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Upgrading the Capacity of Israel's Foreign Policy Apparatus to Deal with the Climate Crisis

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Summary: The climate crisis is a formative change with far-reaching consequences for Israel's future and its strategic policies, not simply in domestic terms of quality of life and economic structure and policies, but also for its relations with the region and the world. An examination of Israel's foreign policy vis-à-vis the complex challenges presented by the climate crisis shows that Israel's foreign policy decision-makers and planners have yet to internalize the sharp change looming ahead of the country and its political-diplomatic direction in the coming decade. The existing perceptions, the sporadic action, and the limited conceptual and material resources issue demonstrate that it has yet to reach the level of a substantial strategic issue in Israel's conduct of its foreign affairs. As a result, the ministries and agencies tasked with various aspects of foreign policy operate in a decentralized and unregulated manner on international cooperation to confront climate issues.

Adapting the foreign system to the challenge of the climate crisis requires, first and foremost, a profound conceptual change. It calls for a shift from the logic of dealing with the climate issue as a "foster child" of secondary importance to core strategic issues to a new approach of climate diplomacy² that sees the climate crisis as a political strategic game changer of prime importance to foreign policy and its implementation. Dealing with the climate crisis as a political issue challenges traditional thinking about the practices shaping foreign relations and about the actors expected to lead these processes. For example, it redefines the importance of non-governmental actors – civil society organizations, the scientific-

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This paper is based, among other things, on a series of interviews with experts and senior officials from other countries and international organizations. It is also based on a February 2023 Mitvim roundtable about the role of Israel's foreign affairs system in dealing with the climate crisis. The event, which included researchers, government representatives and former ambassadors, sought to consolidate knowledge and insights from the field. Special thanks go to former Ambassador Mike Harari who greatly assisted in writing this paper, former ambassadors Danny Carmon and Danny Shek, Toby Gissel who assisted in the comparative research, Gideon Bromberg and Sharon Bengio of EcoPeace, and Johannes Uhl of the German GIZ.

² Climate diplomacy is part of an overall concept of climate political sustainability in which political and environmental issues are intertwined. See Mitvim's paper on Climate Political Sustainability: The Core of 21st Century Foreign Policy, March 2023.

technological community, and the business sector – and positions them as active participants in shaping foreign policy. More broadly, adopting climate diplomacy provides an opportunity to reexamine the relationship between the government and non-governmental sectors in shaping Israel's foreign relations as a whole.

Based on a review of the structure and activities of Israel's foreign affairs apparatus on climate issues and case studies from other countries and interstate bodies, the aim of this policy paper is to propose recommendations for conceptual and structural-systemic changes to upgrade Israel's foreign affairs apparatus handling of climate change challenges. Implementation of conceptual change in the field of climate diplomacy at the national level relies on three main components: a) anchoring and defining the role of Israel's foreign policy within the framework of Israel's national effort to confront climate change; b) a structural change in the foreign affairs system itself – defining a strategic integrating actor to deal with the international pillar of Israel's climate policy; a clear internal division of roles within the system and improvement of inter-ministerial coordination through a permanent government forum; and substantial increase of resources and managerial inputs devoted to the field within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In this context, we see the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as a national integrator in shaping Israel's climate diplomacy. c) the creation of new multi-sectoral systems of cooperation between Israel's governmental and non-governmental sectors.

A. Introduction

The climate crisis is a game-changing event for the international system and the regional and global geopolitical reality. Looking ahead, the climate crisis, as well as cooperation frameworks and scientific-technological assets, are expected to have a critical impact on alliances, foreign relations, and the strategic conduct of the international system. This is especially pertinent in regions particularly susceptible to climate change, such as the Middle East and Mediterranean Basin.

Climate change in Israel and the Middle East as a whole is a **complex and ongoing event, characterized by a high level of uncertainty.** Phenomena such as rising temperatures and sea levels, multiple extreme weather events, decreased rainfall and desertification processes all pose potential threats to life in Israel, including its security and civilian resilience, and to its neighbors in the region.

The climate crisis is expected to transform from a significant policy matter into a key issue shaping Israel's foreign relations this decade with its neighbors, partners, rivals, and enemies in the international system. Its unique character blurs political boundaries and requires a different perspective of political defeat and victory. Regional cooperation is becoming a strategic-political aspect of this change, which is not only

designed to achieve military security and build coalitions against enemies. Cooperation is also a central tool to help Israel and its neighbors deal more jointly and effectively with a

deepening crisis, and could also yield diplomatic achievements for Israel in other arenas. Due to its fateful uniqueness and potential systemic impact on all countries in the region, **the climate crisis could serve as a real game changer in Israel's long-term regional integration.** It could also provide a unique platform for breaking down barriers in the considerations of regional leaders as they recognize the long-term necessity of integrating Israel's technological and systemic assets in dealing with the climate crisis consequences. Thus, Israel's preparedness for the climate crisis – as a political event and a foreign policy issue – constitutes both a necessity for foreign policy planning and **a unique strategic opportunity** to deepen and expand Israel's integration in the surrounding regions.

To meet these challenges, Israel's foreign affairs architecture must be designed to play two complex roles. The first is to serve as **a two-way channel of learning, joint action and assistance vis-à-vis the world** in dealing with the climate crisis. This channel would play an important role in importing ideas and methods to improve Israel's ability to cope with the consequences of climate change. Second, it must leverage the climate crisis as a strategic space for strengthening Israel's foreign relations in general, and creating regional connectivity, in particular. In other words, the foreign affairs system must **seize the opportunity inherent in the climate crisis as a platform for advancing broad political goals** – in Israel's global branding, in strengthening and expanding its regional relations, and even in promoting Israeli-Palestinian peace. In this regard, its challenge is to optimally "export" Israel's unique added value to the world in dealing with climate change in order to contribute to the global effort and thereby advance Israel's standing and political goals.

