

**A Time for
American
Renewal**

**Lessons We
Should Have
Learned
from Vietnam**

The Middle East in the New US National Security Strategy



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A Time for American Renewal

by Ahmed Charai

Amid the acrimony, angst, and anger of America's electoral and cultural politics, too many Americans have lost the ability to see what I see clearly from afar: That the United States remains a startlingly resilient country that is still the hub of the world's economy and the lighthouse for high ideals.

America seems to go through cycles of crisis and renewal. To an outside observer who believes in the "American dream," today's problems look like another catalyst for America's relentless national spirit to discover solutions that, in the end, make the country stronger. In the early 1990s, a time of grunge music, slacker culture, and economic anxiety, who would have

guessed that the consumer internet was just a few years away from remaking industries and generating great fortunes for both entrepreneurs and employees? Does anyone really doubt that, even now, Americans are gathering their inner strength and hard-earned insight, preparing to renew their culture with ideas and inventions?

Certainly, the United States today is crowded with crises. Still reeling from the pandemic, the nation also faces worrying street violence.

Outside America, the world seems to be rapidly unraveling. North Korea launches missiles. China menaces Taiwan. Japan rearms. Putin's invasion of Ukraine has left more than 100,000 dead and driven millions of civilians into camps, emptying farms that once fed Africa and Asia and smashing nuclear plants that might poison Europe with radioactive fallout. Refugees dot the Mediterranean in small boats while

elections put hardliners into parliaments across the Eurozone.

To restore peace and harmony, a new coalition of like-minded governments must come together for the common good. The United States has a major leadership role to play; it must reassure its partners and provide them with guidance and shared goals.

In the Middle East, it is time to face Iran holistically. The Iranians are a people brimming with talent and potential (half of its population is under the age of 32). Many are facing down a dictatorial regime that is willing to murder its own citizens as the world watches. The rulers, who adhere to an extremist ideology, have spent decades funding terrorists and fomenting troubles in Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Bahrain. Is there a better way to isolate the mullahs without immiserating their people?

Is there a way to deter the mullahs without threatening the peace of their Arab and Israeli neighbors? A new strategy must be found, while not forgetting that Iran is seeking nuclear weapons and building the long-range missiles to carry them.

Further east is China, now convulsing with uprisings and crackdowns. China is ringed by US allies and partners—from Japan and South Korea to a rising India—who worry about China's global ambitions. Restoring trust and partnership with these democratic allies is crucial if the world is to meet China's challenge. A way must be found to engage China directly, to avoid trade wars and currency crises, to find common ground.

Without America's leadership, the nations at the edge of the vast Eurasian continent cannot cohere and combine to defend against the threats posed by Russia and China, which are now working together.

While descriptions of the US role in world affairs since World War II vary in their specifics, they agree on four indispensable elements: leading globally alongside allies; protecting and promoting the liberal international order; defending freedom, democracy and human

rights; and preventing the dominance of regional hegemony in Eurasia.

The question for the next Congress is whether the role of the United States across the globe has changed, and if so, what does this change mean for both America and the world?

Abandoning America's global role puts America herself at risk. Without secure sea lanes and prosperous partners, who will buy America's products or make its silicon chips, smart phones, or solar panels? Without training and equipping foreign forces, who will fight America's enemies abroad so that they do not attack the homeland? Isolation isn't an answer; it is an invitation to misery, for both America and the world.

Self-doubt and anxiety are afflictions of both individuals and nations. The road to recovery often starts by seeing oneself reflected in the eyes of one's friends, of being reminded who one is, and why one matters. America needs to find the strength to lead its friends and summon the creativity to confound its foes. It needs to begin again, as it has done many times before. I know it can. *

AHMED CHARAI

Publisher

Ahmed Charai is the chairman and CEO of a media conglomerate and a Middle East adviser in the United States and abroad. He is on the board of numerous think tanks and NGOs, including the Atlantic Council, the International Center for Journalists, International Crisis Group, and the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security. His articles have appeared in leading American and Israeli publications.

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The Centrality of the United States to Global Affairs

by Eran Lerman

Amid the ongoing war in Ukraine and new tensions in the Middle East, observers often look to how the United States responds to these and other challenges. In this sixth print issue, JST publisher Ahmed Charai reminds us of the abiding resilience of American democracy and its centrality to resolving global conflicts. Dov Zakheim, JST's board chair and columnist, describes the role of the Middle East in the new US National Security Strategy. At the JST's December gathering in Washington, General James Jones provided an overview of American foreign policy with stories from his own career in military and foreign policy.

Several pieces in this issue add to the understanding of Israel. The once and future prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, is profiled by JST columnist (and former Member of Knesset) Ksenia Svetlova. Israeli journalist Tal Lev-Ram maps out the priorities facing the incoming military chief of staff, General Hertzvi Halevi. The strategic and tactical factors behind Israel's ambiguous Ukraine policy are explained by Pnina Shuker and Daniel Rakov.

Israeli political leaders met this fall with JST publisher Ahmed Charai and provided a preview of future challenges, as we report. Arie Krampf, describing how Netanyahu's economic reform

led to a more independent foreign policy, sees an (unwritten) Netanyahu Doctrine. Former Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami offers Russia's invasion of Ukraine as a lesson for what happens when ideology is allowed to prevail over pragmatism.

We also address the future of Israel's regional relations. Israel's former National Security Adviser Meir Ben-Shabbat recommends actions to consolidate and expand the Abraham Accords. Former US Ambassador to Israel Dan Shapiro takes a step further, applying the regional integration model of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to the Middle East. In his piece, Gidon Bromberg links this quest for regional integration with the urgent need for cooperative policies on water and the environment. Editor-in-Chief Eran Lerman analyzes the pros and cons of the maritime border understanding between Lebanon and Israel that will unlock further offshore natural gas exploitation.

Preventing Iran from obtaining a military nuclear capability is an overriding priority, but Haaretz columnist Amir Oren warns of the dangers of a singular focus. He recalls the Israeli intelligence community's campaign to prevent



German engineers from helping Nasser’s Egypt build missiles in the 1960s, which came at the expense of dealing with other threats. A potentially significant threat of a very different nature is discussed by David Bernstein who sees woke ideology as a danger to the future of the US–Israel relationship.

Looking further afield, Turkey expert Alan Makovsky explains the political and economic dynamics in that country as both President Tayyip Recep Erdoğan and his rivals position themselves toward the “hinge elections” of early 2023. Veteran US diplomat Laird Treiber affirms Africa’s growing importance in the post-pandemic

era and details effective African initiatives on COVID-19 vaccines and in the fields of mobile communications and energy markets—a note of optimism in turbulent times.

Returning to the theme of US centrality, Robert Silverman writes about the continuing need for an American capacity to help post-conflict countries (including Ukraine in the future) rebuild national institutions, often called “nation building.” We must learn from past experiences, as Ron Neumann, Charles Ray and Jim Jeffrey remind us in “Lessons We Should have Learned from Vietnam.” *

ERAN LERMAN

Editor-in-chief

A STORIED CAREER IN THE MILITARY AND FOREIGN POLICY

On December 15, Gen. (ret.) James Jones told stories of his time as National Security Adviser, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, and Marine Corps Commandant and gave advice on current issues, in a wide-ranging discussion with Admiral (ret.) James Foggo.

The discussion took place, under Chatham House rules, over a lunch at the Metropolitan Club in Washington hosted by the JST and the Navy League, with welcome remarks by JST publisher Ahmed Charai and Board Chair Dov Zakheim. Charai commented that throughout his more than 40 years of service to country, General Jones has always championed the idea that the United States is a surprisingly resilient country, a hub of the global economy, and a beacon of democracy to many others.

Jones grew up in post-World War II France and attended French schools before attending

Georgetown University and entering the Marine Corps. After leading a platoon in Vietnam, where he earned the Silver Star for combat action, he served for five years in the military liaison office of the US Senate, working under then Navy Captain John McCain.

Jones commented on US weapons systems, especially his experience as Marine Corps Commandant in supporting a vertical take-off and landing aircraft, the V-12 Osprey. He talked about the US system of regional combatant commanders; he prefers the term “unified commanders” as a better term for peacetime commands. He described setting up the African Command and discussed the growing importance of US policy in Africa.

Jones also shared his vision for incorporating diplomatic and economic personnel and policy into the regional commands, which have the advantage of being co-located with allies and partners. He described a three-level concept for organizing US foreign policy with strategic planning in Washington; operational goal-setting at expanded regional commands;

and tactical execution at the embassies. He recognized such a re-organization would involve trusting and empowering regional commands to play a greater role.

On the Russo-Ukraine War, Foggo expanded on an observation by Jones that, while the US had worked with both Ukraine and Russia on train and equip policies at a better time in US-Russia relations, 15 years ago, only Ukraine had adopted the US system of non-commissioned officers. Foggo explained how NCOs were making a difference in the prosecution of the Ukraine war; he also noted that while the Chinese navy has more surface vessels than the US, the Chinese military likewise lacks NCOs. *



JST publisher introduces retired Gen. (ret.) Jones and Adm. (ret.) Foggo



Metropolitan Club lunch hosted by JST and the Navy League



Ahmed Charai with USIP President Lise Grande



Gen. Jones telling stories from his career



Ahmed Charai and J Street President Jeremy Ben Ami



The JST team (left to right) Board Chair Dov Zakheim, Board member Adm. Foggo, Publisher Ahmed Charai, Board member Gen. Jones, Managing Editor Bob Silverman



THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS AT YEAR TWO: A WORK PLAN FOR STRENGTHENING AND EXPANSION

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.
Photo credit: Kobi Gideon/GPO / Latin
America News Agency via Reuters Connect



by Meir Ben-Shabbat

Although it was not the Biden administration that fathered the Abraham Accords, it proved willing to adopt them—hoping, with this endorsement, to assuage the dismay felt by many in the region with other aspects of its policy. Still, the president has done little, so far, to promote the Accords and their expansion. Moreover, the weakening of US influence in the region and the fear of Iran’s growing power may have further slowed down the process, possibly raising doubts in countries that have yet to decide whether to join the Accords.

The Iranian role in the war in Ukraine provides the White House with an opportunity to change course on the Iranian regime and take an uncompromising stance on Iran’s nuclear file, subversive activities in the regions, and the regime’s brutal suppression of the persistent protests. It could then translate this shift into gains on other fronts relating to the Accords.

It is vital for Israel to put together a comprehensive, systematic work plan, in consultation with the US and its regional allies, in order to strengthen, deepen, and expand the Abraham Accords.

As the Abraham Accords reached their second anniversary in September 2022, we can feel a sense of satisfaction with the relations woven between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Morocco. There are trade agreements, high-level diplomatic and security-related meetings, direct flights, and growing tourism.

These normalization agreements have withstood serious tests, including the COVID-19 pandemic, which slowed down the rate of interactions and hampered the ability to implement significant aspects of the Accords. They survived a change of administrations in

Washington with its attendant dramatic shift in US policy toward the Middle East. They overcame the implications of persistent political instability in Israel and held firm even in the face of violent crises in Gaza. The existence of the Abraham Accords has become a permanent reality.

Still, the Accords’ potential is far from being fully tapped, and the sense of satisfaction is tinged with concerns and worries about the continued process. The Biden administration did articulate a sincere will to maintain the momentum of the Accords, but the president’s policies and the weakening of US influence in the Middle East has worked against this desire. Thus, the circle of participating nations has so far not expanded, and the progress to date has occurred mainly in bilateral government-to-government channels.

True, the Negev Summit in March 2022 was a multilateral result of the Abraham Accords, and it was followed up with a meeting in Bahrain in June of foreign ministry directors-general. A formal steering committee, the Negev Forum, was created to monitor cooperation on security issues as well as education, energy, and tourism. Still, not much has happened in practical terms, and the significance of the Negev Forum is that it exists at all. Few major regional initiatives or private sector projects have occurred in the past two years, other than an agreement to build large-scale solar energy capacity between Jordan, the UAE, and Israel (and its implementation will be complex, owing to the lack of appropriate infrastructure in Jordan). The accession of Saudi Arabia to the Accords remains still a hope. The realization of the promise to let Israeli civilian aircraft to overfly Saudi Arabia and Oman on their way to the Indo-Pacific ran into difficulties, specifically because of Oman’s hesitations. Given the unstable relationship between President Biden and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the Saudis did not make an effort to deliver on this promise, which the Americans obtained during Biden’s July visit to



Bahrain's Foreign Minister Abdullatif Al Zayani, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, US President Donald Trump and United Arab Emirates (UAE) Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed in the signing of the Abraham Accords, September 2020. Photo credit: Reuters

the region. The fear of Iran's growing power in the Biden era will never be mentioned as the reason for any of these delays—certainly not in official meetings or statements—but it is “the elephant in the room” and is reflected in other developments and events in the region. Hence the closer relations between the Gulf states on one hand and Russia and China on the other and their decision to limit oil production despite Biden's entreaties; the rapprochement between the UAE and Iran, which led to the mutual return of ambassadors, after six years of disrupted relations; and also the Riyadh–Teheran dialogue, which resumed after Biden took power and has been sustained with a low profile.

Difficulties have also occurred with Sudan and Morocco, the other two nations that joined the Abraham Accords. A bilateral normalization agreement between Sudan and Israel has yet to be signed, although the Sudanese leadership did sign the declaratory part of the Accords in January 2021. Therefore, the two countries have not yet opened diplomatic missions and still need to establish channels of civilian interactions. Israeli and American statecraft

are not to blame, however; the internal turmoil in Sudan and the tensions between the power players in Khartoum go a long way toward explaining the delay.

Not all is going smoothly with Morocco, despite relations that are now flourishing at a level Israelis could barely dream of. There can be no doubt that Rabat seeks to advance the engagement with Israel. Visits by Israeli cabinet ministers to Morocco have become routine. Bilateral agreements have been signed in a long list of fields. Security cooperation has tightened, reflected in the mutual visits by the military chiefs of staff on both sides and arms contracts signed. Direct flights are almost always filled to capacity. Business delegations from both countries have paid mutual visits and established joint ventures. Channels of communication and cooperation have been established between universities and research centers, trade unions, cultural groups, and sport associations. More is yet to come.

Still, the diplomatic missions have yet to be officially upgraded to embassies. Israeli

ministerial visits in Morocco have not been reciprocated, and the two heads of state, King Mohammed VI and President Yitzhak Herzog, have not yet met. It is not easy to ascertain to what extent this is due to Israel's ambiguous stance on Morocco's sovereignty in the Western Sahara. Clearly, there is an expectation, at the highest levels in Rabat, that Israel would join the US, Poland, France, Bahrain, and the UAE and to the dismay of Algeria, even Spain, who have either recognized Moroccan sovereignty or expressed some level of support for Morocco's position. There can be no doubt as to the positive impact such a step would generate.

While it is not counted among the Abraham Accords countries, Chad should also be noted in this survey of Israel's changing relations in the region. Led by the late Idriss Déby, this nation made its way to Jerusalem on its own, neither with a regional framework nor a supportive US position. Diplomatic relations were resumed in November 2019 but kept at a low profile. In May 2022 Israel's ambassador to Senegal presented his letter of accreditation to Chad's current president, Déby's son Mahamat. The focus now should be on building trust in the peace process by manifesting the fruits of peace to the people in Chad. If the people see the balance sheet of normalization with Israel as negative, this could increase the risk of negative momentum, which could block and harm the achievements of the Abraham Accords.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE: SIX STEPS FOR ISRAEL, THE US, AND REGIONAL ALLIES

First, do not take the Abraham Accords for granted or assume they are irreversible.

The acts of signing the Accords did generate a true sense of celebration, gave rise to a new spirit, mobilized fresh energies, restored optimism, and offered new hopes. But as in matrimony, real life begins after the party, including the challenges of consolidating the relationship, enhancing and expanding it, preserving its vitality, its spirit, and its passion. It is therefore of critical importance to prepare a detailed work plan for bolstering, deepening, and widening the Abraham Accords—and to create a mechanism, led by the signatory heads of state, to monitor implementation.

Second, change course on Iran.

The US administration should take the next steps from its current, growing expression of frustration and displeasure with Iran, given its involvement in the war against Ukraine. A firm approach toward Iran is the right stance and not only because of its role in the Ukraine war or activities to undermine the Abraham Accords. Tehran's nuclear ambitions and its terrorist activities threaten stability and peace, both regionally and globally. Practically it would serve the broader interests of the American administration and respond to the main challenges the West faces. In addition, it would enhance weakening Russia's ability to pursue the war, taking actions to resolve the global energy crisis, reversing the Gulf states drift toward Russia and China, blocking Iran's destructive ambitions, and enhancing the process of normalization.

Rather than quarrel with Saudi Arabia, be pushed around by Iran, and tread water on three major foreign policy issues (the war in Ukraine, the energy crisis, and Iran's nuclear project), the Biden administration should decide to confront Iran, which is both morally and practically right. It would, in addition to specific gains in the region, enhance the place of the US in the emerging world order.

Third, advance joint projects aimed at solving urgent global problems, in the fields of energy, food, and water.

Bureaucratic barriers should be removed and the comparative advantages of Israel and the Gulf states should be fully utilized. Thus, for example, regarding the global food crisis, African countries, including Sudan, can raise alternatives to wheat, using Israeli, Moroccan, and Emirati agricultural knowledge. It is also possible to harness the experience Israel has garnered as a leader in the field of alternative protein sources and meat replacements.

As for water, Israel, as a world leader in recycling and desalination technologies and in the extraction of water from the air, can provide solutions to problems of water shortage and management.

Fourth, open a land bridge of trade between Europe and the Gulf via Israel.

Potentially cheaper and more efficient than some of the alternatives, a land bridge of trade

could reap benefits both for the regional players and for European countries, which could use it also for their global import and export. It would also promote trade among the Abraham Accords signatories and would contribute to global growth.

Fifth, promote joint regional projects,

for example, in the field of energy. Gas-related interests have already created new dynamics of cooperation in the region, embodied by the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), which includes Israel and Egypt alongside other regional and European partners. Steps in that direction already have generated the prospect of linking the power grids of the Gulf countries and Africa with those of Europe via Egypt and Israel. Such projects would not only produce economic benefits but would also enhance the sense of partnership between the countries while also contributing to general security. In this context, it may also be possible to find solutions to some of the basic problems of the Gaza Strip, without incurring further security threats to Israel.

Sixth, enhance initiatives in the field of education and culture,

to bolster basic attitudes in support of peace and weaken hostile positions and the hold of radical Islamist ideas. This is a critical component for grounding peace at the popular level, among citizens and peoples, and not only among governments.

ABOVE ALL, PRESERVE WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED ALREADY!

Egypt: It remains the cornerstone of the agreements between Israel and the Arab countries. Strengthening links with Egypt is a strategic interest and of the highest degree of importance for Israel's national security. The Abraham Accords provide momentum and a range of specific opportunities for projects with Cairo that could not be realized in the past. The combination of regional and global circumstances with security, economic, and political interests at this time create an opportune moment for cooperation.

Jordan: Despite the systemic constraints it faces in its relations with Israel, the Kingdom is an important partner. There are ways to preserve the relationship, to find opportunities for greater regional cooperation, and to tighten

coordination through unofficial channels.

Morocco: Israel should recognize Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara, especially after the US and other countries have either done so or have expressed support for Morocco's position. It would be unwise to leave this issue as a stumbling stone in the otherwise impressive trajectory of improving relations.

Sudan, Chad, and Kosovo: Steps need to be taken to accelerate the official signing of a diplomatic agreement with Sudan. Both Sudan and Chad should be invited to all working groups of the Accords' signatories. The same goes for Kosovo, a Muslim-majority European nation, which has established relations with Israel and has an embassy in Jerusalem. When each and every signatory profits from its affiliation with the Accords, this will shore up the agreements and encourage other countries to come aboard the Peace Train.

In a speech I gave as head of an official Israel delegation to Abu Dhabi, shortly after the announcement of the Abraham Accords, I pointed out the meaning of this name: "Abraham, our first father, carried forward an innovative vision. He stood out against the fixations and false beliefs prevalent in his day and founded the monotheistic faith. Belief in God marked him out to be a source of blessing to us all, 'And in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed' (Genesis 12:3)."

For Abraham, too, things were not easy. The vision was clear and the journey toward its realization was carried out with determination, faith in the justice of his cause, and an understanding that this is a long-term investment that will affect the future of all peoples in the region. The words with which I ended my speech still hold up well: "We take inspiration from our common father and break a new path, of hope and optimism, of fraternity and partnership, toward prosperity and peace." *

— MEIR BEN-SHABBAT

Meir Ben-Shabbat served as national security advisor to the prime minister of Israel from 2017 to 2021. He is now a senior research fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) in Tel Aviv.



THE ASEAN MODEL: A V INTEGRATION BEYOND



ASEAN Summit in Bangkok (top) and The Negev Summit in Sde Boker (bottom).
Photos credit: Koki Kataoka / The Yomiuri Shimbun, Reuters

VISION OF MIDDLE EAST THE ABRAHAM ACCORDS



by Daniel B. Shapiro

The summit of foreign ministers came together on relatively short notice. It was unstructured, informal, with little of the staff work or pre-negotiation that normally precedes such gatherings. The agenda was slim and general, and the outcome rather modest. But viewed through a historical scope, the results were transformational.

I am not referring to the Negev Summit held in March 2022. On that occasion, Yair Lapid, Israel's foreign minister took advantage of an upcoming visit of US Secretary of State Antony Blinken to fire off WhatsApp messages inviting his regional counterparts to join them. The foreign ministers of the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco, and Egypt flew to Israel, and, in an unprecedented fashion, all sat at one table with their Israeli host and his American guest.

The Negev Summit produced more than photo-ops. The ministers announced the establishment of six working groups on security, energy, health, education, water and food security, and tourism. In a follow-up meeting in Bahrain in June, the Negev Forum was established; working group co-chairs are being appointed. The process is buttressed by non-governmental efforts, like the N7 Initiative that I am involved with through the Atlantic Council. Another meeting of the foreign ministers,

and possibly even a heads of state summit, is planned, although the upcoming Israeli election will probably delay it into early 2023.

In addition to doing the daily work of building and deepening these relationships, advocates of integration should be thinking long-term—not just months ahead, but years, even decades into the future. And as we do, we should open up our imaginations as to what the Middle East could look like.

