



Inclusive Foreign Policy in Israel – Trends and Processes from a Gender Perspective

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Gender equality and women's rights are consensual values across parties and political agendas in Western democracies, of which Israel has always been proud to be a part. However, Israel's 37th government, which is the most religious and conservative in the country's history, set Israel back on the gender issue. Yet, the new government's weakening of the female voice can also be an opportunity for change: The struggle for adequate representation of women in decision-making processes, which previously only troubled the limited communities of women's organizations, became a core issue in the public discourse and expanded the awareness that gender equality and women's rights are fundamental values of democracy. It is not a struggle only of women nor of one political camp or another, but a central part of liberal democracy. This policy paper, written in collaboration with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, examines the concepts of inclusive and feminist foreign policy and seeks to suggest elements of these concepts that Israeli policymakers may adopt, whether on short term, or for the long run.

A. Introduction

Inclusive foreign policy¹ is a political approach that calls for integrating and representing the variety of population groups that make up a society in decision-making processes related to foreign policy, both in the personal aspect of the people who lead policy, and in the substantive aspect of the issues comprising that policy. This approach aims to reflect social pluralism by increasing the representation of significant subgroups in the bodies that lead foreign policy, with the understanding that integrating diverse worldviews will lead to more effective management of foreign policy. These subgroups in Israel include the ultra-Orthodox, Israeli Arabs, residents of the geographic and social periphery, immigrants, and women. The latter, although not a numerical minority, are significantly underrepresented in the Foreign Service.

¹ For an extensive reference to the term "inclusive foreign policy" see [joint research workshop](#) of the Mitvim Institute and the Israel Democracy Institute held in July 2016.

This paper focuses on the gender aspect of inclusive foreign policy, and women's role in the Israeli Foreign Service. Feminist Foreign Policy (FFP)², as this approach is known, includes not only the integration of women in decision-making bodies but also gender mainstreaming³ in all strategic, political, and diplomatic measures. This approach seeks to introduce an emphasis on issues related to human safety and security, peace, equality and human rights into foreign policy, which is traditionally focused on military power, violence and control.

This world view takes on new importance not only in view of Israel's election results, but also in the global arena because of the ongoing war in Ukraine, which has led to the militarization of the political and civil discourse in Europe, and the victory of racist, fascist, populist and illiberal parties in various parts of the world. The decline of liberal and democratic values and rise of securitist and nationalist approaches have been increasingly evident in Europe and the US in recent decades.⁴ An amplified militaristic discourse is historically identified with patriarchal and masculine approaches; in other words, the military and wars are men's affairs. Conservative and illiberal trends are also characterized by an erosion in the progress of gender parity, which has been exacerbated since 2020 by the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵ Even ideologically neutral countries such as Sweden and Finland submitted official requests to join NATO in May 2022.⁶

Along with the enhanced militaristic and illiberal discourse, an opposing trend demonstrates that national interests and national security are not necessarily only a military matter. COVID-19, along with the climate crisis, have honed the need for a perceptual change and redefinition of global existential threats. Security is not only about wars and violent conflicts; it also relates to civil threats that undermine national resilience and endanger citizens. A country's defense is led not only by generals on the battlefield, but also by experts and expertise from other spheres of life, such as public health, food security or renewable energies, which also play leading roles in the defense of national interests and citizens' well-being.

The purpose of the paper is to promote public debate on the importance of increased women's representation in foreign policy decision-making bodies and of a gender

² See Scheyer, Victoria, and Marina Kumskova. (2019). "[Feminist Foreign Policy](#)." *Journal of International Affairs* 72.2: 57-76; Aggestam, Karin, Annika Bergman Rosamond, and Annica Kronsell, (2019). "[Theorizing feminist foreign policy](#)." *International Relations*, 33.1: 23-39; Thompson, Lyric, Spogmay Ahmed, and Tanya Khokhar. (2021). "[Defining a feminist foreign policy](#)," *International Center for Research on Women. ICRW*. Online.

³ Walby, Sylvia. (2003). "[Gender mainstreaming: Productive tensions in theory and practice](#) - Contribution to ESRC Gender Mainstreaming Seminars," *University of Leeds*. Online.

⁴ Goren, Nimrod and Muriel Asseburg Eds. (2022) "[Democratic Backsliding and Securitization: Challenges for Israel, the EU and Israel-Europe Relations](#)," *Mitvim Institute*.

⁵ A [report](#) by the World Economic Forum estimated before the Corona virus outbreak that it would take 100 years to reach full gender equality at the global level. Following the epidemic, the estimate was updated to 136 years.

⁶ "[Ratification of Finland's and Sweden's Accession to NATO](#)," *NATO web site*, May 2022.

perspective in shaping Israel's foreign relations, and to propose processes and perceptual changes promoting the principles, values and practices of an inclusive foreign policy. It argues that an inclusive foreign policy representing a variety of opinions and worldviews results in more effective and comprehensive decision making and a considered and balanced foreign policy that better represents the interests of the state and enables the sustainable achievement of its foreign policy goals and objectives.

The first part of this paper briefly reviews key definitions, theories and approaches that define the term “inclusive foreign policy”, and related international measures, most notably UN Security Council Resolution 1325. The second part briefly presents examples from countries that have adopted feminist foreign affairs models as a mandatory national plan. The third part focuses on Israel's Foreign Service, reviews its components and the legislation and regulations adopted over the years to increase gender equality. This section includes an updated look at women's representation in foreign policy bodies. The fourth and concluding part of the paper presents a series of recommendations for dealing with the barriers and structural failures, and suggests organizational, perceptual and cultural changes conducive to significant integration of a gender perspective in Israel's foreign policy, not only by increasing the number of women around decision-making tables, but also in terms of the issues on which those decisions focus and of the conceptual framework for analyzing reality and planning policy.⁷

B. Inclusive foreign policy - theories and approaches

Traditional international relations theories define foreign policy both as relations between states and as the structural organization of a government in conducting its foreign affairs. The principle of sovereignty and safeguarding the national interest is the core of any foreign policy, often presenting states with security dilemmas. Traditionally, these systems are organized in a hierarchical manner, with the top ranks comprised of men, and shaped by masculine principles.⁸

The feminist approach to international relations is based on the normative argument that since women constitute half the population, it is only right that they should also constitute half the elected officials and decision makers. Gender is an integral characteristic of the global structure, making it necessary not only to integrate women into the system, but also to shift thinking from a sole focus on military power to a broader consideration of civilian issues, informed by the realization that each decision may have different effects on men and

⁷ The paper is based on a round table discussion held on 7/21/2022 in collaboration with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. The participants were: Markus Bickel, Halit Barel, Michal Graf, Sausan Hasson, Orni Livni, Tanya Moreks, Ksenia Svetlova, Victoria Sulkowitz, Marie Schrotter, Roy Kibrick, Aviva Raz-Shechter, Naomi Sternberg, Pnina Sharvit-Baruch. The paper does not necessarily express agreement between the participants.