The purpose of this document is to outline strategic directions and formulate concrete solutions for a comprehensive change in perception regarding the dual role of the foreign affairs architecture in leveraging the climate crisis on the one hand, and improving the national response to the climate crisis, on the other. The document focuses on two main pivots: systemic structural changes, and the types of activities required to upgrade the activity of Israel's Foreign Ministry and related agencies in the face of climate change. The document is divided into three sections: a review of Israel's current climate issue activity, a review of the activities of European and Mediterranean actors (Sweden, the EU, and Cyprus) on climate issues, and finally, a description of the required conceptual change. The latter is also translated into policy recommendations for anchoring and substantially upgrading Israel's international cooperation on climate issues. The comparative examination that we conducted enables us to examine solutions and thinking based on various case studies and determine their suitability for Israel.

B. Israel's Foreign Policy Actions with Regard to Climate Change

1. Government Ministries Engaged in International Climate Activity

Israel's foreign affairs architecture consists of varied governmental bodies, chief among them the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which is responsible for formulating goals and promoting Israel's foreign relations. However, a report by the State Comptroller³ lists 34 government ministries and agencies that maintain direct and indirect contacts in the international arena with government officials, professionals, and international organizations in accordance with government policy. The report also points to the absence of a coordinating mechanism among the various bodies and of clear demarcation in their roles and responsibilities, resulting in overlapping activity. **"Orderly mechanism, clear procedure, or regular and ongoing practice for mutual updates by government ministries and other government bodies have not been defined, making it difficult to concentrate efforts in the international arena,"** according to the government watchdog's findings.

As illustrated in the chart below,⁴ the government bodies interfacing with other countries and international organizations include the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), the Ministry of Environmental Protection, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sports, the National Security Council and more. The Comptroller's report deals with the problems afflicting a broad range of ministries and agencies tasked with implementing Israeli foreign policy as a whole, without zeroing in on any specific issue. However, the failings to which it points are highly relevant to Israel's foreign relations regarding climate activity. Each of the above-mentioned entities is authorized to maintain external relations on climate issues. However, to the extent that they even do so, their activity is decentralized and uncoordinated, making it difficult to assess its impact and effectiveness.

³ Summary of [State Comptroller's report](#) on the foreign ministry's budget crisis, May 2020 (in Hebrew)

⁴ Ibid.

Israel's foreign affairs architecture – the executive bodies representing the country in the international arena

Ministry of Foreign Affairs		National Security Council		Prime Minister's Office	
Civil Aviation Authority	National Security Council	Ministry of Finance	Israel Space Agency	Ministry of Tourism	National Cyber Directorate
"Nativ" Prime Minister's Office	Israel Innovation Authority	Israel Police	Ministry of Education	Ministry of National Security	Council for Higher Education
Ministry of Economy and Industry	Ministry of Justice	Ministry of Health	Ministry of Diaspora Affairs	Ministry of Communications	Ministry of Defense
Ministry of Aliyah and Integration	Ministry of Labor	Ministry of Regional Cooperation	Ministry of Culture and Sport	Ministry for Social Equality	Ministry of Science and Technology
IDF	Ministry of Intelligence	Ministry of Energy	Ministry of Interior	Ministry of Transport	Water Authority
	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development	Ministry of Jerusalem and Heritage	Ministry of Environmental Protection	Ministry of Strategic Affairs	

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs aspires to lead Israel's international climate cooperation on three levels:⁵ global, regional and national. On the global level, this means increasing Israeli involvement and contribution, such as better connecting hundreds of Israeli companies engaged in climate solutions to the international arena. At the regional level, it strives to expand activities in order to create regional climate resilience. At the national level, it seeks to influence domestic processes in order to meet the country's regional and global obligations. Several strategic milestones stand out in the foreign ministry's climate-related activities in recent years: the appointment of a special envoy for climate issues (2017) and the definition of climate change as one of its ten core objectives (as of 2020). As of 2023, the Ministry defines the integration of the global effort to deal with the climate crisis and its consequences as a primary core goal of Israel's national interests, with an emphasis on energy, food and water security.⁶

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not have a dedicated climate crisis unit. Instead, its Economic, Justice and Public Diplomacy departments are primarily engaged in dealing with this field within the framework of their organic activity, allocating specific resources to the subject. The Economic Department coordinates a climate innovation team, setting as its goal the allocation of 40% of its budget to climate change (as of 2023). The Foreign Ministry's Legal Bureau accompanies the various departments on international climate treaty negotiations. The ministry has also established a "Climate Change and Global Agenda" taskforce with responsibility for global agenda and climate activities, such as holding the 2021 Earth Day.⁷ Its objective is to turn the State of Israel into a leading player in this field and promote Israeli green technologies. The ministry's Public Diplomacy Division also deals with climate issues, briefing Israeli missions abroad on related matters and providing them with information ahead of important international climate change events.

In terms of its overall activity, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is increasingly engaged in climate activity: a) introducing climate-related contents in its cadet training; b) compiling a glossary of climate terms (September 2022) that was distributed to all missions and ministry personnel; c) a project dubbed "Green Foreign Ministry" harnessing its various departments and staff in order to enhance the sustainability of its headquarters and representatives. A plan has also been formulated to increase the solar panels throughout the ministry offices in Jerusalem. A "zero emissions" plan was also formulated in order for the ministry to play a lead role, along with the Accountant General of the Ministry of Finance, in the government's zero emissions by 2030 goal.

The ministry's headquarters and its diplomatic missions abroad are also tasked with representing the country at a large number of annual climate change activities, such as Earth

⁵ From remarks by Ambassador Gideon Bachar, Special Envoy for Climate and Sustainability, at a Mitvim Institute roundtable in February 2023

⁶ "[Main 2023 work plans for government ministries and auxiliary units](#)", from the government's website, June 2023 (in Hebrew)

⁷ "[Earth Day at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#)", from ministry's website, April 2021 (in Hebrew)

Day, in the various communities and countries where they operate. In a significant upgrading of its climate-related focus, a first-of-its-kind Israeli government pavilion presented Israeli climate innovations and solutions at the 2022 UN climate conference in Sharm el-Sheikh (COP27). The project was led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the participation of eight government ministries, including the ministries of environmental protection, energy and agriculture.

