

The Foreign Policy Index of 2022: Insights from Mitvim Experts

The Mitvim Institute's Tenth Annual Public Opinion Survey on Israeli Foreign Policy was conducted in late August 2022. The survey was conducted by the Rafi Smith Institute and in collaboration with the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, among a representative sample (both politically and demographically) of the adult population in Israel (800 men and women, Jews and Arabs) and with a sampling error of 3.5%. This document presents the findings of the survey, divided into four areas: the Israeli Foreign Ministry, Israel's foreign relations, Israel and its surrounding regions, and Israel and the Palestinians. This year the survey included, among other topics, questions about Israel's stance on the war in Ukraine, the impact of the normalization agreements two years in and the potential of leveraging them to promote Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking, the climate crisis, and the Iranian nuclear threat.

Dr. Nimrod Goren, President and Founder of Mitvim: The Israeli public is getting ready for the coming election. According to Mitvim's Foreign Policy Index of 2022, the parties' positions on foreign policy issues, and specifically the Palestinian issue, will have a significant influence on the voters' decisions. The public seems to show support for the Lapid Government's main policy steps – i.e. substantiating the Abraham Accords, enhancing relations with Jordan, normalizing relations with Turkey, improving relations with the EU, as well as with the Biden Administration. However, the Israeli public is also willing to endanger future strategic benefits because of their hawkish positions on the Palestinian issue. A majority of Israelis are willing to forfeit full normalization with Saudi Arabia if it would involve freezing the building in the settlements. They are willing to forfeit Israel joining important EU programs if it involves excluding the settlements from their frameworks. In general, advancing Israeli-Palestinian peace is ranked low in the public's set of political priorities and this reflects the political leadership's problematic tendency to ignore the Palestinian issue all together. Nevertheless, facing growing tensions in the West Bank – vis-à-vis Israel as well as in Palestinian domestic politics – a change in this perception is required, and Lapid's statement of support for the two-state solution is a step in the right direction. There is a substantial linkage between the Palestinian issue and Israel's regional and international standing. Israeli decision-makers have to demonstrate that linkage to the public, enhance the dialogue with the Palestinian Authority, including by arranging a direct meeting between Lapid and Abu-Mazen, and create a tangible vision for peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

Dr. Gil Murciano, CEO of Mitvim: The Israeli public values practical steps. 10 days after his UN speech, in which he referred to the two-state solution as a political vision, the Israeli public provided Lapid with guidelines on how to turn this vision into action. The Israeli public tends to be quite sceptic or undecided when presented with comprehensive plans to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or even long-term solutions in Gaza. However, the Israeli public (including large parts of those who define themselves as center-right) tends to support tangible steps – practical policy options for cooperation and conflict prevention, that have an

implicit potential to promote the two-state solution. For example, while only 36% supports a proactive effort by Israel to promote the two-state-solution, 62% of the respondents supports forming a joint Israel-Palestinian-Jordanian conflict prevention mechanism in Jerusalem, a step that reflects on Israel's sovereignty in the city. More than half think that Israel should assist in building Palestinian energy and water independence, both relating to Palestinian state-capacities. Most importantly, for the second year in a row, more than half of the public (including a significant majority among center-right and center voters) support leveraging the Abraham Accords to promote Israeli-Palestinian peace making. Averting historical compromises and hallmark handshakes on the White House lawn, the Israeli public supports utilizing the tangible "here and now" for peace making.

Dr. Lior Lehms, Director of the Israeli-Palestinian Peacemaking Program: Incidents and tensions at the Temple Mount/Al Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem served as a trigger for rounds of violence in the Israeli-Palestinian arena. In the last year, against the background of the fear of escalation during Ramadan, Israel tried to draw lessons from previous cases, and initiated a dialogue with Jordanian and Palestinian officials in order to prevent a crisis and escalation; various actors suggested turning these contacts into a permanent mechanism. The Mitvim Institute's new survey shows that the Israeli public is aware of the sensitivity of the holy places in Jerusalem, and recognizes the need to institutionalize the coordination between the parties on this issue. Sixty-one percent of respondents expressed support for establishing a coordination mechanism that would include Israel, the Palestinians, and Jordan, and would work to prevent escalation in the holy places in Jerusalem. The need for such a mechanism is becoming more acute these days, in view of the growing tensions in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and concerns regarding escalation around the holy places during the Jewish holidays. Strengthening coordination between Israel, the Palestinians, and Jordan on this important matter can lay a better foundation for promoting cooperation on other issues and help pave the way for renewing the Israeli-Palestinian peace making process.