⁸ Scheyer, Victoria, and Marina Kumskova. (2019). "[Feminist Foreign Policy](#)." *Journal of International Affairs* 72.2: 57-76.

women.⁹ Feminist foreign policy defines the interactions of states with other states, as well as with non-state actors, in a way that prioritizes peace, gender equality, and environmental integrity; anchors, promotes and protects the human rights of all; seeks to abolish colonial, racist, patriarchal male-dominated power structures; and allocates significant resources, including research, to achieve this vision.¹⁰ This approach calls for recognizing the gender deficit in foreign policy, identifying the gender-related failures, and changing the organizational and cognitive structures that have traditionally been dominated by men by expanding the participation of women in political action along with the adoption of gender thinking.¹¹ The absence of women in decision-making bodies risks creating a gender blind spot, with men in key positions being unaware that their decision-making is gender-biased and may ignore the needs of women.¹²

The prevailing definition in European literature of gender mainstreaming is taken from a special report of an expert committee established by the Council of the European Union in the late 1990s. Mieke Verloo, who headed the committee, defined the term as “the (re)organization, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy-making.”¹³ Assimilating gender thinking means promoting a gender-sensitive organizational culture and asking at all stages of planning and decision-making whether - and how - the moves affect men and women. Feminist approaches are integrated into the Ethical Foreign Policy approach,¹⁴ as they stem from ethical norms and aim to promote a normative change resulting in a foreign policy that is also defined by a moral framework and based on broad cosmopolitan norms of global justice and peace, not only on national interests and power struggles.

Critics of feminist foreign policy argue that its identification with soft power precludes its ability to deal with aggression, security threats, or terrorist organizations. Its proponents respond that the feminist approach does not ignore elements and insights provided by traditional approaches, but offers a different integration and evaluation of the various

⁹ Thompson, Lyric, Spogmay Ahmed, and Tanya Khokhar. (2021). "[Defining a feminist foreign policy](#)," *International Center for Research on Women. ICRW*. Online.

¹⁰ Thompson, Lyric, Gayatri Patel, Gawain Kripke, and Megan O'Donnell. (2020). "[Toward a Feminist Foreign Policy in the United States](#)," *Washington, DC: International Center for Research on Women*. P. 4.

¹¹ Aggestam, Karin et.al., "[Theorising feminist foreign policy](#)," *International Relations*, 33.1. pp. 23-39.

¹² The term blind spots or "perceptual gaps" in organizations refers to gaps in the organizational worldview, which mean areas of which the existing approach in the organization is unaware of their existence, or suppresses their significance so that they do not threaten the existing order. These blind spots may lead to unconscious distortions in the perception of reality and relevance gaps in the functioning of the organization. See for example, Scopelliti, Irene, Cary K. Morewedge, Erin McCormick, Lauren H. Min, Sophie Lebrecht, and Karim S. Kassam. (2015). "[Bias blind spot: Structure, measurement, and consequences](#)," *Management Science*, 61(10), 2468-2486.

¹³ Walby, Sylvia. (2003). "[Gender mainstreaming: Productive tensions in theory and practice - Contribution to ESRC Gender Mainstreaming Seminars](#)," *University of Leeds*. P. 7

¹⁴ Aggestam, Karin et.al., "[Theorising feminist foreign policy](#)," *International Relations*, 33.1: 25; Aggestam, Karin, and Annika Bergman-Rosamond. (2016). "[Swedish feminist foreign policy in the making: Ethics, politics, and gender](#)," *Ethics & International Affairs*, 30.3: 323-334.

elements. It is the new balance between traditional power politics and ethically informed foreign policy that makes such diplomacy wise and effective. Therefore, feminist foreign policy is not necessarily limited to adopting a pacifist position, and the paradigm of feminist foreign policy includes approaches that encourage pragmatism in the exchange between the use of soft and hard power.¹⁵

Feminists and civil society bodies are divided on the question of whether women's organizations should focus on promoting peace and human rights (soft power), or on promoting the integration of women in decision-making bodies on issues that are traditionally considered "masculine", such as security and strategy (hard power). The struggle to integrate women into male decision-making bastions is critical to strengthening gender equality and feminist discourse, but the struggle to promote peace and equal rights is also an important voice that must not be silenced, even if public opinion and male leaderships perceive it as a weakness. This is an important voice, essential to the concept of a feminist foreign policy and to its core agenda of placing such issues at the center of the political discussion.

Many studies demonstrate the importance of women's inclusion in the political arena. A high level of women's representation in parliaments affects not only political culture and the promotion of gender equality, but also the nature of legislation. A study by the Israel Democracy Institute found that most legislation on issues related to women was promoted by women Knesset members, rather than their male counterparts. Women were more attentive to issues that are relevant to and affect the female population, especially in areas such as education, family, health, welfare, children, abortion and gender violence.¹⁶ In the field of foreign policy, extensive literature demonstrates how, for example, the inclusion of women in the formal stages of peace negotiation processes not only increases prospects of reaching agreement, but also improves the nature of the agreement and prospects of its long-term preservation.¹⁷ Other studies emphasize the importance of listening in foreign policy, arguing that empathetic cooperation practices associated with feminist worldviews add perspectives that other traditional foreign policy approaches tend to neglect.¹⁸

An inclusive foreign policy, which represents a variety of opinions and worldviews, not only incorporates diverse considerations in decision-making processes and more correctly represents the country's best interests, but also promotes a combination of norms and

¹⁵ Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamond, "[Swedish feminist foreign policy in the making: Ethics, politics, and gender.](#)" *Ethics & International Affairs*, 30.3: 323-334.

¹⁶ Shapira, Assaf, Ofer Kenig, Chen Friedberg, and Reut Itzkovich-Malka. (2013). "[Representation of women in politics – a Comparative Perspective](#)," Policy Research, Israel Democracy Institute, p. 53 (Hebrew).

¹⁷ Levinas, Shiri. (2022). "[Women's Peace Organizations in Formal Peace Processes: Benefits of Partnership, Price of Exclusion](#)," part of a series on potential peace process actors by the Mitvim Institute and the Davis Institute for International Relations.

¹⁸ Aggestam, Bergman-Rosamond, and Kronsell, "[Theorising feminist foreign policy](#)," *International Relations*, 33.1. p. 34.

values along with safeguarding national interests. The feminist approach of foreign policy requires a change in the way countries determine their priorities and make political decisions. It challenges the traditional structures of foreign policy based mainly on competition for resources, power, and strength.