Other key government actors engaged in international climate change cooperation

Ministry of Environmental Protection. The ministry's international activity is carried out by its International Relations Division located within its Planning and Strategy Cluster. It is tasked with coordinating activity on global environmental issues and multilateral agreements with foreign governments and organizations, including regional cooperation with neighboring countries on cross-border environmental issues and environmental diplomacy. The Barcelona Convention on protection of the Mediterranean is illustrative of the ministry's responsibility for foreign issues and multilateral cooperation. The convention contains various protocols to which Israel is a signatory, such as the movement of ships and goods, waste treatment, and more. Professional representatives from the Ministry of Environmental Protection travel to conferences organized by the Barcelona Convention, contributing their knowledge on relevant issues, mainly desalination and water management. Thus, dedicated environmental protection ministry officials manage Israel's relations with the convention's central secretariat, sending expert representatives to its meetings.⁸

Ministry of Energy and Infrastructure. The Ministry of Energy has a significant role in all matters related to Israel's energy security. It is responsible for leading policy, legislation and regulation in the field of energy conservation, encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship, diversifying energy sources, and more. Its activity also includes promoting regulation and construction of renewable energy infrastructure, although Israel is still behind in terms of energy utilization of existing resources in Israel.⁹

Although it does not have a dedicated foreign affairs arm, the ministry is active in international agreements, such as the 2021 Blue Green Prosperity agreement, a joint Israeli-Jordanian-Emirati venture under which the UAE will finance the construction of green energy facilities in Jordan.¹⁰ Power generated from these facilities will be exported to Israel, which, in return, will build a new desalination plant and export the water to Jordan. The Israeli side of the project was led by the energy ministry (then-Energy Minister Karine Elharar

⁸ The information on Israel's participation in the Barcelona Convention is based on interviews with officials from the Ministry of Environmental Protection, including Adam Shlimtzik, head of the International Relations Division.

⁹ Shani Ashkenazi, Calcalist. "[Even Gaza is more advanced than us in renewable energy](#)", April 13, 2023 (in Hebrew)

¹⁰ [Israel, Jordan to Partner in Water for Energy Deal](#), Reuters, Nov. 22, 2021)

represented Israel at the signing ceremony).¹¹ The agreement is just one example of the ministry's significant role in harnessing Israel's energy resources and leveraging them for regional cooperation, including the export of natural gas discovered in its economic waters to its neighbors.

The ministry is also pushing ahead with a project for the construction of a submarine electric cable connecting Israel to Cyprus and from there to Europe (the Great Sea Interconnector).¹² The initiative, launched in 2020, is intended for electricity produced mostly by renewable energy. Plans also call for connecting the Israeli electricity system to the Cypriot and Greek grids and from there to the European one. In May 2023, the Ministry of Energy published a strategy for integrating hydrogen in the Israeli energy market with a view to using natural gas pipelines to position Israel as a partner in transporting hydrogen from the Middle East to Europe.¹³

Ministry of Regional Cooperation. As its name implies, the ministry has been working in recent years on regional initiatives designed to help improve the quality of the environment in general, and to confront the climate crisis, in particular. For example, its representatives took part in the UN climate conference held in Sharm el-Sheikh (COP27) in 2022, participated in promoting a project to rehabilitate and purify the Lower Jordan River basin together with other government ministries and bodies, and supported a regional biological control project. The ministry is in contact with many actors, including local authorities in Israel, civil society organizations and government ministries in a bid to harness their participation in regional cooperation on climate change and environmental protection.

National Security agencies. The security community, which includes the Ministry of Defense, the National Security Council (NSC), the IDF, and other security agencies, constitutes another component of Israel's foreign affairs architecture. Analyzing the threats and understanding the strategic implications of climate change for Israel are topics of increasing focus by Israel's security and intelligence community. The defense establishment perceives the consequences of the climate crisis as threat multipliers both in the national and human security dimensions for Israeli citizens in climate emergencies. It therefore addresses the issue in three main contexts: its impact on the threat posed by the regional system, its impact on operational capability, and preparations for assisting the civilian population in climate catastrophe scenarios.

On the structural level, two developments attest to the defense establishment's increasing preparations to confront the climate crisis - the establishment of the Gazit Institute under the IDF's Military Intelligence Research Division, and the National Security Council's decision to define the climate crisis as a threat to Israel's national security (as of 2022) and to assign a

¹¹ The agreement grew out of the [Green Blue Deal](#) initiative by EcoPeace, a civil society organization that works for peace through environmental cooperation.

¹² [Joint press release of the Ministers of Energy of Cyprus and Israel](#), March 24, 2024

¹³ [Israel Hydrogen Strategy](#), ministry website

head of field to the issue. The Gazit Research Institute was established in partnership with Rafael Advanced Defense Systems and includes multi-disciplinary researchers in the fields of economics, international affairs, society, psychology, and the climate crisis. The institute is tasked with researching complex climate change problems and provide practical solutions.¹⁴ Israel's National Security Assessment has devoted extensive attention to the climate crisis in its recent annual reports.

As noted in the State Comptroller's report, more than 30 different government bodies deal in some form or another with the external aspects of climate crisis issues, but this paper addresses those that by definition maintain close ties with the international system and therefore participate in shaping Israel's climate diplomacy.

2. Cross-Ministerial Climate Diplomacy Cooperation

As noted above, the division of roles and powers among the various government ministries engaged in international climate cooperation is unclear and has not been defined in an orderly manner. There is no permanent inter-ministerial forum for discussing international cooperation on the climate crisis, and its goals (political and environmental-national). However, the increasing global engagement with the issue and the need to provide responses to the changing reality have led in recent years to the establishment of a number of inter-ministerial frameworks to provide practical solutions to specific issues on the agenda. The COP27 meeting, for example, as an important international event combining diplomatic content with environmental-scientific issues, contributed to developing an inter-ministerial dialogue to coordinate climate diplomacy. It is important to emphasize, however, that more often than not, these frameworks are initiatives by the professional echelon in the various ministries, rather than the product of strategic thinking or an organized division of labor.

