the disagreement among the various voices, consensus was reached over the following points: It is imperative that Israel develop a reliable military option, strengthen its strategic cooperation with the United States, and bolster its collaborations with other countries in the region in order to curb Iran while developing the necessary strategic depth.

[To watch the interview with MK Nir Barkat, click here >>](#)

The American Strategy

in the Middle East

“After 9/11, we have seen the United States pursue a ‘maximal policy’ in the Middle East of regime change in Syria and Iran, and democratization of the regional system at all costs. The current U.S. administration, unlike the maximalist approach, is trying to focus on core realistic objectives based on support for our partners, setting achievable objectives, and being ambitious about the power of America’s influence and diplomacy.”

Hon. Brett McGurk
Coordinator for the Middle East and
North Africa, White House (NSC)



[To watch the interview with
Hon. Brett McGurk, click here >>](#)

The U.S. administration is leading a policy of lesser involvement, and currently focuses on the strategic competition with China and Russia. Thus, the hasty withdrawal from Afghanistan, pursuit of a renewed nuclear deal with Iran, growing uncertainty with regard to the continued U.S. military presence in Iraq and Syria, and cracks in the wall of sanctions imposed by the United States on Assad’s regime (the Caesar Act), have led to dynamic regional architecture that impacts the alliances and bilateral ties between countries in view of the growing concern that the U.S. policy in the region will alter.

Moreover, according to **Mr. Haim Saban**, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer at Saban Capital Group (SCG), who spoke at the conference, the United States is preoccupied with severe domestic issues, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, a growing concern over an imminent economic crisis, the need to restore national infrastructure, and upcoming congress elections. The Middle East has been demoted on the American national set of priorities by more pressing domestic needs, as well as the increasing international threats posed by China, Russia, and North Korea.

In the same vein, **Hon. Brett McGurk**, Coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa, White House, elaborated on the current U.S. administration’s validated policy during the conference. He claimed that **after 9/11, the United States pursued a “maximal policy” in the Middle East of regime change in Syria and Iran, and democratization of**



Gen. (ret.) Joseph Votel, Former
Commander, United States Central
Command (CENTCOM)



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

the regional system at all costs. The current U.S. administration, unlike the maximalist approach, is trying to focus on core realistic objectives based on support for allies, setting achievable objectives, and broadening America's influence by means of diplomacy.

Nevertheless, the U.S. commitment to Israel's security remains strong, and is founded on strategic cooperation between the defense establishments and armies. Thus, **the current U.S. policy focuses on diplomatic means, regional de-escalation, and sales of advanced weapons to Washington's regional partners by way of bolstering their independent defense capabilities while maintaining Israel's qualitative military edge (QME).** This policy significantly lessens American involvement in the region, and could increase Tehran's pressure on the U.S. forces stationed in Iraq and Syria. America's desire for stability, and its unwillingness to immerse itself in yet another campaign in the Middle East, in view of the growing Chinese and Russian challenge, are playing into the hands of Tehran, particularly while the negative echo of its withdrawal from Afghanistan still resonates, which many position-holders in U.S. leadership believe was profoundly detrimental to U.S. deterrence in the Middle East.

Gen. (ret.) Joseph Votel, Former Commander of the United States Central Command (CENTCOM), applauded the decision to align Israel under the CENTCOM area of military responsibility, as it helps

to tighten operational collaboration and overall military coordination, while enhancing the potential for regional cooperation in the campaign to curb Iran. In his presentation at the conference, he stated that regional training and coordination under U.S. guidance form a leap in regional collaboration and counter Iranian influence.

If the negotiations in Vienna fail, would it lead to the adoption of an American military plan B vis-à-vis Iran or a continued investment in diplomatic efforts to avoid an armed conflict? The answer to this question has implications not only for the strategic competition between Israel and Iran, but for the regional conventional as well as nuclear arms race, and the shaping of the Middle East in the upcoming years.

[To watch the interview with Gen. \(ret.\) Joseph Votel, click here >>](#)

[To watch the interview with Mr. Haim Saban, click here >>](#)

Israel and the Palestinians:

One, Two or... Three States?