C. Implementing a feminist/inclusive foreign policy

The demand for significant integration of women in foreign policy decision-making was raised at the UN Women's Conferences as early as the mid-1980s of the last century. A decade later, in 1995, all UN member states adopted a strategy of assimilating gender thinking as a mechanism for promoting gender equality. Over the years, the UN Security Council has adopted ten different resolutions on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). These resolutions are based on three universal values: protection, equality, and peace, and on emphasizing the unique position of women.¹⁹

The most important of these is Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) approved in October 2000. This resolution emphasizes the need to integrate women and adopt a gender perspective in peace processes and conflict resolution, and calls for increasing women's role in decision-making at all levels. Resolution 1325 is based on four central principles: recognition of the different effects of conflicts on women and men; protection of women and girls in conflict areas; equal participation of women in political processes, and the assimilation of gender thinking in these processes.²⁰

Resolution 1325 calls on the member states to ensure increased representation of women at all levels of decision-making in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts, and encourages them to formulate a strategic action plan for the resolution's implementation. Although it focuses on the place of women and gender thinking in conflict resolution processes, it is considered a milestone in the promotion of gender equality in all state institutions, including the Foreign Service. All signatory countries have declared their intention to adopt the resolution. Only a few have taken actual steps to adopt and implement it.

Sweden was the first country to launch a feminist foreign policy in 2014 as a combination of internal processes in its foreign policy and a perceptual change of its foreign policy goals:

“Gender equality is a fundamental goal of Swedish foreign policy. Ensuring that women and girls enjoy basic human rights is an obligation under our international

¹⁹ Aharoni, Sarai (2015). "Women, Peace and Security: Resolution 1325 of the Security Council in the Israeli Context," policy paper within the series on Advancing Women in the Public Arena, Van Leer Institute (Hebrew).

²⁰ The full [Resolution 1325](#) text is available on the UNSC website. See also, Aharoni, S. "Women, Peace and Security", and Kahana-Dagan, Merav (2020). "[Women, Peace and Security, declarations and actions](#)", Mitvim Institute opinion article (Hebrew).

*commitments and a prerequisite for achieving Sweden's broader foreign policy goals - peace, security, and sustainable development. Sweden's feminist foreign policy is based on the belief that peace, security and sustainable development can never be achieved if half the world's population is excluded.*²¹

An OECD report that examined the elements of Swedish policy and the practices adopted by the Swedish government found that leadership at the highest levels played a key role in adoption of the model. Prime Minister Stefan Löfven and Foreign Minister Margot Wallström promoted gender equality at all levels through frequent and clear political messages, coordination of expectations and targeted activity to promote the issue, holding ongoing consultation with all relevant ministry employees at all levels. Sweden has incorporated the issue of gender equality in all stages of foreign policy planning and budget approval, and demanded from each department and representation abroad an explanation of how it was implementing feminist foreign policy in practice. The report attributes the Swedish success to a comprehensive set of training and support mechanisms for implementation of the policy, which include gender budgeting and recruitment strategies to ensure that the diversity of the foreign affairs staff reflects the commitment to gender equality.²²

The Swedish approach is the most thorough and comprehensive in the world, targeting all areas of foreign policy, both in the representation of women and in the policy content and goals. It is based on three pillars known as the three R's: Rights, Resources, Representation.²³ At the Committee on the Status of Women in 2021, Swedish Ambassador for Gender Equality Ann Bernes suggested adding a fourth "R", Reality. She meant a continuous examination of the policy implementation and adaptation of the vision to reality by identifying weak points in the implementation and learning processes that could improve the effectiveness of the feminist foreign policy.²⁴ Sweden joined the UN's call for men to promote this move, not only women, and when the United Nations launched the "HeForShe" campaign in 2015,²⁵ Swedish Prime Minister Stefan Leuven was recruited as a special ambassador of the initiative, to which all Swedish government ministers declared their commitment.²⁶

²¹ ["Handbook of Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy,"](#) Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2019.

²² ["Sweden's Feminist Foreign Policy,"](#) OECD, June 30, 2021.

²³ Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamond, ["Swedish feminist foreign policy in the making: Ethics, politics, and gender,"](#) *Ethics & International Affairs*, 30.3: 325.

²⁴ Thompson, Ahmed, and Khokhar, ["Defining a feminist foreign policy,"](#) *International Center for Research on Women. ICRW.* Online. P.3

²⁵ HeForShe is a solidarity movement to promote gender equality, established by the United Nations with the aim of mobilizing men to advance gender parity. The movement recruited celebrities such as former US President Barack Obama, actor Matt Damon and singer Harry Styles as ambassadors to promote the fight against gender stereotypes and discrimination against women.

²⁶ Aggestam and Bergman-Rosamond, ["Swedish feminist foreign policy in the making: Ethics, politics, and gender,"](#) *Ethics & International Affairs*, 30.3: 328.

In October 2022, a new government was sworn in in Sweden, led by the moderate party (Moderate Party), with the outside support of the far-right party (Sweden Democrats). It remains to be seen whether the new government and the new foreign minister continue to manage feminist foreign policy, and how.²⁷ The composition of the government (11 of the 21 ministers are women) gives rise to hopes that this policy will be maintained, at least in terms of gender representation.

Canada also adopted a limited model of feminist foreign policy in 2017, and with the support of Prime Minister Trudeau, a self-avowed feminist, launched a national Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP). The program's initial phase focused on a feminist approach to development and aid, but later expanded to other aspects of foreign policy such as diplomacy, defense and trade. Canada has also been at the forefront of the effort to direct more resources to women's rights organizations, feminist movements, and civil society organizations for the advancement of women.²⁸

In Germany, as part of the coalition agreements establishing the new government at the end of 2021, the Greens and Social Democrats agreed to adopt a feminist foreign policy based on the Swedish three "R" model.²⁹ The new government identified gender equality as one of its main goals and stated that it is fully committed to acting in accordance with feminist foreign policy to strengthen the rights, resources and representation of women and girls around the world and to promote greater diversity in society. This statement was regarded as significantly bolstering the feminist foreign policy approach in the world, in general, and was received with great appreciation by the feminist civil society organizations in Germany.³⁰

The new German government's policy combines a change in representation with a change in perception. Along with a commitment to increasing gender representation and diversity among foreign service staff, and expanding the participation of women in peace missions, the government also declared the adoption of a gender perspective in all foreign policy interactions.³¹ This change is being led by senior ministers, notably Foreign Affairs Minister and Green Party leader Annalena Baerbock, and the Minister of Development and Economic Cooperation Svenja Schulze of the Social Democratic Party (SPD).