ASEAN has helped foster a common regional identity, while allowing each country to preserve its own uniqueness. Time and again, the region's leaders rededicate themselves to sticking together, to solving problems through talking, not fighting, to building something greater than the sum of their parts.



The atmosphere was a bit more formal. US President Joe Biden and the leaders of the US–ASEAN Special Summit, May 2022. Photo credit: Michael Reynolds/POOL via CNP/IN via Reuters Connect

For that, it helps to have models to emulate. There is no one model to turn to, but perhaps the gold standard of what regional integration in the Middle East could look like is from a region thousands of miles to the east—Southeast Asia.

Which brings us back to that earlier summit. The year was 1967. While the Middle East was convulsed by its own conflicts, the nations of Southeast Asia, just emerging from the colonial era, had been riven by disputes. Indonesia and Malaysia had fought a low-grade border war on the island of Borneo, and Malaysia and the Philippines were also at loggerheads over conflicting territorial claims. War still raged in nearby Indochina, threatening the stability of the entire region.

At the initiative of Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman of Thailand, who had mediated the conflicts among his neighbors, he and his counterparts from Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore convened for several days in August at an isolated Thai beach resort. As ASEAN historians Jamil Maidan Flores and Jun Abad describe it, the atmosphere was informal, relaxed, ideal for candid conversations and creative thinking away from the glare of cameras. The goal was to explore the creation of an organization that would enable these neighbors to strengthen their regional relationships, bring peace and prosperity to their citizens, and avoid open conflict when disagreements arose.

At the conclusion of the summit, the ministers traveled to the Thai capital and signed what became known as the Bangkok Declaration. This simple, four-page document announced the formation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). To be honest, it did little else. The remaining paragraphs included fairly boilerplate language about neighborliness, increased cooperation in various fields, the promotion of peace and stability, and a pledge to convene regular meetings of foreign ministers.

It reads like any of thousands of communiqués drafted at multilateral meetings. It could have amounted to very little. But from those modest beginnings, an organization emerged that far outstrips the expectations of even its founders. It took time, but today, ASEAN represents an extraordinary exercise in regional integration. As Khoman said at the signing ceremony, ASEAN could enable “building a new society that will be responsive to the needs of our time and efficiently equipped to bring about, for the enjoyment and the material as well as spiritual advancement of our peoples, conditions of stability and progress.” Indeed, it has.

The foreign ministers of the five founding members did, indeed, begin to meet regularly. Then, starting in 1976, ASEAN heads of state began attending summits, with the frequency increasing to as much as twice a year. Intervening meetings of the foreign ministers helped prepare the heads of state summits. Today, there are regular meetings of ministers with other areas of responsibility—energy,

Strikingly, ASEAN membership has proven stable and mutually beneficial despite the diversity of its members.

health, trade, agriculture, and so on—with their ASEAN counterparts. The ASEAN members agreed on a rotating annual chairmanship and the creation of a secretariat whose leadership also passes among its members, which coordinates many of the gatherings and assists in implementation of regional projects.

Not surprisingly, other regional countries saw advantages in ASEAN membership, and the organization expanded. Brunei Darussalam joined in 1984, followed by Vietnam in 1995, and Laos and Myanmar in 1997. When Cambodia finally signed on in 1999, it brought ASEAN to its current total of ten members states, representing, today, a population of some 670 million citizens.

The original ASEAN has evolved and grown over the years. In 1992, the ASEAN Free Trade Agreement (AFTA) was signed, leading to the phased elimination of tariffs and customs duties on trade between the countries. In 2009, an ASEAN human rights body was established, with the stated aim of allowing the member states to hold each other accountable for upholding certain standards. ASEAN began to engage other nations and regional groups as a bloc, signing free trade agreements with Australia and New Zealand, China, India, and South Korea, hosting foreign ambassadors to its secretariat, and convening summits with foreign leaders. US Secretaries of State have even indulged in parody song performances, matching the light atmosphere their ASEAN hosts prefer. At the last US–ASEAN summit with President Biden at the White House in May, the atmosphere was a bit more formal.

The organization also spawned significant non-governmental cooperation. The private sectors of the ten countries have similarly aligned themselves, prioritizing their regional partnerships, with organizations of ASEAN engineers, lawyers, surgeons, shippers, and dozens of other professions coming to life. Civil society organizations and universities also pursue first-order partnerships with their counterparts in ASEAN countries. The intensity of people-to-people exchanges across ASEAN members is vast and perhaps immeasurable.



U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Morocco's Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita at the Negev Summit in Sde Boker, March 2022. Photo credit: REUTERS

Strikingly, ASEAN membership has proven stable and mutually beneficial despite the diversity of its members. They are large (Indonesia) and small (Singapore); rich (Brunei) and poor (Laos); closely affiliated with the United States (Thailand, the Philippines) or much more aligned with China or Russia (Cambodia, Vietnam). Several have undergone transitions to more democratic governance, while others have backslid away from it. They span a wide range of religious, cultural, and economic characteristics.

Nevertheless, all these nations have consistently determined that participating in the cooperation that ASEAN facilitates brings benefits to their people, their economies, their environment, and their security. They perceive

that the organization strengthens the ties of the group internally, while bolstering them in dealing with external actors. ASEAN—complete with a flag, evocative symbols, and an anthem—has helped foster a common regional identity, while allowing each country to preserve its own uniqueness. Time and again, the region's leaders rededicate themselves to sticking together, to solving problems through talking, not fighting, to building something greater than the sum of their parts.

Five and a half decades after its humble beginnings, the net effect of ASEAN is an ever-thickening web of ties between governments, peoples, private sectors, and societies that makes a descent into conflict nearly inconceivable. There is too much at stake, too

many relationships, too many common interests to justify anything other than sustaining and increasing the process of regional integration.

To be clear, no model is perfect. ASEAN has its critics, even internally. There is always more to do, always more to build. Many of ASEAN's members are not democracies, or they have democratic systems that have proven unstable. Human rights violations by several of its governments are not uncommon. Myanmar, with its brutal dictatorship and broad Western sanctions against it, has proven a particular challenge; ASEAN members have condemned the military junta's excesses but have also faced calls to go further and suspend Myanmar's membership. Some observers argue ASEAN is slow to reach decisions, given its requirement for consensus and inclination to defer hard choices. The secretariat is weak, by design, and chronically understaffed and underfunded. There are, it has been said, too many meetings and not enough action.

But those critiques do not undercut ASEAN's value. An organic product of the nations of Southeast Asia, it is undeniable that it has helped prevent conflict and ensure stability, which has given rise to the incredible growth and prosperity the region has experienced—a one hundred-fold increase in GDP in its first 50 years. By some estimates, ASEAN will boast the equivalent of the world's fourth largest economy by 2030.

Regional integration represents a sea change in thinking about how the nations of the MENA region will relate to one another in the decades to come.

Those dynamic trends have obviously benefited the people of the ASEAN countries, but not just them. As one former US ambassador to ASEAN remarked to me, “the stability, and resulting prosperity, ASEAN has facilitated in a strategically vital region have been hugely beneficial to US interests. So has its promotion of values we share, like the rule of law and freedom of navigation.” This helps explain why the United States has been such an active partner and enthusiastic supporter over the years—often competing with other powers to do so.

How relevant is the ASEAN model to a potential organization supporting regional integration in the Middle East and North Africa? Should it have a secretariat, operate by consensus, or negotiate as a bloc with other countries? Those are questions for the member countries to decide. An organization in the Middle East and North Africa region might look different in certain respects. It should be organic to the region, representing its members' individual and collective interests, security needs, economies, history, identities, and cultures.

Government initiatives like the Negev Forum and non-governmental ones like the N7 Initiative have much to offer to secure the benefits of normalization. There is a need and a value for near-term evidence of how normalization can positively impact the lives of the citizens of countries who engage in it. At this early stage, these efforts are precisely what is required.

Normalization is an event. It happens, and even matures, but then that phase passes. Beyond it, there are relationships to nurture, build, and deepen, a multilateral regional architecture to erect. Regional integration represents a sea change in thinking about how the nations of the MENA region will relate to one another in the decades to come: identifying common interests, rooted in their common history, and fostering a common identity while preserving what is unique about each of them

(and gaining appreciation for each other's uniqueness). It moves beyond building trust to sustaining inherently trusting relationships, beyond proving the mutual benefits of the partnership to internalizing the logic that there are deeper gains to be harvested from thinking and acting collectively than from viewing all interests through an individual lens. And as the ASEAN experience teaches us, integration need not be held back by the diversity of the MENA countries' sizes, economies, political systems, cultures, or religions.

Even in this heady post-Abraham Accords era, the MENA region is not there yet. It takes time. But the potential and the building blocks are there: regular multilateral meetings of senior officials; the prospect of similar meetings of officials and experts with specific responsibilities in fields like energy, health, agriculture, education, and defense; a UAE-Israel free trade agreement that could be a model, or a basis, for a regional free trade agreement; emerging people-to-people, private sector, and civil society links.

As one building block is stacked on another, as more citizens benefit in their lives, as with ASEAN, the club of regional integration is one that others will want to join. Even—in the MENA-specific context—with the requirement of crossing the threshold of normalization with Israel, as six Arab countries already have.

When it will eventually be established, there is a logical name for this regional organization: the AMENA Countries, the Association of Middle East and North African Countries. AMENA means “trustworthy” or “reliable” in both Hebrew and Arabic. It is the feminine form of the word, which applies well to states, which are feminine nouns in Semitic grammar. AMENA will instantly signal, with trilingual clarity, that it represents a community of trust, reliability, common interests, and the common benefits of security and prosperity.

This model is different from another form of integration that has been discussed in the past, a Middle East NATO-type organization. Security will always be a key pillar of the partnerships

of many of the regional states, as they deal with common threats. It can be relevant in an AMENA model as well. But integration and cooperation in non-security domains deepen the partnerships, get more of the societies invested in them, and allow for a broader group of members with differentiated security needs.

This vision will take time to realize. And the precise form it takes over time cannot be known at its outset. But like the founders of ASEAN, today's Middle Eastern and North African leaders have before them a profound opportunity to build an integrated region that bears no resemblance to what has come before and can positively affect the lives of all who live within it. *

DANIEL B. SHAPIRO

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**BRINGING WATER
SECURITY FOR
PALESTINIANS AND
ISRAELIS: A CALL
FOR A “GREEN BLUE
DEAL” FOR THE
MIDDLE EAST**





by Gidon Bromberg

Today there is a window of opportunity to advance new Israeli–Palestinian water arrangements that can improve livelihoods, foster confidence building, and advance peace. The looming climate crisis demands that measures be taken urgently. Israel’s recognized and innovative leadership in the water sector, the dire impact of the climate crisis on Palestinian freshwater availability, and the opportunity presented by the new political awareness in Israel all combine to create a unique context in which decisions could be taken toward conflict resolution, cooperation, and trust-building in the water and climate sectors.

A long-standing impediment to progress on Israeli–Palestinian water issues is the zero-sum mindset, which sees one side’s gain as the other side’s loss. That is why EcoPeace works on the ground with schools and municipalities, as well as young professionals and decision makers, highlighting to all that we are fully dependent on one another from an environmental perspective, and therefore working together is not doing a favor for the other but rather a matter of self-interest and mutual gain.

EcoPeace’s bold initiative “A Green Blue Deal for the Middle East” calls on the Israeli and Palestinian governments to act cooperatively on water issues under a climate-crisis paradigm, rather than continuing to hold water issues hostage to the politics of the final status negotiations (which seem unlikely to take place anytime soon). By advancing the Green Blue Deal, water security and climate resilience can be achieved for Israelis, Palestinians, and all in the region.

THE STATUS QUO THREATENS WATER SECURITY AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Israel is well known for its leadership in the water sector and its ability to advance climate adaptation on water issues. Over 70% of Israel’s drinking water is now sourced from desalination plants. In addition, Israel is a global leader in treating and reusing wastewater for agriculture, creating water security for its farmers.

But while Israel has achieved a high level of water security, the conflict-related sanitation crisis in the West Bank and Gaza threatens the gains that have been made. In the West Bank, over 60 million cubic meters of Palestinian-sourced raw and poorly treated sewage are released annually into the environment, contaminating scarce ground water. Israeli and Palestinian communities that live in proximity to the 12 cross-border streams suffer from severe public health concerns. Similarly, the conflict-related sanitation crisis in Gaza risks the health and welfare of Palestinians and Israelis alike. The sewage from Gaza released into the Mediterranean leads to the intermittent closure of Israel’s southernmost desalination plants, directly affecting the Israeli water supply.

To protect its citizens, Israel unilaterally builds sewage treatment plants on its side. Israel, however, deducts the cost of sewage treatment, including the capital costs of construction, from Palestinian taxes. In 2019, these deductions totaled over 110 million NIS. The deductions weaken the Palestinian Authority and create a disincentive to find sanitation solutions on the Palestinian side. As indicated in a 2017 report of the Israel State Comptroller’s Office, the current water and sanitation arrangements harm both sides and fail to effectively protect scarce shared natural waters. This failure poses a threat to the gains made in Israel’s water security.

THE CLIMATE CRISIS FURTHER CONTRIBUTES TO PALESTINIAN WATER INSECURITY

EcoPeace is determined to help its respective governments and peoples understand that the climate crisis can and must lead to increased cooperation. Israelis and Palestinians are experiencing firsthand the impact of the climate crisis. Climate change is no longer seen in the region as theoretical but is recognized by all as an immediate threat to water, health, and national security interests. The combination of conflict, internal management issues, and the climate crisis significantly contributes to Palestinian water insecurity, loss of livelihood, and animosity toward Israel.

ISRAEL'S NEW APPROACH PRESENTS NEW OPPORTUNITIES

In recent months, political players in Israel have reached out to the PA with a desire to increase cooperation in the environment and water sectors. If implemented, such cooperation will improve the reality on the ground and build confidence, essential to advancing peace efforts. Led by the Ministry of the Environment, Israel has identified the climate crisis as an issue of national priority.

Israel has expressed a desire to work closely with the Biden administration and US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry in the global fight against climate change. Most recently, Israel's President Herzog created a National Climate Forum and a working group on regional cooperation was established. The link between the climate crisis and regional security is also acknowledged by the Israeli security community.

ECOPEACE'S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMMEDIATE ACTION

Much has changed since the EcoPeace's three co-directors presented their perspective to the UN Security Council in 2019. At that time, EcoPeace outlined a vision of how the respective governments could promote climate resilience by harnessing the sea, through increased desalinated water, to be powered by harnessing the sun, through large-scale investment in solar energy. Within less than a year since the release

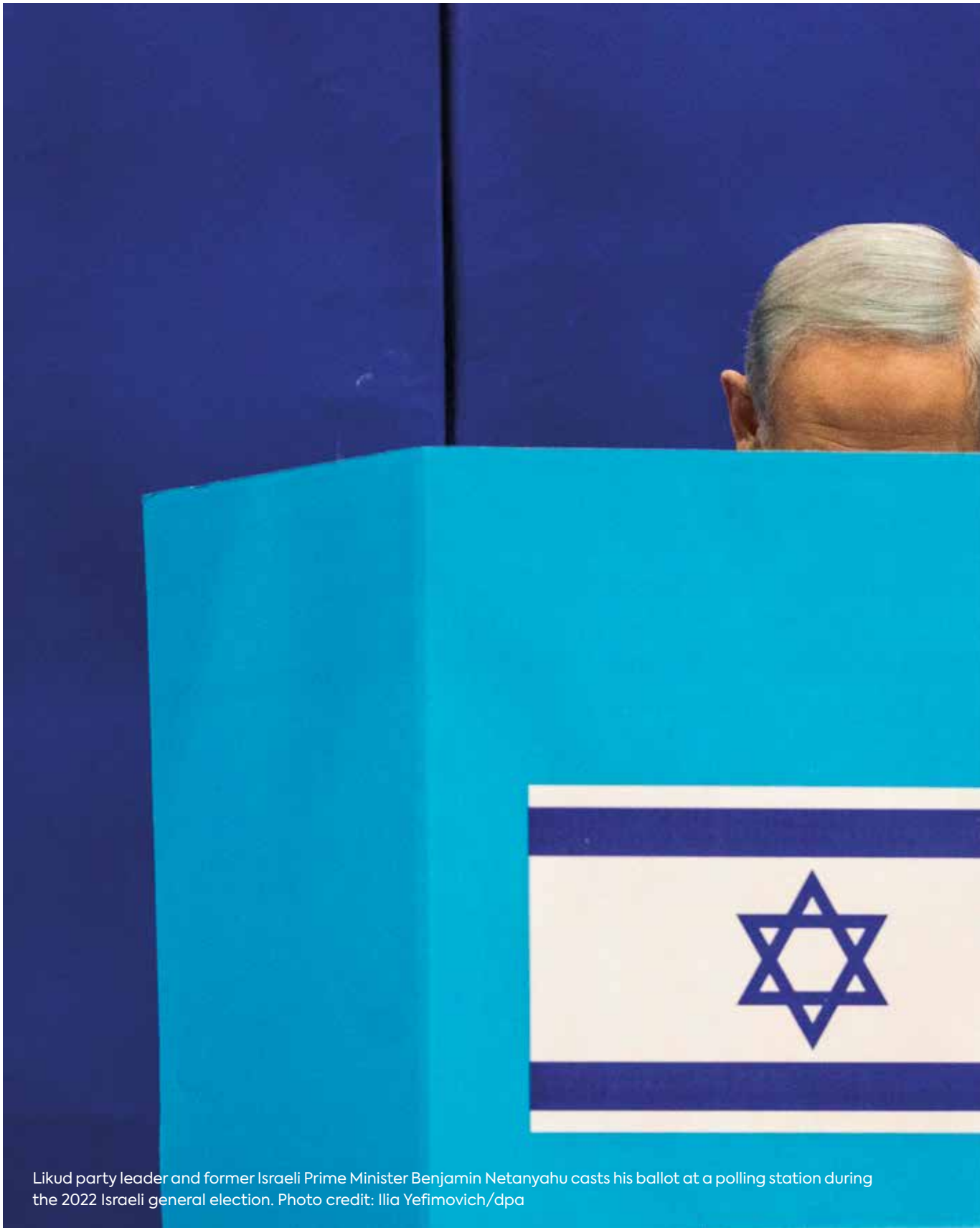
of the Green Blue Deal report, largely due to the opportunities and changing circumstances previously described, the governments of Israel and Jordan signed a declaration of intent to establish a large-scale solar facility in Jordan, which will sell electricity to Israel in exchange for desalinated water sales to Jordan. The deal represents a landmark climate resilience agreement for the region. The same Green Blue Deal rationale can now bring water security for Israelis and Palestinians, build confidence, and keep alive prospects for peace.

EcoPeace is calling on decision makers to embrace a climate resilience perspective, and to prioritize Israeli-Palestinian climate security by calling on the parties to agree on new arrangements for natural water allocation and pollution control. Furthermore, the organization is inviting foreign ministers to follow the lead of Finland's foreign minister, Pekka Haavisto, and help create a "coalition of the willing" to advance a Green Blue Deal of climate resilience in the Middle East. EcoPeace additionally calls on the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum to widen its mandate to include renewable energy and climate concerns, to be a primary vehicle of advancing climate security in our region. Finally, the organization calls on the Security Council to recognize globally that climate change is a "threat to peace" within the meaning of Article 39 of the UN Charter. ✱

* Adapted from a statement made by the author to the UN Security Council on January 19, 2022.

— GIDON BROMBERG

Gidon Bromberg is the co-founder of EcoPeace Middle East and has been its Israeli director since its establishment in 1994. EcoPeace is a unique regional organization that brings together Jordanian, Palestinian, and Israeli environmentalists to promote sustainable development and advance peace efforts in the Middle East.



Likud party leader and former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu casts his ballot at a polling station during the 2022 Israeli general election. Photo credit: Ilia Yefimovich/dpa

THE PARADOX OF NETANYAHU





by Ksenia Svetlova

Israel is once again going to the election polls on November 1, for the fifth time in less than four years with only one real issue on the agenda: “Bibi or not Bibi.”

Who is this man and why did he, from among all Israeli politicians, define and shape Israel for the past generation? Today, at the age of 72, after countless embarrassing political combinations, broken promises to his supporters, three criminal cases, quarrels with US Presidents Clinton and Obama, and a flirtation with Russia’s Vladimir Putin, Netanyahu is considered the most seasoned and charismatic politician. He enjoys the highest percentage of support in the Israeli public of any candidate, when asked who is the most qualified for the position of prime minister. One can feel various emotions toward Netanyahu, but it’s hardly possible to ignore him. Even when his competitors talk about themselves and their ideology and goals, they often end up talking about Netanyahu.

Not only in Israel but also abroad, attitudes toward Netanyahu are polarizing—you either love him or hate him. His supporters believe that he is irreplaceable in somewhat messianic terms. In practice, they credit him and his policies for the country’s dramatic economic growth during his years in office since 2009. They respect his ability to avoid dangerous concessions and yet achieve a breakthrough with several Arab countries in the Abraham Accords. Meanwhile, his opponents warn of the great danger inherent in his ambitions (and his efforts to shed off his legal problems) and do not shy away from using the harshest terms in describing him as not trustworthy, sneaky, cheap, and egoistical. They hint heavily that he has come under the influence or control of his wife and son.

Thus, in public, he is either greeted with chants of “Bibi—King of Israel” or with bitter “Don’t come back” banners placed on the roadsides. Some of his own supporters may occasionally promise themselves to wean the Likud off its dependence on Bibi. And yet, despite the curses and disappointments, his support base crowns him time and again as their absolute leader. His grip on his party is as firm as ever.

THE LEADER OF THE JEWS

Netanyahu leads the second generation of right-wing politicians since the founding of the state in 1948 (Ze’ev Jabotinsky led the right in the pre-state era). The first-generation leaders were Prime Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir, both active in pre-state underground organizations that fought the British. They were known to live modest lifestyles and adhere to conservatism in politics and personal life.