Dr. Micah Goodman, Author of Catch 67 | Dr. Dana Wolf, Head of the Law and Security Program, Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy and Strategy, Reichman University | Mr. Ohad Hemo; Correspondent for Palestinian Affairs, Channel 12 TV | Dr. Michael Milshtein, Senior Researcher, Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS) at the Reichman University

Israeli-Palestinian relations are currently at a fateful crossroads that requires a profound understanding of reality while it is forming, as well as the scenarios that could evolve, and, no less importantly, a poignant, topical, bold discussion on whether the current policy employed (which, de facto, lacks vision and strategic depth) could provide Israel with long-term security, and, if not, what could be the implications of such a policy, and which national decisions should be promoted.

For three decades, the two nations have been torn between opposite extremes, adhering to varying strategies from collaboration through a full-fledged clash to the adoption of unilateral steps. During the 1990s, many on both sides felt a solution for the decades-long dispute was within reach; then, during the second half of the 2000s, relations between them had once again upheaved as the Second Intifada broke out, and the Palestinians resumed their armed struggle against Israel; and a decade after that, the Palestinians had embraced defiance and unilateral steps as part of an approach that, once again, has ultimately failed to yield any strategic accomplishments for their people, or change their reality.

At present, many Palestinians and Israelis are exasperated with the possibility of promoting a long-term arrangement. The void left by peace negotiations is being filled by the alternative "conflict management" strategy, which reflects both nations' distrust in the ability to make historical decisions. Instead, they prefer to cultivate the fabric of life as means of maintaining peace and quiet, until the time will come for historical decisions, and assuming that the current situation may be "frozen" much longer.

There seems to be constant progress on the Israeli side too, often unintentionally, toward a single state reality, inter alia due to the economic and infrastructural-civil affinity between the West Bank and Israel growing closer. **Thus, while Israel is preparing for the realization of threatening scenarios, such as a third intifada or the collapse of the PA – inter alia due to the impact of past threats or an analysis of the current state of affairs through relatively narrow prisms that lack an understanding of the deeper currents in the Palestinian arena** – it seems that the main challenge it will be facing is actually embodied in the quiet, as it reflects a creeping merging of the two societies while the Green Line is being blurred.

Israeli engagement in the Palestinian issue requires a clear, up-to-date perspective on the challenge posed by the Gaza Strip too. The arrangement promoted by Israel vis-à-vis the Hamas government recognizes its existence de facto in the long range, and the unprecedented alleviation in restrictions provided by Israel is helping Hamas tighten its grip on the region (as well as prepare for the challenges it will face in the future when it attempts to head the Palestinian system), while lowering the chances of alternatives developing such as the renewal of PA control in the area.

In this context, Israel must formulate a much stricter policy than the one currently employed, particularly with regard to Hamas, which should be making genuine concessions in areas such as the MIAs and POWs in exchange for benefits to civilians (a condition declared during Operation Guardian of the Walls but never actually implemented). Such a policy could lead to the renewal of security clashes in the Gaza Strip; however, it is essential for Israel to establish rigid rules, and maintain its power of deterrence vis-à-vis Hamas.

In his presentation at the conference, **Dr. Micah Goodman** described the strategic "catch" Israel was in as being between a rock – the challenge associated with its continued control of the West Bank – and a hard place – the threat posed by withdrawing from it. As an interim solution, he outlined a suggestion for "minimizing the conflict", whereby the Palestinians' fabric of life in the West Bank would be improved (with no territorial distinction drawn between them and Israel) to enable a security calm until conditions will ripen for a long-term arrangement.

Mr. Ohad Hemo, Correspondent for Palestinian Affairs on Channel 12 TV, argued that there seems to be growing support among Palestinians – particularly in the West Bank – for the single state solution: a trend that reflects despair from the two-state vision as well as the preference to improve civil reality, even if it means living under an Israeli regime, and postponing the achievement of the goal of establishing an independent Palestinian State indefinitely. Ohad Hemo demonstrated the growing hold of the single-state alternative when describing his conversations with many Palestinians in the West Bank, which made him realize that, in view of the colossal failure of both peace negotiations and military resistance, due to which the possibility of realizing the two-state vision is now slimmer than ever, the Palestinians are growing more inclined to focusing on improving their fabric of life, even if it means living under Israeli rule.