Among the leading interministerial initiatives in recent years in the field of climate diplomacy are the recently established climate negotiations team (2023) to formulate Israel's positions ahead of the Bonn Climate Change Conference (June 2024), which included representatives from the ministries of foreign affairs, environmental protection, energy, finance, agriculture, and the Bank of Israel; a joint interministerial team to discuss sea level rise and its implications; and a similar team to promote the Blue Green Prosperity project with the UAE for Israel to purchase green electricity from Jordan and sell it water in return.

Nevertheless, there is currently no strategic think tank dealing with the division of labor between the various ministries to promote international cooperation. Even more lacking is staff work to define the political goals of cooperation in this field. The absence of a permanent forum creates inconsistencies – both in terms of long-term planning and implementation of government decisions to promote international climate cooperation. The

¹⁴ [Gazit Institute website](#)

lack of an inter-ministerial integrating body at the implementation level is evident in the uncertainty regarding the future implementation of projects that have already passed the planning stage, such as the rehabilitation of the Lower Jordan River or the promotion of regional initiatives. Moreover, the absence of an overall planning-implementation factor in the field of climate change makes national activity in this field vulnerable to political changes and/or personnel changes on professional levels.

3. Cross-Sectoral Climate Diplomacy Cooperation

As with interministerial cooperation, cross-sectoral cooperation is also decentralized and not part of an official body or regulated policy. International events such as the UN climate conferences of recent years in Glasgow and Sharm el-Sheikh, as well as various exhibitions such as Expo 2020 held in Dubai, contributed to promoting cooperation among government ministries, the business sector and other bodies. For example, knowledge and experience in climate and biodiversity were presented in the Israeli pavilion at Expo 2020, with the cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Environmental Protection, the Jewish National Fund, and the Nature and Parks Authority. The exhibition also featured the Desertech Initiative – an Israeli community consisting of representatives from diverse sectors trying to create solutions for sustainable living in an arid climate. This community, which is a joint initiative of the Merage Foundation Israel, the Israel Innovation Institute, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Ben-Gurion University, is based on academic and applied research that takes place at Ben Gurion University, regional research and development centers, leading start-ups, corporations and public organizations in the fields of sustainable agriculture, energy, water and infrastructure.

Despite these inspiring examples, a look at inter-sectoral climate cooperation in Israel points to significant obstacles preventing broader and more productive activity. A special report by the Israel Democracy Institute¹⁵ details significant regulatory, financial, and training obstacles between climate entrepreneurs and government ministries, and proposes the establishment of an integrated forum under the Prime Minister's Office tasked with coordinating and synchronizing the work of all relevant government ministries to provide appropriate regulatory responses to climate change. While the gaps between private entrepreneurs and the government, as the report indicates, are clear, the integration of civil society organizations and research and academic bodies into such a forum will presumably help impart knowledge and bring to the surface local, regional and environmental needs (see further details in the recommendations section of this document).

Israel's Foreign Affairs System vis-à-vis the climate crisis – strengths and challenges

Israel's foreign affairs architecture consists of many entities that act, inter alia, on the climate issues increasingly occupying a significant share of the regional and global agenda. An

¹⁵ [Climate Change Project: Israel 2050](#), Israel Democracy Institute.

analysis of their activity points to long years of professional activity ranging from partnerships in international climate treaties such as the Barcelona Convention, through regional agreements on energy and other issues, to the vision of the Negev Forum, which seeks to anchor cross-ministerial activity within the framework of a regional forum. What's more, cross-ministerial cooperation on climate issues clearly exists vis-a-vis concrete goals such as the recent UN climate conference in Sharm el-Sheikh, and participation in regional initiatives such as the Cypriot Forum. At the same time, the main gaps and challenges of Israel's foreign affairs activity vis-à-vis climate change stem, inter alia, from the lack of an orderly and anchoring mechanism framework:

- a) **Conceptual:** Absence of a clear conceptual framework or action plan defining Israel's political and/or environmental goals in promoting international cooperation on climate with international and regional systems.
- b) **Systemic:** Under-institutionalization of cross-sectoral cooperation. The limited interface between the foreign affairs system and the non-governmental communities in Israel, creates knowledge gaps and limitations in maximizing opportunities to expand regional and global cooperation. It also limits the potential of a network of international relations for use by the foreign affairs system.
- c) **Structural:** Absence of an orderly framework or guidelines regarding coordination of activity and defining the authority and role of the various entities in Israel's foreign affairs architecture for coping with climate change.

The combined impact of these deficiencies results in persistent lack of clarity regarding the scope and nature of Israel's international climate cooperation. The various ministries usually operate without a clear and regulated budgetary framework, without orderly instructions from above, and therefore depend for the most part on personal/specific and decentralized initiatives. Such decentralized activity also misses the opportunity to harness inter-sectoral activity involving private, academic, and civil sector actors in a coordinated large-scale manner, which could constitute a step up in Israel's climate-political international activity.

C. Lessons from Other Countries and International Organizations

This chapter presents examples from three foreign political and inter-political systems: Sweden, Cyprus, and the European Union, which focus on central concepts and structural changes (Sweden), systemic-structural aspects (Cyprus), and major activities (the European Union). These three case studies relating to the Mediterranean Basin and Europe demonstrate fundamental changes in thinking about the climate crisis as a foreign policy issue and its integration into many and varied foreign activity. These include, for example, financial investments, new cooperation frameworks, and climate diplomacy at the level of bilateral and multilateral relations. The information is based on conversations with representatives of foreign affairs systems in these countries/bodies, and presents the leading perceptions and resulting activity in the context of climate change. Although the paradigms are not necessarily similar, they are based on the strengths and capabilities of

each country, as well as on their economic circumstances, geopolitical standing, political considerations, and more, that pose a threat or challenge in the climate context.