Other countries, such as Luxembourg, France, Mexico, Spain, and even Libya, have adopted various models of feminist foreign policy. At the same time, more and more political parties around the world are including the issue in their election platforms, and governments

²⁷ [Government of Sweden website](#), October 2022.

²⁸ Thompson, Lyric et. Al., "[Defining a feminist foreign policy](#)." *International Center for Research on Women. ICRW*. Online.

²⁹ Gill-Akerman, Liz, and Joanna Pradela. (2021). "[Germany had declared a Feminist Foreign Policy – So what happens next?](#)" *Australian institute for international affairs*. Online.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Scheyer, Victoria, and Marina Kumskova. (2019). "[Feminist Foreign Policy](#)." *Journal of International Affairs* 72.2: 64.

are declaring their intention to adopt these principles.³² Such voices have been emanating recently from civil society in the US, as well, and the House of Representatives declared in 2021 the importance of adopting a feminist foreign policy.³³

D. Inclusive foreign policy in Israel

The State of Israel's foreign affairs system has developed over the years to include a variety of government ministries and governmental, parliamentary and public bodies tasked with shaping foreign policy, representing the state in the international arena, and managing its relations with other countries and international organizations. Its three lead agencies are the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Prime Minister's Office, and the National Security Council (NSC) under the purview of the Prime Minister's Office. In addition, dozens of government ministries and other official agencies operate in the international arena.³⁴

At the parliamentary level, the body that coordinates foreign policy issues is the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, tasked with "supervision and control over the country's foreign policy, its armed forces and its security".³⁵ Several subcommittees operate under the full committee, most focusing on various aspects of security. One is the subcommittee on foreign affairs and information.

Israel's history as a country surrounded by enemies shaped the main focus of its foreign policy on security issues and the defense of the country's borders. In most bodies responsible for shaping foreign policy, there is an inherent connection between foreign affairs and security. Such is the case with the National Security Council, the Political-Security Cabinet, and the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee. This automatic link affects the staffing of senior positions in these bodies and the inclusion of women in the decision-making centers of the foreign affairs system.

Israel was among the first countries to announce the adoption of UNSC Resolution 1325, citing the need to integrate international norms into domestic legislation. In 2005, the Knesset passed an amendment to the 1951 Women's Rights Law that requires the representation of women in public committees and national policy-making teams. The amendment was intended to create public awareness of women's roles in peace processes as defined in Resolution 1325, mandating "appropriate" representation of women from

³² See, for example, Scheyer, Victoria, and Marina Kumskova. (2019). "[Feminist Foreign Policy](#)." *Journal of International Affairs* 72.2: 57-76.

³³ Thompson, Patel, Kripke, and O'Donnell, "[Toward a Feminist Foreign Policy in the United States](#)." *Washington, DC: International Center for Research on Women*. (Retrieved June 16, 2021)

³⁴ The State Comptroller's annual [audit](#) (70b) for 2019 found that the foreign affairs system was too decentralized, involving many ministries, agencies and other official bodies that make it unwieldy, lead to overlaps and undermines its effectiveness.

³⁵ See [Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee](#) website.

various population groups in political negotiating processes.³⁶ However, the amendment was not implemented, and women's organizations continued to vent their disappointment and exert public pressure on the government. In December 2014, the government decided to establish a team to formulate a government action plan for implementation of Resolution 1325.³⁷ In its decision, the government (again) declared its commitment to the promotion and integration of women in public service and to preventing the exclusion of women in the public sphere, describing the purpose of the decision as:

*" To strive for gender equality in all areas of life and to implement gender thinking in government action, including in planning, budgeting and policy-making processes." The means for promoting gender equality, according to this resolution, is to implement gender thinking, which means "recognizing the different needs of women and men and the different effects that policies may have on them, and the development of answers adapted to these needs."*³⁸

In October 2020, the government adopted another related decision (No. 454), sponsored by the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women, requiring increased women's representation in senior government staff positions. With the goal of achieving gender equality, the resolution called for 50% of senior positions to be staffed by women. Following this decision, the Civil Service Commission published new guidelines instructing government ministries to use dedicated job recruitment tools to increase the percentage of women among senior staff.³⁹

However, the many amendments, decisions, and statements over the years have not been reflected in practice, not even in the adoption of UN Resolution 1325 on the inclusion of women and integration of a gender perspective in peace negotiation processes. Although academic literature and historical experience show that the inclusion of women in these processes enhances prospects of reaching agreements and ensuring their stability,⁴⁰ only 5% of the Israeli negotiating team members in successive rounds of peace talks with the Palestinians over the years were women, most of them in junior positions. One notable exception was Tzipi Livni, who led negotiations with the Palestinians in 2007-2008 as foreign

³⁶ See for example, Aharoni, Sarai (2015). "[Women, Peace and Security: Resolution 1325 of the Security Council in the Israeli Context](#)," policy paper within the series on Advancing Women in the Public Arena, Van Leer Institute (Hebrew); Kahana-Dagan, Merav (2020). "[Women, Peace and Security, declarations and actions](#)," Mitvim Institute opinion article (Hebrew).

³⁷ Aharoni, Sarai (2015). "[Women, Peace and Security: Resolution 1325 of the Security Council in the Israeli Context](#)," policy paper within the series on Advancing Women in the Public Arena, Van Leer Institute (Hebrew)

³⁸ See [government resolution 2331](#) of December 14, 2014, on promoting gender equality and assimilating gender thinking. Prime Minister's Office website (Hebrew).

³⁹ See "[Gender Equality in the Civil Service 2021](#)," Civil Service Commission website (Hebrew).

⁴⁰ Levinas, Shiri. "[Women's Peace Organizations in Formal Peace Processes: Benefits of Partnership, Price of Exclusion](#)." Mitvim, 2022.

minister.⁴¹ In fact, the militaristic concept that underpins Israel's existence since its founding has resulted in a leading and key role for the security establishment in peace affairs, as well.