Dr. Dana Wolf underscored the growing trends of disinterest and despair from the Palestinian issue within the international community in recent years. The reasons for these shifts vary from engagement in international issues that are perceived as more pressing, through the ongoing stagnation in the peace negotiations, to the spreading corruption in the Palestinian Authority that leads many western, as well as Arab parties, to limit the assistance they have been offering to the PA.

Looking ahead – it seems that, in recent years, attention in Israel to the Palestinian issue has consistently lessened, whether because the Israeli government was otherwise engaged or due to its despair from the possibility of promoting an arrangement in the Palestinian context. However, ignoring the Palestinian problem will not make it go away. Instead, this attitude could mask a threat that will grow as time goes by. The Israeli public and administration must internalize this understanding, and in accordance with it, feel the urgency to hold a profound discussion on the future of the Israeli-Palestinian relations. Such a discussion cannot amount merely to interim solutions such as "conflict management", and the belief that these will ultimately become permanent solutions.

[To watch the Session on Israel and the Palestinians: One, Two or Three States?, click here >>](#)

A Multi-Arena Confrontation:

What Is the End Game?



Gen. (res.) Gadi Eisenkot, Former Chief of the IDF General Staff, in an interview with Ms. Tali Lipkin-Shahak, Journalist, Galei Tzahal (IDF Radio)

" I see a fundamental flaw in the fact that Israel has no national security perception ... the founding fathers built a security perception that had proven its worth, and we are all familiar with its basic concepts. I think the threats have changed in such a way as to require the formulation of an updated perception, particularly a national security policy that would serve as a vision for the State of Israel, and a source of inspiration for the heads of the defense, economic, educational and health establishments... "

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

The role of the Israeli government is to formulate the vision, objectives, and goals on the national level, while defining the national set of priorities, according to which resources will be allocated. To date, the state leadership has refrained from doing so for political reasons, placing a heavy responsibility on the heads of organizations in the military establishment, who are forced to consolidate the goals, objectives, and priorities when allocating resources based on their own evaluation of the threats and opportunities in routine as well as emergency times.

More concretely, when we attempt to discern whether the IDF has achieved the goals set by the state leadership as it set out to go to war, or whether Israel's strategic state of affairs has improved as a result of the war – we must understand what the state leadership's strategy was when it decided to go to war, and whether any relevant goals and objectives had been derived from it, and set for the defense establishment and IDF.

Yet a deep analysis of the systems in the Gaza Strip over the past decade reveals that the IDF has not been set any clear goals by the state leadership, impeding its ability to present a categorical victory. This state of affairs fuels frustration in the military system and public in view of the heavy prices paid by periodic deterrence operations that do not lead to any substantial shift in the power balance or in Israel's strategic condition. **Unless systemwide strategic objectives be set for the military echelon, anchored in a clear-cut definition of a national set of priorities, the IDF would not be able to achieve the necessary accomplishments to win the next campaign.**

[To watch the interview with Gen. \(res.\) Gadi Eisenkot, click here >>](#)

National Resilience as a Key Dimension in Israel's National Security

Social cohesion – a pre-condition for national resilience

Former Chief of the IDF General Staff, **Gen. (res.) Gadi Eisenkot**, spoke of national resilience as a key component in Israel's security perception. He said that, alongside the growing external threats, that are severe in themselves, the main threat Israel is now facing is that of its internal social cohesion. Consequently, **Israel must draft a new social contract that places an emphasis on solidarity and mutual responsibility among all its citizens, bridges the socio-economic gaps, and improves governance and sovereignty in all of its territories.**



Prof. Uriel Reichman, Founding President and Chairperson of the Board of Directors, Reichman University, in a conversation with Maj. Gen. (res.) Amos Gilead, Executive Director, Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS), Reichman University

Furthermore, with regard to the IDF melting pot, the constant drop in the percentage of eligible youth who end up joining the Israeli conscript army forms a worrying trend that demonstrates the lack of identification that increasingly larger parts of Israeli society have with the national/military service perception, and subsequently, with the values of the state. Should this trend continue, it will pose a primary threat to Israel's security.