Former MK Ksenia Svetlova, Director of the Israel-Middle East Relations Program: Many Israelis (about 57%) believe that Israel should rely on the Arab countries with which normalization has been established to promote peace with the Palestinians. This is an area with very important potential that will be realized when Israel and the Palestinian Authority renew peace negotiations. The relations with our Arab neighbors should not be limited only to economics and security. Israel needs peace with its closest neighbors - the Palestinians - and the Arab countries that normalized relations with Israel have a significant role to play.

Dr. Maya Sion-Tzidkiyahu, Director of the Israel-Europe Relations Program: Mitvim's Foreign Policy Index continues to reflect the trend of improvement in Israel's relations with the European Union. Although 40% of respondents think the EU is an adversary rather than a friend of Israel, if examined along the years, this result expresses a continuous trend of improvement in Israeli public opinion since Mitvim's 2018 Foreign Policy Index, when 55% thought the EU is more of an adversary to Israel. The improvement in public opinion expresses actual improvement in Israel-EU relations. The survey shows that the public understands the political trend, and since the slump in the relations which characterized the last decade, there is an ongoing positive trend in the Israeli public opinion. Foreign Minister, now also Prime Minister, Lapid, continued the process of rehabilitating relations and opening a new page with the EU, which began under former Foreign Minister Ashkenazi. The current government did not incite against the EU, on the contrary. Lapid spoke in a normative voice closer to that of the EU (for example regarding preserving liberal world order and regarding Russia's war on Ukraine). In its turn, the EU also hardly criticized the Israeli government.

For the first time in a decade the EU-Israel Association Council is about to take place, and after a few "dry" years successful negotiations took place over new cooperation agreements. It is hard to assume the public is aware of these different steps, but it seems its ear is susceptible to the new tones and positive atmosphere, which are clearly expressed in the survey's results.

Professor Elie Podeh, Member of Mitvim's Board of Directors: The majority of the Jewish public sees the Abraham Accords as a turning point in Israel's incorporation into the Middle-East, but only 31 percent perceive Israel as part of the Middle-East. Moreover, in listing the five most important countries for Israel's foreign policy agenda, Arab countries are notably absent. Egypt comes the closest in sixth place, Saudi Arabia takes eighth place, Turkey the ninth and the UAE is only tenth. Jordan, which shares the longest border with Israel among its neighbors, is ranked only eleventh in terms of its importance to Israel. In other words, there is no correlation between the high importance given by the public to the Abraham Accords and the relatively low importance the public allocates to enhancing relations with the Arab countries that normalized relations with Israel. Also notable is the alarming trend of a gradual decrease in the Jewish public support for the two state solution (only 35 percent), while the options of annexation combined with establishing one state in which Jews will enjoy special political privileges (18 percent) or continuing conflict management while promoting "creeping annexation" (15 percent) is on the rise. These findings ratify the view that not only do the majority of the Israeli public question the feasibility of reaching a two-state solution, they also reject it as a desirable outcome.