Women were conspicuously absent from the Netanyahu government's negotiations with Arab states on the Abraham Accords, and the only women photographed at the 2020 White House signing ceremony between Israel, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates were "the wives of" - Melania Trump and Sarah Netanyahu. Moreover, not only was a gender perspective not taken into account in the historic agreements, an emphasis was placed in them on the importance of religion, potentially bolstering conservative trends and signaling a regression in the status of women.⁴² Shiri Levinas even points out that naming the agreements after Abraham, the shared father of Muslims and Jews, reinforces patriarchal concepts.⁴³ However, in September 2021, a year after the signing, the countries of the Abraham Accords (Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Morocco) presented a joint initiative at the United Nations emphasizing the importance of integrating women in peace processes and in the prevention of violent conflicts, and urging the integration of women in diplomacy and peace processes based on resolution 1325.⁴⁴

But there is also some good news. At the October 2022 signing of Israel's maritime border agreement with Lebanon, half the members of the team that led the contacts and drafted the agreements were women. This is a telling example not only of the influence that civil society organizations - in this case, especially the Deborah Forum - wield on decision makers, but also of the political and public establishment's ability to lead a conceptual and practical change in increasing the representation and visibility of women in key positions in decision-making centers, as well as the success and effectiveness of such a combination.

The Bennett-Lapid government included in its basic guidelines a short and concise reference to the subject under discussion: "The government will work for full social equality between women and men." A statement of intent is very important, although it was relegated to Article 30 (out of 33).⁴⁵ In addition, the coalition agreement between the Labor Party and Yesh Atid called for the establishment of a Ministerial Committee for Gender Equality to be headed by Labor Chairwoman Merav Michaeli. The agreement stipulated that the committee would coordinate government actions and implement the basic guidelines on full equality between women and men.⁴⁶ It also stipulated that the Authority on the Status of Women (in the Prime

⁴¹ Kahana-Dagan, Merav/ "[Women, Peace and Security, declarations and actions](#)." Mitvim, 2020.

⁴² Levinas, Shiri. "[Women's Peace Organizations in Formal Peace Processes: Benefits of Partnership, Price of Exclusion](#)"; Mitvim, 2022; Aharoni, Sarai B. (2020). "[No Entry: How Israeli Women Were Barred from Peacemaking](#)." *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture* 25.3/4: 70-75.

Levinas, Shiri. "[Women's Peace Organizations in Formal Peace Processes: Benefits of Partnership, Price of Exclusion](#)", Mitvim, 2022.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ [Guidelines of the 36th government](#), Knesset website (Hebrew).

⁴⁶ [Labor-Yesh Atid coalition agreement](#), Knesset website (Hebrew).

Minister's Office) would present an annual situation report and monitor compliance with the aforementioned goals.

These measures by the 36th government are important on a symbolic and declarative level, and have positioned the government as one of the few, if not the only one, to actively promote gender equality. However, as far as foreign policy is concerned, Israel, unlike many previously mentioned Western states, has not formulated a national plan for adopting a feminist foreign policy nor for the implementation of Resolution 1325.⁴⁷ Moreover, the Bennett-Lapid government avoided joining the Istanbul Convention - an international convention to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence, signed by more than 40 countries. The accession procedure was approved by Ministers of Justice Ayelet Shaked and her successor Gideon Sa'ar, but the document was not presented for government approval due to political pressure from right-wing Knesset members and conservative organizations opposed to its stipulations on the treatment of immigrants on the grounds that they undermine Israel's Jewish character. The results of the elections to the 25th Knesset, as stated in the introduction to this paper, pose worrying question marks regarding the ability - and more importantly, the desire - of the new coalition to advance such issues.⁴⁸

Gender integration into the foreign affairs system as of summer 2022

In order to analyze the representation of women engaged in the conduct of foreign policy, one must start from a broader view of gender equality in Israel. The World Economic Forum's gender gap index (as of July 2022) ranks Israel 60th out of 146 countries, lower than most liberal Western states.⁴⁹ Internal data in Israel present a slightly more optimistic picture. The 2021 gender equality report by the Civil Service Commission points to a general trend of improvement, but shows that while gender equality - and even gender majority - has been achieved in the public sector's junior management levels, the senior levels are still predominantly male.⁵⁰

The status of women in Israel is also influenced by religious and conservative trends, which shape the public and political agenda. For example, the politically influential ultra-Orthodox parties explicitly exclude women from their ranks. Bowing to religious sentiment and

⁴⁷ Aharoni, Sarai. "[No Entry: How Israeli Women Were Barred from Peacemaking](#)," *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture* 25.3/4: 70-75.

⁴⁸ Shafran-Gittleman Idit. "[What really bothers opponents of the Istanbul Convention?](#)" Israel Democracy Institute, May 18, 2022.

⁴⁹ [World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report 2022](#). The report ranks countries according to an index of four key indicators: economic participation and opportunity, education, health, and political empowerment. At the top of the table are the countries of Scandinavia, Iceland and New Zealand, and at the bottom - Afghanistan and Pakistan. Israel's position is obviously influenced by the ultra-Orthodox sector, where gender equality is very low in some of these indicators.

⁵⁰ [Gender Equality Report 2021](#). Civil Service Commission website (Hebrew).

demands, some public facilities, such as beaches, are gender segregated, as are some higher education colleges. Demands are also repeatedly made for the exclusion of women soldiers from various IDF activities out of consideration for the feelings of religious male soldiers. These social trends, coupled with the lack of separation between religion and the state and the state monopoly enjoyed by the Chief Rabbinate on marriage and other personal issues, subject women to conservative, patriarchal and religious concepts, which threaten their rights and efforts to achieve gender equality.⁵¹ Political attacks on the judicial system in recent years and calls to curb its independence may also have consequences for the status of women in Israel, and the formation of the new coalition increases concerns that these processes will be radicalized.

The government and Knesset

The Benett-Lapid government boasted a record number of women members. Nine of the 19 cabinet ministers were women, maintaining the continuous, albeit slow, increase in the number of women around the government table.⁵² The 36th government also broke a record in terms of the number of women appointed as director generals of government ministries - nine women headed nine government ministries. However, only three of the 11 members of the Political-Security Cabinet were women, and all three members of the Ministerial Foreign Service Appointments Committee were men.⁵³ On the plus side, a Ministerial Committee for Gender Equality was established in accordance with the coalition agreements among the parties constituting the 36th government, and true to its name, of the 11 members, six were women. Precedents were also set in the Prime Minister's Office regarding the representation of women. During Bennett's tenure, a woman - Shimrit Meir – became the first woman to serve as the prime minister's political advisor. His replacement in the Prime Minister's Office, Yair Lapid brought with him a strong female representation, with eight of the 11 members of his bureau being women.⁵⁴ The government set two other significant landmarks since being installed in June 2021: the Prime Minister's Office was headed for the first time by a woman, Naama Shultz, and Gali Baharv-Miara became the first woman ever appointed as Attorney General and legal advisor to the government.

⁵¹ See for example: Halperin-Kadari, Ruth. (2002). "[Religion as a shaping factor of the status of women in Israel](#)". In Yezraeli, Dafna and Tova Cohen (eds.) *The Woman in Judaism - The Challenge of Feminism in Israel*. Discussion series, Bar-Ilan University (Hebrew).