The ability to create a social charter and shared vision is a pre-condition for Israeli society's proper functioning when grappling with the challenges posed by the times. The establishment must govern in all its territories, while preventing riots and loss of control in mixed cities, as well as in peripheral areas such as the Negev and Galilee. **Prof. Uriel Reichman**, Founding President of Reichman University, spoke at the conference about the cracks forming in Israeli society, the deep rift between the Jewish and Arab populations, the extreme right's growing violence testing the rule of law in Judea and Samaria, and the raging crime undermining civilians' sense of personal safety. These processes are detrimental to social cohesion, and are leading to chaos that weakens Israel in its enemies' eyes. According to **Prof. Reichman**,

[To watch the interview with Prof. Uriel Reichman, click here >>](#)

[To watch the interview with Prof. Rafi Melnick, click here >>](#)

cohesion must be enhanced, and socio-economic gaps bridged, in order for Israel to strongly face the complex challenges ahead.

Prof. Rafi Melnick, Provost and Acting President at Reichman University, noted the bridging of the productivity gap in Israel as an important socio-economic objective. **Productivity per worker in Israel is very far behind the OECD average.** In the absence of a suitable solution, this gap will continue to grow, leading to a decline in quality of life, greater inequality, and ultimately, damage to Israeli society's resilience.

The Israeli government is facing a significant challenge whereby it must bolster governance and sovereignty, enhance social cohesion, and bridge socio-economic gaps as a pre-condition for bolstering national resilience and enabling the Israeli public to strongly face the challenges that lie ahead.

The health system as a contributor to national resilience – Coping with the COVID-19 pandemic



"I look at it as Israel being where you wanted to be, not being the guinea pig, but being right up there, getting the benefit more quickly than most any other country."

Dr. Anthony S. Fauci

The global health crisis does not only test the health system's professional ability to cope with the pandemic, but the cohesion, mutual responsibility, and solidarity of all groups and "tribes" in Israeli society too, in view of the complex challenge of living in COVID's shadow. The pandemic is revealing the social and economic gaps, lack of governance in both geographical and cultural peripheries, the deepening issue of trust among citizens and between them and the government, the unequal allocation of resources among the various groups comprising Israeli society, as well as the latter's national resilience as it grapples with a global pandemic.

Vaccinating all the citizens is the best solution for coping with the pandemic in terms of reducing the rate of infection, number of seriously ill, and hospital overload. The Israeli government's real test is in its ability to spearhead an effective vaccinating process of all sectors of society, while maintaining transparency and message credibility, serving as a role model, and reflecting the state leadership's captaincy.

Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, Chief Medical Advisor on COVID-19 to the U.S. President, and Professor Jonathan M. Gershoni from Tel Aviv University, discussed the Israeli strategy in addressing the pandemic at the conference. Dr. Fauci defined it as successful, for it had actively sought to vaccinate the entire population, and minimize the fatality rate. He further underscored that he uses the Israeli model when he needs to convince others in Washington of the importance of vaccines and booster shots.

Israel was the first in the world to give booster shots, and had wisely formulated the correct strategy whereby vaccines were obtained for every citizen, making them accessible through local health clinics. **MK Yuli Edelstein**, who served as the Minister of Health in Netanyahu's government, had headed the vaccine strategy during his term in office, despite the considerable difficulties he had encountered while doing so among social and geographical peripheries, or the political considerations that, at times, had managed to stain the professional decision-making process. In retrospect, both Israeli governments' overall strategy for coping with the pandemic was successful; but the fight is not over yet, and Israel has yet to face some harrowing challenges along the way.