Sweden

The climate issue is at the core of Sweden's political-security approach. Climate change is a top priority¹⁶ and also a core objective of the current and previous Swedish government's foreign affairs architecture system.¹⁷ Sweden's foreign policy system is guided by a paradigm that sees the climate crisis as a global risk multiplier. The three main components of its climate activity – helping other countries cope with climate change, turning Sweden into a climate innovation center, and viewing the climate crisis as a national and international security threat - derive from this concept and embody it. This concept also gave rise to the 2022 appointment of Sweden's first Climate and Security Ambassador.¹⁸

Foreign assistance for coping with the consequences of the crisis. The Swedish foreign affairs agencies dealing with climate issues aim first and foremost to help other countries in need cope with natural climate change disasters. This reflects the Swedish view of climate change as a "risk multiplier", generating natural disasters that create a domino effect and result in other crises and challenges. In the Swedish view, any event that can change the circumstances of human life, such as heat waves, drought, flooding, and sea level rise are "risk multipliers" affecting human livelihoods.

Sweden as a center for climate innovation. The Foreign Affairs Ministry is also engaged in finding resources in order to turn Sweden into a center of climate innovation. Sweden aspires to become a major player in high-tech products such as battery technology and low-carbon steel manufacturing. But here, too, Sweden takes a cautious approach that sees climate change, and even its solutions, as sensitive issues: the many complex challenges to creating climate solutions can sometimes be harmful to the region in which they are implemented. Therefore, Sweden believes caution should be exercised to avoid harmful consequences of adopting climate solutions.

Climate and security. Sweden's foreign climate issue activity is guided by a concept that views climate change as potentially having a broad security-geopolitical impact on Sweden, Europe and the world. According to this view, from a geopolitical perspective, the climate crisis could lead to dangerous competition for natural resources. Thus, the Swedish Foreign Affairs Ministry works closely with relevant UN agencies and with Sweden's leading research institute, SIPRI, on a special program to study the link between climate and security. From a regional perspective, Sweden is one of the countries that has tried to restrict Russian fossil fuel exports to Europe since the start of the Russia-Ukraine war. Moreover, as a member of

¹⁶ [How will Sweden's right turn affect its foreign policy priorities?](#) Chatham House, November 2022

¹⁷ [Statement of Foreign Policy 2022, Minister for Foreign Affairs Ann Linde](#), Government of Sweden, June 2022

¹⁸ Mitvim Institute 2022 interview with Swedish Climate Ambassador Erik Widman.

the European Union, Sweden sees the 2020 Green Deal policy initiatives as a binding framework binding foreign policy and climate. Sweden believes that no single EU country can deal with the crisis alone, and the bloc must therefore deal with it together.

Cyprus

A regional climate initiative that brought together the Cypriot foreign affairs bodies engaged in climate change response. Cyprus is an interesting case study of a relatively small country that has chosen to promote its international standing by leading regional climate crisis initiatives. While as a member of the European Union it is committed to a national climate plan, it was a regional event in 2018 that led Cyprus to create a paradigm for the organized activities of its foreign affairs system on climate issues.¹⁹

In 2018, the Cyprus Institute²⁰ organized a regional climate conference for the countries of the Middle East and the Mediterranean Basin. The conference was attended by senior officials from the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), who called on Cyprus to play a central role in regional work on reducing emissions and preparing for climate change. One of the conference outcomes was the 2019 launch of the Cypriot Mediterranean and Middle East Climate Initiative ²¹ to create solutions for dealing with climate change for the benefit of all the people of the region. Implementation of the initiative was assigned to the Cyprus Institute in light of its scientific-technical expertise, and it is supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Agriculture and the Environment. The foreign affairs ministry is engaging in climate diplomacy in order to recruit all the relevant players to the initiative's forum. The professional leadership was provided by the Cyprus Institute and its head, who was also appointed by the President as a Special Envoy for Climate Affairs.

The Cypriot paradigm emphasizes that regional joint action is the national goal on climate issues, branching out from a single political actor to the dynamics of regional cooperation as a leading goal. In this context, the Foreign Affairs Ministry has become a supporting player of the Cypriot Initiative. By order of the president, new positions were created, and the foreign affairs ministry cooperated with the ministry of the environment and the Cypriot Institute. The Cypriot president led the effort politically, while scientific-technological leadership was provided by the Cyprus Institute – that is, by a leading civil society body. The Cypriot example thus offers an interesting model for integration of civil society into shaping regional climate diplomacy.

¹⁹ Based on an April 2023 interview with Nicolas Jarraud of the Cyprus Institute who was involved in the Cypriot government's regional initiative.

²⁰ A non-profit government-funded scientific-technological institute

²¹ Minister Tamar Zandberg at a meeting of environmental protection ministers from the region to coordinate climate change activities in Mediterranean countries: "Important and necessary cooperation to advance coping with the climate crisis", Ministry of Environmental Protection website, February 2022 (in Hebrew)

However, it is important to note that the initiative is not enshrined in national climate law, and that the Cyprus National Plan is not an organizing or authoritative document for all of Cyprus' international cooperation on climate issues, including the regional climate initiative. The initiative's lack of legislative anchoring makes it susceptible to changes in political leadership and in the leadership of the Cyprus Institute, and calls into question the political commitment to its future.