⁵² Sokol, Sam. "[Record Number of Women in New Cabinet](#)," *Haaretz*, June 15, 2021.

⁵³ [The Ministerial Committee for Appointments in the Foreign Service](#), from the website of the Prime Minister's Office. The three committee members in the current government are Lapid, Sa'ar and Troper.

⁵⁴ Eichner, Itamar, and Tova Tsimuki. "[Lapid's female beehive, and the meeting with Herzog before taking office](#)". *Ynet*, June 30, 2022 (Hebrew).

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs

The staffing of the Foreign Affairs Ministry shows a notable trend of increased women's representation in a variety of positions. Data published by Foreign Minister Lapid in the summer of 2022 on his Twitter account point to a greater number of women in senior positions compared to previous years. Among 105 heads of mission abroad, 26 are women (compared to 21 in 2021); 70 of 130 department heads are women (52 in 2021). Of 19 ministry deputy directors general, nine are women and 21 serve as division chiefs (out of 39). The tweet was headlined "Gender Parity in the Foreign Ministry", but the data indicated this was only the case in some positions. Among the heads of Israeli missions abroad, for example, only 24% are women.⁵⁵

Another important step in strengthening gender representation in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the May 2022 appointment of Ambassador Aliza Ben-Noun to head the ministry's political-strategic division, making her the first woman in that post. These processes reflect an effort by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to strengthen the integration of women in the foreign service. In late 2020, Ambassador Aviva Raz-Shechter was appointed as a special envoy for the implementation of UN Resolution 1325. At the same time, ministry Director General Alon Ushpiz issued a statement of principles on gender equality marking the 20th anniversary of Resolution 1325. This first statement of its kind by the Israeli government sector undertakes not only to prevent gender discrimination and to advance women's representation, but also to promote processes of work-life balance and the integration of parenthood with career, along with the assimilation of gender thinking in formulating the ministry's work plans, and empowering women in the international arena.⁵⁶ Women have comprised a majority in the Foreign Service cadet courses in recent years (some would argue that this trend is propelled by the erosion of wages and the decline in the status of Foreign Service personnel), but men still hold most senior ministry positions.

National Security Council (NSC)

The National Security Council, as explained at the beginning of this chapter, is a key component in Israel's conduct of foreign and security affairs, but as its name implies, it focuses mainly on security matters. As such, many of its senior positions are filled by former military officers, who are mostly men. The lack of female representation, and even more so the lack of a gender perspective, made headlines during the COVID-19 pandemic and provoked widespread public outrage when it transpired that all 23 experts on the team

⁵⁵ Foreign Minister Lapid's [Twitter account](#), June 17, 2022 (Hebrew).

⁵⁶ [Declaration of Principles on Gender Equality in the Foreign Ministry](#). Foreign Ministry website, December 2020 (Hebrew).

formed by the NSC to deal with the pandemic spread were men. Of the eight research assistants, only two were women.⁵⁷

This prompted NSC Director Meir Ben-Shabbat to appoint a public advisory committee in April 2021 to examine assimilation of gender thinking in formulating national policy recommendations. The report did focus on national strategies in emergency situations, and its conclusions, published in June 2022, apply to the general public service, including the foreign affairs system. Its main recommendation is to enshrine in legislation the adequate representation of women in decision-making centers at the national level, and to define in law a representation of at least 33 percent of women in these bodies, including a legal obligation for women to constitute at least one-third of the members of the Ministerial Committee for National Security Affairs (the Political-Security Cabinet). The report also recommended turning the Ministerial Committee on Gender Equality into a permanent committee.⁵⁸ In September 2022, the government voted to adopt the report's conclusions, and appointed a team led by the chair of the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women and the director general of the Prime Minister's Office to examine ways to implement the recommendations.⁵⁹ Hopefully, the new government will not ignore these recommendations, but given that the incoming coalition only has a 14% women's representation, rather than the report's recommended one-third, it will be difficult for the government to achieve sufficient female representation in the various government committees and the political-security cabinet. Beyond the numerical difficulty of ensuring adequate women's representation - the very motivation to promote such a reality is in doubt.

Defense establishment

Signs of increased awareness of women's representation have also been evident in recent years within the ranks of the IDF and other security-related agencies. Thus, for example, in July 2022, Brig. Gen. Naama Rosen-Grimberg was appointed to the position of military secretary to the President, becoming the first woman in that post.⁶⁰ In another development, Military Intelligence Chief Maj. Gen. (Res.) Aharon Haliwa set a goal for women to comprise 30% of lieutenant colonel ranks in the intelligence corps by the end of 2022. This announcement stemmed from a comprehensive study devoted entirely to the issue of integrating women in military units. The study, led by Brig. Gen. (Res.) Yossi Kupperwasser found that although approximately 50% of the recruits to the corps are female soldiers – their numbers decline in the higher ranks. The peak of the gap is among the senior female

⁵⁷ Eeta Prince-Gibson. "[Israel Appointed 23 Experts to Lead Its Coronavirus Exit Strategy – None Are Women](#)," *Haaretz*, May 8, 2020.

⁵⁸ "[Assimilation of gender thinking in formulating national policy recommendations in emergency situations](#)". Report of the Advisory Committee, p. 36. June 2022. Prime Minister's Office website (Hebrew).

⁵⁹ [Cabinet Secretary's announcement](#), Sept. 4, 2022. PMO website (Hebrew).

⁶⁰ Emanuel Fabian. "[In first, President appoints female officer as military secretary](#)," *Times of Israel*, July 31, 2022.

officers - where the data is "extremely disproportionate in relation to the potential", as the report states.⁶¹

In August 2022, it was even announced that for the first time two women hold senior positions in the Mossad - the head of the organization's intelligence directorate, (a position equivalent to the head of the intelligence division in the IDF), and the head of the Iran desk (the organization's main theater of operations these days). Four women currently hold positions in the senior command level of the organization (out of 18). These appointments prompted an extraordinary public statement by Mossad Director, Dedi Barnea:

"From the moment they enter the gates of the organization, there is full equality between women and men. Many women serve in all operational roles, as fighters and as operatives and integrate into the core of operational and intelligence activities with talent, professionalism and resourcefulness. The door to progress up to the highest levels of command is open to both women and men, according to their suitability and skills".⁶²

These trends of increasing the numerical representation and visibility of women at senior levels are important and significant, but are unlikely to continue in a government expected to set aside the agenda of gender equality and tolerance towards minorities. In the Knesset, too, efforts to achieve gender parity may be replaced by a worrisome reversal of this trend and distancing of the 50% representation goal. It is important to remember that numerical representation is only one element in a set of broader cultural change and practical steps that make up a comprehensive foreign policy. The three-R approach previously presented also emphasizes the protection of women's rights and the allocation of resources as essential elements of a feminist foreign policy. Increasing representation plays an important role in promoting these steps, as well as in leading processes of assimilating gender thinking in the design of foreign policy, but it should be viewed as a first - and partial - step in a much broader and more complex process.