Netanyahu, who became the head of the opposition for the first time in 1992, was their antithesis. He grew up in the United States, after his father—Benzion Netanyahu, an historian of Jewish life in Europe—left the country, unable to advance his academic career due to his revisionist views. Benjamin Netanyahu or Ben Nitay, as he called himself during his years in the US, served—alongside his two brothers—in the prestigious General Staff Reconnaissance Unit (Sayeret Matkal), but the aura of heroism and sacrifice that he gained stemmed from being the brother of Yonatan Netanyahu who fell while commanding the Entebbe rescue operation in 1976.

Netanyahu loved the US and built a life there, focusing on a career in business and with an MBA from MIT (making him the Israeli prime minister with the highest level of formal education). He also became involved with the Institute for the Study of Terrorism named after his brother and thus got to know senior Israelis and developed close ties with them. The transition to a new



Benjamin Netanyahu passes a photograph of his party's election slogan "(Shimon) Peres will divide Jerusalem," February 1996. Photo credit: Reuters

career as an Israeli diplomat was sharp and quick. In 1984, paradoxically, it was Prime Minister Shimon Peres who appointed Netanyahu to serve as Israel's ambassador to the United Nations, to the dismay of the Likud leader, Yitzhak Shamir, who called Netanyahu an "angel of destruction." This nickname stuck with Netanyahu, and many of his political enemies still use it today when they come to imply that in politics, Netanyahu ruins everything that he touches.

The Likud's young generation of "princes" (sons of the party founders) were also not enthusiastic about Netanyahu either—he was too American, he relied on American advisers, and according to many of them (none of whom is currently in the Likud's Knesset list), his style was more suited to the US. It turns out that the American style and advisers were exactly what the Israeli right needed.

The millionaire from Caesarea, the owner of luxury real estate who went to one of the best US schools and endorsed a firmly entrenched

free market philosophy, became the idol of the people living in the small towns of Israel's periphery who suffered from discrimination and the lack of good work opportunities. They had been the key voting force behind the right-wing revolution in 1977 that brought the Likud to power. The man whose way of life is distinctly secular had whispered in a conversation with an influential religious mystic (Rav Kaduri) the iconic phrase—"They [the Left] forgot what it is to be Jewish" and implied that Israelis who believe in the partition of the land are not Jews at all. Later, in the aggressive campaign he would lead against civil society organizations, much of the media, and the left-wing parties in 2015, he would define their activities as "anti-Jewish."

L'ETAT, C'EST MOI

Bibi's articulation of "Jews against a hostile world"—which gained credence among many in Israel after the horrifying violence of the Second Intifada in the years 2000–2005, destroying the

political base of the left-wing parties—helped him shape Israel during his years in power. He had friends among fellow conservative leaders in the West—Stephen Harper in Canada, Mark Rutte in the Netherlands, and others—but he retained his belief that even the US, Israel's greatest friend, is capable of abandoning the Jews to their fate, hence his willingness to openly challenge President Obama over the Iran nuclear deal. When he developed close ties with Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, despite the American sanctions against Russia following the annexation of Crimea in 2014, he justified it as “good for the Jews.” Russia controlled (and still controls) the airspace over Syria, which Israel uses to attack Iranian forces planning attacks against Israel. His ties with figures on the European extreme right, such as Victor Orban in Hungary, gave leverage to the pro-Israel elements in Europe and weakened the critics of Israel: Again, in his eyes, it was good for the Jews, even when many Jews in Europe and the US begged to disagree.

Netanyahu's growing attention to foreign policy in his later years in office led to a personal brand of diplomacy (while chopping away at the functions of the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which he saw as rife with critics of his policies). He built a new relationship with Greece (even when it was led by the left) and Cyprus. He struck a significant personal bond with Prime Ministers Narendra Modi of India and the late Shinzo Abe of Japan and renewed Israel's involvement in African affairs. His crowning achievement in foreign affairs was the promulgation of the Abraham Accords. This new diplomatic momentum further enhanced his sense that his personal presence at the helm has become vital for the national interest.

As time went by, indeed, it seemed that what was “good for Netanyahu” became (in his and his family's eyes) a central part of what is “good for the Jews.” A talented and gifted man, well-read and broad-minded, he began to identify himself more and more with Israel. In 2017 he claimed that his investigations were driven by the “left” in an attempt to launch a “judicial coup” against the will of the voters and despite the impressive state of Israel's foreign relations and economic success. According to Netanyahu, his opponents

as well as Israelis who chose to protest against him were probably on the “payroll of the New Israel Fund,” and every critic, even one with the most impressive military record, became a “stooge of the Arabs, Iran and the left.”

Soon the media that accused him of corruption, and the justice system that wanted to investigate and then pressed charges, became personal arch-enemies, and even the subversive enemies of his state.

Gradually, his sense of being persecuted intensified, as Mazal Mualem, an Israeli journalist wrote in her book “Cracking the Netanyahu Code.” So did his desire to restructure and adapt the media, the judiciary, and the political systems to his needs. Many biographers of Netanyahu believe that the turning point came in 2016, when he appointed himself minister of communications, maintained close ties to the key media moguls, and, according to their testimonies, personally interfered when negative items were published about him, his wife, or his son. As the judicial system kept investigating his dealings with his billionaire friends, whose gifts seemed to cross the thin line into graft, every person involved in the proceedings—the general commissioner of the Police, the attorney general, the state prosecutor, and the judges—all became targets of campaigns of incitement led from the prime minister's residence on Balfour Street. Could it be that Netanyahu, who used to be an energetic and dynamic minister of finance, now avoided promoting necessary but difficult reforms and refrained from significant changes in the political, economic or social spheres, because he was too busy with political survival and wars with the media and the justice system? It might be just another one of Netanyahu's paradoxes. Another one is his attitude toward Israel's Arab minority—which he warned against during political campaigns while taking pride in having initiated a massive program of public sector investment in Israeli Arab towns and neighborhoods.

Today, his base is united behind him. But many other Israelis are flying banners against him from the bridges and overpasses. They fear that in another twist of the endless elections saga and in an attempt to escape a criminal verdict that might



Netanyahu speaks at the last rally ahead of the general elections, October 2022.
Photo credit: Iliia Yefimovich/dpa

end his otherwise spectacular political career, Netanyahu will continue his brutal war against the media and the judiciary, form a government with the most extreme and xenophobic elements in the far right, and carry forward Israel's "Orbanization" process following the Hungarian model. At the same time, the other part of the Israeli polarized public apparently believes that Israel could collapse if Netanyahu does not return to power, and that the Lapid–Gantz government, that lasted for just one year, was the least competent in the history of Israel.

Many in Israel attribute the country's ongoing political polarization to this man who has ruled the government for nearly 15 years, already longer than the founding father, David Ben-Gurion. Others will conclude that this attribution is an attempt by Netanyahu's opponents to suppress popular support for him, out of their elitist disdain toward his voters. All other issues—the worsening security situation

in the West Bank, the gas deal with Lebanon, the high cost of living, the war in Ukraine—are currently woven into this lasting political moment of Benjamin Netanyahu and his ability to shape Israel's discourse and its politics. For now it seems that Netanyahu is not going anywhere, even if he will lose (again) the ability to build a rightwing majority after elections. And even if at some point he will be removed from the Likud leadership, his influence will continue for many years to come. *

— KSENIA SVETLOVA

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THE DEBATE INSIDE ISRA BOUNDARY ARRANGE



Israeli delegates deliver statements after signing the maritime border deal with Lebanon, in Rosh Hanikra, northern Israel October 27, 2022. Photo credit: Reuters/Amir Cohen

EL OVER THE MARITIME MENT WITH LEBANON



by Eran Lerman

Not since the Oslo Accords of 1993–1995 has an aspect of Israel's relations with an Arab neighbor aroused such vehement argument in the Israeli public. Unlike the Oslo Accords, however, this is not a bilateral agreement signed in each other's presence as Lebanon refuses to deal with Israel directly, in any manner that would imply some form of recognition. Thus, as the clock ticked away before Israel's November 1 parliamentary elections, and the expiration of Michel Aoun's term as president of Lebanon on October 31, a US-sponsored understanding was reached with each of the two countries signing a letter to the US government (which would also be deposited with the UN) that delineates an agreed-upon maritime boundary between each country's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), as well as parts of their territorial waters.

Israel's opposition, led by former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, repeatedly accused the "weak and inexperienced" Lapid government of surrender (or even betrayal), throwing away Israel's potential assets. The government, backed by the views of the defense establishment, claimed that the arrangement would benefit Israel's economy, remove the threat of war, and may constitute a historic turning point in the long, sad history of relations with Lebanon. It portrayed Netanyahu's position as irresponsible warmongering.

Lebanon's reluctance, mentioned above, to directly deal with Israel did not help the proponents of the arrangement in making their case. Moreover, Prime Minister Lapid spoke of averting a clash, which made it look as if he had surrendered to the threat of violence. Five points of bitter contention stand out:

1. For well over ten years, various suggestions have been made as to an equitable middle line at sea between Israel's more northerly claim and Lebanon's, with a triangular area of 860 square kilometers in area between them (see map). Israel had been willing to settle for half or less. Still, in recent months, the Lebanese government raised an outlandish claim to an even more southerly line. In response to this tactic, Israel decided to agree to Lebanon's original line, if Lebanon would accept—as a fact of life, not in legal terms—the current situation (the "buoy line") of the territorial waters next to the shore. For the Israeli proponents of this arrangement, it was a reasonable concession, aimed at giving Lebanon a significant stake in gas production and hence in stability. For its detractors, it was a shameful and harmful failure to defend Israel's rights.

2. Perhaps more important than the actual line was how Hezbollah inserted itself into the fray. It launched a few unarmed drones toward the production platform in the Karish field, which lies in Israel's EEZ, but also partly within Lebanon's second, more southern line made late in the negotiations by Lebanon. Hasan

Israel & Lebanon Key Gas Infrastructure And Overlapping Border Claims

■ GAS FIELD/PIPELINE

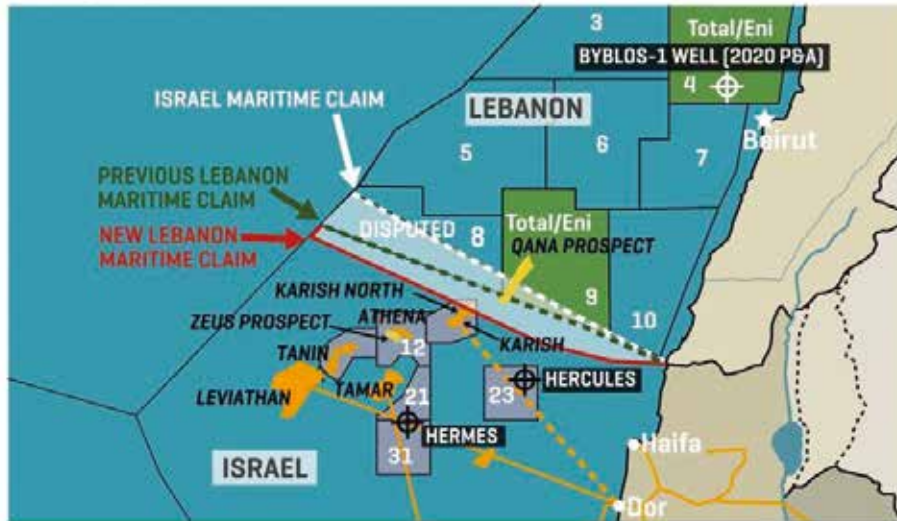


Photo credit:
The Washington
Institute for Near
East Policy

Nasrallah was signaling that conflict may erupt over the gas. This led many in Israel to accuse their government of a retreat under the threat of violence, causing grievous harm to the all-important concept of deterrence. As key Israeli players kept saying, Israel wants Lebanon to gain and to have a win-win stake in stability. Hezbollah thus faced a real threat to the very legitimacy of its position in Lebanon. If Israel is not really an enemy and even shows generosity to help Lebanon survive economically, what excuse is there for Hezbollah to remain independently armed against “the Zionist entity?” The organization and its Iranian masters thus had to play up their threat, to make Israeli magnanimity look like a surrender to blackmail. Careless Israeli language added to that impression.

3. The direct economic gain to Israel from the future exploration of the Qana field, which lies largely within the Lebanese EEZ as now agreed, is bound to be marginal. The real benefit would be that Lebanon would have a stake in

stability of the maritime border and that gas production in Israel’s Karish field could begin (as indeed it has on October 26). Folly, retort the detractors: it will be years before any income materializes, and Hezbollah’s grip on Lebanon is so firm that the national economic interests would be easily cast aside once the organization finds a reason for conflict with Israel. What you fail to see, answer the proponents, is that gas production in the Eastern Mediterranean has been made so much more lucrative by the war in Ukraine. It has also become ever more important as a key component of the strategic relationship with Egypt. These are two reasons why a future Israeli government, even under Netanyahu, may ultimately be wary of reversing the present government’s decision (Netanyahu is on record saying he would treat this like the Oslo Accords, which he reviled but did not reverse).

4. The detractors raise a valid constitutional point: A major concession affecting Israel’s national rights cannot be implemented without



US Senior Advisor for Energy Security Amos Hochstein and Lebanon's President Michel Aoun.
Photo credit: via Reuters



a referendum—under a law from the 1990s—or at least a Knesset vote. The prime minister did secure an opinion from Attorney-General Gali Baharav-Miara that the arrangement regarding the maritime boundary can be implemented by government fiat, an opinion which the Supreme Court upheld. Still, politically, it’s difficult to avoid the impression that Lapid and his colleagues were in a hurry to translate this into electoral gains (a steady plurality of Israelis support the arrangement, if the polls are to be trusted). But it is also difficult to ignore the brutal political edge of the criticism—much of it ad hominem—hurled by Netanyahu and his allies.

5. Finally, another significant point of contention has surfaced: a sense of distrust among many in the nationalist and religious right toward the military high command and the defense establishment. The latter are suspected of being too soft on Israel’s enemies and too attentive to American pressures. These are the people, tweeted one Likud member of Knesset, who gave us the 1973 Yom Kippur War, the 1982 mess in Lebanon, and the 2005 withdrawal from Gaza.

The present acrimony may reflect a broader agenda that might have an impact on the elections and their aftermath. *

ERAN LERMAN

Col. (ret.) Dr. Eran Lerman is a former senior intelligence officer. He served as Israel’s deputy national security adviser (2009–2015), and prior to that as director, AJC Israel and ME office (2001–2009). He is currently the vice president of the Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security and a lecturer at Shalem College.

THE CHALLENGES FACING THE NEXT CHIEF OF STAFF OF THE ISRAELI DEFENSE FORCES



THE NEXT CHIEF OF STAFF

Major General Hertzi Halevi, the next chief of staff of the IDF. Photo credit: IDF Spokesperson's Unit





by Tal Lev-Ram

Major General Hertzi Halevi will be the next chief of staff of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), replacing Lieutenant General Aviv Kochavi on January 1, 2023. His appointment was controversial because it was made by a transitional government, with parliamentary elections scheduled for November 1, 2022. Benjamin Netanyahu, leader of the opposition, did not hide his displeasure at the presumption of the present leadership to make a major appointment that will only take place during the term of a new government, which he hopes to lead. But the legal hurdles were cleared: Attorney-General Gali Baharav-Miara (the first woman to serve in that position) ruled that the position of a chief of staff is so critical that the appointment can be made even during an election period. The government then appointed (retired) Supreme Court Justice Menachem “Menny” Mazuz as chair of an advisory committee for the appointment of senior officials, thus ensuring further legitimacy for the government’s appointments.

Defense Minister Benny Gantz had narrowed the candidate field for chief of staff to two: Halevi and Major General Eyal Zamir. People close to

Gantz insisted that this was not a predetermined outcome: Gantz had held at least three meetings with Zamir to hear his vision of the IDF. Rumors that Zamir was not favored because Netanyahu (and his family) liked him were summarily dismissed. In 2018, then Prime Minister Netanyahu had wanted to appoint Zamir, who had been his military advisor, instead of Kochavi. But Netanyahu had deferred to the objections of the security establishment. The criticism at the time was not directed against Zamir himself, but rather because he had not held enough two-star positions to qualify as chief of staff. Four years later, both candidates had the requisite command experience, but Halevi possessed unique qualifications—a special forces background with a degree in philosophy—which made him the preferred choice.

How important is Halevi’s appointment? Every incoming chief of staff inherits the work of the outgoing one. Halevi will inherit signed contracts for the procurement of weapons and existing operational plans. He certainly does not start from scratch, but it is his duty to pass the torch onto the chief of staff who will replace him with a better IDF than the one he received.

In a country like Israel, which has many security needs, the chief of staff must decide on the priorities during his term, because it is simply not possible to budget for everything. This will determine what is

being done, but no less important what is not being done, with the choices being driven by intelligence assessments and by advanced risk management. In addition, decisions by a chief of staff are often subject to public debate. For example, in the case of Elor Azaria—a soldier court-marshaled for shooting a wounded terrorist lying prone on the ground—many on the right resented the decision of then Chief of Staff Gadi Eizenkot to put him on trial.

Still, one should be wary of the media's tendency to speculate on the role of a chief of staff's background and character—Halevi, the thoughtful, introverted special forces paratrooper, versus Zamir, who came from the armored corps. What is certain is that the incoming chief of staff will face challenges in preparing the military for five key problems that are expected to accompany him throughout his term of office (which is normally four years).

IRAN

The 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) led to the decision to dramatically reduce the readiness for an IDF military option against Iran. The American withdrawal from the agreement in 2018 led to significant Iranian violations which, in turn, resulted in a decision during the last two years to revert once again to preparing a military option for an attack on Iran's nuclear facilities. Israel currently does not have a credible attack option, and the military's commander in the coming years will be required to raise the level of the IDF's readiness for a military confrontation and an exchange of blows between the Jewish State and the Islamic Republic—against the background of the intense “campaign between the wars” already underway.

Also, after months of stagnation, one gets the impression of an eminent breakthrough in a deal with Iran, which even the American administration supports, so it is not an imaginary scenario that a new nuclear agreement may be reached in the coming weeks, and it may be worse than the previous one.

Many in the defense establishment believe that a bad agreement is better than the current situation. In addition to the experience gained by the Iranians in enriching uranium to high levels, their progress in the field of ballistic missiles could bring the red line even closer for Israel. Be that as it may, the cooperation between the IDF and the Mossad in covert operations and obtaining intelligence for the purpose of exposing the intentions of the Ayatollah's regime may be of great importance, especially in the case of a new nuclear agreement between Iran and the West.

“EVIL WILL COME FROM THE NORTH” (JEREMIAH 1:14)

Other than Iran and Gaza, the latter being a place where Israel always has short rounds of conflict, Lebanon's Hezbollah is the most dangerous enemy that poses a significant likelihood of war. One just need look at the recent tensions surrounding the maritime border negotiations with Lebanon and the Hezbollah threats against Israel's offshore gas explorations.

In recent years, the IDF has been improving its readiness for a conflict on the northern front, especially against Hezbollah. The ground forces, navy, and air force have all trained in exercises with northern scenarios. New advanced weapons have been purchased. The IDF has a plan that the top brass believe has the potential to destroy Nasrallah's military capabilities. The weak point of the plan, however, hinges on estimates that thousands of civilians in Lebanon will die in the first days of the war.

Will Israel's political echelon that in 2006 failed to approve attacks on Lebanese civilian infrastructure, owing to pressure from the Americans, succeed in approving such plans for the IDF during the next war? It is a compelling and complex question, but it's clear that the IDF may be tested in the coming years in implementing plans for attacks on Hezbollah.

In addition, Israel's air superiority over Lebanon has deteriorated due to the



The most dangerous enemy that poses a significant likelihood of war.

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah addresses his supporters, August 2022. Photo credit: Reuters

strengthening of Hezbollah's new air defense systems. Now Israel's air force has to think twice before sending unmanned aerial vehicles into the skies of Lebanon. Should Hezbollah shoot it down, the IDF will be required to respond—and therein lies the short path to escalation, which Israel does not want.

Over the last decade, an operational concept was established according to which the Israeli air force carries out missions several times a week outside the territory of the State of Israel. Undoubtedly,

these actions have slowed down Hezbollah, and for instance, its precision missile project. Yet they have not given up and are constantly moving weapons between Lebanon and Syria.

Between cost and benefit, the next chief of staff will be required to question whether the prestigious aerial operations do not also come at the expense of investing in readiness for the next war against Hezbollah—against precision missiles, cruise missiles, and swarms of unmanned aircraft.

There is, of course, no need to completely stop the aerial maneuvers, but the next chief of staff will definitely have to deal with the question of the centrality of this campaign and its share of the pie.

GAZA AND THE WEST BANK

In recent years, Israel has sought to avoid conflicts in the Palestinian arena but repeatedly finds itself drawn into rounds of violence in Gaza. Halevi has held a position in the Southern Command and knows very well that in his first year as chief of staff, he may be required to test the ground forces in Gaza.

The signs and signals from the West Bank do not bode well either. In the past year, a wave of deadly attacks in Israeli cities killed 20 people, mainly from terrorism originating in the West Bank or East Jerusalem, which shows how unstable this arena is.

For years there has been talk of succession struggles in the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the possible consequences for Israel. Mahmoud Abbas has already been buried countless times, but at the age of 86, it seems that he is truly closer to the end of his tenure than to the beginning.

Signs of instability can be seen mainly in the refugee camps of Jenin and Nablus in the northern West Bank, where the PA has a complete lack of power. As a result, the IDF is forced to operate in places where the PA has no control, and clashes with armed Palestinian gunmen occur more often. Accordingly, the army’s agenda is increasingly influenced by what is happening there.

PERSONNEL

Complaints about the conditions of IDF service are increasingly coming not only from young officers at the rank of lieutenant or captain but also from career officers of the rank of major and above, including those above the age of 30 and those slated to be generals. Changes in the military pension system have caused some of the complaints. In addition,

retired officers point to societal changes in the prestige and pride associated with military service.

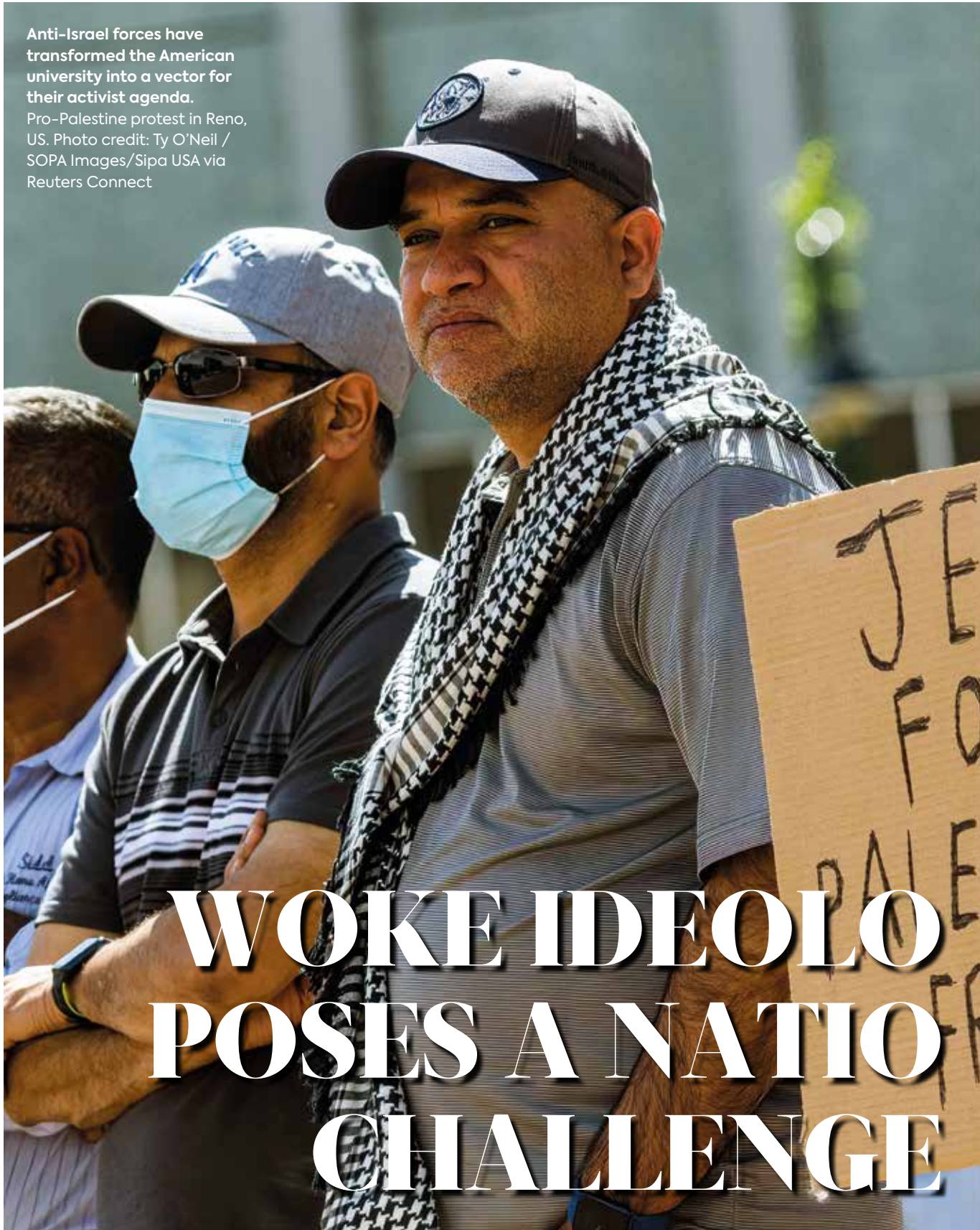
The IDF needs to adopt a more flexible approach in the current labor market, given the competition for top talent from Israel’s private sector. Some observers rank this challenge as equal to or greater than the operational and force building challenges that Halevi will face in 2023. *

TAL LEV-RAM

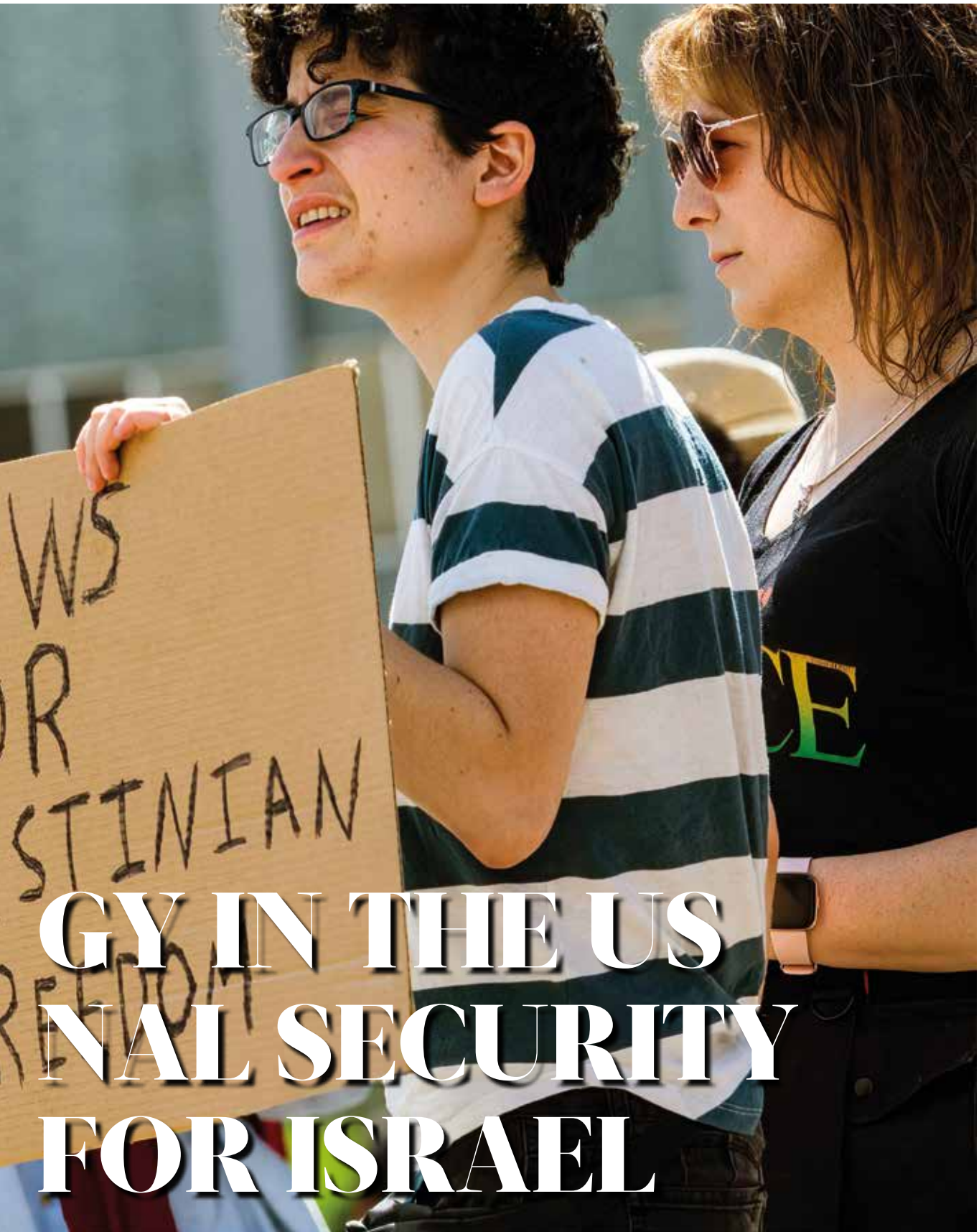
Tal Lev-Ram has been the chief military correspondent of the Israeli daily newspaper Maariv for the past five years. Between 2008–2017, Lev-Ram served as a reporter and analyst for IDF Radio. A combat officer by training, Lev-Ram also served as an IDF spokesperson for the Southern Command between 2005–2008 during the disengagement from Gaza.

Anti-Israel forces have transformed the American university into a vector for their activist agenda.

Pro-Palestine protest in Reno, US. Photo credit: Ty O'Neil / SOPA Images/Sipa USA via Reuters Connect



WOKE IDEOLO POSES A NATIO CHALLENGE



GY IN THE US NAL SECURITY FOR ISRAEL



by David Bernstein

Frazzled by recent discussions with her American Jewish counterparts, an Israeli friend recently asked me, “What alien species has taken over the American Jewish community?”

There has indeed been an abrupt shift in political attitudes among a segment of American Jews and other elites, which, unabated, will corrode US–Israel relations and Israel’s national security. My recent book “Woke Antisemitism: How a Progressive Ideology Harms Jews” investigates how the ideology behind this shift disenfranchises the American Jewish community. In addition, woke ideology undermines American national resolve and hence its confidence and projection of power in the world, which creates a leadership vacuum and strengthens the hands of bad actors. It exacerbates the negative media environment for Israel, diminishes bipartisan support for the Jewish state, and has the potential to affect international investment in Israel. In light of this admittedly gloomy assessment, I offer some recommendations for how Israeli officials should maneuver in the current highly charged political environment.

WHAT IS WOKE IDEOLOGY?

Woke ideology holds two core tenets: first, that bias and oppression are not just matters of individual attitude but are embedded in the very structures and systems of society; and second, that only those with lived experience of oppression have the insight to define oppression for the rest of society. The second of the two

tenets is known as “standpoint epistemology,” the idea that knowledge is derived from one’s position in the power structure. In this framework, knowledge is tied to identity and to a group’s experience and perceived ability to see inequities.

A person who is deemed oppressed can insist that a non-oppressed person lacks moral standing to question his or her assertions about race, gender, power, or oppression and that the critic is “speaking out of privilege.” Standpoint claims are thus the ideological foundation of “cancel culture.”

Woke ideology began as an academic study, grew into a faddish campus ideology, and then morphed into corporate diversity programs. From there it became a dominant ideology in mainstream American institutions, including government bodies, medical associations, the movie industry, mainstream media, and even the US military. US Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Michael Gilday added to his recommended readings Ibram X. Kendi’s book, “How to Be an Antiracist” in which Kendi argues that “Capitalism is essentially racist,” and that “to truly be antiracist, you also have to be truly anticapitalist.” Woke ideology is both, according to public surveys, highly unpopular and, judging from its continued expansion, remarkably unflappable in the face of resistance.

AN ALTERED MEDIA ENVIRONMENT

The May 2021 fighting in Gaza between Israel and Hamas illustrated a change in media coverage of Israel. In each prior round of fighting in Gaza (2008, 2012, 2018) media coverage—both news and opinion—unfolded in a predictable pattern. The stories and editorials generally acknowledged that Israel must have leeway to defend itself against Hamas rocket

DEFENDER OR COLONIZER?

AGE

18-29 (14%)



30-44 (25%)



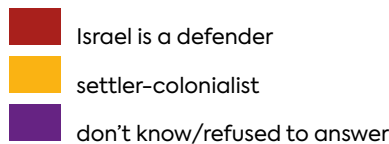
45-54 (20%)



55-64 (18%)



65+ (22%)



Poll commissioned by the Jewish Institute for Liberal Values, August 2022.

fire aimed at Israeli civilians. Then, as casualties mounted, the coverage turned against Israel, and within a few days, the same outlets condemned the Jewish state for using “disproportionate force.” In May 2021—when this latest round occurred—even in the earliest stages of the conflict Israel was not extended the usual benefit of the doubt and was vilified as the oppressor in many outlets.

Consistent with the oppressed/oppressor binary in the mainstream press, polling shows Americans on the center-left and young people are less sympathetic to Israel. From 2002 through 2014, Democrats were significantly more likely to side with the Israelis than the Palestinians. Since 2014, not uncoincidentally when protests broke out in Ferguson, Missouri and Black Lives Matter became a household name, that preference for Israel has gradually faded, and now Democrats are about equally as likely to sympathize with Palestinians as with Israelis. In a poll commissioned by the Jewish Institute for Liberal Values,

respondents were asked if they believe Israel to be a sovereign nation with the right to defend itself or an occupier and a colonizer that uses modern military power to attack defenseless Palestinians. Progressives and young voters were more likely to agree with the colonizer narrative.

INSTALLING WOKE SOFTWARE INTO YOUNG AMERICANS

Over the course of five decades, anti-Israel forces focused on US college campuses have transformed the American university into a vector for their activist agenda. Having enjoyed considerable success, they are now turning to K-12 education. They are playing the long game—what activists call “the long march through institutions”—in inculcating a stark ideological worldview that portrays anyone with power or success (success is a function of power, in this worldview)—America, Israel, Jews, Asians, men—as oppressors. Many schools teach students to see people’s identities as markers of privilege and power and to “recognize and resist systems of oppression.” With this ideological software running through kids’ brains, the school system does not have to even utter the word “Jew” or “Israel” for Jews and Israel to be ultimately implicated in oppression.

DECLINE IN SUPPORT FROM YOUNG JEWS AND YOUNG EVANGELICALS

Neither are young Jews immune from the effects of ideology. A poll conducted by the American Jewish Committee (AJC) in May 2022 revealed that 53% of US Jews ages 25–40 feel connected to Israel. Among those who do not feel connected are those who disagree with Israel’s policies and those who fear social ostracization driven by feeling out of synch with their peers. “Our survey indicates that millennial

US Jews may be willing to suppress their Zionism, or even their Jewishness, to remain in good social standing,” stated the AJC.

Surveys of young evangelical Christians show similar trends: In a poll of evangelical Christians between the ages of 18 and 29 conducted in the spring of 2021, only 33.6% sided with Israel, a marked shift from 2018, when 69% of young evangelicals supported Israel. Both young evangelicals and young Jews are immersed in the same ideological environment as their peers and aren't immune from its effects.

EROSION IN AMERICAN NATIONAL RESOLVE

Woke ideology not only lessens support for Israel among Americans, it also diminishes enthusiasm for America and for the nation's sense of purpose in the world. According to a recent survey, pride in their country has reached record lows among Americans. In 2013, 56% of Democrats were “extremely proud” of being American; today the figure is 26%, reflecting not only a change of leadership in the White House but shifting political attitudes. Asked about the state of American foreign policy, Henry Kissinger responded that “A minimum condition for great achievement for a society is to believe in its purposes and in its historical record. And if the educational system of a country becomes increasingly focused on the shortcomings of its history and less on the purposes of the society, then its capacity to act internationally will be diverted into its internal struggles.” An American society that loses faith in its own sense of purpose and moral standing is likely to be less assertive on the international stage and less likely to be a reliable ally facing down global threats.

EXPLOITATION BY BAD ACTORS

An Islamist–progressive alliance—European in origin with an anti-Western, anti-American, and anti-Zionist agenda—has now planted itself in the US. In a report called “The Red Green Alliance is Coming to America,” the Reut Group describes how woke ideology has been exploited by radical Islamists forces who use it to influence American foreign policy in the Middle East. The Reut Group points out that in the US, this cooperation is accelerated by a process of

“progressivization” of Muslim Brotherhood organizations, which are steadily adopting the rhetoric of progressive politics.

The Islamist–progressive alliance focuses its foreign policy criticism on the pro-Western axis of US allies, and it seeks to undermine US support for the Abraham Accords, the normalization agreements signed in 2020 between Israel and four Arab countries.

ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES

As woke ideology has set into the corporate and financial worlds, the already growing movement toward Socially Responsible Investing (SRI) has gained further steam. Companies have adopted environmental, social, and governance metrics to rate business performance. Along with standards of “equity”—proportional representation of marginalized communities in companies—are human rights scores as well. The Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement has pushed UN human rights reports on Israel to affect investors' decision making. While previous BDS efforts had little if any effect on the Israeli economy, the growth of SRI practices, fueled by wokeness, could affect Israeli companies over time.

EFFECTS ON THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY

The effects of woke ideology are being felt within the Democratic Party. Jewish operatives on Capitol Hill see up close how the ideology impacts members of Congress who are constantly looking over their left shoulder at the activist wing of the party. It wouldn't take a significant drop in support for Israel for a future Democratic president to withhold backing for the Jewish state in the UN Security Council. Daniel Gordis, the Koret distinguished fellow at Shalem College in Jerusalem, recently stated:

“I don't think you have to move the needle too far to the left of the Democratic Party to get to a place where those vetoes (in the UN Security Council) might not come . . . And that obviously itself . . . could be a hugely dangerous thing. One could see, for example, a growing international sentiment designed to ostracize Israel and you could foresee the next time there's a May 2021 (Israel– Hamas conflict) . . . European air carriers say we're not flying to Israel, and they also say that Israeli lines like El Al cannot fly to the US.



Protest Against Israel’s possible Annexation of the West Bank Near the home of Ivanka Trump and Jared Kushner, July 2020. Photo credit: Michael Brochstein/Sipa USA via Reuters Connect

And you could imagine in a different kind of precedent, the United States copying that even for a week or two, reminding Israelis that they are fundamentally completely surrounded (Israel from the Inside Podcast, October 2022).

If the ideology continues to take hold, it is possible but not inevitable that we will see a major shift in the Democratic Party toward the “settler-colonialist” narrative of Israel.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ISRAELI POLICYMAKERS AND DIPLOMATS

In light of the challenges posted by woke ideology, I recommend

- * Israel policymakers and planners should be educated and fully briefed on the ideological trends in the US;

- * Israelis should speak openly to select American Jewish leaders about their concerns with woke ideology and how it will impact US–Israel relations and Israeli national security;

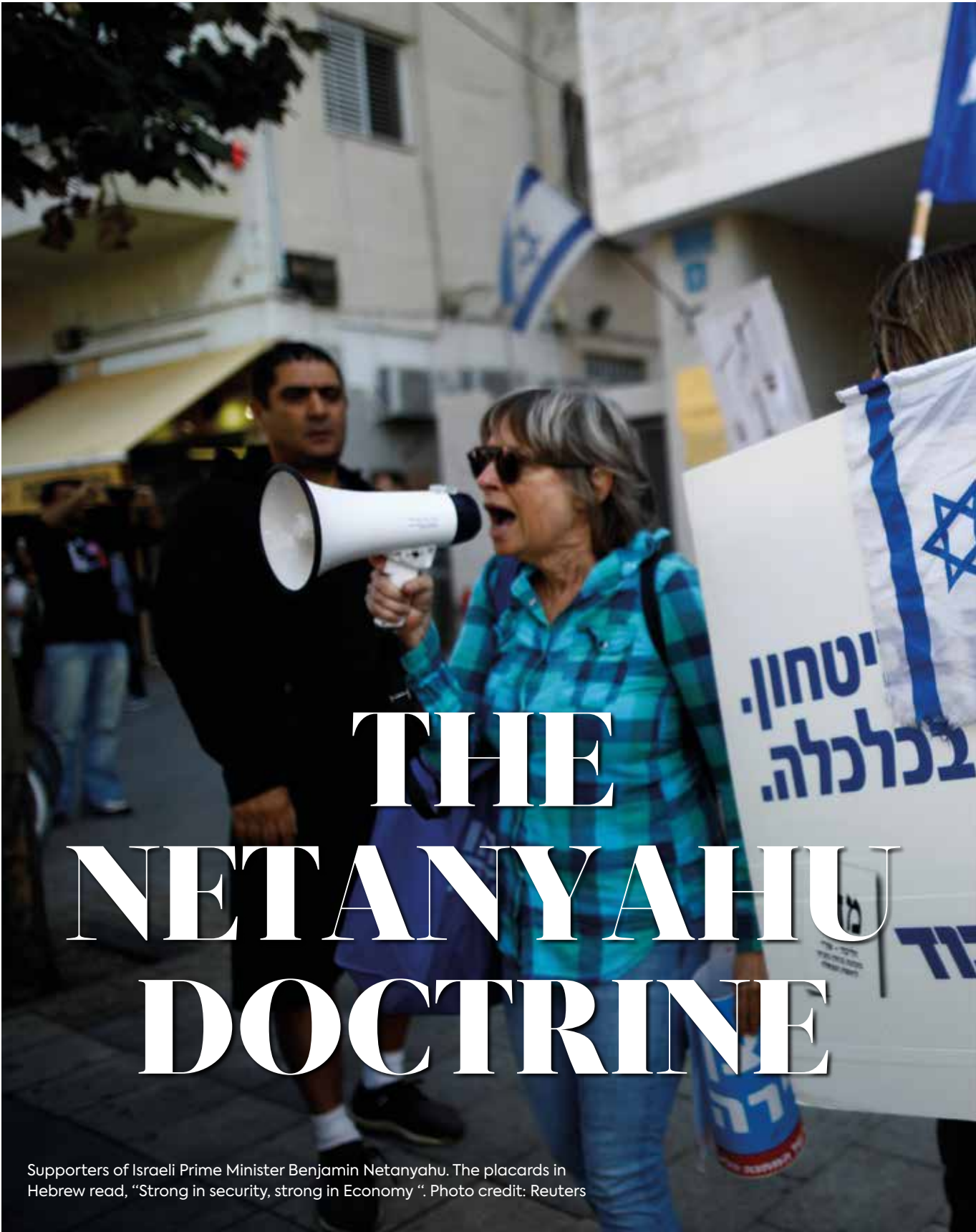
- * Israeli embassies and consulates should shift their outreach and engagement efforts away from political progressives and toward political centrists among ethnic and immigrant communities;

- * Israel should take steps to rebut the SRI narratives on Israel and support efforts of alternative, values-based investors that are not biased toward Israel;

- * Israeli officials should remain steadfastly nonpartisan and avoid tying Israel’s brand to either party so as to avoid accelerating the politicization process. *

DAVID BERNSTEIN

David Bernstein is the founder of the Jewish Institute for Liberal Values (JILV.org) and author of “Woke Antisemitism: How a Progressive Ideology Harms Jews.”



THE NETANYAHU DOCTRINE

Supporters of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The placards in Hebrew read, "Strong in security, strong in Economy ". Photo credit: Reuters





by Arie Krampf

The notion of a national security doctrine is usually associated with the foreign policy of hegemonic powers, particularly the United States. Several American presidents have either promulgated a doctrine or had one named after them. A doctrine is usually understood as encompassing economic, geopolitical, and even social objectives, as well as the policies to attain those objectives.

Although we tend to associate the notion of a doctrine with hegemonic powers, we can also attribute doctrines to small and medium-sized states. Their doctrines are not so much about changing the world order but rather about responding to changes in local and regional circumstances and in global tectonic trends. In the case of Israel, it would be safe to argue that the country's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, had a national economic-security doctrine. As a leader of Israel's labor movement, chairman of the Jewish Agency, and prime minister, he played a key role in shaping Israel's economic-security strategy during its formative years, the contours of which I will discuss below.

Since the early 2000s, a new national economic-security doctrine was consolidated by center-right elements in the Israeli political system. Benjamin Netanyahu, first as minister of

finance and then as prime minister, played a key role in shaping what I describe as the transition from the financial dependency doctrine of Ben-Gurion to a financial independence model, which allows for a more independent foreign policy.

RELIANCE ON FOREIGN CAPITAL UNDER THE BEN-GURION DOCTRINE

Looking at the economic history of Israel, there was one phenomenon that has constantly occupied the leadership: the need for foreign capital. Since the origin of Zionist settlement in Palestine in the 1880s, the question of financing the national project was just as critical as the territorial issues. Initially, the funds were delivered to sporadic Jewish settlements as tutelary philanthropy. In the first half of the 20th century, the World Zionist Organization and the Jewish Agency for Palestine channeled capital from world Jewry to Palestine's Jewish community, especially to the labor movement. During the first two decades after the establishment of the state in 1948, although the US and the Jewish diaspora provided foreign capital, reparations from West Germany were the main source of capital. Overall, the state-building process was heavily dependent on the financial support of liberal-democratic Western powers.

The reliance of Israel on foreign—Western—sources of capital was part of Ben-Gurion's economic-security doctrine that was consolidated as early as the 1930s. Ben-Gurion believed that the destiny of the Jewish state in

Palestine would be determined by demography. However, the creation of a Jewish majority in Palestine required rapid industrialization rather than gradual economic growth. Rapid industrialization could not have been achieved without foreign capital. Therefore, the dependency of Israel on Western capital—either from Germany, from the US or from the Jewish diaspora—was a key pillar in Ben-Gurion’s doctrine. Over time, this principle had become part of Israel’s national identity.

The reliance on foreign capital made Israel—like many other small emerging economies—a vulnerable territorial being. Dependency was often framed as an asset and sometimes as a liability. During the 1970s, Israel went through a rapid process of armament financed by US economic and military assistance. During this period, Israel built its military power and became a regional power at the cost of deepening its dependence on the US and growing foreign debt. Israel’s vulnerability was manifested a few years later, when the changing circumstances in the Middle East led the US to curb and condition its assistance to Israel. After several years of a growing crisis, in 1985 Israel faced an existential debt crisis: It was no longer able to finance its foreign debt. Eventually, Israel received an assistance package from the US, but only after the government approved and implemented a tough stabilization plan, which included cutting the defense budget.

The stabilization plan demonstrated the fundamental tradeoff that many small economies face: prioritizing economic autonomy that enable the state to address domestic socioeconomic objectives at the cost of growing external vulnerabilities and dependencies; or prioritizing the state’s external power by lowering vulnerabilities and dependencies at the cost of undermining its capacity to respond to domestic socioeconomic conditions. It is sometimes possible to escape this tradeoff between autonomy and sovereignty, if the international environment accommodates it.

During the 1990s, there was a narrow and short-lived window of opportunity to escape

this tradeoff. It was assumed that if the Middle East became a more stable region, capital would flow in, exports would flow out, and the cost of defense would decrease. In such circumstances, the tension between autonomy and sovereignty would subside. This vision of a new Middle East implied that Israel would no longer be an isolated liberal democracy in the Middle East but would rather be at the epicenter of a new regional market. The Israeli economy would benefit from access to new global markets, including Arab countries. To ensure a smooth transition, Israel would receive full US economic and political support.

Israel had a taste of this vision during Rabin’s government. The center-left government privatized state-owned-enterprises and liberalized trade, but it also increased investment in health, education, and infrastructure, especially in the country’s geographic periphery, where new immigrants were settled, and in Israeli Arab communities. During Rabin’s government, inequality levels in Israel fell and real wages increased. The peace process was a necessary precondition for the success of this strategy. It opened new markets for Israeli products, and it turned Israel into a potential investment target for the expanding global financial markets. In addition, the peace process was consistent with US interests in the region, and Israel was handsomely rewarded and supported. Rabin’s government brought Israel as close as it had ever been to the European social-democratic model.

For a moment, the 1990s were the dawn of a new era. Israel seemingly was able to overcome the small states’ fundamental policy dilemma between economic autonomy and external sovereignty. Rabin’s government represented a potential end of the Ben-Gurion doctrine, which prioritized economic autonomy at the cost of dependency.

A NEW DOCTRINE

The outbreak of the Second Intifada in September 2000 turned the game upside down. The failure of the Camp David Summit in that year marked the end of the peace economy. The

right-wing governments in the post-Intifada period faced a new dilemma: How to restore economic growth without a peace process? This dilemma was the origin of a new economic-security doctrine.

In the early 2000s, the Israeli economy was in a recession, caused by the outbreak of the Second Intifada, the global market collapse known as the “dot.com crisis,” and the 9/11 terror attacks. The government of Ariel Sharon, led by Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, implemented an austerity policy. In April 2003, a month after his appointment as minister of finance, Netanyahu announced the Economic Recovery Plan, which included a budget cut, a lowering of government deficits, and severe reductions in social spending and allowances. He also reduced government subsidies to the private sector.

For Netanyahu, private sector growth was a means to improve Israel's economic power in a globalized world. Whereas Rabin's government perceived privatization and liberalization as part of a peace dividend, for Netanyahu—and for the right-wing governments in the post-Second Intifada period—privatization and liberalization were processes designed to improve Israel's capacity to withstand external political pressure and pursue an independent foreign policy.

Some economists hailed the Netanyahu reforms, whereas others—particularly at the Bank of Israel—thought they were responsible for the growing rates of poverty and inequality and for underinvestment in infrastructure.

By late 2003, Israel's current account had become positive and was growing, indicating that foreign currency was pouring into the economy. This change, which went unnoticed by the Israeli public, was nothing less than a transformative moment, a revolution in Israel's economic history. As I explained above, Ben-Gurion's doctrine assumed dependency on foreign capital. This dependency, I argue, was a key element in the national vision and identity: the dependence of the state-building project on foreign assistance. Becoming a “surplus country” for capital flows meant that

more foreign currency was entering Israel than leaving it through nonfinancial transactions. Israel had become less vulnerable than it had been before.

The Bank of Israel hoarded part of the foreign currency. The Bank of Israel's foreign reserves, having rocketed since 2007, currently are among the highest in the world per gross domestic product. At the same time, despite the deadlock in the peace process with the Palestinian Authority, Israel's risk premium on government bonds stayed low and matched the risk premium of some countries in Europe.

From the perspective of foreign policy, the termination of the peace process and the strengthening of the economy led Israel to take a unilateral approach to the conflict. This approach included the withdrawal from Gaza in 2004.

What I call the Netanyahu doctrine is based on geographic, institutional, and even mental separation between Israel as a globalized economy and Israel as a state that occupies a territory and engages in a territorial conflict. Elsewhere I have called this doctrine “hawkish neoliberalism,” a doctrine based on the premise that free markets must be harnessed to serve the national purpose.

IS THE NETANYAHU DOCTRINE SUSTAINABLE?

The greatest blind spots of the Netanyahu doctrine are its domestic social costs. During the 2000s, inequality and poverty rates rose. Investment in education, public health, development, and infrastructure declined. From the perspective of Netanyahu and his camp, the domestic costs were a fair price to pay for sustaining Israel's position in the international sphere.

After the global financial crisis of 2008 and the social justice protests inside Israel in the summer of 2011, Israel's economy was partly rebalanced to restore some social spending. However, Israel still lags behind in terms of public investment among the countries belonging to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu points out how his government reduced the trade deficit during a briefing of economic reporters, February 1999. Photo credit: Reuters

The future of the Netanyahu doctrine also depends on the course of the Israel-US relationship because Israel remains significantly dependent on the US. Israel's ability to forge independent relations with China and Russia has limits due to US concerns with technology transfer. It could be the case that after Russia's war in Ukraine, a revitalized West led by the US will pressure Israel to realign its foreign policy, despite its increased financial independence. *

— ARIE KRAMPF

Arie Krampf, an associate professor at the Academic College of Tel Aviv-Yaffo, served as a visiting professor in the Department of Government at Harvard University, and as researcher at the Free University of Berlin and the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science. His latest book is *The Israeli Path to Neoliberalism: The State, Continuity and Change* (Routledge, 2018).

THE REASON ISRAEL'S REFUGEE WEAPONS TO



ING BEHIND SAL TO SUPPLY UKRAINE



Protestors hold signs at a demonstration against the Russian military invasion into Ukraine, in Tel Aviv, Israel. Photo credit: Reuters



by Daniel Rakov, Pnina Shuker

Is [Israel] with the democratic world... or with those who turn a blind eye to Russian terror?
Volodymyr Zelenskyy, October 24, 2022

Ever since the Russian invasion of Ukraine last February, Israel's policy of not supplying weapons to Ukraine has come under both domestic and international criticism. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy recently stated that the decision by Israeli leaders not to support Kyiv has encouraged Russia's military partnership with Iran. Inside Israel, critics say support for Ukraine is a moral imperative; others demand that Israel stand with its greatest ally, the US.

Israel faces a dilemma: How to balance its intricate ties with Moscow, its strategic alliance with the United States, its significant partnerships with Western countries, and its long and cordial relations with Kyiv. What are the reasons behind the current policy and how might it change in the future?

The surge in Russian attacks on the Ukrainian hinterland in autumn 2022 made the Ukrainian government's need for air-defense systems urgent. At the end of September,

Zelenskyy claimed that only five states produced the kind of air defense that Ukraine needed, and he pointed to Israel as being one, and as not helping Ukraine enough. In a late October interview, Zelenskyy revealed that former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had refused his request for Iron Dome short-range anti-rocket systems years before the Russian invasion, and that he had received the same answer from Netanyahu's successors after the war started. Zelenskyy was upset that Israel refused to supply even non-lethal communications systems for the Ukrainian military. Israel's Defense Minister Gantz has since offered to provide his Ukrainian counterpart with an early warning system for missile attacks.

Ukrainian officials further claim that the Russian-Iranian convergence emphasizes that Moscow would do anything to support Iranian nuclear ambitions; therefore, helping defeat Russia in Ukraine would allow Israel to weaken Iran.

There are tactical reasons for Israel's refusal to supply Ukraine with the Iron Dome short-range missile defense. The Israelis claim they don't have spare batteries and interceptor missiles and question whether the Iron Dome is the right system for Ukraine. Indeed, the Iron Dome is used in Israel against unguided rockets, whereas in Ukraine, the main threat is from precision-guided missiles and drones. It's not clear that the Iron Dome would have the same success rate against Russia as it has against terrorists in Gaza.

The Israeli Iron Dome batteries are deployed to protect a relatively small amount of territory. To cover Ukraine's vast lands, it needs more extensive air-defense arrays than the Israeli one does. Taking the systems out of the Israeli order of battle would leave the country vulnerable, as there is a constant threat of escalation from the Palestinians in Gaza or Hezbollah in Lebanon. There is also an apprehension that Russians would study the Iron Dome to find weaknesses and take revenge on Israel by helping Hamas and Hezbollah challenge the Iron Dome more effectively.

Ukraine could use a few Iron Dome systems to defend its critical infrastructure. Alternatively it could benefit from other Israeli air-defense systems. The main reason behind the Israeli refusal is not tactical but rather political-strategic.

At the beginning of the war, the US and the European countries pressured Israel to adopt a clear public position against the Russian invasion. Since then, the US government has eased up on its pressure and doesn't expect Israel to increase aid to Ukraine. Still, many critical voices in Washington, both on Capitol Hill and in the think-tank community, have expressed "displeasure at Israel for refusing Ukraine's request for defensive military equipment to combat Russia's invasion." The criticism in the US Congress is both from Democratic and Republican lawmakers. A senior Israeli former defense official conveyed recently to one of the authors that while the Europeans are quite understanding of the Israeli position, he's extremely anxious about future repercussions for US-Israeli relations and specifically Israel's reputation as a major US ally in the Middle East.

For its part, Russia is not interested in alienating Israel, which is one of a small group of Western countries not overtly hostile to it. The war has brought Russia and Iran closer together as the two most anti-western countries in the world, as Iran seems to be the only (or at least the major) supplier of weapons that

Moscow desperately needs in Ukraine—loitering munitions (aerial attack weapons that search for a target) and soon, probably precise ballistic missiles. It's not clear whether or not Israel is helping Ukraine with intelligence to counter newly employed Iranian-made weapons. Some Ukrainians claim Israel is helpful, while others deny it. Israel doesn't believe it is in Moscow's interest to help Iran go nuclear; however, nobody in Jerusalem is hopeful that Russia would actively prevent a nuclear Iran scenario.

Russian officials threaten that giving weapons to Ukraine would mark Israel as an "unfriendly state," to be followed by countermeasures. These might include interfering with Israel's freedom of operations in Syria and Lebanon; supplying sophisticated military technology to Iran (Russia does have capabilities Iran desires); and limiting the emigration of Russian Jews to Israel, which has intensified in recent months.

Russia's intervention in Syria's civil war in 2015 made Moscow an important factor in Israel's ability to continue weakening the Iranian military presence in Syria and Lebanon. Russia has thus far turned a blind eye to Israeli air attacks in Syria against Iran, as long as Israel accepts Russia's strategic dominance in Syria. Throughout the Russian-Ukrainian war, Russia has continued to acquiesce in Israeli operations in Syria, despite moving closer toward Iran. Russia has warned Israel that weapons supplied to Ukraine would change its passive position on Israeli attacks in Syria. Despite the weakness of the Russian military in Ukraine, Russia can make it harder for the Israeli Air Force to act in Syria, and no Israeli commander or politician is willing to sacrifice Israeli soldiers to help Ukraine.

Last summer, Russia initiated a process of closing down the Jewish Agency in its territory, signaling to Israel that the Kremlin can put pressure on Israel by endangering its capability to help Russian Jews emigrate to Israel.

Finally there are domestic Israeli political considerations. The Israeli public and the

government, in general, are quite sympathetic to Ukraine and do not want Russia to defeat the Western allies. Nevertheless, Israel's security is under constant threat of sudden escalation into war with Hamas in Gaza or Hezbollah in Lebanon, with an increasing probability of a nuclear Iran scenario. Not many in Israel support opening a new confrontation front with Moscow, if it's not necessary. An October 18 poll by the Israeli public TV showed that a plurality of the Israeli public oppose supplying lethal weapons to Ukraine (41% against, 21% supportive of selling weapons, 38% with no opinion).

The issue was also politicized during the run-up to elections for the Knesset on November 1. The right accused Yair Lapid's government of not being sensitive enough in maneuvering between Moscow and Washington and claimed that former Prime Minister Netanyahu could reduce tensions with Moscow. Therefore, the current government didn't want a new crisis with Russia that could play into the hands of its political opponents.

CONCLUSIONS

Israel supports the Western camp on Ukraine but faces both tactical and strategic constraints in supplying lethal weapons to Ukraine. Internal public criticism could conceivably move government policy to some degree but probably only to increase humanitarian and non-lethal military aid.

Jerusalem's dilemma is harsh. Supplying weapons to Ukraine would, given explicit Russian threats, endanger concrete security interests in the short term. Not supplying weapons to Ukraine involves the less clear and more long-term reputational loss of not being supportive enough of the West in its generational fight against Russia. Currently Israel prefers the short term, but it might change its calculations if the long-term losses become more concrete and observable. *

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**STOPPING THE
DEVELOPMENT OF
WEAPONS OF MASS
DESTRUCTION: A MOSSAD
OPERATION THAT
FORESHADOWED THE
IRAN NUCLEAR THREAT**



by Amir Oren

Recent revelations, going back 60 years, shed new light on the intensity of Israel's commitment to prevent enemy states from procuring means of mass destruction. For the last 41 years, this commitment has been public record. Following the destruction of the Iraqi nuclear facility in July 1981, Prime Minister Menachem Begin announced what became known as the Begin Doctrine: "We shall not allow any enemy to develop weapons of mass destruction turned against us."

The Begin Doctrine was translated again into action in Syria in 2007, although it took Israel 11 years to own up to its raid on the nuclear compound at al-Kibar. A more recent series of startling events in Iran, from "Stuxnet" and less subtle acts of sabotage to the assassination of key figures, apparently indicates that once again, a systemic effort is underway to disrupt and delay an enemy's military nuclear project. Yet the air force is not the only tool in Israel's arsenal. Israel's external intelligence agency, the Mossad, saw fit to release recently a 41-year-old study of an even older drama, which predates both the Begin Doctrine and the modes of action used today, but may also demonstrate the cost of taking an overly zealous stance.

This is the story of the Mossad's campaign against German personnel who relocated to Egypt after World War II to work in its emerging defense

industry. Known in Israel as the "scientists' affair," in truth, these were not the caliber of Werner Heisenberg and Wernher Von Braun, Germans who worked on nuclear matters and missiles, respectively, in the United States after the war. Instead, it involved primarily engineers and technicians. In retrospect, the author of study, written in 1982 and now made available in Hebrew, concluded that the entire affair may have been blown out of proportion; but at the time, given the sensitivities of Israeli society and government, it became a major public issue.

If the story faded long ago, why revisit it? The answer is twofold. First, the study is a treasure trove of details never disclosed before. Second, there are insights and lessons relevant to the problems of 2022 as much as they were to the problems of 1962. What Russian doctrine likes to call now "warfare in the gray zone," undeclared violent actions that nevertheless do not cross the threshold of war, was already being implemented in the Israeli–Egyptian arms race six decades ago. And what was then read in Arabic or German is now easily translated into Farsi.

Recently, with no fanfare, the Mossad released an unsigned 184-page report commissioned by its in-house historical research department. Such books and articles are familiar to visitors of the CIA and National Security Agency websites, where there is a dedicated effort to use the no-longer-secret past to educate both officers and citizens. But it is extremely rare in Israel, for fear of either political (or diplomatic) fallout or compromising tradecraft, sources, and methods, some of which remain even despite the digital age.

Indeed, although many passages, words, and names have been redacted, much remains that the censorship is just a distraction, as the narrative flows down the Rhine and Nile.

In order to understand the context, one must go back to Israel some 60 years ago, still marked (as it continues to be still) by the Holocaust and facing a constant fight for survival in an hostile Arab neighborhood bent on its destruction.

The Mossad, for most of its first 15 years, had one boss—or in the British jargon “Supremo”—Isser Halperin, better known by the Hebrew version of his name, Harel. His identity was known by many in the media but was never published as long as he was in office, which added to his secretive aura. He was more powerful than his Western colleagues because his account included the Shabak, Israel’s domestic security agency, in addition to the Mossad. He was thus not only an Allen Dulles or a Richard Helms, but a J. Edgar Hoover.

Harel was vehemently anti-German. His main claim to fame, even more so when his name was whispered rather than shouted, was Adolf Eichmann’s abduction in Buenos Aires in 1960. The Mossad was suddenly cast as a Nazi-hunter organization, in addition to more conventional intelligence gathering activities.

All Israelis were anti-Nazi, but not all of them rejected ties with the Federal Republic of Germany. Ben-Gurion called Konrad Adenauer’s Western part of the divided country “The Other Germany” and depended on German reparations to keep the struggling Israeli economy above water. It was an astute move. In early 1957, when Ben-Gurion resisted American pressure to withdraw from the Gaza strip, the CIA was tasked with looking into the effectiveness of sanctions imposed on Israel’s access to hard foreign currency. The conclusion was that because Deutsche Marks were paid as reparations, cutting the trickle of US dollars would be useless.

By the turn of that decade, another aspect of reliance on West German money emerged. In strict secrecy, Israel started the construction of the Dimona nuclear reactor, assisted by French

know-how. Strapped for cash to finance it, Shimon Peres, Ben-Gurion’s deputy defense minister in charge of the nuclear enterprise, managed to get off-budget help from German contacts, some of whom wished to cleanse their records, their conscience, or both. For Ben-Gurion and Peres, with Israel’s security at stake, this was no time for purity. They looked forward, rather than back into the abyss.

Harel also looked ahead politically. He saw himself in competition with Peres and the young former military chief, Moshe Dayan, for Ben-Gurion’s confidence and support. Harel objected to Dimona and formed an alliance with Foreign Minister Golda Meir. She also resented Ben-Gurion’s priming of Peres, her junior by 25 years, and suspected that Ben-Gurion had intended, in the struggle to choose a successor once he retired, to leapfrog her generation in favor of the Dayan-Peres group.

This personal situation left its mark on the response to the Egyptian missile issue. It was not the Mossad but the military intelligence branch of the Israel Defense Forces that noted the surprise unveiling of Egyptian surface-to-surface missiles in a military parade. The Mossad had no idea this was coming. Although there were earlier reports of Egyptian efforts, they had been discounted as bravado. Now, suddenly, this became a top priority item.

The Mossad’s declassified case study points out the tug-of-war behind what happened next. The issue was framed in terms of Egypt’s total dependence on contract foreign specialists, as its own indigenous industry was far from capable, and most of the project’s skilled workforce was German. Watching this were three Israeli government organizations, each with its own view: the alarmist Mossad (essentially Harel, with his anti-German bias and bleak outlook), which had no assessment capability at the time; the more sanguine Defense Ministry (Peres and his R&D experts, working on comparable Israeli projects); and the agency in charge of national assessments, the research function of the Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI) of the Israel Defense

Forces. The DMI's technical intelligence branch, under a Lt. Colonel Reuter, was closer to the Mossad's view than to that of Peres and was a frequent participant in Harel's deliberations. The debate, while internal, was mindful of a bewildered public and agitated body politic. Once the decision to respond—under the code name “Operation Vitamin”—was made, the scene shifted to Europe and mostly to Germany, with detours to Austria, Switzerland, France, and Belgium, as well as to Egypt, with “black bag” operations in travel agency storefronts and post offices through which Mossad agents read other people's mail and arranged for explosive charges to be sent to hurt or frighten engineers (but sometimes wounding their secretaries or lab assistants). All this occurred amid cat-and-mouse games with local European and Egyptian authorities, with their own petty bickering between police forces and security services. In the bitter cold of December and January, operatives had problems avoiding traffic accidents and were forced to pay damages when a French chateau they had acquired as a base for an abandoned scheme was flooded when ancient pipes froze.

With notable frankness, Mossad admits that it made use of Israeli and European journalists—some were paid for their services—either to elicit information from subjects or to publish articles to affect public opinion. The Mossad story also highlights collaboration with friendly businessmen and professionals, who lent their assets and abilities to what they saw as a vital battle to save Israel.

According to the Mossad's historians, Harel inundated Western Europe with entire squads of hit men, burglars, pilferers, sorters, photographers, lookouts, and getaway car drivers. Arab operations—recruiting and running agents to spy on Egyptian, Syrian, and Jordanian targets—were given lower priority, when the campaign to recruit, frighten, or hit Germans in Nasser's employ was supervised personally and on-site by Harel. This order of battle was hugely expensive, as weeks turned into years and safehouses and cars were rented regardless of cost. There is a

special poignancy to this early 1960s focus on Germans in Nasser's employ when one recalls that Zvi Zamir, the head of the Mossad ten years later, flew to London to meet super-spy Ashraf Marwan days before the 1973 October War with no back-up and no communication device. The Mossad chief had to look for an after-hours pub with a pay phone to call collect and convey the most momentous war warning ever given.

Harel told the Mossad's historians that he did not bother Ben-Gurion, his immediate superior and sole politician in his chain of command, although he did keep Golda Meir privately informed with operational details.

Ultimately, Harel crossed swords with Ben-Gurion (and lost) when his virulently anti-German leaks to the press contradicted the latter's strategy of befriending Bonn. This was not the last time a German angle evoked bitter echoes and influenced policy. Under Golda Meir, in the 1970s, the Mossad (and the IDF) pursued Black September with extra passion, because their attack on Israeli athletes was carried out in Munich. And when the German hijackers of the Air France airliner to Entebbe consigned Jewish passengers to one side and non-Jews to the other, people throughout Israel, and in the Commando force sent to rescue the hostages, shuddered at the memory of the “selekzia.”

One of the best Mossad stories in the book has to do with ex-SS Colonel Otto Skorzeny. He was recruited as an agent because he was cleared of war crimes and as far as it was known, he never took part in killing Jews—others, yes, but not Jews. It turned out the researchers did not go far enough. Upon closer inspection, including of his own post-war writing, it turned out that he was involved in atrocities, although by that time, it was too late, and the operation itself had already been deemed successful. A former subordinate of his, a drill sergeant and ferocious security officer guarding the “German scientists” named Valentin, obeyed Skorzeny's order to help the Israelis. Valentin had one weakness—his feelings of inferiority because Nazi military authorities had denied his request to be commissioned as

an officer. Prodded by his Mossad handlers, Skorzeny promised Valentin that his commission as an officer had been lost in the mail during the chaotic last period of the war, and the sad sergeant was actually a happy lieutenant; Valentin thus obligingly helped Mossad.

Intelligence buffs are sure to be pleased by these stories. They may also assume the current approach to Iranian nuclear experts is based on the tactics applied to the German missile developers, whose elimination from the program—by intimidation, job proposals at home, or extreme measures later known as targeted killing—was expected at least to delay it. Yet the authors of the Mossad in-house study are not certain whether it was all worth it. Much like the atomic archive spirited from Tehran decades later, mailbags, office drawers, and document shelves provided the Mossad 60 years ago with an enormous outpouring of photographed material, difficult and slow to digest—30,000 pages within several weeks—taking analysts away from other important tasks. Long before the internet, cyber, and the days of mega-data, even the Mossad found that sometimes there was too much information.

As to the verdict of history—Nasser never got his missiles nor the bomb. But what role “Operation Vitamin” played in this failure is far from clear. It can be said, however, that well before Prime Minister Menachem Begin articulated it, an embryonic version of Begin’s Doctrine was already at work in Harel’s operation. Its intensity attested to the importance that was attached to such operations, then as is now. *

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UKRAINE IN THE TRAP OF IDEOLOGICAL FIXATIONS

BY SHLOMO BEN-AMI

The tragedy now unfolding in Ukraine serves as a painful and powerful reminder of one of the foundational lessons of modern history. Ideological and faith-driven fixations, whether in foreign or domestic affairs, lead to bad policy. Evidence-based policies do not necessarily guarantee success, but their built-in pragmatism allows for adaptations that take into account changing conditions and new facts. Faith and ideology, by contrast, seek to impose values grown from the bedrock of inflexible principles. They tend to blind policymakers from seeing reality as it is.

The hecatomb into which Adolf Hitler led Germany and the world was the direct result of his belief in German racial superiority and his defiance of science's capacity to feed the German volk without resorting to the conquest of a vast Lebensraum. The solution lay in turning Germanic Wagnerian mythologies into executive policies of world domination. Joseph Stalin, the head of another ideologically based regime, prevailed precisely because he departed from absolute imperatives and founded his war objectives and the nature of his alliances on cold, rational self-interest. His was a Patriotic War, not a campaign for world revolution.

Closer to our days, George W. Bush believed that his presidency was part of a divine plan, and that the events that led him to war were defined by "the hand of a just and faithful God." Inevitably, Bush's wars clashed against the Middle East's harsh realities.

British delusions of exceptionalism lay also at the root of Brexit. Led by a vanguard of zealots,

Brexit was a leap of faith, an adventure where politics got trapped in an ideological straitjacket, a sprint into the unknown. Still clinging to an anachronistic view of Britain as a sovereign global power, the Brexiters believed that unleashing from the EU's stifling regulations would restore Britannia to her place as a global power. And, as is always the case with ideological zealots, details and technicalities were haughtily dismissed. Brexiter Michael Gove disdainfully derided "the experts." Predictably, Britain is adrift today as she hasn't been since the 1970s.

Fantasies about a nation's exceptionalism are not necessarily just the product of leaders' whims; they spring from the nation's history and collective spirit and, no less importantly, they also define the nation's strategic comportment. Accordingly, the missionary zeal of American civilization and the persistent Puritan ethos of "the shining city upon a hill" have been the cause and pretext of US imperial undertakings. Even

Vladimir Putin has shown that Europe has been living in a fantasy, post-historical world where military power does not matter, nationalism is a force that can be tamed by subsidies, and leaders are supposed to be law-abiding, well-mannered gentle folk.

though realpolitik has forced America to coexist, and frequently connive, with dictatorships, its imperial overstretching has fundamentally been the result of the drive to convert faraway lands to America's value system. In Vietnam and throughout South and Central America, this meant fighting communism; in Iraq and Afghanistan, it was about fighting terrorism and exporting democracy.

War, the curse and engine of history, is back. In Ukraine, it has forced the West to unite in a common struggle against Vladimir Putin's violent revisionism. But, in its quest for a distinct identity, Europe had been, particularly since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the threat of a great war in Europe, estranged from America's imperial ways. The deeper roots of the rift lay in what Denis de Rougemont saw in 1946 as the gulf that had opened in the realm of collective mentalities between "young America, the homeland of the future" and "old Europe, the homeland of memory." America represented "dynamism relieved of the weight of tradition" while Europe with its "ancestral quarrels that go around in circles" was always busy escaping the ghosts of her past. As from the end of the Cold War, Europe reacted to America's imperial ways through a new mission civilisatrice embedded in international law and institutions, in the predominance of the principles of compromise and reconciliation, and in an almost religious belief in universal peace. America's biblical self-assurance in a transcendental destiny clashed with a continent that, since the creation of the European Union, has seen itself as the first empire in history to have been built by consensus, compromise, and negotiations.

But, through his annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the invasion of Ukraine seven months ago, Vladimir Putin has shown that Europe has been living in a fantasy, post-historical world where military power does not matter, nationalism is a force that can be tamed by subsidies, and leaders are supposed to be law-abiding, well-mannered gentle folk.

Putin is one in a long line of leaders who brought mayhem to the world and to their own people in the name of historical delusions and faith-driven convictions. His war in Ukraine, not unlike Brexit or America's imperial wars, is driven by Russia's own brand of exceptionalism, now translated into a Sisyphean effort to break history's iron law about the rise and inexorable fall of empires. Vladimir Putin's "programmatic" speech on the occasion of the annexation to Russia of Ukraine's Eastern provinces was not a sudden outburst of anti-American rage. Putin has been developing in recent years a body of political thought aimed at confronting America's hegemonic presumptions with Russia's own narrative.

I heard Putin's narrative at a dinner in Sochi for a small group of guests in 2015. To him, Russia's conflict with the West is not just a clash over geostrategic aspirations. It is rather a profound civilizational rift, a collision between the West's supposed universal values and Russia's quest for a distinct identity. George Kennan, the man who as early as 1946 determined America's Cold War strategy, saw the origins of the rift in the clash of titans between the Soviet Union and the West that was, he believed, "written into the genetic code of the Soviet Union."

The West was never an innocent bystander in this ideological clash, for it has always believed that peace with Moscow is determined by whether Russia looks for a place in the Western orbit or clings to the traditional values shaping Russian civilization. Putin's defiance of the major achievement of America's Cold War victory—a European security architecture based on the integration of the whole of Eastern Europe into the Western sphere—comes with long explanations of Russian history, Orthodox Christianity, Russia's distinct culture, and the ethos of a mighty country proud of the vastness of its geography.

Even though Putin's geostrategic ambitions amount to a clear attempt to undo the collapse of the Soviet Union, to him "the greatest catastrophe of the 20th century," his ideological sources of inspiration go back to the Czarist era. It is there that he looks for an old-new

galvanizing ideology to supplant the defeated communist Weltanschauung. His dead mentor is the Christian-fascist philosopher Ivan Ilyin, whose remains Putin repatriated in 2010 from Switzerland where he had lived and died as a sworn enemy of the Bolsheviks. Conspicuously, Putin has also repatriated for reburial the remains of White Russian commander and general, Anton Denikin, and those of Ivan Shmelyov, the author of idyllic recreations of life under the Czars.

Putin wants Russia to skip the memory of the Soviet period and link instead to the history that started in the early Middle Ages in Rus, with Kyiv being the cradle of Russian Orthodoxy—in 2016, Putin inaugurated with great fanfare a monument to Grand Prince Vladimir, the late 10th century ruler of Kievan Rus who also converted to Orthodox Christianity—and continued in to the Romanov Empire and modern Russia. Putin does not see himself as the heir of Lenin and Stalin; he is a “White” not a “Red” Czar obsessed with the recreation of eternal Russia and the Romanov legacy with its cultural richness and the imperial military glory. Putin’s major institutional ally in his nationalist endeavor is the Russian Orthodox Church, whose hierarchy still sees the victory of Bolshevism in 1917 as the triumph of atheism, or as a Jewish Masonic plot to destroy “Holy Rus.”

Alexander Pushkin’s most famous work, Eugene Onegin, alludes to Russia’s turbulent history straddling East and West. But with Putin, the pendulum has swung back to Russia’s intimate history and traditions. He has drawn from Russia’s Cold War defeat the same conservative values that Tolstoy idealized as Russia’s response to the Napoleonic invasion. Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* is a monument to how Russia’s Fatherland War frustrated Peter the Great’s westernizing project by driving Russia back to the traditional values of Russian Orthodoxy and the virtues of the common Russian, thanks to which General Mikhail Kutuzov defeated the French Emperor. Isaiah Berlin’s essay on “The Hedgehog and the

Fox” brilliantly interprets Tolstoy’s novel as an ode to the natural virtues of simplicity, intuitive wisdom, and Christian ethics of the uncorrupted Russian peasant. Tolstoy’s Russia, which defeated Napoleon, is Putin’s Russia, the antithesis of the decaying West.

Putin comfortably relies on the imperial traditions of Russian literature. Just as Lermontov’s poetry constructed an imperial, colonialist Russian perspective on the Caucasus, Pushkin did so on Ukraine, notably in his historical poem *Poltava* on how Tsar Peter the Great tightened Russian control over Ukraine, a historical moment that Putin invoked in a speech last June. To Pushkin, Ukrainians, such as their 17th century national hero Ivan Mazepa, were to be pitied and despised. A similar message comes from Nikolai Gogol, a Ukrainian by birth who switched his identity to a Russian imperial one and used his talent to prove, most notably in his historical novella *Taras Bulba*, that Ukraine needs to be civilized by the Russian empire.

To Ivan Ilyin, Putin’s mentor, Bolshevism’s sinful rise was also the victory of a multiethnic empire that diluted the Russian ethnic purity of the fatherland. And, indeed, Putin has made

Putin’s demographic anxiety has developed into an obsession of creating territorial contiguity with Russia’s ethnic minorities beyond Russia’s borders, a strategy that is clearly reminiscent of Hitler’s grab of the German-speaking Sudetenland and Austria’s Anschluss.

Russia's dwindling demography into a key political concern. Admittedly, demography has often been central in determining national policies in other countries as well. France after World War I encouraged natality as a way to combat Germany's military superiority. And, in Israel, cleareyed analysts rightly warn the country's leaders of the specter of a demographic doomsday whereby Jews would become a minority should Israel annex the West Bank. Demography, perhaps more than territory, has historically been a defining tenet of Zionism.

Russia's demographic crisis is particularly acute, though. With a fertility rate among the lowest in the world, an abortion rate among the highest, and life expectancy declining at an alarming rate, Russia, the vast continental empire, is now practically depopulated. Consequently, for someone like Putin who believes population to be synonymous with power and grandeur—in January 2020, he assured his countrymen that “Russia's destiny and its historic prospects depend on how numerous we will be”—the integration into the fatherland of millions of ethnic Russians who live outside the bounds of the Russian Federation is a vital policy item. The Russianization of Ukrainians that are being now forcefully displaced from their lands into Russia is, then, revealing. Putin's demographic anxiety has developed into an obsession of creating territorial contiguity with Russia's ethnic minorities beyond Russia's borders, a strategy that is clearly reminiscent of Hitler's grab of the German-speaking Sudetenland and Austria's Anschluss.

The cult of World War II that Putin promotes as the greatest moment of the Soviet family in its heroic battle against fascism has practically become in Russia a surrogate religion that is meant to bear on Russia's place in today's global power puzzle. In 2014, Putin even passed a “memory law” criminalizing the dissemination of “false information” about the Soviet Union's actions in the war, and in June 2020 he found time to offer his own distorted interpretation of the war in a 6,000 word article. In Putin's order of things, the post-World War II division of

spheres of influence in Europe that was decided in Yalta should supplant the post-Cold War liberal US-led system.

Putin's blast of America's unipolar world is not an exclusively Russian obsession. It resonates beyond Russia's borders in the multipolar world that we live in. Even if eventually defeated in Ukraine, Putin's defiance of America's “mindless pursuit of hegemony” has the potential of rallying behind his flag other alienated nations and civilizations. Throughout Asia, notably in China and India, and Africa as well as in the heart of Europe and in the United States itself, authoritarian rulers, populist leaders, and Christian fundamentalists are endorsing a value system that is inimical to that of the liberal West. “Democracy Under Siege” is how Freedom House recently defined our times. The international balance, it concluded, is shifting in favor of tyranny. Nor has America's own faltering democracy set an edifying example to the world. Its archaic, dysfunctional democratic institutions have still to adapt to her responsibilities as a world power and toward its own citizens. The collapse of America's post-Cold War hegemony, resulting from what Edward Gibbon attributed to the Roman Empire as “the natural and inevitable effect of immoderate greatness,” has created a malady that is a civilizational affair as much as it is a geostrategic repositioning by global powers. *

— SHLOMO BEN-AMI

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THE MIDDLE EAST IN THE NEW US NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

BY DOV S. ZAKHEIM

Outlining his foreign policy objectives in 2020 in the magazine *Foreign Affairs*, then presidential candidate Joe Biden asserted that “it is past time to end the forever wars.” Indeed, as president, he withdrew all troops in a frenzied retreat from Afghanistan and reduced troop levels in Iraq by more than half. Ending the “forever wars” has been only a part of Biden’s longer-term strategy for the Middle East, however. Instead, his objective, like that of his two predecessors, is to downgrade the importance of the Middle East in American strategy.

Barack Obama began the trend of reducing America’s military presence in the region, and by December 31, 2011, all American troops had left Iraq. Obama also began the larger process of subtly altering Washington’s relationships with states that heretofore were its closest regional allies. Obama’s overtures to Iran and the American-inspired negotiations with Tehran that led to the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) angered America’s allies, notably Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, who felt that their views had not been taken sufficiently into consideration, that they had not been fully briefed on the state of the talks, and that the agreement gave too much away to Iran.

Although Donald Trump established a close relationship with both Israel’s Benjamin Netanyahu and Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, he too sought a reduced

American presence in the region. Even the 2020 Abraham Accords, which represented a breakthrough in relations between Israel and the Arab world, did not alter the thrust of Trump’s objectives and indeed pointed to a Middle East that relied more heavily on its own relationships for coping with a common Iranian threat.

Biden is thus continuing the trend set by his predecessors. The number of American forces in the region, which approximated 50,000 troops as recently as 2020, fell to less than 20,000 by mid-2022. And the National Security Strategy and the National Defense Strategy, both of which were released in October, confirm that the Middle East no longer is a major concern for the Biden administration.

The president’s preface to the National Security Strategy focuses on partners in East Asia and Europe and does not mention the Middle East at all. The strategy itself has a major section that discusses “out-competing China and constraining Russia” and terms climate change “the existential challenge of our time.” As for the Middle East, it is highlighted not only after the Indo-Pacific and Europe, but also after the Western Hemisphere.

The strategy document is unapologetic regarding the Middle East’s lower place in the hierarchy of US concerns. It states: “We have too often defaulted to military-centric policies underpinned by an unrealistic faith in force and regime change . . . while failing to adequately account for opportunity costs to competing global priorities or unintended consequences.” It then lays out five basic principles that will guide American policy in the region. These are to strengthen and enable partners to defend

themselves against foreign threats; to ensure freedom of navigation; to reduce tensions and end conflicts “wherever possible through diplomacy;” to foster regional integration; and to promote human rights. On the last of these principles, the National Security Strategy asserts that America “will . . . continue to demand accountability for violations of human rights.” The document does not indicate how that last commitment might be implemented, and at what cost to relations with key Middle Eastern allies.

The region again comes into play when discussing the fight against terrorism and when addressing a potential Iranian nuclear threat. Nevertheless, the document states that America will be “shifting from a strategy that is “U.S.-led, partner-enabled” to one that is “partner-led, U.S.-enabled.” How our Middle Eastern friends will respond to that statement is not entirely clear. If Saudi Arabia’s support for an oil price increase that empowers the Russian war effort in Ukraine is any indication, the administration’s statement is a worrisome portent indeed.

Another possible cause for concern among America’s Middle Eastern allies is the National Security Strategy’s assertion that the US will not commit forces to combat unless “and the mission is undertaken with the informed consent of the American people.” What “informed consent” might mean is never spelled out. It could connote a requirement for congressional support, which, however, might not be forthcoming given the isolationism of extreme right-wing Republican legislators and progressive Democratic legislators. It could even mean a popular referendum of some sort. Whatever is meant, the administration now has the burden of reassuring its allies that its ability to employ military force will not be permanently constrained by either the legislature or the public.

The Middle East remains a theater where wars not only can break out at any time but are also still ongoing, as in Syria, Yemen, and Libya. That Washington rightly has assigned priority

to the threats from China and Russia does not obviate the need for a carefully structured strategy for the Middle East. Such a strategy should articulate objectives, such as extending the Abraham Accords to other states; building upon the recent natural gas agreement involving Lebanon and Israel; restoring comity with both Saudi Arabia and the UAE; encouraging cooperation on the threats posed by climate change and food and water shortages; and supporting the movement for freedom in Iran. Moreover, the administration should outline the various means at America’s disposal to achieve those objectives.

The region has long had a way of upending American strategic priorities. Precisely because the US confronts major threats from Chinese adventurism and Russian aggression, now is the time for the Biden team to formulate a coherent strategy that will outline the steps it will take to avoid yet another conflagration in this perennially volatile region. *

— DOV S. ZAKHEIM

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WHEN NATION BUILDING WORKS



Reconstructing the Grand al-Nuri Mosque in the old city of Mosul, Iraq. Photo credit: Reuters

BY ROBERT SILVERMAN

Nation building is a US policy for transforming post-conflict countries, a policy discredited among a broad swath of Washington because of Iraq and Afghanistan. But I question this consensus and recommend rehabilitating the policy in time to help reconstruct postwar Ukraine.

Didn't the US role in postwar Japan show that democracy can be transferred to non-Western countries? Hasn't nation building in South Korea, Colombia, Bosnia, and Kosovo been fairly successful? Weren't the results in Iraq very different from those of Afghanistan? And won't the US be called upon in the future to help reconstruct postwar states?

Let's start with a story.

APPOINTMENT IN SAMARRA

I was late for my appointment in Samarra. In retrospect, I like to think I was intentionally varying meeting arrival times, as civilians in postwar Iraq learned through experience, to reduce the chances of an ambush by insurgents. But honestly our three-car convoy was late in leaving the palace compound in Tikrit for the hour drive south to the fabled city of Samarra, the largest city in the province of Salah al-Din where I led a civilian governance team.

It was early January 2004, a new era for Iraq. The US military had captured Saddam Hussein a month before, hiding out in a hut in the midst of a tangerine orchard across the Tigris and

within sight of his childhood home, al-Awja. The orchard was owned by the maternal relatives of one of his bodyguards. (Lesson learned from the search for Saddam: Mothers have clan alliances, sometimes more powerful than those of fathers for being less public. See Book of Genesis/sons of Rachel and Leah, and King Ibn Saud/sons of Husa bint Ahmed al-Sudairi.)

We arrived in Samarra about 10:40 am and pulled into the parking lot next to the municipal building where voting was to take place. The first thing I noticed were small reddish-tinged puddles and reddish chunks amid the gravel of the parking lot. A car bomb had gone off in the lot right at our appointment time of 10:00 am, killing several bystanders waiting to vote. The parking lot attendant had disappeared.

We walked inside the municipal building, over the broken glass from the blown-out windows and upstairs to the polling place. There was acting mayor Adnan Thabit, in traditional kaffiyeh and robe, seated and talking with the municipal staff who were sweeping up debris from the bomb. A former Iraqi general imprisoned by Saddam, Thabit radiated calm, even bonhomie. He had seen much worse than this attempt to scare people; the elections would be rescheduled.

