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Trends in Israel's Regional Foreign Policies

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Editors: Dr. Roee Kibrik, Dr. Orni Livny, and Lotem Buganin

This document maps the main trends underlying Israel's regional foreign policy and foreign relations from January to June 2025, a period coinciding with the first six months of Donald Trump's second term and its profound impact on the global political system and the Middle East. Israel's foreign relations during this period were also shaped by the continued war in Gaza and the government's ongoing attempt to weaken the country's judiciary and legal system. This period was marked by an intensification of the trends observed in the previous six months surveyed by Mitvim. These include continued government refusal to end the war in Gaza with a comprehensive hostage deal, consideration of Trump's Gaza population transfer plan, and promotion of West Bank annexation. The scenes of carnage and destruction in Gaza, as well as the use of humanitarian aid as a means of military pressure and intensified settler violence in the West Bank, drew unprecedented international criticism, placing Israel and Europe on a collision course, and turning Israel into a pariah state with resulting painful international boycotts. Israel, which years ago opted to pursue a military alternative to deal with Iran's nuclear program, took advantage of geopolitical circumstances to launch a war against Iran. Its impressive military capabilities, despite the unclear achievement of its strikes, rehabilitated its standing as a regional military power to be reckoned with. But it also contributed to Israel's perception as a destabilizing regional force, a view compounded by the failure to take advantage of its military successes to promote the many emerging opportunities for political breakthroughs and normalization. The war highlighted the value of Cyprus and Greece as strategic assets for Israel's home front. On its northern front, Israel tried to advance the emerging potential for stabilizing the new regimes in Lebanon and Syria. While benefitting from the massive US support of its policies and actions, including the Trump administration's risky strikes on Iran at Israel's behest, Israel paid the price of having its freedom of action curtailed by the United States and being forced to comply with American demands. administration's risky strikes on Iran at Israel's behest, Israel paid the price of having its freedom of action curtailed by the United States and being forced to comply with American demands.

1. **Guided by political considerations, the Israeli government refuses to end the war in Gaza with a comprehensive hostage deal, refrains from presenting a plan for Gaza's post-war administration, and applies pressure on the military to advance Trump's population transfer plan.** Concerted US engagement results in a January 2025 hostage release and ceasefire agreement, and the entry of humanitarian aid into Gaza. But in keeping with its backing for Trump's population transfer plan, Israel violates the ceasefire and orders the military to resume fighting. It also takes measures to move much of Gaza's population into designated zones, destroying additional residential areas and taking control of land and roads to implement its plans. Negotiations to end the war and release the hostages are suspended, and anguished families seek relief from foreign leaders. The Israeli government rejects political solutions proposed by other countries and ignores the military's position that the Gaza maneuver has exhausted itself. It is nonetheless forced to give in to US pressure, agreeing to the resumed flow of aid into Gaza in return for the May 12 release of American-Israeli hostage Idan Alexander.
2. **Israel exploits the humanitarian crisis to apply pressure on Hamas, ignoring the cost to its international standing exacted by the rising death toll in Gaza.** Israel returns to fighting in Gaza while once again halting the entry of humanitarian aid, moving thousands of Gazans to designated "safe" zones, and destroying residential quarters and the environment. Under international pressure, Israel launches an alternative aid mechanism, supported by the United States but rejected by international aid organizations. The humanitarian crisis and the images and reports emerging from Gaza of residents shot dead while seeking aid at food distribution centers generate harsh global criticism and growing calls to boycott Israel.
3. **Israel promotes annexation of the West Bank, with American backing, undeterred by ineffective international opposition.** The government pursues actions to weaken the Palestinian Authority (PA), approves the construction of thousands of building units for Israelis in the West Bank and Palestinian land transfers to Israeli control, establishes new settlements, and supports settler violence against Palestinian communities. Israel ignores or opposes plans for Gaza's future proposed by the international community. These include an Egyptian blueprint for Gaza's reconstruction that entails bolstering the PA, and a move to implement the two-state solution led by Saudi Arabia and France. Instead, Israel reinforces local Palestinian forces both in Gaza and throughout the West Bank. Meanwhile, the US administration lifts the sanctions imposed on violent settlers by the Biden administration, while sanctions imposed on violent settlers and government ministers by European countries fail to change Israeli policies.
4. **Israel implements the military alternative to dealing with the Iranian nuclear program, but uncertainty clouds the operation's achievements.**

After an ongoing dialogue with the Americans, who sought to negotiate a new nuclear agreement with the Iranians, and given the serious degradation of Iran's allies in the region, Israel launches a long-planned war to damage Iran's nuclear program and ballistic missile capabilities. The impressive capabilities it displays help Israel realize its hopes of drawing the United States into the operation in order to provide support and intelligence backing, bomb the deeply buried Fordow nuclear site, and achieve a quick end to the war. Israel's ongoing security cooperation with the countries of the region also proves itself, allaying concerns that the war with Iran and the US involvement would deteriorate into a regional war. At the same time, the long-term implications of the war remain unclear due to the ambitious addition of the Iranian regime overthrow to the goals of the war, unsupported by Israel's allies; the uncertainty regarding the damage to Iran's capabilities and its motivation to continue its nuclear project, as well as the continued skirmishes with the Houthis and the extensive damage of Iran's bombings to the Israeli home front.