[To watch the interview between Dr. Anthony S. Fauci and Prof. Jonathan M. Gershoni, click here >>](#)

[To watch the interview with MK Yuli \(Yoel\) Edelstein, click here >>](#)

IPS Recommendations

- .1** A comprehensive, validated national security strategy should be formulated to define a vision as well as goals and objectives, alongside a national set of priorities. The strategy would serve as a compass for the defense establishment and IDF, and as basis for prioritization, resource allocation, and defining assignments and objectives.
- .2** Israel must anchor the United States' commitment to its security by tightening the strategic collaboration, maintaining the qualitative military edge (QME), and ensuring its support during military force buildup processes. Israel should attempt to impact the Vienna talks, as well as the draft of the nuclear agreement with Iran by working with the U.S. administration rather than against it. This joint effort should be based on an understanding of the United States' own national set of priorities, as well as the potential toll on the relations between the two countries in the event that Israel overtly objects to the steps taken by President Biden.
- .3** At the same time, military force buildup must be expedited to develop an independent and reliable response to the Iranian nuclear program. An overall diplomatic campaign should be led in Washington and Europe to highlight the heavy price posed by a "nuclear Iran" to the region and world.
- .4** In view of the Iranian nuclear program's trailblazing progress under the auspices of the renewed negotiations with the great powers in Vienna ("three weeks away from nuclear breakout"), Israel should, at this point in time, examine which solution would be the lesser of all evils with regard to its national security interests. The signing of a nuclear deal would provide international legitimization for Iran's possession of considerable nuclear capabilities within five years, and would jeopardize Israel's legitimacy to take future action. However, should the parties fail to reach an agreement, Iran would become a nuclear threshold state, and, under an extreme scenario, could have a nuclear bomb relatively quickly, and with no restraints.
- .5** Israel should therefore promote the signing of an effective nuclear deal by the United States and other great powers; one that would address all the aspects associated with halting Iran's nuclear progress, extending the breakout time (should Iran take a strategic decision), and removing the sunset clause. Such an agreement would meet the Israeli security needs, as well as the regional and international ones, in view of the hazardous long-term implications of a nuclear Iran for both the region and, indeed, the world.

.6 The aggravated military threat posed by Iran in the Middle East (UAVs, the proliferation of advanced firing capabilities, precision, cyberattacks, etc.) bolsters Israel's status as a key player that is valuable to regional stability and security. The realization of the potential for the establishment of a regional air defense array, as suggested by the Commander of the IAF, should be explored, for it would strengthen the strategic collaboration with the Sunni states, enhance Israel's valuableness, lead to deeper bilateral ties with the Arab world, and enable the strategic depth required to address Iran.

.7 The Campaign Between Wars is an essential means by which to curb Iranian entrenchment in the region as well as enhance Israeli deterrence, and should be both established and further developed. In this context, Israel would do well to preserve its strategic ties with Russia, including the working relations between President Putin and Prime Minister Bennett, alongside the enhancement of ongoing security coordination to help maintain operational freedom of action in Syria, and avoid unnecessary miscalculation.

.8 A long-term strategy should be formed with regard to the Palestinian issue, based on the understanding that the "conflict management" policy is no obstacle on the path to a "single state", while sweeping the separation and "two state" solution to the dusty corner of history. The fact that the "single state" idea is gaining momentum in the Palestinian public poses a challenge to Israel's identity as a state, as well as its international status. A proactive policy should therefore be promoted to bolster the view of separating the two populations – physically and ideally – and actively inform reality, while maintaining hopes of a peace process in accordance with national security considerations.

.9 Vis-à-vis the Gaza Strip and Hamas challenge, Israel is required to formulate a stricter policy than the one employed to date, primarily with regard to its demand that Hamas make tangible concessions, particularly pertaining to the MIAs and POWs in exchange for benefits to civilians (a condition declared during Operation Guardian of the Walls but never actually implemented). Such a policy could lead to the renewal of security clashes in the Gaza Strip; however, it is essential for Israel to establish rigid rules, and maintain its power of deterrence vis-à-vis Hamas.

.10 National resilience is a pre-condition for Israel's ability to address complex external challenges. Israel is advised to reinstate governance and sovereignty in all its territories, reinforce solidarity and mutual responsibility between all groups and "tribes" comprising Israeli society, alongside a massive investment in the bridging of the socio-economic gaps between its geographical and cultural peripheries and central Israel, as these have been deepening consistently. In the absence of national resilience, Israel would not be able to strongly face the complex challenges posed by its enemies.

All conference sessions are available for viewing on the IPS website
bit.ly/IPS-ConferenceWeb2021





About

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 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 assess key processes shaping the Middle East and 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, particularly with respect to American Jewry.

