Mitvim Experts' Commentary on the 2025 Foreign Policy Index

September 2025

The Mitvim Institute's 13th annual public opinion poll on Israeli foreign policy was conducted in late August 2025 by the Rafi Smith Institute in cooperation with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation*

Defenceless under the night
Our world in stupor lies;
Yet, dotted everywhere,
Ironic points of light
Flash out wherever the Just
Exchange their messages:
May I, composed like them
Of Eros and of dust,
Beleaguered by the same
Negation and despair,
Show an affirming flame.
(W.H. Auden)

Dr. Gil Murciano, CEO of the Mitvim Institute: The 2025 Foreign Policy Index conveys an important message to opposition leaders from the left through the center-right about their electorate. It reflects a deep desire to shift from the stage of fighting to one of political-diplomatic agreements. Moreover, the index sends a significant signal to centrist and center-right leaders, especially with the return of Bennett and Eisenkot to the political arena: terms such as a Palestinian state, cooperation with the Palestinian Authority, and diplomatic initiatives toward the governments of Lebanon and Syria are no longer perceived as taboo by most of their voters. The urgency of finding a way out of Israel's political deadlock is not confined to the left; it has become a central concern for much of their constituency and a meaningful starting point for renewed political-diplomatic efforts. **For Israelis outside the core right-wing camp, the choice between Sparta and Athens is clear — they seek an exit from isolation and a restart of strategic cooperation with the region, turning Israel's military gains into the foundation of a better future.**

Dr. Nimrod Goren, President and Founder of the Mitvim Institute and Executive Board Member at Diplomeds: The 2025 Mitvim Index again indicates that the Israeli public views its country's international standing, as well as the Israeli government's foreign policy performance, unfavorably. Previous surveys have also demonstrated consistent dissatisfaction with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' (MFA) ability to fulfill its mission. The Israeli foreign service should serve as a key pillar in strengthening Israel's international ties, particularly during difficult periods like the one we are experiencing. For many years this was the case, with many of Israel's past achievements credited to career diplomats. The MFA

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has been systematically weakened under Netanyahu governments — including exclusion from decision-making on major diplomatic issues and the transfer of key responsibilities to other ministries. Nevertheless, its exceptional human capital was still able to deliver diplomatic achievements when given opportunities. This was made clear during the Bennett-Lapid government of 2021-22, when the MFA's standing was upgraded and Israeli diplomats then spearheaded significant successes, including the Negev Forum and improved relations with the EU, Turkey, and Jordan. Under the current government, however, the ministry is increasingly becoming part of Israel's diplomatic problems rather than the solution. Its recurrent weakening — also exemplified by frequent turnover of ministers and directors-general, budget cuts, and the concentration of diplomatic powers in the hands of Minister of Strategic Affairs Dermer (instead of the Foreign Minister) — is one factor, but not the only one. **The growing politicization of the public sector, and the resulting weakening of the Israeli civil service, have not spared the MFA. It has become a partner in right-wing ideological agendas, such as erasing references to the Green Line (e.g., in statements on E1 construction and by holding its first-ever staff retreat in the West Bank).** Once a pioneer of digital diplomacy worldwide — including the creation of unique lines of communication with wide audiences in Arab countries — the MFA now increasingly uses social media and AI tools to mock or smear international critics of Israeli government policy. It also helps legitimize ties with far-right European parties, even though MFA officials were usually the ones warning of the dangers of such alliances. These steps contribute to the deterioration in Israel's global standing, largely caused by Israeli policies on the Palestinian issue, and may explain why some senior Israeli diplomats have recently resigned before the end of their terms. The ongoing Gaza war and the policies of the far-right pose mounting diplomatic challenges for Israel, as reflected in the Mitvim 2025 survey. Better public diplomacy — which many in Israel advocate for — will not solve this on its own. A broader policy shift is needed. But also, a strong, independent, professional foreign service can provide more effective inter-state engagement, sustain international dialogue, seize regional opportunities, and truly project Israel's diverse society outward.