The European Union

The European Union is an interesting case study because it is neither a state nor an international organization. As an interstate bloc, it is a body with major political and economic power and its extensive climate policies are influential both within its borders and beyond. The policies range from regulation that obliges all member states to issue²² national plans for dealing with the climate crisis, to formulation of the European Green Deal²³ as the basis for climate change action with a view to becoming the world's leading player on zero emissions and climate crisis solutions. In terms of foreign affairs (beyond its borders), the EU channels its activity into two main directions: exercising its political weight, and exercising its economic weight in promoting climate diplomacy.²⁴

Interstate negotiations: The European Commission is the lead EU body on climate diplomacy. The Commission sends negotiating teams to the various UN climate conferences, supported by climate experts on relevant agenda items. Thus, the Commission is responsible for climate negotiations and diplomacy on behalf of all EU countries.

Guidelines and training for member states: Among its many functions, the Green Deal also provides guiding principles for ambassadors of member states on how to act and what goals to pursue. Thus, even in the absence of an EU climate ambassador, member states are coordinated on climate foreign policy.

Emphasis on foreign investment in climate issues: The Green Deal directs that at least 35% of EU investment outside its borders is channeled toward climate change response.

Establishing a system for joint monitoring of carbon trade as a successful regulatory model: One of the EU's most effective and successful programs in the foreign policy context is its carbon trading policy. In addition to the emissions trading system within the EU, the bloc established the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)²⁵ in order to coordinate emissions with its trading partners. The mechanism is designed to deal with so-called 'carbon leakage' that occurs when EU-based companies move carbon-intensive production abroad to countries where less stringent climate policies are in place than in the EU, or when

²² [National energy and climate plans \(NECPs\)](#), European Commission Website

²³ [The European Green Deal](#), European Commission website

²⁴ Based, inter-alia, on Mitvim's interview with the policy advisor of the EU's Directorate for Climate Action.

²⁵ [Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism](#), European Commission website.

EU products are replaced by more carbon-intensive imports. The system is designed to ensure that these products do not exceed the bloc's emissions quota even in countries where emissions regulation is lower than that of the EU (or non-existent). In so doing, the EU ensures that the cap is maintained within its borders and at the same time encourages cleaner industrial exports in countries that are not bloc members. The EU also helps various countries establish carbon trading systems.

Insights from the Comparative Analysis

Diverse perceptions and structures, and reliance on relative advantages for formulating strategy and planning activities. The above-discussed examples demonstrate that foreign policy on climate change is derived from each country's climate goals and political makeup, and therefore the structure of foreign system climate activity differs. Also shown is that the perception of foreign affairs differs between countries: there is no single leading concept, and each country derives /relies its own from a prominent event (such as the establishment of the Cypriot initiative) or an acute security need (regional and energetic, in the Swedish case). But despite the differences and diversity in structure and perceptions, the comparison shows how the strategy of each country's foreign affairs system on climate change derives from its relative advantage and serves as a guideline and tool for its activities and goals (the Cypriot regional initiative, the Swedish emphasis on climate technology assets, the EU's use of its political and economic weight).

The comparisons also lead to the conclusion that **in the absence of legislative, institutional or regulatory anchoring, continuity of climate action cannot be guaranteed**. When the work and climate activity of the foreign system is not anchored in binding documents, as in the Cypriot case, the continuity of initiatives depends on changing political and personal motivations.

Integration of non-governmental actors in shaping climate foreign policy. The Swedish and Cypriot case studies highlight the important role of research bodies and institutes in foreign policy related to climate issues. These bodies provide a dual advantage: they back government actions on the basis of their scientific and research knowledge, and can also bring professional colleagues from other countries to the table in order to achieve deep ongoing bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

International potential of climate leadership. Countries' size and geopolitical status certainly impact the scope of resources and pressure they can exert in the international arena to advance climate goals. However, the Swedish example, and especially the Cypriot one, demonstrates that gaining a leading position to promote climate diplomacy and regional cooperation can serve as a basis for strengthening the international standing of relatively small countries, and upgrading their assets in the eyes of regional and global partners.

D. Conceptual Change

1. New concept: Integrating the climate crisis as a core issue in planning and managing Israel's foreign relations

Climate change is an ongoing and complex event, with varying degrees of uncertainty in the near and long term. It blurs political boundaries and requires a different kind of view of political defeat and victory.²⁶ The political engagement with the climate crisis issue is intended to deal with common threats through cooperation. Israel, like all its neighbors, is at high risk of rapid temperature increases, sea level rise, multiple extreme weather events, decreased rainfall and desertification processes. Despite its small size, Israel's advanced scientific and technological achievements offer hope of possible solutions to this complex issue. At the same time, the climate crisis also presents a unique diplomatic opportunity for Israel's integration in the region, with an emphasis on deepening existing ties and establishing new ones with countries with which it does not have diplomatic relations.

The integration of these factors requires a change in national perception regarding the activity of Israel's foreign affairs architecture in the face of climate change. As usual in Israel's handling of new systemic variables, the first signs of a national change in strategic thinking about the climate crisis emerged from the Israeli defense establishment. As noted above, the climate crisis as defining a new threat or a threat multiplier is resulting in new assessments of countries' capabilities and action plans. However, regional cooperation on climate is a strategic-political issue that transcends boundaries of national security or threat scenarios. Dealing jointly and more effectively with a deep and ongoing crisis is a strategic goal for Israel and its neighbors from which far-reaching political changes can emerge. Embedding the perception of climate change as a strategic issue requires consideration of climate angles in all strategic foreign policy decision-making, including cabinet decisions and strategic planning processes.

The new strategic concept of climate diplomacy begins with anchoring and regulating the national goals and the sphere of the foreign ministry's climate issue activity. In order to upgrade its activity, a clear definition is required of the roles of each government ministry within the foreign affairs architecture on dealing with the climate crisis. This would go a long way to harnessing Israel's entire foreign apparatus vis-à-vis its political-climate goals. The most necessary framework in this regard is Israel's climate law. The draft climate law,²⁷ recently approved by the Ministerial Committee on Legislation ahead of its Knesset approval process, constitutes an important milestone in Israel's response to climate change. However, it lacks regional and global contexts, and fails to address the role of the foreign affairs architecture in realizing climate goals, such as reducing emissions and preparing for

²⁶ ["Political Climate Sustainability: The Core of 21st Century Foreign Policy"](#), Bar Rapaport, Mitvim Institute.