Maj. Gen. (res.) Amos Gilead, Executive Director, Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS), Reichman University

IPS Team: Dr. Moshe Albo | Ms. Hila Ziv | Dr. Michel Milshtein | Ms. Inbal Gat | Dr. Shay Har-Zvi | Ms. Fortuna Tebul | Ms. Nirit Gil.



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Conference Program

Security & Policy Conference:

What Strategy Does Israel Need?

November 23, 2021 | Reichman University

09:00 Opening Session

Greetings

Prof. Rafi Melnick, Provost and Acting President Reichman University

Maj. Gen. (res.) Amos Gilead, Executive Director, Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS), Reichman University

Special Address by the Prime Minister of Israel Hon. Naftali Bennett

What is the American Strategy in the Middle East?

Hon. Brett McGurk, Coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa, White House (NSC)

With **Maj. Gen. (res.) Amos Gilead**

09:45 The Iranian Threat - Is the Strategy Effective?

Leaders Discussion

Mr. Tamir Pardo, Former Head of the Mossad

Maj. Gen. (ret.) Amos Yadlin, Former Chief of IDF's Military Intelligence

Maj. Gen. (res.) Yaakov Amidror, Former Head of the National Security Council; Senior Fellow, Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security (JISS)

Mr. Gideon Frank, Former Head of the Israel Atomic Energy Commission; Chairman of the Council, Technion, Israel Institute of Technology

Moderator Ms. Gili Cohen, Diplomatic and Political Correspondent, "Kan" - The Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation

Commander of the Israeli Air Force (IAF) Maj. Gen. Amikam Norkin

In an interview with **Mr. Alon Ben-David**, Senior Defense Correspondent

10:30 One-on-One:

MK Yuli (Yoel) Edelstein, Former Minister of Health and Former Speaker of the Knesset

With **Mr. Sefi Ovdia**, Political Correspondent, Channel 13

Covid-19: An Undefeatable Enemy?

שיחה בשניים

Dr. Anthony S. Fauci, Chief Medical Advisor to the President of the United States; Director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID)

Prof. Jonathan M. Gershoni, Tel Aviv University

Address by the Hon. Lt. Gen. (res.) Benjamin Gantz Israeli Minister of Defense

11:50 A Multi-Arena Confrontation: What Is the End Game?

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

In an interview with **Ms. Tali Lipkin-Shahak**, Journalist, Galei Tzahal (IDF Radio)

The Russian Challenge in the Middle East

In cooperation with The Kennan Institute, Wilson Center, Washington, DC

Mr. Matthew Rojansky, Director, Kennan Institute, Woodrow Wilson Center, Washington, DC

Ms. Ksenia Svetlova, Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS), Reichman University

Maj. Gen. (res.) Amos Gilead

One-on-One

MK Nir Barkat, Former Mayor of Jerusalem
with **Dr. Michael Milstein**, Senior Researcher, Institute for Policy and Strategy (IPS) at the Reichman University

12:40 The IDF's Integration with CENTCOM (American Central Command): An American Perspective

Gen. (Ret.) Joseph Votel, Former Commander, United States Central Command (CENTCOM)

In a strategic conversation with **Prof. Boaz Ganor**, Founder and Executive Director, Institute for Counter Terrorism (ICT), Reichman University

Israel and the Palestinians: One, Two or Three States?

Discussion

Dr. Micah Goodman, Author of *Catch 67*

Dr. Dana Wolf, Head of the Law and Security Program, Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy and Strategy, Reichman University

Mr. Ohad Hemo, Correspondent for Palestinian Affairs, Channel 12 TV

Moderator Dr. Michael Milstein

Israel-US Relations: An Unbreakable Bond?

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

13:30 Closing Session

Hon. Avigdor Liberman Israeli Minister of Finance

In an interview with **Mr. Shimon Shiffer**, Senior Political-Diplomatic Commentator, Yediot Ahronoth

Prof. Uriel Reichman Founding President and Chairperson of the Board of Directors, Reichman University

In a conversation with
Maj. Gen. (res.) Amos Gilead

Conference Moderator Ms. Sharon Wexler, "Kan" - The Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation