



THE MITVIM INSTITUTE'S FOREIGN POLICY PLAN FOR THE 36TH GOVERNMENT OF ISRAEL

On June 13, 2021, the 36th Government of Israel was sworn in, headed by Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid, the first government since 2009 which is not led by Benjamin Netanyahu. The Mitvim Institute sees the new government as an opportunity to promote significant changes in Israel's foreign policy, as well as to improve the manner in which this policy is managed and planned. Some areas require urgent rehabilitation after years of neglect and are on the verge of dangerous deterioration; others demand adaptation to the challenges expected for Israel in the near future; additional areas provide an opportunity to promote the long-term national interests of Israel and its commitment to a democratic-liberal value.

The following is the executive summary of Mitvim's overarching foreign policy plan for Israel's government.

It was developed through a working group consisting of the following Mitvim experts: Dr. Gil Murciano, Dr. Roei Kibrik, Merav Kahana-Dagan, Dr. Maya Sion-Tsadikياهو, former MK Ksenia Svetlova, Dr. Lior Lehrs, Amb (ret.) Arthur Koll, and Gabriel Mitchell. Our thanks go to Dr. Nimrod Goren, Nadav Tamir, Dr. Moran Zaga, Prof. Elie Podeh, Amb (ret.) Colette Avital, Amb (ret.) Shimon Stein, Dr. Anat Lapidot-Firilla, Arnon Spiegel, Dr. Ehud Eiran, Dr. Ilai Saltzman, Col (Res.) Ehud Evental, Dr. Ronen Zeidel, members of Mitvim's Board of Directors, and other partners who contributed to the document and its preparation.



Deepen the infrastructure of Israel's ties with the normalization states – the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan – in order to leverage the agreement for renewed momentum in advancing Israeli-Palestinian peace.

The normalization agreements provide the government with a potential game changing opportunity to redefine Israel's place in the region. Creating a connection between the regional framework and the Palestinian issue will not only help deepen existing ties with the normalization states, but could also serve as a significant catalyst for expanding the normalization process and bringing other strategically significant states on board, such as Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Oman and Southeast Asia's Muslim states.



Respond to the national aspirations of the Palestinians within the framework of the two-state solution.

Given the current absence of appropriate conditions for renewed negotiations on a permanent status agreement between Israel and the Palestinians, the government should prepare and develop the constitutional, organizational, physical, economic and social infrastructure required for renewing the peace process in the future. In the short term, the government should work to strengthen the Palestinian Authority (PA) and avoid actions that would render the two-state solution non-viable.



Adopt and implement a new, proactive policy approach on the Gaza Strip.

This approach should seek to restore PA control, weaken Hamas, and mobilize long-term international engagement in the economic development of the Gaza Strip.



4

Allocate significant resources to rehabilitating relations with Jordan, which deteriorated under Netanyahu to a crisis point with strategic implications.

Within this framework, Israel should also become involved in strengthening and rehabilitating the Jordanian economy. Israel should designate this goal as a strategic priority to both ensure the stability of the Kingdom and improve relations between the two countries.

5

Enrich and diversify relations with Egypt beyond military and energy capacities to include the civilian field.

Israel should also encourage Egypt to direct its mediation efforts to bolster the PA's standing in the West Bank and Gaza and renew diplomatic dialogue between Israel and the PA.

6

Recognize the ongoing socio-economic crisis in Lebanon as a direct threat to Israel's national security.

Israel should seek to stabilize the situation through various means, while limiting potential points of tension. At the same time Israel should also increase diplomatic pressure against Iranian efforts to upgrade Hezbollah's rocket systems.

7

Turn the page in Israel's relations with the European Union (EU).

First and foremost Israel should deepen, expand and institutionalize relations with the EU and designate it as a values-based and significant partner. Israel should concurrently continue to improve bilateral relations with European states, prioritizing liberal democracies. It should ensure that the development of these relations is not abused in order to undermine the EU or distance it from regional and international processes. Israel must encourage and enable these actors to play a more significant role in advancing diplomatic efforts in the Israeli-Palestinian arena and strengthening the normalization process.

8

Recognize the Mediterranean Basin as a contemporary area of significant opportunity.

This region is likely to be a strategic interface between various arenas in the coming decade. It is also expected to be a space for diplomatic and economic partnerships with the states of the Middle East, North Africa and Europe.

9

Designate the Red Sea as a strategic arena.

The Red Sea is a meeting point of economic, security and diplomatic interests and presents an opportunity to strengthen cooperation with a series of actors: Arab states, Ethiopia and the states of the Horn of Africa, Europe and even those not conducting diplomatic relations with Israel (especially Saudi Arabia). Israel should examine the possibility of helping mediate and advance peace between the countries of the region.

10

Adhere to the principle of partisan neutrality in its foreign relations with the US.

At the same time, given the gradual US withdrawal from the Middle East, Israel should seek to preserve US involvement in issues of substantive importance. In addition, the government should devote efforts to repair relations with the progressive elements of the American Jewish community.

11

Adopt the JCPOA as a framework of reference to confront Iran's nuclear program, while working from within it to expand its scope.

The revised framework should cover Iran's regional activities and its efforts to develop offensive capabilities.



12

Reframe Israel's mindset regarding the climate crisis as an urgent foreign policy issue of strategic importance.

The Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean Basin are “hot spots” of climate crisis repercussions. The climate crisis intensifies the risk of conflicts and endangers quality of life. At the same time, it offers important opportunities for long-term cooperation with the region and between Israel and the Palestinians. Environmental issues, such as limiting carbon emissions and advancing renewable energies, are an integral component of the foreign policies of liberal democracies with clear impact on their international standing.

13

Differentiate between criticism of Israeli policy and de-legitimization of Israel's right to exist in both words and actions.

The government should address international criticism of its policies, even when it perceives the criticism as harsh or unjustified. The government should conduct an open dialogue with international critics and domestic and international civil society organizations.

14

Adjust Israel's foreign policy to embody the fundamental values of freedom, justice, peace, and equality, defined by the signatories of the Declaration of Independence, as guiding principles for Israel's membership in the family of nations.

This includes reflecting the global values derived from Israel's belonging to the camp of liberal democracies. Applying ethical principles to foreign policy and trade is significantly more important in an era of growing Israeli influence, with its actions projecting on the regional and global reality.

15

Make the Ministry of Foreign Affairs an integral part of shaping Israel's strategic policy on issues pertinent to its core national interests.

The Ministry's experts must be part of strategic decision-making forums, participate in national security cabinet discussions, and play a significant role on the National Security Council. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs' positions on these issues must also be expressed in public discourse.

16

The Ministry of Regional Cooperation should adopt an operational role as a regional facilitator to advance ties and initiatives of non-governmental Israeli actors in the Middle East.

A special emphasis should be placed on civil society and the business community. The Ministry should assume responsibility for leveraging the normalization process with the region to advance relations with the Palestinians and rebuild the relationship between the government of Israel and PA leadership.

17

Divide the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee into two separate committees, one on foreign affairs and one on defense.

At minimum, the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee should greatly increase its discussion of foreign affairs and its ongoing oversight of Israeli foreign policy.

