

Trends in Israel's Regional Foreign Policies

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This document presents key trends characterizing Israel's regional foreign policy from January to June 2024. During this period, foreign relations were shaped by an intensifying global power struggle between the Western axis, led by the U.S. and the Chinese-Russian-Iranian axis, with the war between Israel and Hamas serving as an additional arena threatening to destabilize the region beyond its borders. The ongoing campaign in Gaza saw a transition to lower-intensity fighting, international efforts to advance a hostage deal and ceasefire, and a persistent war of attrition between Israel and Iran and its proxies, primarily Hezbollah in the north. Throughout this time, Israel refrained from presenting a political vision for the post-war period, prioritized political interests over diplomatic considerations, chose to continue fighting over securing a hostage deal, and accelerated the annexation of the West Bank. Initial substantial international support for Israel at the beginning of the war gave way to growing criticism, accusations being examined in international courts in The Hague, increasing sanctions on settlers, and damage to Israel's foreign relations. Tensions between the U.S. and the Israeli government increased, Israel's relations with Turkey plunged into an unprecedented crisis, and normalization processes were frozen, reverting to being characterized primarily by security cooperation.

1. ***The world wants to end the war and implement a two-state solution within a regional arrangement, while Israel firmly avoids presenting a plan for the day after the war.*** The U.S., Europe, and regional countries are pushing to end the war and build an alternative to Hamas in Gaza in the form of an independent Palestinian state managed by a revitalized Palestinian Authority, connecting this move to a regional arrangement. They have shown willingness to mobilize for this effort. However, the Israeli government expresses strong opposition to the two-state solution, refuses to promote the Palestinian Authority as an alternative to Hamas, and avoids presenting a vision for the post-war reality. Given Israel's stance, countries

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have taken independent steps, including additional European countries recognizing the State of Palestine.

2. ***The hostage deal is stalled as Israel is unwilling to pay the requested price of ending the war, while Hamas benefits from the war's continuation and the multi-dimensional damage Israel is experiencing because of it.*** The U.S., Qatar, and Egypt are making efforts to mediate a hostage deal that would end the war and secure the hostages' release. Despite support from the Israeli public and security establishment for advancing a deal, and efforts by the hostages' families in the diplomatic arena, the Israeli government opposes a hostage deal that would end the war, prioritizing political considerations.
3. ***Israel is coming to terms with an escalating and prolonged war of attrition with Hezbollah on the northern border, placing its hopes in deterrence and diplomatic efforts by the U.S. and France to prevent a full-scale war.*** Israel and Hezbollah continued to exchange fire, trying to understand the new rules of engagement and identify each side's red lines to avoid escalating to a general campaign. Israel is cooperating with efforts by U.S. envoy Hochstein and French President Macron to achieve diplomatic solutions to the fighting in the north, while simultaneously threatening to launch a large-scale military operation.
4. ***Under the cover of the war in Gaza, Israel is deepening the annexation of the West Bank and working to weaken the Palestinian Authority.*** The Israeli government promoted Jewish settlement in the West Bank, supported the expulsion of Palestinian communities, fully backed settler violence, and transferred civil administration of the West Bank from the military to the Ministry of Defense. Simultaneously, the government acted to weaken the Palestinian Authority, particularly in the economic sphere, by stopping fund transfers. Sporadic decisions by the U.S. administration and other countries to impose sanctions on several prominent settlers and entities have not yet led to a change in Israel's conduct.
5. ***The Israeli government is trying to stretch its relationship with the U.S. administration to gain greater freedom of action, without breaking it and risking the loss of crucial diplomatic and military support.*** The U.S. used the critical aid it provides to Israel to shape Israeli behavior and prevent regional escalation. It opposed massive action in Rafah and even delayed arms shipments, demanded more humanitarian aid, and criticized Netanyahu's handling of the Gaza war and hostage deal as politically motivated. The U.S. also criticized the undermining of the Palestinian Authority and imposed sanctions on settlers for the first time. However, despite significant criticism of the Israeli government and pressure from internal opposition, the Biden administration and the Jewish community stood by Israel. The U.S. provided Israel with armaments, assisted in deterring Hezbollah, and led regional efforts to repel Iranian attack. Meanwhile, Netanyahu and his ministers blamed the Biden administration for preventing them from achieving victory, and Netanyahu promoted another speech in the House of Representatives with Republicans in an election year, against the wishes of the incumbent President, who had invited him to a meeting at the White House.