5. **The Trump administration demonstrates unparalleled support for the Netanyahu government, but curtails Israel's freedom of action.** President Trump presents the Gaza population transfer plan in line with Israeli government policy, overrules the Biden administration's refusal to provide Israel with heavy munitions, helps repel Iranian missiles and, for the first time, participates in an Israeli offensive, bombing Fordow and other nuclear facilities. The Trump administration also lifts sanctions imposed by the Biden Administration on violent settlers and allows Israel freedom of action in the West Bank, helps establish and operate a new aid mechanism in Gaza, imposes punitive sanctions on the judges of the International Criminal Court in The Hague, and defends Israel at UN institutions. This cross-the-board support nonetheless takes a toll on Israel's independent stand and actions. The administration promotes the release of Idan Alexander in direct and separate negotiations with Hamas, forcing Israel to restore humanitarian aid to Gaza, change its UN vote on Ukraine, turn its planes around to end the war with Iran, and even issue a statement on behalf of Israel's Atomic Energy Commission supporting the US role in bombing Fordow. The administration also bypasses Israeli objections to lift sanctions on Syria, and erodes the IDF's qualitative advantage to which it declares its commitment by selling weapons to the countries of the region.
6. **Israel's policy in Gaza and the West Bank place its relationship with Europe on a collision course.** European states are unable to maintain a "business as usual" attitude toward Israel given their adherence to the two-state solution and international law that Israel rejects with its policies in Gaza and the West Bank. While Germany maintains a dialogue with Israel, Britain imposes sanctions on violent settlers, and France promotes an international political initiative to implement the two-state solution. Other countries, led by Spain, Ireland, Slovenia and Norway, promote measures harmful to economic and civil relations with Israel. Despite the dialogue between Israel and representatives of the European Union, the EU launches discussion of Israel's compliance with the

terms of its joint association agreement with Israel, which includes a commitment to democratic principles and international law. Eastern European countries, including Hungary, Romania and the Czech Republic, provide the Israeli government with a European refuge from criticism and sanctions.

7. **Israel proves it is a force to be reckoned with, but is becoming a toxic and isolated state.** Israel demonstrates impressive military success in multiple arenas, bolstering its arms sales and preserving its formal political relations. Nonetheless, Israel is increasingly isolated due to actions and statements by its leader in violation of international law, images and reports emanating from Gaza and the West Bank, continued regional instability resulting from the war in Gaza, as well as ongoing government attempts to advance the regime coup and subvert democratic norms. Israeli soldiers and leaders face arrest warrants in various countries, foreign airlines suspend flights to Israel due to security concerns, Israel's international credit ratings are downgraded, and the negative growth outlook remains unchanged. This striking trend with its long-term potential for significant public opinion erosion against Israel is reflected in opinion polls around the world, including in the United States, and in measures by global civil society implementing unprecedented academic, research, art, labor union and trade boycotts.
8. **Israel cooperates with the countries of the region on security matters, but its policies raise objections.** The peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan, and the normalization with the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, and Morocco endure under the US umbrella, as does security cooperation with these countries, despite Israel's refusal to end the war in Gaza. However, an Israeli campaign to undermine relations with Egypt exacerbates tensions with its neighbor, manifested in Egypt's refusal to accept a new Israeli ambassador and to send one of its own to Israel. The crisis with Jordan continues, fueled by the Gaza war and Israeli policies in the West Bank and Jerusalem. The normalization countries that sought to advance relations with Israel following the January ceasefire in Gaza once again adopt a lower profile vis-à-vis Israel. What is more, the historic opportunity to promote normalization with Saudi Arabia fails to materialize in light of Israel's continued refusal to advance the two-state solution. The countries of the region propose policies that are anathema to Israel, calling for an end to the war in Gaza and its reconstruction, for strengthening the PA and establishing a Palestinian state alongside Israel, for investment and stabilization of the Syrian regime, and for a diplomatic solution to the impasse over Iran's nuclear program.
9. **Israel is cooperating with the rebuilding of the Lebanese state and weighing its options in the Syrian arena.** Israel cooperates with the process of consolidating the new regime in Lebanon and strengthening the Lebanese army under American auspices, mainly by maintaining coordination, striking Hezbollah targets, and ensuring minimal intervention in Lebanon's other affairs. On the other hand, its policy on Syria is marked by inconsistency. On the one

hand, it issues statements critical of the new regime and even carrying out military strikes on targets within Syria, including Damascus, in defense of Syria's Druze minority. Nonetheless, after Trump meets with al-Sharaa and lifts sanctions on his country, and especially after the war with Iran, Israel seeks to advance contacts and agreements with the new regime.

10. **While the crisis with Turkey deepens, Greece and Cyprus prove themselves as a strategic home front for Israel.** Turkey continues to attack Israel and its prime minister, especially over the ongoing war in Gaza, and trade between the two countries continues to decline. Understandings between Israel and Turkey ease tensions stemming from the two countries' involvement in Syria. At the same time, the leaders of Greece and Cyprus, who had long avoided meetings with Israeli counterparts due to the war in Gaza, hold a summit meeting in March with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu while continuing their criticism of the war in the Gaza Strip. Collaboration in fighting wild fires also continues and Israeli tourism in Greece and Cyprus flourishes. The two countries also serve as a safe haven for Israelis during the war with Iran, providing refuge and transfer points for those awaiting the resumption of flights to Israel.

* Dr. Roee Kibrik is Research Director at the Mitvim Institute; Dr. Orni Livny is Mitvim's Deputy Director General; Lotem Buganim is a Mitvim Institute intern. The document is published in collaboration with the

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