²⁷ [Climate Bill draft](#), Ministry of Environmental Protection, September 2023

crisis risks.²⁸ As demonstrated in Chapter 2 (above), the prospects of climate initiatives are dimmed when they are not enshrined in law.

The Foreign Affairs Ministry as a critical channel for consolidating regional cooperation. The proposed conceptual change imposes a critical role on Israel's foreign affairs architecture in linking domestic climate-related developments with those occurring in the international arena. Foreign ministry representatives and embassies constitute a strategic channel for the flow of information into and out of Israel on climate issues. Another no less important role for the foreign affairs system and the foreign affairs ministry in particular is establishing, consolidating, strengthening and preserving Israel's foreign relations around this issue, which opens up a new and creative space for political cooperation. The foreign ministry must spearhead efforts to identify areas and issues for regional climate cooperation (such as initiatives to reduce emissions, connection of electricity grids, cross-border parks for conservation purposes, shared resources, joint emergency response systems, etc.), the results of which could also enhance Israel's handling of the climate threat. Along with external cooperation, the foreign affairs system also plays a role in domestic aspects. In order to emphasize Israel's relative advantage in terms of regional cooperation, in particular, and globally in general, all the entities that can contribute to such collaborations must be harnessed. These range from technology companies to civil society organizations that should work in a coordinated manner that emphasizes the relative advantage of each sector and player in the system.

At the organizational level, the new approach is based on three systemic changes. a) a change in the foreign affairs system's priorities to increase the allocation of resources and establish new infrastructure for dealing with climate change (with an emphasis on the foreign ministry); b) a significant upgrade of interministerial cooperation and coordination, including the appointment of a national integrator for foreign activity on the climate crisis; c) a reexamination of the relationship between the government system and the scientific-technological community, the business sector and civil society active in this field. Creating such interfaces will enable these non-governmental actors to take an active role in shaping Israel's climate diplomacy.

2. Recommended Action

Implementing the concept of climate diplomacy at the national level

Legislative anchoring of international cooperation in a national climate law. Climate change is a strategic issue for Israel and therefore also for its foreign affairs architecture. The challenge it poses requires orderly, coordinated, and legally enshrined activity in a manner that ensures continuity and cohesion in the wake of personnel or political change.

²⁸ "In order to benefit the environment, the Israeli climate law needs regional attention", Einat Elazari Mitvim Institute, December 2022 (in Hebrew)

Therefore, action should be taken to anchor regional cooperation in Israel's draft climate law, and to require each government ministry to formulate an assessment of risks and opportunities not only internal, national, but also international. The roles of the foreign affairs and environmental protection ministries and of other entities in promoting Israel's international cooperation on climate change must also be defined in law.

Establishing an inter-ministerial steering committee for international cooperation on climate issues as an integrator of national efforts in the field. As noted, climate change is an ongoing event characterized by great uncertainty and a changing reality – physical, civil/demographic, geopolitical, and political. Professional responses to these challenges require flexibility and navigational adjustments, as well as speed and extensive professional capabilities. Therefore, a permanent interministerial steering committee should be established for climate crisis cooperation. It should include all government entities constituting Israel's foreign affairs architecture, among them the ministries of foreign affairs, environmental protection, defense, economy and trade, and the National Security Council, all operating under an appointed government coordinator.²⁹

The steering committee will act as an independent coordinator of national efforts in the field of international cooperation on climate issues, and handle three main tasks: a) building and regularly updating a permanent plan to define Israel's national goals in promoting international climate cooperation; b) planning and coordinating all ministerial activities and strategic measures on these issues in the global and regional arenas, including the clear designation of the responsible ministry for each channel of activity; c) monitoring the implementation of decisions – both of joint projects with international and regional players, and of regulatory domestic commitments. The head of the committee – the national integrator – must be provided with appropriate executive powers and represent the decisions of the steering committee to the decision-making echelon. The steering committee should also be integrated into every strategic planning process regarding security and foreign relations, and given responsibility for regularly integrating climate perspectives in cabinet deliberations, with an emphasis on strategic decision-making regarding Israel's foreign affairs.

Designing a concept and infrastructure to address the climate crisis as a political foreign ministry event

Promoting staff work at the ministry of foreign affairs to define Israel's political goals in promoting climate cooperation. The conduct of Israel's foreign affairs system in the field of climate change is based on general goals and temporary opportunities. Clear planning work on this issue will analyze the main arenas and political objectives of climate

²⁹ The September 2022 [Negev Forum decision](#) is a relevant example of anchoring interministerial climate cooperation and the foreign ministry's role as leading and coordinating such a mechanism.

diplomacy, focusing on the climate crisis' unique potential as a game-changer for Israel's integration into strategic spaces. Prominent examples of political objectives that correspond with the unique nature of climate diplomacy include the creation of primary interfaces with Arab states that do not maintain diplomatic relations with Israel, increasing public support for the normalization process through contact with human needs in the countries of the Abraham Accords, and promoting Israeli-Palestinian peace.

Establishing a climate diplomacy department in the foreign affairs ministry. Various divisions and departments in the foreign ministry currently deal with international climate issues. The standing of this issue in the foreign ministry's activities has improved with the appointment of a special envoy on climate. However, the establishment of a defined unit serving as a professional knowledge center is essential in order for the subject to receive optimal treatment, utilization of political opportunities, and improvement of the learning process from developments in the global system. Due to the multidimensional nature of the issue and the strategic implications of the climate crisis on the core of Israel's political activity, that division should logically be directly subordinate to the foreign ministry's political-strategic division.

Another option is to subordinate it directly as an independent division to the director general of the foreign ministry or to the head of the ministry's political-strategic division. A multilateral cooperation department should be formed within this division to identify and initiate opportunities for multilateral cooperation on climate issues in order to deepen Israel's international ties, with an emphasis on the regional system. We also recommend defining as a distinct goal of this division the utilization of climate cooperation as a key tool for establishing new diplomatic ties, and designating the division head as a permanent advisor on environmental affairs to the ministry's director general.