Dr. Moran Zaga, Policy Fellow: Beyond the clear benefits of the Abraham Accords in bilateral cooperation with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Morocco, the agreements had a deeper impact on Israelis' perceptions of the Arab world and the Middle East. The survey found that over half of Israelis (53%) believe that Israel's position in the Middle East has improved following the agreements. This figure is even more impressive compared to last year with a 19% increase in the rate of respondents that the Abraham Accords are a turning point in the acceptance of Israel in the Middle East. There is no doubt that this is a real revolution in the perception of Israel, which in the past was a "small country surrounded by enemies". At the same time, it should be noted that there is a gap between the prevailing Israeli public opinion and the corresponding public opinion in the Arab countries. In a survey conducted by the Washington Institute, it was found that only 26% of the Emirati and 23% of the Bahrainis attribute a positive effect to the Abraham Accords on the region. A larger proportion of respondents testified that business and civil cooperation with Israel should be allowed (42% Emiratis and 37% Bahrainis), but the road to popular support for Israel is still far off, even in the Abraham Accords countries. Therefore, it is our duty to support peace, and we should strive to achieve a genuine acceptance of Israel in our region through culture, diplomacy, and people-to-people interactions. We can be encouraged by the fact that the trend is positive, especially when the change has already begun within us.

Bar Rapaport, Director of Climate Diplomacy Project: The survey results reflect the public's recognition that there are essential infrastructures necessary for humans' basic needs, such as water and energy. The public also recognizes existential challenges such as the climate crisis, where the Palestinians' resilience has a direct impact on Israeli resilience. We see this recognition through the survey, where the public supports strengthening the Palestinians' water and energy systems and working together with the Palestinians to face climate challenges. The fact that those subjects are seen as "soft" in their character, and as issues that are not connected to competition over limited resources between the two sides, allows the public to more easily accept it as a possible

form of cooperation. These cooperation frameworks can facilitate future agreements around the shared lives of Israelis and Palestinians.

Dr. Ehud Eiran, Member of Mitvim's Board of Directors and Director of the PPE Program at the University of Haifa: The Foreign Policy Index shows that climate change is still not a major concern for the Israeli public, at least when it comes to the country's foreign relations. For example, cooperation with other countries in the climate change space came only fourth (out of six) in the Israeli public's preferences for the state's foreign policy agenda. A regional organization that would focus on such cooperation gained only a tepid 7.21/10.00 level of support, which was even slightly lower when compared to last year's survey. The conclusion: Israeli officials should take the lead and convince the public regarding the gravity of the climate issue. They must take the lead because current data does not show that we can expect a bottom-up move in this direction.

Former Ambassador Daniel Shek: One in mouth and one in poll. According to Mitvim's Foreign Policy Index, most Israelis claim that the parties' foreign policy positions will have a bearing on their choice on election day. Now this sounds to me like a finding that reflects what the French call "bon ton", rather than reality. Other polls, focusing entirely on election-related issues, show that, like in many other countries, foreign affairs are very low on the list of priorities for the average voter, if at all. In fact, some of the parties in the race don't even have positions on foreign affairs in their platforms. Similarly, the very high level of importance (7.30) given in the poll to strengthening the Israeli foreign service is hardly reflected in public debate, or even among politicians. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been in a paralyzing labor dispute for months now, but no public or political pressure on the ministers in charge to end the semi-strike can be detected. So yes, the Israeli public does appreciate its diplomats and their achievements, but they keep their love well hidden in their hearts.

Dr. Roei Kibrik, Director of Research: Liberal Democracy Ltd. Israel likes to define itself as the only democracy in the Middle East, and to use this image in order to strengthen its identity and relations with the developed, liberal-democratic countries in the world. However, as the current survey results demonstrate, the citizens of Israel embrace the liberal-democratic positions only to a limited extent, and prefer the tactical pragmatic cost-benefit calculations over the long-term strategic promotion of democratic values and norms. For example, a relative majority of the public (49.9 percent) think that the type of government in a country should not be a consideration in determining Israel's relations with it, and only a minority gave priority for developing relations with democracies (36.2 percent); only about 40 percent support the possibility of appointing an Arab minister in a ministry dealing with foreign policy; a large minority (about 20 percent) supports the annexation of the West Bank while granting special rights to Jews; and most Israelis (53.3 percent) support Israel's policy of "walking between the drops" regarding the war in Ukraine and not fully supporting Ukraine and the position of the liberal-democratic West. These findings demonstrate Israel's low commitment to democratic values and norms in foreign policy; a supplemented fact to the processes of democratic backsliding that are currently occurring, weakening Israel's image and identity as a democratic country.