E. Recommendation for an inclusive Israeli foreign policy

The review presented here highlights a series of historic, structural, and cultural barriers hampering Israel's adoption of an inclusive foreign policy. Its establishment in a sea of enemy states bred a strong militaristic organizational culture that spilled over into the agencies tasked with foreign and security issues and formed an inherent link between foreign and security affairs. The preference for appointing former officers (almost all of them men) to senior positions in these civilian bodies, combined with cultural perceptions that see feminism as a weakness and religious-conservative trends that exclude women from politics,

⁶¹ Tal Schneider. "[Military Intelligence target women for 33% of lieutenant colonel rank by year's end](#)," *Zman Israel*, July 17, 2022 (Hebrew).

⁶² "[For the First Time in the History of the Mossad: Two Women Serving in Key Senior Positions](#)," Press release, Prime Minister's Office, Aug. 18, 2022.

as prominently reflected in the recent elections - all of these restricted women's representation in decision-making centers and prevented the assimilation of gender thinking in political action. Now, more than ever, it is vital to introduce these issues into the public agenda and point to the benefits of adopting an inclusive foreign policy. Below are a number of possible directions of change and processes that can help promote such Israeli foreign policy.

Awareness and education

Awareness of a problem is the first step in any change process. Awareness of the gender representation gaps in the foreign affairs system and of the importance of adopting inclusive foreign policy norms, must be raised at all levels - starting with the political echelons, through senior management, and fanning out to the general public. Raising awareness is a long and arduous process, which should be carried out on two parallel levels. The first is raising the awareness of senior and junior management to the principles of feminist foreign policy and the gender representation gaps in the organization they manage. The second level is the topic's accessibility and its importance to the general public. There is a major gap between the importance of promoting gender equality and what the public thinks about the issue. Discussion of these issues remains the domain of a few who are close to the subject. The great majority of the public is unaware of the troubling representative fallacy and is indifferent to its importance. There is room to integrate the ideas of a feminist foreign policy in the education system, along with curricula that deal with gender equality.

Commitment and personal example

Along with constant educational efforts, the personal commitment of the prime minister and his ministers to these issues is of crucial importance, as was proven in the Swedish case. This should be reflected not only in the statements and promises they make, but mainly in action: the appointment of women to senior positions in the government at large, and specifically in security-related bodies and in the foreign affairs system, and the adoption of a national plan based on the assimilation of a gender perspective. This should be part of a national plan and a joint effort of government agencies (the Ministerial Committee for Gender Equality, the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women) and civil society organizations, under the active leadership of the prime minister and the minister of foreign affairs.

A change in organization culture

Promoting awareness should be accompanied by a fundamental change in organizational culture, and the adoption of a gender-sensitive organizational culture in the lead foreign policy bodies. Such moves should start from the top - from the commitment of senior officials to gender equality and their leadership of measures designed to advance this goal. In order

to lead a gender-sensitive organizational culture and to integrate gender thinking in the decision-making processes, managers at all levels need to undergo dedicated training giving them the tools to understand what a gender-sensitive organizational culture means, and how it can be promoted. Responsibility for such training could be handed to the Authority for the Advancement of the Status of Women, or to civil society organizations dedicated to the issue (such as the Deborah Forum). Such training should be mandatory and a condition for the appointment of candidates to senior management positions. Organizational changes should also include a change in hiring and promotion procedures, considering the different needs of men and women, developing intra-organizational support networks for female empowerment, and emphasizing issues such as life-work balance that will make it easier for women to compete for senior positions.

Conceptual change

Raising awareness of flaws and failures, and leading practical organizational changes should be backed by broader conceptual changes, which require a different look at accepted frameworks. The first conceptual change is the recognition that national security does not consist only of military threats, but also of a large variety of civilian threats, the most prominent of which currently are epidemics such as the Corona virus and the climate crisis. Safeguarding security interests should not be the sole prerogative of generals - expertise and experts from civilian fields also have a major role in doing so. Severing the inherent connection between foreign affairs and security is yet another essential conceptual shift. Recommendations for such a split have been raised several times in recent years by Mitvim Institute experts, and the issue remains highly relevant. As long as the lead bodies of Israel's foreign policy are the same ones leading its security strategy, and as long as the perception of security is focused on military threats, the typical profile of decision makers will be of former military officials who have moved on to the public sector. Such a path naturally excludes most women from these positions.

The idea of splitting the Political-Security Cabinet in two and creating separate Security Affairs and Foreign Affairs cabinets, or dividing the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee in two, is essential for bolstering the foreign affairs system even without regard to the issue of gender representation. If implemented, it could also be a turning point both in the representation of women and in the integration of civil and gender issues in foreign policy strategies. A change in the perception of foreign policy from one that is dictated by security interests to one that focuses on global civil challenges will expand the scope of foreign policy expertise to areas such as the economy, climate, health, education, agriculture, human rights - and result not only in an increase in the number of women among policy designers, but also in the assimilation of gender thinking.

These seemingly technical moves in the government and the Knesset of separating security from foreign policy bodies could promote this perceptual change, but must be monitored

constantly so that it does not weaken these mechanisms and does not result in women being relegated only to foreign issues and men to security ones. Along with perceptual changes regarding the shaping and implementation of foreign policy, we need a perceptual change and a reexamination of the security issue. In other words, we need to be asking what existential threats face Israel and what comprises its national security in the 21st century. Given that these threats have expanded and are no longer only military in nature (i.e., the Corona virus, the climate crisis), the traditional appointment of military officers to senior positions in civilian bodies that deal with security - as well as foreign policy - becomes irrelevant and could open doors for the integration of women in senior key positions in both bodies that deal with security, and those tasked with foreign policy.