Dr. Omer Zanany, Director of Mitvim's Program for the Advancement of Israeli-Palestinian Peace: Public attitudes toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remain complex, confused, and at times contradictory. On the one hand, the public now exhibits a hardened stance, saturated with negative emotions fueled by the trauma of October 7th, on Palestinian issues. Most deny Israeli responsibility for Gaza's humanitarian crisis, distrust the Palestinian Authority (fewer than 10% support it playing a governing role in Gaza during a transition), and support for annexation has grown slightly. On the other hand, the public deeply understands the direct link between judicial reform and annexation steps, 51% support international sanctions on violent settlers, and 52% support the deployment of a multinational force in Gaza (compared to only a third favoring a temporary Israeli military rule). **Most importantly — consistent with other surveys — a majority (55%) supports a regional political arrangement that would bring home the hostages in return for normalization and the gradual creation of a demilitarized Palestinian state, intended to live in peace alongside Israel.** The survey results underscore the urgent need for leadership that offers a new security narrative — one rooted in vision and decisions — for the day after the war.

Dr. Maya Sion-Tzidkiyahu, Director of Mitvim's Israel-Europe Relations Program: The European Union is facing an unprecedented reputational collapse among the Israeli public. While Israelis clearly recognize its importance to Israel and express concern about measures it may take, 67% now view the EU more as an adversary and only 14% as a friend to Israel. Since 2018, the Index has tracked this question, and the numbers have never been this negative. The explanation lies in the EU's criticism of Israel and in member states'

demands for punitive measures against Israel. The survey also found that a decisive majority of Israelis understand the EU's significant economic power: 67% are very or somewhat concerned about potential European steps against Israel, and 15% slightly concerned. The concern is justified. The EU is Israel's leading trading partner (about €45 billion in goods and €25 billion in services annually), and a key investor (€75 billion in 2023). It is also Israel's leading partner in publicly funded innovation, research, and development. Horizon Europe, the world's largest research program (€95 billion over seven years), has no substitute as it enables groundbreaking research in collaboration with leading researchers and innovators from nearly 50 countries. Exclusion from it would severely harm Israeli research and accelerate brain drain. The EU's influence on Israel's economy, jobs, livelihoods, and quality of life is immense. **The public understands well the great importance of the EU for Israel's economy, innovation, employment, and aviation. A downgrading of relations would have a profound impact on Israel's economy. What the Israeli public hardly recognizes, however, is that the EU seeks the wellbeing of the State of Israel and its citizens. Israel's security and existence are important to the EU. Yet it now finds itself in direct confrontation with the Israeli government and its policy in Gaza. After two years of intense discussions both inside and outside the negotiating rooms, the EU has been left with no tools of influence other than the economic levers and cooperative frameworks it has with Israel**. In light of the data and the state of Israel-EU relations, it is understandable — and justified — that the Israeli public is concerned about the use of these levers. We should all be concerned by the declared intention of Israel's friend, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, to bring before the Council of Foreign Ministers a proposal to revoke Israel's trade benefits with the EU, which was the main reason for Netanyahu's Super Sparta's call.

Dr. Orni Livny, Mitvim Deputy Director: A gender-based analysis of the findings highlights what has been repeatedly stated in recent years: the absence of women in decision-making tables is a fundamental and significant failure. When examining the findings, it is hard not to ask 'what if' — what if more women held key positions, what if the leadership of the state combined military tactics and security strategies with a gender-sensitive worldview. **Our surveys consistently show that women express lower support than men for military solutions, greater skepticism toward aggressive military policies, and stronger preferences for diplomatic approaches, international engagement, and political solutions.** In fact, on nearly every significant foreign policy question, women are found to be less supportive of military measures and more supportive of dialogue-based approaches. Women are also more concerned about Israel becoming a "pariah state" and place higher importance on Israel belonging to the liberal-democratic camp. These preferences explain women's relative pessimism regarding Israel: they give the government lower grades for its performance and are less optimistic that things will improve in the coming year. The thought of "what if" is indeed frustrating. But it is also what should guide us in the coming year — a year in which the Israeli political map will be reshaped, and election platforms will be formulated. The demand for gender equality must become a cross-party consensus, transcending political blocs and divisions. Anyone who cares about liberal democracy should demand of the party they support that women be included on its candidate list, and that the values the party pledges to promote also incorporate a gender perspective.