Indeed the elections in Samarra were rescheduled and held without further violence. The first free elections for the province's legislature were held in February, and the newly elected council began meeting in March 2004. The fight with al-Qaida in Iraq, predecessor to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), was just starting and Samarra would remain a hot spot in that fight. But Iraq's fragile, imperfect



Samarra, Iraq. Photo credit: Shutterstock

democracy held together. With the help of the US military, Iraq's elected governments eventually defeated successive waves of attacks of Baathists and Islamists seeking to retake Baghdad and gain power.

One year ago, in December 2021, when President Biden convened the Summit of Democracy in Washington, the two Middle East countries represented were Israel and Iraq.

Was Iraq's democracy, fragile as it is, worth the destruction wrought and the lives lost? What I know is that there is no casualty-free, cost-free option for US foreign policy in the Middle East, including complete withdrawal. To paraphrase Leon Trotsky on war, you may not want the Middle East, but the Middle East wants you. That is not a justification for invading,

occupying, and remaking Iraq. But it is a reason not to dismiss nation building as a policy option out of hand, without studying the recent US experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

The term "nation building" is misleading and arrogant (although it's better than the term "pacification" used for this activity in the Vietnam War). It implies one nation initiates or creates another. I know of no such case in modern history. Nations arise through efforts of their own people, usually over centuries. One nation can create and sustain key institutions for another, for instance, the US creation of Japan's postwar constitution or the US-led establishment of a federal government for Bosnia.

More accurate terms would include “institution building” or “state building.” Nation building has become common usage, however, for the full range of security, political, social, and economic activities by one country in another, in the context of post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction.

CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS

Each case is different. Some involve a military defeat and overthrow of the prior regime while others do not (an example of the latter is Colombia). Nevertheless, three conditions for success would seem to apply in all cases.

Commitment and resources of the intervening country

The most successful cases of US nation building are Germany, Japan, and South Korea. In the aftermath of World War II, the US represented nearly 50% of world gross domestic product; it didn’t need other countries’ economic help in reconstructing these countries’ national institutions. It had the resources and also the domestic public commitment to stay in all three.

Today, the US doesn’t dominate the world economy as it did after World War II and would need economic help from its European and other allies to sustain nation building. Europeans have supported the US-led efforts in Bosnia and Kosovo but less so elsewhere. Equally important, the American government, and by extension the American public, need to be committed to staying in the other country for the long period needed for successful nation building.

Political culture, economic development, strategic importance of the intervened country

Even with all of the resources in the world, nation building will not be successful in countries that lack a political culture and stage of development conducive to building national institutions. That doesn’t require a modern

industrialized economy or a Western-oriented political culture, but it does imply a tradition of a centralized state with national institutions, including economic ones, widely accepted in the intervened country.

Also important are local leaders who will work with the intervening country in creating the new institutions and grow them organically in their societies.

This practical view of nation building focuses on institutions and jettisons the “winning of hearts and minds” and ideological baggage associated with some prior efforts. We must not require that the intervened country become a liberal market democracy to begin nation building, even if we hope that is where it is eventually headed (as eventually happened in South Korea). We must be flexible in adapting the new national institutions to the society where the nation building must take root.

Finally, countries that have conducive conditions for nation building may still not be good candidates if they aren’t sufficiently central to the national interest of the intervening country and the intervention cannot be justified on international legal grounds such as UN Security Council resolutions. Otherwise, domestic discontent can erode the intervenor’s staying power. Nation building is risky policy, and a detailed assessment of the long-term prospects for success and strategic importance of the target country must be taken before jumping in.

Area experts to carry it out

A comparative look at Iraq and Afghanistan suggests a third condition for success: area experts needed to perform the assessments and carry out the nation building.

Iraq had conducive conditions for nation building: a long tradition of the centralized state, a relatively literate population, and national economic institutions. Its oil resources, large population, and strategic location make it important. Thanks to effective stewardship of its oil revenue for a ten-year period starting in



President Joe Biden delivers remarks at Summit for Democracy at the White House, December 2021. Photo credit: Pool/ABACA via Reuters Connect

the late 1940s, Iraq had a good school system and modern infrastructure that knitted the country together, despite ethnic differences. At its economic height in 1981, right before Saddam embarked on a series of disastrous wars, Iraq had a per capita income comparable to some southern Europe countries. Twenty years later, thanks to Saddam's wars and resulting UN sanctions, Iraq was in ruins, with per capita income comparable to sub-Saharan Africa and a dictator still threatening to invade his neighbors.

Afghanistan, by contrast, was never a good prospect for nation building. Its modernization efforts never went very far beyond the capital city of Kabul. Its central state always contended

with regional power centers backed by their own militias, and its literacy rate, infrastructure, and per capita income were always among the world's worst. Its sole strategic importance—denying a haven for Islamist terrorists—indicated a need for targeted military strikes and over-the-horizon monitoring, not nation building.

Nation building, just like other foreign policies, must be informed by a detailed understanding of the other country provided by area experts. This ingredient was lacking in the planning for both Afghanistan and Iraq.

US diplomats at the State Department, who had in their ranks the closest approximation to area experts in the US government, were kept

out of the initial decision making on Iraq and Afghanistan by the Bush administration. Then, after the US had intervened in both Afghanistan and Iraq in 2003, US diplomats were called upon to staff the occupations. Fortunately, we had a corps of Arab Middle East experts for Iraq but lacked a comparable bench for Afghanistan.

The US mainstream media promoted a view, which took hold in Washington, of Afghanistan as the “good” intervention because we were fighting al-Qaida; Iraq was the “bad” intervention because it was a war of choice imposed by neoconservative Republicans. Notice the focus was always on us, not the foreign country. Thus the Obama administration withdrew from Iraq (only to reinsert troops back in to help defeat ISIS, where they are still), while doubling down on nation-building efforts in Afghanistan, which ultimately failed.

THE SHORT AND LONG TERM

In the short term, we should recognize the US experience with nation building is not over. Whether we like it or not, the US will be called on in the future to help stabilize and reconstruct post-conflict and failing states, perhaps in Haiti, Venezuela, Libya, or elsewhere.

The next great test will be postwar Ukraine, and we should begin planning now. The Ukrainians will have to reimagine and reconstruct the country, ending the rule of the oligarchs and attacking the endemic corruption that defines the country. The US has invested billions to date, with many more billions needed for reconstruction (see Anders Åslund’s estimate); the Europeans must contribute their fair share. The Ukrainians will turn to the US and Western Europe. And that, in turn, requires the US government to have people with the necessary area expertise to ensure success.

Over the longer term, the State Department needs to revitalize area expertise to serve the nation. The most influential American diplomat, whom I wrote about in my first column for JST, was George F. Kennan. According to his official biographer, John Lewis Gaddis, Kennan wasn’t a

particularly adroit manager, and he shared many of the prejudices common in the foreign service of his day, but in 1946 he wrote a cable defining the Containment Doctrine, which was adopted and pursued throughout the Cold War.

Kennan’s insights on the nature of the Soviet Union came after years of studying the Russian language at US-government expense and two tours in Moscow. To get future Kennans will require prioritizing area expertise and analysis over other worthy goals.

Did those of us who volunteered and served in Iraq make positive contributions to that country, regional stability, and American foreign policy? The Iraq results are not all in. Amid the terrible cost in lives, there are some good signs that should not be overlooked. But that requires another column. *

ROBERT SILVERMAN

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Photo credit: Shutterstock



TRENDS IN AFRICA AS IT EMERGES FROM THE PANDEMIC

BY LAIRD TREIBER

Africa, along with the rest of the world, overcame a series of crises in the past three years, including the COVID-19 pandemic and global supply chain-induced economic shocks, resulting from Russia's invasion of Ukraine. These crises exacerbated other negative trends, leading several countries to backslide on their commitments to democracy. But they have also transformed the African continent in important ways, from public health to energy to information and communications technology (ICT), that will make "post-pandemic" Africa a very different place than the pre-pandemic one. They also play into ongoing efforts to implement the African Continental Free Trade Area, which will be the largest free trade area since the formation of the WTO. This Africa is much more nuanced, jettisoning prior tropes of "Afro-optimism" and "Afro-pessimism," and justifying a new appreciation of the continent's growing importance.

Arguably, the easiest lens to employ for understanding the transformation that is taking place is through the COVID-19 pandemic. As the coronavirus infections spread around the world in 2020, individual African countries found themselves unable to compete with developed countries that had the decades of contacts with companies and large checkbooks necessary to procure essential personal protective equipment for their medical staff and

vulnerable populations. As vaccines emerged in late 2020 and 2021, much of the same scenario repeated itself. African leaders channeled their frustration into transformative initiatives that set up the most effective regional health governance structure, leveraging the buying power of the continent's 1.3 billion people through a remarkable online platform, the African Medicines Supply Platform, which made selling medicine and equipment easy and guaranteed payment. Africa built on this with the Africa Vaccine Acquisitions Task Team, which in turn convinced heads of state to set the goal for Africa to produce 60% of the vaccines and medicines it consumes by 2040 (up from 1% in 2019). In a matter of months, these initiatives shifted shortages of critical supplies into surpluses, while African governments used their new platform to entice companies on the continent to add new production lines to replace supply shortages.

This example is an important illustration of the power of governments banding together to change their narrative and doing so in close cooperation with the private sector. They fully understand that achieving this goal will require putting in place the right kind of regulatory and policy environment. As a result, they have accelerated the process of ratifying and setting up the African Medicines Agency, which will provide continent-wide guidance and policy direction, and have strengthened the African Center for Disease Control (which did a remarkable job of coordinating regional and continental health policies during the pandemic). The African Union and member

governments have also released a framework for the Partnership for African Vaccine Manufacturing (PAVM), which lays out the various steps needed to realize this goal, including expanding both critical research into neglected diseases capable of jumping from animals to humans and clinical trials on the continent.

Africa was already on track pre-pandemic to become the second biggest health market in the world behind only the US. When African companies and governments couldn't get the critical supplies they needed in 2020 as global supply chains were disrupted, they innovated, resulting in the greatest number of advances using ICT technology of any continent, according to the World Bank. The need to innovate electronic health services has unleashed a wave of programs to re-imagine how health systems work, making them more patient-centric and employing big data to better understand where patients are and what they need on a holistic basis (rather than disease by disease), creating significant new opportunities for forecasting and planning to unlock efficiencies in time and money.

Africa's handling of the health aspects of the pandemic are critical, in part because within 20 years, Africa will be the single biggest pool of workers and consumers on the planet as the global north (including China) ages. The fact that Africa has taken such important steps

Africa has already pioneered some of the most innovative developments in the mobile space, and new developments are rapidly emerging in health, energy, and agriculture.

to control its own narrative is an important bellwether of how Africa will shape the development of the future of markets, including energy, ICT, and agriculture.

Africa is already reshaping what the future of energy markets will look like, posing an interlocking set of challenges and opportunities. Most countries in Africa are focused on the urgent need to expand access to reliable electricity. Despite significant progress over the last decade, roughly half of Africa's population (600 million) currently lacks access to grid power. The global pandemic underscored just how critical access to electricity is, including for e-health and supply chain-related items like cold storage. The lack of sufficient transmission and installed generation capacity, as well as refineries, has left Africa more dependent than other continents on imported fuel—and the sharp increases of fuel prices induced by Russia's invasion of Ukraine have made that dependence even more costly. The good news is that Africa has significant potential energy sources across the sector, including significant new natural gas discoveries, large solar and wind potential (which several countries have started to develop), and emerging opportunities for next-generation nuclear energy. Africa also is home to many of the larger deposits of critical minerals that will power the green economy, offering significant opportunities to meet the global need for a greater supply of these materials while also diversifying their processing, moving away from heavy reliance on China. African leaders have made it clear that they must improve their own energy security by developing these resources.

Rather than treating this as a challenge to climate change, the world has the opportunity to work with African countries to develop these resources in a way that meets both Africa's need for electricity and accelerates the transition to a net zero world by 2050. It is simply not feasible to tell Africa that they must forgo new gas power generation in the medium term while shipping more quantities of critical mineral ores to the developed world. Working with Africa offers the

near-term prospect of increasing global energy resources at a time when Europe and Asia need alternative sources to reduce dependence on Russian oil and gas. In this regard, Africa offers a great opportunity to chart what a just transition from fossil fuel economies to clean energy looks like, while creating significant opportunities for companies across the globe.

Africa is having a similar impact on the shape of the future of ICT. The continent has faced a digital divide in which hundreds of millions of Africans lack access to the internet—while simultaneously being the continent that has shown the greatest innovation in the use of ICT during the pandemic, according to the World Bank. The pandemic induced millions of Africans to use e-commerce for the first time, and digital health and e-government are driving demand to expand networks and cell phones, just as several consortia are delivering new subsea cables to expand Africa’s access to the global web. Africa has already pioneered some of the most innovative developments in the mobile space (e.g., Kenya’s Mpesa mobile money system), and new developments are rapidly emerging in health, energy, and agriculture. As the world’s most rapidly urbanizing continent ever, the range of issues related to city planning are already working to use these new tools.

While there will continue to be challenges in each of these sectors, Africa merits greater attention, as it will increasingly meld the economic potential of its growing population with its own vision of how to best address its needs, which will have an increasingly important influence on how the rest of the world develops. *

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Members of Company "D," Second Battalion, Third Infantry, 199th Light Infantry Brigade, in Long Binh, Vietnam on October 6, 1969. Photo credit: DPA / Picture Alliance via Reuters Connect

LESSONS WE SHOULD HAVE LEARNED FROM VIETNAM

BY RONALD E. NEUMANN, CHARLES RAY, JAMES JEFFREY

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ith recent experiences of Iraq and Afghanistan in mind, three former US ambassadors look back at their earlier careers as infantry officers in Vietnam and offer the following lessons.

RONALD E. NEUMANN ON PERSONNEL POLICY AND MILITARY ADVISING

Among the many lessons from Vietnam, I would start with the need to build a learning culture because so many other lessons flow from that. Simply put, an organization with a learning culture can draw lessons from mistakes and apply them to the future. A learning culture can take the time to acquire essential knowledge of a foreign culture and society and then shape policy considerations—what is feasible—and how means need to be brought into balance with goals.

The absence of such a learning culture is a distinguishing characteristic of the wars in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. It was in Vietnam that the late John Paul Vann quipped that, “We don’t have 12 years’ experience. We have one year 12 times.” The personnel policies applied to all three wars guaranteed that this would remain true. When I was an infantry officer in Vietnam, many officers rotated jobs even within a one-year tour. At the end of my tour my company was returning to an area we had worked in months before. I was the only one left who knew where we had found enemy trails and positions—and I was leaving. They would have to find them all over again.

In Iraq and Afghanistan, military units rotated yearly, except for some with shorter rotations. Diplomats changed out yearly. Within three months of my arriving as ambassador in Kabul, nearly all my senior staff had departed. The problem was so pronounced that I referred to it as “the yearly institutional frontal lobotomy.”

Longer tours are essential. Senior diplomats and generals probably should remain in place at least three years, and subordinate leaders at least two years with staggered tours so that new arrivals learn from those remaining.

Just as every combat commander does not do equally well when placed in the role of advisor, every good diplomat is not well suited to what has been called expeditionary diplomacy. Some who volunteered for State Department duty in Afghanistan were great; others, there for the pay or to escape a failing marriage, were wildly unsuitable. Great care needs to be exercised to find, keep, and incentivize those—military or civilian—who have the talents for these types of situations.

Former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates referred to this personnel problem as having to go to war with the Pentagon in order to fight the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Institutional systems are not sympathetic to such micromanagement of assignments. If there is a lesson here, it is that commanders on the ground and very senior leaders in Washington are going to have to repeatedly struggle with their personnel departments to get the right people into the right positions.

From a long list of other lessons, a few seem particularly important. One is to understand that conflicts like those in the three wars in question cannot be waged successfully on short timetables. Trying to make the enemy conform to timelines set by domestic political considerations is a fool’s errand, yet that was what President Obama demanded when he clamped down and made totally unrealistic timetables on the surge in Afghanistan. No analyst will be able to foretell accurately how long such conflicts may last. The insurgency in Sri Lanka took 30 years to defeat. How an enemy will react and adapt is unknowable. If one is going to consider getting involved in another such war the lesson ought to be that it will take an unknown but long time. Perhaps one should plan for a couple of decades and then expect to adjust. If that isn’t acceptable then don’t start.



US ambassador to Afghanistan Ronald E. Neumann (center left) and Nangarhar governor Gul Agha Sherzoi talk to the media during a joint news conference in Jalalabad city, Kabul, Afghanistan, October 2005. Photo credit: Reuters

Equally important is to be honest with political leaders about what is possible. The military did not serve President Obama well when they indicated they could still succeed, even with his reduced timetable, although they may have believed they could get the timeline extended later based on earlier experience in the Balkans.

High quality reporting is essential both to the analysis of how the conflict is going and how policy might be adjusted. However, getting such reporting and analysis is daunting. In Vietnam, the emphasis on “happy talk” set America up for a major collapse of domestic political will after the battles of Tet in 1968 punctured the balloon of phony reporting. A Rand study comparing the metrics used in Vietnam with those in Afghanistan concluded that most of the reporting was highly flawed and that the reasons

for the flaws were likely to continue. When I arrived in Baghdad, the daily press briefing was so devoted to good news that it had lost all credibility. When there actually was positive news, it was doubted.

Effective military advising at the level of building armies is something the US has done badly in all three wars. Special Forces do well at advising small units, but when the problem becomes larger our record is lamentable. In Vietnam, my platoon partnered (for training) with some Vietnamese platoons. I received no instruction on advising.

In Afghanistan, the advisory function was given to the National Guard. Several years went by in Afghanistan before any serious training or professional education for the trainers was instituted. No adequate system of rating

progress in the military training area was ever found. Three different systems were tried. In each one, those who were conducting the training decided how well they were doing. At home, no unit could avoid an inspection, but in the three wars I witnessed, training progress was self-rated.

This is not simply a military problem. Getting the US out of the lead combat role became a decisive political issue in all three wars. To do that required the local forces to take over so the quality of our training became a central political issue.

Perhaps the most fundamental and difficult issue raised by all three wars is what to do about inadequate local leadership. Every study of insurgency, including the famous US Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual, stresses the need to leave many important tasks to the local government. One of the most painful lessons from these wars is the necessity of effective local leadership; without it, we lose. But what does one do when that leadership proves inadequate, as was the case in all three wars considered here?

The American solution has been to come up with the plan we want the locals to embrace. This was the pattern, and it is a failed pattern. The lesson could be that we should not get involved without knowing the quality of local leadership. But in none of the three wars was this made clear in advance.

If the local leadership is clearly deficient, perhaps we should quit the endeavor. But that is more easily said than done when one is deeply mired in a war. We did that in Afghanistan, and the result was a shameful debacle and broken promises to Afghans who fought with us.

Another approach could be to continue support until the necessary leader emerges, as President Alvaro Uribe did in Colombia or Ramon Magsaysay did in the Philippines. Every situation will be different. But the basic lesson is to understand that local leadership is critical and that we cannot substitute for it with our plans and concepts. Learning that lesson may be the hardest one of all.

CHARLES RAY ON PLANNING FOR CHAOS IN WITHDRAWING FROM A WAR ZONE

The August 30, 2021 withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan ended the 20-year long war in that country and America's longest combat deployment. General Mark Miley, the chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, termed the withdrawal of forces and the evacuation of noncombatants from Kabul "a logistical success but a strategic failure," echoing in many ways the chaotic withdrawal from Saigon in April 1975.

Despite the 2020 agreement with the Trump administration, the Taliban violated it almost before the ink was dry by rocketing US and Afghan bases. To say that the evacuation was chaotic is an understatement. Many Afghans who worked for us, including some with dual Afghan-American citizenship, were not evacuated, and the Pentagon reported that military equipment worth \$7 billion was left behind in Afghanistan after the withdrawal.

Watching this event play out brought back memories of the withdrawal of US forces from Vietnam in 1973 and the final pull out of all Americans in 1975, and I was not surprised at how messy it all was. Wars are all too easy to start but difficult to withdraw from. While some of the criticism of the Biden administration is warranted, it should be tempered by the fact that withdrawing from a conflict area is never an orderly process.

Those who are old enough to remember the chaotic scenes of the withdrawal from Saigon after April 30, 1975 should see the parallels. The withdrawal of US combat forces occurred two years earlier, from January to March 1973, after the Paris Peace Accords were signed.

The Paris Accords were similar to the Afghan peace deal in that they called for a cease-fire, withdrawal of US forces, release of prisoners of war, and peaceful reunification. Like the Taliban, the North Vietnamese almost immediately violated the agreement by attacking South Vietnamese forces and troops and war materials as they moved into South Vietnam.