Integrating the environmental-climate perspective as a central pillar of foreign ministry activities

Appointment of climate attachés at embassies: Climate attachés should be appointed at Israeli embassies in key global climate arenas (7-8 attachés). These arenas include leading countries in the field of global climate activity (for example, Germany and UN Headquarters in New York), and countries where climate cooperation can enhance diplomatic ties (for example, in the normalization countries or in Jordan/Egypt). The climate attachés will deal with three main tasks: a) importing ideas from climate change developments around the world; b) identifying areas of potential influence and helping to emphasize Israeli equity and contribution to global efforts in the field; c) assisting Israel's representation in climate negotiations.

Training environmental diplomats: Such training requires adapting the contents of the cadet course to deal with the climate crisis and emphasizing the recruitment of staff with experience in environmental issues as part of cadet recruitment process. The training

process at the US State Department's Office of Intelligence and Research could serve as a model for such training and for creating a professional track for climate cadets qualified for environmental diplomatic positions. Their supreme importance lies in creating a professional knowledge center in Israel's strategic community of professionals who can combine diplomatic expertise with scientific-technological knowledge.

Foreign aid on climate issues: This should be considered as a unique dimension of the ministry's foreign aid department, Mashav. Climate assistance should be introduced as a new and wide-ranging layer of Mashav's activity, in addition to the foreign aid framework that Israel provides. Cooperation could be established and/or improved in this regard with other international aid agencies (such as the German GIZ or USAID) based on a model of foreign resources combined with Israeli knowledge. Within this framework, organized staff work will be carried out to define Israel's main impact goals based on a model of strategic returns and human-environmental need (the Red Sea and Horn of Africa areas are very prominent in this regard). In this context, it is worth noting that foreign aid is perceived not only as a significant factor in improving Israel's branding and influence, but also as a source of learning and monitoring problems and solutions applicable to the national arena and other foreign aid arenas.³⁰

Israel's focus on climate and advancing the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can help Israel narrow the gap between its commitment to the OECD and its foreign aid allocations. While Israel is already providing water and food aid to various countries, consideration should be given to diversifying the countries receiving aid and the areas significantly affected by climate change that will be targeted for aid grants.³¹ Foreign aid in this area is both valuable in itself and in strengthening Israel's branding in countries of diplomatic value. Moreover, foreign aid from Israel to the Global South is especially significant because these countries see Israel as a unique model of a country from the Global South managing water and food resources through technological advancement.

Building climate crisis interfaces between government and the non-governmental community

Establishing a hybrid inter-sectoral center for climate research and initiatives. The climate crisis highlights the essential importance of the business sector, the scientific community, and civil society as non-governmental actors that play a significant role in shaping Israel's climate diplomacy by virtue of their ongoing activities. In order to realize the potential inherent in these factors, both in the learning space and in the sphere of influence,

³⁰ See, for example, the June 2023 joint statement by President Herzog and US Vice President Harris on a climate initiative bringing together 30 countries to invest \$70 million in implementing advanced climate technologies in the Middle East and Africa to ensure food security.

³¹ For more information on Israel's aid and the gaps between its commitments and actual assistance, see [Official Israeli Development Aid](#), CBS website, December 2022 (in Hebrew).

they must be integrally integrated into the national government effort. This integration could assume the form of a permanent forum that brings together representatives of government ministries, private companies and civil society organizations to generate common profit. Such a forum will give the business community a relative advantage in opening new markets by harnessing the resources of government ministries and civil society organizations. It will also enhance the business community's standing in improving regulatory processes and supporting legislation. The business community, for its part, will provide the inter-sectoral forum with innovative knowledge about the rapidly developing sectors and technologies related to coping with the climate crisis. Civil society organizations will be able to use this information to form new collaborations, identify opportunities for partnerships and, no less important, update government ministries and private companies on existing needs in the field – challenges as well as opportunities.

This type of center could potentially perform diverse local, regional and global activities. These could include, for example, research collaborations with other countries and bodies in the region and around the world, holding entrepreneurial events to find climate solutions, and climate advocacy action based on climate change data from a local, regional and international perspective. Furthermore, the center could offer knowledge and training related to climate change and its opportunities for Israel to Israeli diplomats and missions around the world. As mentioned, it should regularly incorporate cross-sectoral activities with the participation of private sector, academia and civil society players in order to link diplomacy to science, innovation, business, and the community under one roof.

In this context, the next international climate conferences could provide an opportunity to consolidate and solidify coordinated leadership of civil society, business-private and government coalitions. As it did at COP27, the foreign affairs ministry must serve as a coordinator, facilitator and leader of Israel's presence. These climate conferences are an excellent opportunity to practice real time cross-sectoral work with external entities on climate issues. They also require advance preparation, which can provide an opportunity for increased cooperation among various entities as an ongoing process and not only a one-time event.

E. A Final Note

Israeli foreign policy plays significant national roles in the face of complex climate crisis challenges, chief among them leveraging the crisis into political opportunities at both the regional and national levels. Insights from case studies in other countries and organizations illustrate the importance of adapting the foreign affairs sector to the climate crisis challenges on three levels: a) a conceptual level linking Israel's strategic interests to the climate crisis; b) a systemic-structural level that assimilates and anchors the climate issue into the agenda of Israel's foreign affairs system; c) key activities derived from these conceptual and systemic changes. In this context, this document recommends deepening and regulation of cooperation among government ministries, but also between various sectors, while

positioning the ministry of foreign affairs as the party responsible for integrating such cooperation and allocating the necessary resources to these ventures. Only a revolution in systemic thought of this kind can enable the foreign ministry to deal with the threats Israel faces and exploit the enormous opportunities inherent in the climate crisis to reshape Israel's strategic policy by the end of this decade.