Eitan Ishai, Director of Mitvim's Middle East and North Africa Program: The findings highlight a growing gap between Israeli and the moderate Arab countries' perceptions regarding the use of military force as a foundation for regional normalization. In Israel, the "normalization through force" concept dominates — the belief that demonstrating strength and military superiority deters enemies and encourages allies to cooperate. This leads to a quarter of Israelis who believe that continued fighting in Gaza strengthens Israel's ties with

the Arab world, and nearly 40% think war with Iran has increased Arab interest in normalization with Israel. In the Arab world, however, these steps are viewed as irresponsible policies that endanger regional stability and undermine reconstruction efforts. While Arab states share interests in weakening Hamas and Hezbollah, curbing Iran, and stabilizing Syria and Lebanon, they prefer diplomacy and restraint. Israelis, by contrast, support (41%) continued strikes in Lebanon even at the cost of friction with the new government, and a majority of the public favors renewing the war with Iran, or at the very least pursuing a 'mowing the grass' policy similar to that seen in Lebanon. The result is that **Israel, once seen as a stabilizing force, is increasingly perceived by its neighbors as a source of instability — even sparking discussions of regional alliances against it. Israel's desire to be perceived as the 'regional madman' may deter adversaries, but it also alienates potential partners and casts Israel as an agent of chaos, pushing the region further away from a path of normalization and reconstruction.**

Bar Rapaport, Coordinator of Mitvim's Political-Climate Sustainability Project: Two years into the Gaza war, Israelis still fail to grasp the immediate and far-reaching consequences of their country's handling of Gaza's humanitarian crisis. 44% of Israelis say that Israel bears no responsibility for the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. This, despite the fact that Israel controls all entry of humanitarian aid into the Strip, oversees its internal movement corridors, has in recent months occupied large parts of Gaza territory, and — as an occupying power under international law — is obligated to ensure the civilian population's needs are met. Only 17% say Israel should act out of moral duty, while 32% support action only to preserve Israel's international standing. The humanitarian crisis in Gaza is the cause of Israel's severely damaged image abroad, but beyond that, the crisis devastates entire communities in Gaza, fuels hatred toward Israel, and sows the seeds of future radicalization. **In order to look ourselves in the mirror, and to promote a secure and sustainable future, Israel must take active steps to prevent a humanitarian crisis and to implement a humanitarian strategy that will build a better future for Gaza's residents.** Such a strategy should include non-Hamas civilian administration of the Strip, in cooperation with international actors, and serve as part of the foundation for a sustainable reconstruction process within the framework of a comprehensive political process that ultimately leads to a two-state solution. Against the backdrop of the racist and destructive policies advanced by the Israeli government, it is civil society actors — those who do not avert their gaze from the suffering in Gaza, who do not harden their hearts in the face of atrocities, and who mobilize to support humanitarian efforts — who embody a moral backbone and serve as a ray of light in the darkness. On the basis of the values they represent, it will be possible in the future to build a shared, solidaristic society committed to peace and hope.

Nadav Tamir, Mitvim Board Member and J-Street Israel Director: The 2025 Foreign Policy Index of the Mitvim Institute and the Rafi Smith Institute outlines a set of Israeli priorities that are more sober than the government may wish to acknowledge. Above all, **the survey paints the picture of a public that, deep down, knows what needs to be done, but awaits courageous leadership to guide it to safe shores**. With regard to the Palestinians, the picture is not as polarized as is often claimed. A majority of the public (55% of those surveyed with an opinion) supports an international package deal that would include a ceasefire, the return of hostages, the dismantling of Hamas's military capabilities, normalization with the Arab world, and the establishment of a demilitarized Palestinian state. Furthermore, 54% support cooperation with the Palestinian Authority on environmental issues. At the same time, only 12% are willing to see the Palestinian Authority as a significant actor in governing Gaza after the war; 54% oppose international recognition of a Palestinian