Cultural and social change

The militaristic culture that has shaped Israel since its founding makes it difficult to promote a feminist agenda. Not only is there little sympathy and identification with feminism, feminist thinking is regarded as weak, and feminist struggles are viewed by the public with indifference, even disdain. Women are identified with peace, "soft" power, not with foreign policy and certainly not with security matters. Part of the perceptual change entails the understanding that gender thinking does not mean thinking about women, but denotes a social and cultural change that means changing priorities and thought patterns. In other words, gender thinking does not mean adopting policies led by women for women, nor does it mean setting aside security interests. Increasing women's representation in senior government, Knesset and public posts could serve as a platform for deeper cultural changes in the perception of women's standing and shatter the militaristic paradigm. The first step in promoting such a cultural change requires a declarative and symbolic change in terms of a prominent representation of women precisely in the bodies tasked with security, such as the Security-Political Cabinet, the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, the National Security Council and all the relevant committees attached to these bodies. Appointing women to senior positions in decision-making bodies on issues perceived as "masculine" (army and defense) will not weaken policy. On the contrary, it will strengthen policy making with diverse worldviews and new perspectives. Incorporating social values such as compassion, concern for the weak and protection of human rights into discussions on the security of the state is not an expression of weakness, but of strength, constituting a normative statement conducive to broader perceptual and cultural changes.

Legislation

Legislation is a central path to ensuring increased representation of women. The NSC report adopted by the Lapid government recommended legislation mandating a 33% representation of women in national-level decision-making centers. The report focused on bodies tasked with emergency situations, but its recommendations should also be expanded to include the foreign affairs system, requiring that women fill at least one third of senior

positions in its committees and decision-making bodies. As per Government Resolution 454 of October 2020 (mandating the use of job designation tools to increase the percentage of women among senior staff), the 33% target would be gradually expanded to 50%. In the same vein, should such standards be legislated to ensure women's representation in political parties? The ultra-Orthodox parties will not allow any such legislation at this time, but that does not mean that other parties should not adopt models of equal representation - even if not enshrined in legislation.

Reinforcing the rule of law and status of women

In addition to conceptual, cultural and operative promotion of inclusive foreign policy principles, a fundamental and continuous struggle for the status of women is required. The current political climate risks setting back the above-described trends of improvement in women's representation in the Knesset, in government and in the public sector in recent years. Uncompromising political and civil action is required to strengthen the rule of law and maintain liberal principles that promote gender equality and protect women's rights in the face of religious and conservative worldviews that erode equality. Protecting the justice system, which has always been an anchor in maintaining equal rights in the face of calls to weaken it, is a difficult and complex challenge. It is to be hoped that the deep concern over the intentions voiced by key members of the new coalition to undermine the justice system are dispelled.

Resource allocation for the advancement of an inclusive foreign policy

The principles of feminist foreign policy focus on three key essential components (the three R's) - representation, rights, and - resources. Perceptual, cultural and organizational change is not possible without the allocation of dedicated resources. A national plan is required that will not only enshrine in legislation increased representation, but will also allocate resources for education and training of managers and for programs to empower women and train them for senior positions in the public sector. Gender equality thinking should begin in the initial planning stages of the state budget and continue throughout the process until its approval. At the same time, resources must be allocated to provide proper budgetary support of civil society organizations that promote gender issues and work to advance women in the public sector.

Strengthening civil society

Following on from the previous section, civil society bodies such as the Deborah Forum and associations such as Kann and Itach-Maaki must be strengthened. Such organizations play a vital role in all moves to promote gender equality in general, and in the conduct of foreign policy in particular. They promote issues that the government is unable to advance for various political reasons. They have an important role in keeping the issue on the public

agenda, in supervising and monitoring the implementation of decisions, and in encouraging women to run for senior positions. The best example is the response of women's organizations to the makeup of the advisory committee appointed by the NSC on COVID-19. The fact that not a single woman was included among the 23 experts appointed to the committee reflected a glaring blind spot of the NSC heads - all men - who were unaware of the organizational failure in representing women. The ensuing public protest led by women's organizations led the NSC to establish the gender parity panel whose conclusions were recently adopted by the government. At the same time, the activity of women's organizations in promoting peace is of great importance. Although these organizations may perpetuate the concept that identifies women only with peace and soft power, their commitment to changing the public agenda is a central component of adopting a gender perspective in foreign policy decision-making. Feminist civil society will now have to devote its efforts to separate the struggle for the integration of women in decision-making centers from the political wrangling between the Knesset coalition and opposition. This is a cultural struggle by women and men striving to live in a more just and equal society, and not a partisan political issue owned by one side or another.

The role of the international community

Over the years, Israeli governments have declared their adoption of UN Resolution 1325, but have avoided operative steps to implement its principles. As discussed in the introductory chapter, an increasing number of Western countries, most notably Sweden, Canada and Germany, have adopted national feminist/inclusive foreign policy plans. While the geopolitical reality in Israel differs from theirs, the government can learn from their experience and adopt practices that those countries led in the process of assimilating an inclusive foreign policy. The key to a perceptual and cultural change, as proven in these countries, is the personal commitment of the prime minister and the minister of foreign affairs to promote the issue, both through frequent political messaging and by setting personal examples. Sweden's strategy for implementing the change included a comprehensive set of training and support mechanisms, among them gender budgeting and recruitment strategies to ensure diversity in the workforce at all levels, and a commitment of the entire foreign system to gender equality. In Germany too, the starting point for change was the commitment of the incoming foreign minister to promote the issue, which was part of the coalition agreements. The commitment of the parties to lead a fundamental change in German foreign policy is accompanied by consultation processes with the participation of civil society bodies.

The influence of the international community also comes into play in raising awareness of these issues, as manifested during German Chancellor Angela Merkel's 2018 visit to Israel, when she commented to Prime Minister Netanyahu that no women participated in her meetings with government officials and top business leaders. This comment by Merkel, and her photograph surrounded by men in suits at a meeting devoted to the issue of innovation,

prompted protests by women's organizations and politicians. A group of high-tech entrepreneurs even organized an alternative photo shoot next to a cardboard figure of Merkel at Rabin Square in central Tel Aviv. Three years later, in October 2021, on Merkel's farewell visit to Israel towards the end of her tenure, the picture was already different. All her meetings were attended by women, both members of the cabinet and senior business and technology sector representatives, alongside Prime Minister Bennett.

F. Summary

An inclusive foreign policy, representing various opinions and worldviews, strengthens the decision-making processes and shapes a more effective foreign policy consisting not only of interests but also of values and norms. In the current political situation in Israel, when the religious and conservative government aims to weaken the judicial system, women's rights and gender equality are pushed to the bottom of the government's agenda. But this civil crisis, which brings out hundreds of thousands of Israelis in demonstrations against the government, is also an opportunity for a perceptual change that places gender equality as an essential value in the fight for democracy. Even if, in the short term, the chance that this government will adopt gender principles in policymaking seems impossible, it is crucial to build an alternative for the longer term: to implement principles of inclusive foreign policy among politicians, civil servants, and public opinion, so that in the future Israel may adopt these principals. However, these processes must focus not only on numbers - how many women sit around the discussion-making table but also on the essential question of what topics are discussed at that table.