6. ***The legitimacy for the war against Hamas, and even for the State of Israel itself as part of the family of nations, has been damaged and is being challenged in international courts in The Hague and in international institutions.*** International support for the war against Hamas and for Israel's right to defend itself has been replaced by sharp criticism. The war in Gaza has led Israel and its leaders to face accusations of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes in international courts in The Hague. Efforts to maintain international law, justify military action, and transfer of humanitarian aid to Gaza have been undermined by Israeli statements and actions driven by political considerations and extreme ideology, leading to increased international criticism. This was further compounded by the government's ongoing actions to weaken the Israeli judicial system, despite relying on it to deflect international criticism, and its failure to uphold the law in the war in Gaza and in the occupied territories.
7. ***Regional cooperation focuses on managing aspects of the Gaza campaign and preventing spillover to other arenas, relying on necessity and professional domains while distrust and tension persist at political levels.*** Egypt is assisting in the humanitarian effort, managing Gaza's southern border, and mediating the hostage deal; Jordan and Israel cooperated in bringing Jordanian humanitarian aid into Gaza and in repelling Iran's drone attack, despite open hostility towards Israel in Jordan; Qatar assisted in mediating the hostage deal, Morocco sent humanitarian aid to Gaza, and the UAE became the closest partner in providing humanitarian aid in Gaza, enjoying Israeli trust and cooperation that other players did not receive. The connection and cooperation were based mainly on contacts between the security and intelligence forces of the countries, while at the political level there was at least tension, and sometimes even open hostility.
8. ***The formal normalization agreements holds, but the war in Gaza has halted the expansion and deepening of the regional normalization process, and the continuation of the war challenges the regional cooperation needed to deal with Iran*** - Israel's regional relations showed resilience and were not formally severed despite the images from Gaza and the associated pressures, but their nature changed. The momentum to advance these relations was replaced by suspension and waiting. While Israel supported the Emirati effort to become dominant in the humanitarian field in Gaza, both countries lowered their profile in exposing their relations, and economic projects were not advanced. Public relations with Bahrain and Morocco entered a freeze, the multi-lateral regional frameworks that established in the normalization process were not convened, and the advancement of normalization with Saudi Arabia, which was on the agenda before the war, now depends on Israel's willingness to end the war and promote the two-state solution. On the other hand, the necessity and potential for regional cooperation were demonstrated in repelling Iran's direct attack on Israel.
9. ***Europe stands by Israel, supports advancing the two-state solution, criticizes Israel's management of the war and occupation, and seeks to play a significant role.*** Europe supported Israel in its fight against Hamas, but this support has been replaced by criticism of how the war is being conducted, concerns about violations of international law, and growing public criticism, including increasing calls for boycotts. Seeking a significant role, several European countries chose to advance recognition of a Palestinian state, supported Israel in its struggle against Iran, helped secure

funding for the Palestinian Authority, and imposed sanctions on settlers as well as on Palestinian terrorist organizations. In response, the Israeli government acted to strengthen its relations with right-wing and Euro-skeptic elements on the continent, against the backdrop of widespread changes in public attitudes and voting patterns within national institutions and the European Union.

10. ***While the crisis with Turkey deepens to new levels, Cyprus and Greece serve as a strategic rear for Israel.*** The crisis with Turkey reached new heights when for the first time trade between the countries was deeply affected by the diplomatic dispute, with Erdogan conditioning the export of goods to Israel on a ceasefire in Gaza. In response, Israel reduced its exports to Turkey, leading to a notable decline in trade relations. Greece assisted in bypassing direct trade challenges with Turkey, and Cyprus participated in international efforts, serving as a channel for transferring humanitarian aid to Gaza and supporting intelligence, diplomatic, and military efforts related to the campaign in Gaza and the northern front.

11. ***Israel disconnects from the world / the world disconnects from Israel?*** Israel has not yet become a pariah state, and most formal agreements and collaborations have been maintained despite the images from Gaza and government actions prioritizing local politics over Israel's global standing. However, Israel's credit rating plunged, external investment funds withdrew their investments, airlines suspended resuming flights to Israel, and Colombia severed diplomatic relations with Israel. Trade relations with Turkey declined, France and Canada announced arms embargoes on Israel, Israeli participation in major international exhibitions was prevented, exhibitions of Israeli artists were canceled, and academic collaborations were affected. Additionally, Israel's standing in global democracy indices deteriorated, reflecting a loss of its liberal character.