Withdrawing from a combat zone while armed forces are still in the field, even with



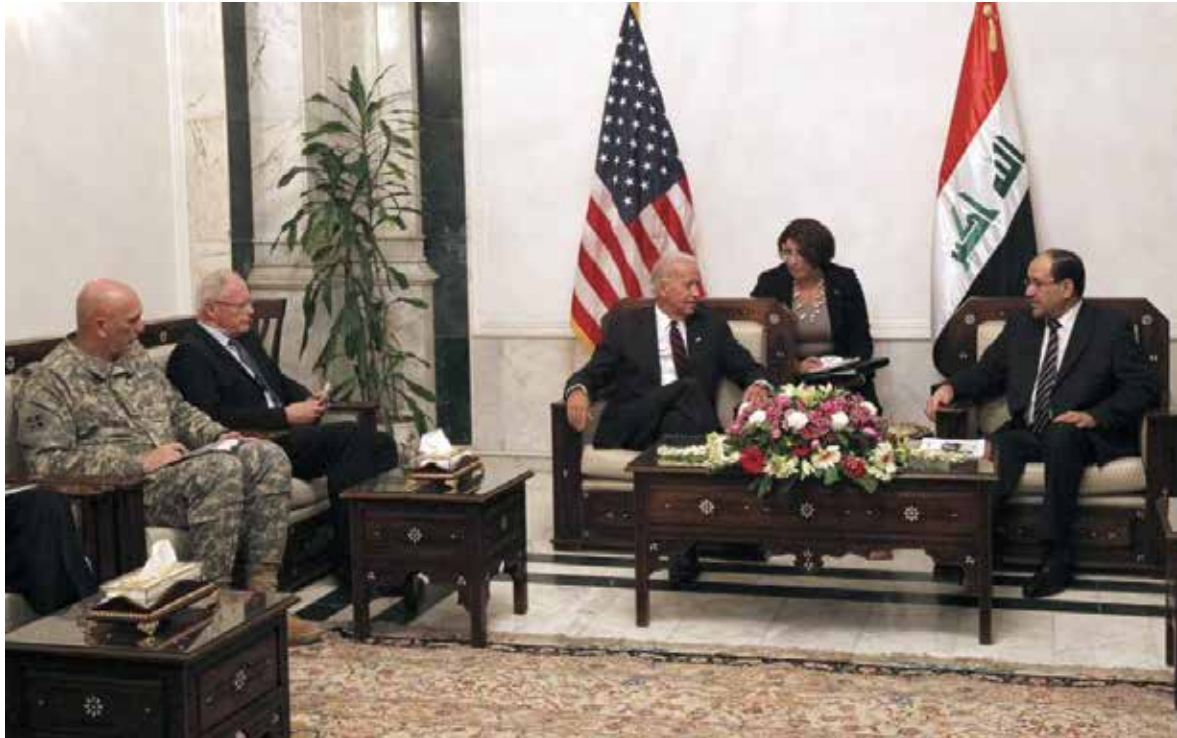
The USNS reach Vung Tau Harbor, Vietnam on September 7, 1966 with troopers of the Eleventh Armored Cavalry Regiment. Photo credit: DPA / Picture Alliance via Reuters Connect

signed agreements, depends on the honorable intentions of all parties to such agreements. We didn't have either in Vietnam or Afghanistan. It's a bit like being in a fist fight with a determined opponent and deciding to end it without being assured of your opponent's intentions. To turn and walk away from such a situation leaves you vulnerable to being punched in the back.

My personal experience with the 1973 withdrawal shows just how messy such an operation can be. I was eight months into my second tour in Vietnam when the accords were signed, and I had been assigned to the military intelligence group that provided intelligence

support to the Military Assistance Command in Vietnam. The month before the accords went into effect were some of the most violent of the war, with the North Vietnamese forces maneuvering for the most strategic positions in advance of the cease-fire. These operations included a rocket attack on Saigon's Tan Son Nhut Airbase in December. My unit was located on the base not far from the runway and caught one of the rocket hits, nearly destroying my office, which I was fortunately not in at the time.

The real chaos started for me after the cease-fire went into effect. My unit sent me and another officer to Bangkok in February 1973 to



Iraqi PM al-Maliki receives US Vice President Biden, US Ambassador to Iraq Jeffrey and US military commander in Iraq, General Odierno, in Baghdad, August 31, 2010. Photo credit: Reuters

transfer some important operational files. The files were voluminous, and the handover took almost a week. When we returned to Saigon we found our offices vacated and no sign of our unit. We checked with the personnel office and were informed that our unit had received its withdrawal notice and had returned to the US. No one in the group had thought to pick up a phone and call Bangkok to let us know. We were finally able to finagle flights out of Saigon. I was assigned to a unit in Okinawa and ended up strap-hanging on an Air America logistics flight.

According to a report in the San Diego Union-Tribune in 2012, the US left behind \$5 billion worth of military equipment in 1973 when US forces were withdrawn. This figure, by the way, is completely separate from the equipment that was jettisoned during the hasty 1975 evacuation. Moreover, the \$5 billion in equipment left

behind in 1973, when adjusted for inflation, would be approximately \$33 billion in today's dollars.

The government was faulted for "leaving Americans behind in Afghanistan." Often overlooked is the fact that most of those who were unable to evacuate had been advised to leave earlier on flights out of Kabul but had chosen to stay. In Vietnam, many of those left behind were the children of US servicemen and their mothers who were either unable to get to evacuation points in time or whom we were unable to reach.

We should do all that we can to help those who have helped us in a war, but we must never think that things will go smoothly no matter how much we plan. The best military plan in the world goes out the window when the first shot is fired, and this includes withdrawal plans.

Wars are easy to start but hard to stop. As Machiavelli wrote in *The Prince*, published in 1532: “People may go to war when they will, but cannot always withdraw when they like.”

JAMES JEFFREY ON THE STRATEGIC PITFALLS OF LIMITED WARS OF CHOICE

The Vietnam war remains the seminal experience of my life 50 years afterwards despite some other striking episodes later as a diplomat (being on the ground for the end of the Cold War in Germany, working in postwar Iraq). It's not only because I was young and my life was on the line (although Vietnam was not consistently as dangerous as Iraq in 2004). It was because of the juxtaposition of Vietnam as a reflection and accelerant of social upheaval in the US in some respects more dramatic than today. It was also the blind unwillingness of smart, decent people whom I respected to see reality when it crossed significant political and ideological lines (similar to today).

For my generation, the boomers (and especially its educated public policy elite), the issue of Vietnam and its lessons were resolved forever with the draft resistance movement, Kent State, movies like “Platoon” and “Coming Home” that portrayed those of us in Vietnam as either war criminals or victims, topped by Neil Sheehan’s Pulitzer-winning book, *Bright Shining Lie*. That book deconstructed the one great tragic hero of the war, John Paul Vann, as a man who had once deeply understood the conflict and advocated slipping into the jungle at night with a knife, but who was allegedly transformed into an ogre symbolizing America’s evil by directing B-52 strikes when he died. Of course, in 1972, Vann wasn’t fighting guerrillas anymore but three North Vietnamese army divisions in the Central Highlands and stopping them—something you needed B-52’s, not knives, to do.

Afghanistan, like Vietnam, was intended by the US as a limited war. The US government tends to wage less costly and less risky “wars of choice” because the local stakes are not high in these wars, in which the commitment is often limited and unenthusiastic, while that of its

local adversary is total. The results are often compromised endings. In an essay reviewing Ken Burns’ Vietnam War documentary, I called this the “contradictions of containment.”

In both Vietnam and Afghanistan, we witnessed what happens when US air support is quickly withdrawn. The decisive move of the Vietnam War turned out to be the North Vietnamese army’s conventional invasion in 1975. The rapid collapse of the South Vietnamese forces would seem to suggest that victory was inevitable, but it was not. The 1975 offensive was largely a carbon copy of the disastrously failed North Vietnamese invasion in 1972. But South Vietnamese troops had won in 1972 because they were backed by massive US air power and logistics. The US military provided virtually nothing to Saigon in 1975, because of congressional blocks. *

RONALD E. NEUMANN

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CHARLES RAY

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TURKEY'S HI



Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan (right), Leader of Republican People's Party (CHP) Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu (left).
Photos credit: via Reuters

NGE ELECTION

 BY ALAN MAKOVSKY

In 2023, Turkey will hold a hinge election. An opposition victory would mean a more democratic, pro-Western Turkey—and a Turkey that keeps its distance from Islamist groups. An Erdoğan victory would solidify his hold on the nation and most likely mean diminished freedoms and continued Turkish efforts to balance East and West, as well as continued flirtation with groups like the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is seemingly vulnerable. Until recently, his job approval ratings were down, and polls showed him trailing each of the most-discussed potential opposition presidential candidates. And no wonder. Per capita income in Turkey tumbled over the past six years by nearly a quarter, from \$12,500 in 2015 to \$9,500 in 2021. Inflation, officially at 83.5%, is probably far higher. Turkey's currency, the lira, has lost roughly half its value against the dollar over the past year. And Erdoğan shows no inclination to reverse any of the key policies that have produced this economic chaos. Adding to his vulnerability, Erdoğan is widely blamed for the Turks' number-two concern (after the economy): the presence of 3.5 to 5 million generally unwelcome Syrian refugees.

Nevertheless, more recent polls show Erdoğan's support once again rebounding. He is, after all, Turkey's longest-ruling leader and most successful politician since the onset of free elections in 1950. His religion-oriented Justice and Development Party (AKP, in its Turkish

initials) has come in first in every national election since its maiden effort in November 2002. The stage is set for Erdoğan's toughest challenge in 20 years.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

Under the “executive presidency” system, narrowly (and disputedly) adopted by popular referendum in 2017 and implemented in 2018, presidential and parliamentary elections are held simultaneously, with each elected to five-year terms. The 2023 elections, which must be held by June 18 but could be earlier if President Erdoğan so decides, will be the first since 2018. Before 2014, the Turkish parliament, not the people, selected the president.

Under this new system, the president can govern by decree on most issues and appoint virtually every top official in the executive and judicial branches, without any “advice and consent” parliamentary review process.

There are two main electoral coalitions in Turkey, both initially formed in preparation for the 2018 elections. The People's Alliance (Cumhur İttifakı) consists of Erdoğan's AKP and the far-right Nationalist Action Party (MHP).

Its rival, the Nation Alliance (Millet İttifakı), comprises the center-left Republican People's Party (CHP), run by Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, and a Turkish nationalist breakaway from MHP called İyi, or Good, Party. İyi's leader is a former interior minister—the only female to have held that post—Meral Akşener. (When spelled in all upper-case, as in the party logo, the word “İYİ” evokes an early Turkic tribal warrior symbol.)

Erdoğan's People's Alliance is the more ideologically coherent coalition. Both of its parties support ethnic Turkish nationalism,

favor a strong presence of religion in society, and have limited tolerance for expressions of Kurdish consciousness. With MHP support, Erdoğan largely muzzles the media and pursues a muscular foreign policy, including a willingness to project force.

The two main constituent parties of the opposition Nation Alliance differ on the central political problem of Turkish society; that is, how to accommodate Kurdish demands and integrate Kurds into Turkish society. CHP, while it has Turkish nationalist elements, supports the legitimacy of the Kurdish-rights Democratic Peoples' Party (HDP), calls for the release of HDP's founder from prison, and criticizes the government's wholesale removal of elected HDP mayors. Note the use of the plural "Peoples" in HDP's name, ascribing multi-ethnicity to Turkey which has traditionally insisted on a unitary Turkish character. İyi is on the other side of those issues.

CHP and İyi do agree on two things: Erdoğan must go; the parliamentary system of government should be restored.

Two smaller parties who share the priority of "beat Erdoğan" also joined the Nation Alliance in 2018: the Islamist Saadet Party and the center-right Demokrat Party. And in 2021, two breakaways from Erdoğan's AKP joined to form a grouping called the "Table of Six." The two are former prime minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's Future Party (GP) and former foreign minister Ali Babacan's Democracy and Progress Party (DEVA), each reflecting ideologies of earlier, more liberal stages of the AKP's development.

The core Nation Alliance parties, CHP and İyi, are hoping that the Table of Six concept will broaden the appeal of the Alliance; right now, however, the four small parties collectively score only about 3% in the polls.

The Kurdish-rights HDP isn't welcome in the Nation Alliance, mainly because İyi sees HDP as linked to the PKK, banned in Turkey as a terrorist organization. But the opposition will need strong Kurdish support to win the elections, with Kurds representing about 15% of

the electorate, and it won't receive that support unless it has at least the implicit backing of the HDP, the dominant party among Kurdish voters.

Taken together, the two main parties of the People's Alliance, AKP and MHP, and the two main parties of the Nation Alliance, CHP and İyi, plus HDP, constitute the five most popular parties in Turkey and the five largest in parliament.

OPPOSITION CHALLENGES

The opposition alliance's strongest argument is Erdoğan's troubled economy. The opposition's challenges are daunting, however. Its mixture of ideologies was noted above. Another is its failure to date to announce a common presidential candidate. The likely candidate will be Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, whose CHP is the largest party in the Nation Alliance.

Kılıçdaroğlu is a relatively colorless politician with a bureaucratic background but has a reputation for being clean in a society where few of his counterparts can make that claim. At its core, CHP remains secular and strongly Turkish nationalist, but Kılıçdaroğlu has reached out to more religiously traditional elements and has softened the party's approach toward the Kurds. The most striking example of this—and his greatest electoral success—was in the 2019 local elections. He promoted mayoral candidates with conservative backgrounds (one a former MHP member, the other a lifelong CHP member but from a traditional, center-right family) in Istanbul and Ankara and also forged an informal partnership with the Kurdish-rights HDP—and won both elections. That ended an era of 25 consecutive years of rule by Erdoğan's AKP (and a predecessor religious party) in Turkey's two largest and most prestigious cities.

Kılıçdaroğlu, who turns 74 in December, seems determined to run. His five coalition partners, all of whom represent parties to his right, are reportedly unhappy about that prospect, although they aren't saying so publicly. One reason for their skepticism about him is his spotty showing in the polls, where he has



A supporter of Turkish President Tayyip Erdoğan waves an AKP flag. Photo credit: Reuters

now slipped behind Erdoğan. Linked to that is the fact that CHP national election results have been stagnant during his 12-plus years as leader; CHP regularly captures about 25% of the vote as the country's second largest party, whereas AKP consistently receives in the forties.

A second concern is Kılıçdaroğlu's style. Even many of his supporters worry that his low-key, non-charismatic personality wouldn't hold up well against Erdoğan's rhetorical bullying—all

the more so in a country that generally favors powerful leaders.

A third problem is Kılıçdaroğlu's religion: Alevism, a heterodox version of Islam that many conservative Sunnis consider to be not Islam at all. Historically, CHP draws a significant portion of its vote from Alevis, who are generally believed to compose about 20% of Turkey's population. (Turkey's census-takers do not ask about religious preference or ethnicity, so

estimates can be made only indirectly.) In a recent poll, 34% of Turks said they wouldn't vote for an Alevi, including 20% of CHP supporters and 26% of İyi supporters.

Finally, there is CHP's historical baggage. Founded by Kemal Atatürk on the principles of Turkish nationalism and anti-clerical secularism, the CHP was for decades at odds with the sizable religious segments of the society as well as with the Kurds. Kılıçdaroğlu has worked hard to soften that image. But significant numbers of religious people are convinced that a return to power by secularists would threaten hard-won gains of the two-decade-old Erdoğan era. During this period, women wearing headscarves, who were long at the center of Turkey's kulturkampf, have made enormous gains. Once barred from universities and from political office, they now can enter any career path, including the military. Although polls show that secularists now fully accept this situation and have no desire to overturn it, historical memories remain strong among many religious Turks.

ERDOĞAN'S RESURGENCE

Erdoğan's surprising ascent in recent polls is attributable to three factors.

Populist economic message: Throwing inflation caution to the wind, Erdoğan has begun to use his office to bestow largesse on the public. Most recently, he announced plans for 500,000 low-income, public housing units; more than 7 million people applied in the first month. Thanks to his dominance of the media, Erdoğan has been able to persuade large segments of the public that worldwide problems, rather than economic mismanagement at home, are the source of Turkey's economic woes.

Foreign policy: Erdoğan's foreign policy has been bold and aggressive but also at times surprisingly nimble. He has been unusually adept at steering Turkey through the thicket of the Russian war on Ukraine, even if in a manner

generally distasteful to his Western allies. He manages to maintain close relations with both Ukraine and Russia, selling armed drones to the former while deriving maximum benefit from economic relations with the latter. He has also managed to keep at bay Western frustration with his anti-sanctions policy, thanks to his efforts at mediating between Moscow and Kyiv, especially his negotiating, along with the UN, a deal to allow Ukraine to export grains and thereby ease world hunger and food prices.

Erdoğan's decision to hold Sweden's and Finland's NATO membership hostage to their compliance with Turkish demands regarding the PKK is popular domestically. Like his four invasions of Syria and his active support of Azerbaijan's recapture of most of Nagorno-Karabakh, it is an example of a policy that Kılıçdaroğlu almost certainly would not have pursued himself but to which politically he could not object once Erdoğan took the initiative.

Opposition missteps: Perhaps the most important reason for Erdoğan's recovery in the polls has been disarray in the opposition, highlighted by its failure to project a clear policy message and uncertainty about its choice of presidential candidate.

The opposition has made tactical mistakes as well. In October, for example, Kılıçdaroğlu proposed a bill to protect the rights of women who cover their heads to serve in public positions, which would have simply formalized the existing situation. His intention was to demonstrate to the religious community that they need not fear a return to power of a secularist party. But Erdoğan, long the champion of Turkey's religious, quickly turned it to his advantage, announcing he would propose not just a law along those lines but a constitutional amendment. Whatever Kılıçdaroğlu's intentions with his original proposal, many of his supporters are angry that he changed the focus of public discourse from their issue, the failing economy, to an issue squarely in Erdoğan's wheelhouse.

THE FORK IN THE ROAD

A government led by Kılıçdaroğlu and his National Alliance would not represent a 180-degree change from Erdoğan—on issues like Greece, Cyprus, Azerbaijan, and the PKK it might seem virtually the same—but it would be different in many ways. To give a few examples:

Western orientation: Kılıçdaroğlu is a secularist coming from a tradition that sees Turkey's proper place as part of the Western world, and he feels more at home in the West than in the Middle East or Russia. He would be disinclined to rock the boat in NATO.

Russia: Kılıçdaroğlu would certainly pursue ties with Russia, which are now economically critical for Turkey, but he probably could be counted on to work with the West to limit Moscow's ability to use Turkey to circumvent sanctions.

Human Rights: Kılıçdaroğlu and his partners would reverse Erdoğan's authoritarian course and head in a more democratic direction. The media would be freer and journalists and political opponents would be less likely to be imprisoned.

Kılıçdaroğlu has also said he would abide by the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights—as Turkey is obligated to do as a member of the Council of Europe and as it did for decades before the Erdoğan years. This quickly would lead to the release of two of Turkey's most internationally known political prisoners, Osman Kavala, a liberal activist and philanthropist, and Selahattin Demirtaş, co-founder of the HDP.

Muslim Brotherhood: Kılıçdaroğlu has frequently criticized Erdoğan for pursuing a "Muslim Brotherhood-based" foreign policy. He would likely expel foreign Brotherhood members in Turkey—and likely would do the same with Hamas elements.

Israel: Relations with Israel are likely to warm within limits. A return to the close military cooperation of the Süleyman Demirel era of the 1990s is unlikely, particularly given Israeli ties with Greece and Cyprus. But Erdoğan's rhetoric—and provocations in East Jerusalem—would disappear. Although pro-Palestinian, Kılıçdaroğlu is unlikely to resort to the kind of rabble-rousing on the Palestinian issue that Erdoğan has.

The 2023 campaign has already begun in earnest and will surely heat up once the opposition announces its candidate for president, probably in January. Differences between Erdoğan and the opposition represent two distinct pathways. One pathway or the other will determine Turkey's course and influence the entire Middle East, for the next five years and likely beyond. *

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President of Israel Isaac Herzog (right) with JST publisher Ahmed Charai. Photo credit: Eran Ackerman

ISRAELI LEADERS DISCUSS REGIONAL DEVELOPMENTS WITH JST

BY THE JERUSALEM STRATEGIC TRIBUNE

The consistent message we heard from five political party leaders in Israel in mid-September is they are tired of campaigning and hope for a decisive result from the elections scheduled for November 1. These will be Israel's fifth parliamentary elections in four years. The polls show Israel's public remains nearly evenly split with support for a Netanyahu-led bloc and a bloc of parties opposed to Netanyahu.

JST publisher Ahmed Charai said in each meeting that Israel's new Abraham Accord partners also hope for a decisive result from these elections; they want an Israeli leadership they can work with over a period of years, not months. He also noted the need for signs of progress on the Palestinian front in order to expand the Abraham Accords to new Arab partners.

On the right, we met separately with Rabbi Aryeh Deri, head of the Shas party, and with Amir Ohana, number six on the Likud Party election list (and a close confidant of leader of the parliamentary opposition Benjamin Netanyahu). They projected that the Likud's Netanyahu will emerge as the decisive winner in the elections and will lead a coalition with at least a 61-seat majority in the Knesset (which has 120 seats). Netanyahu will avoid a rotational prime minister arrangement, which characterized each of the recent governments, and seek to serve as the prime minister for a four-year term. They both discounted concerns with the far-right, although they didn't rule out

including one or more centrist parties in the next governing coalition. But they stressed the need to start post-election coalition negotiations with a 61-seat majority that would include the extreme right-wing party of Ben-Gvir and Smotrich.

On the left, we met separately with Merav Michaeli, transportation minister and head of the Labor Party, and with Karine Elharrar, energy minister and number four in the Yesh Atid Party of Yair Lapid. Michaeli is focused on rebuilding the Labor Party, the party of Israel's founders that has dwindled in recent elections, based on her personal popularity and principled positions of the Labor Party. Elharrar highlighted the important progress toward regional integration during her term of office—the Israel–Jordan–UAE agreement to build solar power and plans to increase natural gas exports to Egypt (and then onto Europe) by doubling the size of an existing pipeline in the Sinai. She said Israel supports Lebanon's natural gas plans as a source of stability for the region, provided of course Lebanon and Israel reach an agreement in current maritime border talks.

We also met with Defense Minister Benny Gantz, who is head of the centrist National Unity Party, who said Israel needs a broad-based government in order to face the existential threat posed by Iran. He stressed that if Iran becomes a nuclear threshold country, it will be emboldened to expand its current aggression against Israel and other countries in the region, both directly and indirectly through proxies.

In addition to our round of the political party leaders, the JST team paid a courtesy call on President Isaac Herzog at his residence and discussed regional developments with him. *



President of Israel Isaac Herzog with the JST editorial team. Photo credit: Eran Ackerman



Israel Defense Minister Benny Gantz (right) with JST publisher Ahmed Charai. Photo credit: Eran Ackerman



Energy Minister Karine Elharrar and aide Tomer Mizrachi with the JST editorial team. Photo credit: Eran Ackerman



Energy Minister Karine Elharrar (center) with the JST editorial team. Photo credit: Eran Ackerman



Transportation Minister Meirav Michaeli (right) with the JST editorial team. Photo credit: Eran Ackerman



Transportation Minister Meirav Michaeli (right) with JST publisher Ahmed Charai. Photo credit: Eran Ackerman



Head of the Shas party Rabbi Ariyeh Deri with the JST editorial team. Photo credit: Eran Ackerman



MK Amir Ohana with the JST editorial team. Photo credit: Eran Ackerman



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