state; 35% support annexation of the territories; and 51% of the public do not see a moral obligation to act in order to improve the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. This reflects the tension between a desire for a comprehensive solution that would deliver both security guarantees and a demilitarized Palestinian state, and the trauma of October 7th, which continues to shape Israeli attitudes. The public's celebratory reaction to the assassination attempt in Qatar, alongside the widespread indifference to the displacement of more than a million residents of Gaza City, demonstrates that most Israelis still have not "connected the dots." The public does not grasp that a state which fires shells into a country allied with the United States and Europe, that declares its intention to "flatten" a city of one million people, and that inflicts such broad harm on a civilian population, cannot truly be part of the democratic world, nor a genuine partner to its neighbors in the region. The Israeli public wants to belong to the democratic world, and understands that it needs Europe and the Arab states. But for now, it is unclear whether it is willing to pay the price required to achieve it. For such a shift to occur, Israel must be led by different leadership — leadership of the kind exemplified by Menachem Begin, who after the trauma of the Yom Kippur War steered Israel toward peace with Egypt. When Israel's liberal camp stops being afraid and begins to lead, then - perhaps at last - the kind of leadership that can achieve this will emerge.

Reef Itzhaki, Mitvim Impact Director: The Israeli public is well aware of the diplomatic price Israel is paying, as reflected in the low score of 4.39 for its international standing, the score of 3.93 for the government's performance in foreign policy, and the fact that 57% of respondents express concern about Israel's image as a "pariah state." Yet the survey results are almost identical to last year's, a fact that demonstrates that in the eyes of the public, Israel has still not crossed the Rubicon. One might describe the public as being in a state of denial: even when it senses the erosion of Israel's standing, it does not interpret this as a sign of diplomatic collapse and fails to imagine its strategic consequences. This is also reflected in divided expectations for the future: 37% believe Israel's situation will improve, 32% fear deterioration, and 31% are convinced there will be no change at all. The data suggest that **for most of the public, sanctions and international decisions still belong to the "there" — settlements and extremist actors in the government — rather than the "here" of Israelis' daily lives inside the Green Line.** This state of denial is also evident in key strategic issues, where the public adopts the coalition's narrative that sanctifies military logic, while being aware of the diplomatic costs but viewing them as merely temporary. For example, most respondents (39%) believed that Israel's show of strength toward Iran actually increased willingness amongst Arab countries for normalization, even though relations have not in fact warmed. On another question, more than half saw military power against Iran as Israel's main strategy, despite its destabilizing effect on the region. Military strength also enjoys broad support in the Lebanese arena: half of respondents preferred continuing strikes on Hezbollah, even at the diplomatic cost of greater friction with the Lebanese government. Ultimately, the fact that the public recognizes erosion but does not interpret it as a deep crisis leaves the coalition's narrative as the dominant voice in the public sphere.

Former Ambassador Michael Harari, Mitvim Research and Policy Fellow: The survey shows that the public is divided regarding the proper policy toward Lebanon and the ceasefire agreement, as well as toward the regime of Ahmad al-Sharaa in Syria. This division reflects a degree of confusion, which is understandable given Israel's unclear policy toward both arenas. The impressive military achievement against Hezbollah was translated (partially) into a ceasefire agreement that left Israel in five positions in southern Lebanon and gave it freedom to continue military activity. The situation in Lebanon has now entered a particularly challenging stage: implementation of the Lebanese government's decision to disarm Hezbollah (and to collect weapons from Palestinian refugee camps). This challenge

requires not only continued military pressure, but also a clear diplomatic vision to support Lebanon's internal process to implement the next stage. For this, **Israel needs a policy that works in concert with the U.S. and other key actors — France, Saudi Arabia, the UAE — and strengthens the hand of the Lebanese state and society in moving forward. The same applies in the Syrian arena.** While skepticism toward the al-Sharaa regime is understandable, it does not justify Israel's "hyper-active" policy toward it. Jerusalem has not yet decided whether it prefers to see the al-Sharaa regime stabilized, Syria remaining a weakened state, or the country fragmented. It seems that the immense achievement of Iran's withdrawal from Syria has been forgotten almost instantly and inexplicably. Ankara's bid for influence in Syria — perhaps even dominance — poses a challenge to Israel, but it is not comparable to the Iranian challenge. As has happened many times before, but is particularly evident under the current government, Israel struggles to internalize the necessity of diplomatic wisdom built upon military achievements, however important and impressive those achievements may be.

Rina Bassist, Mitvim Research and Policy Fellow: The Israeli public is concerned about the deterioration of the state's international image and values Israel's belonging to the camp of liberal-democratic countries. At the same time, it ignores the Israeli government's responsibility for the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. France is ranked after Britain and Germany among the European countries most important to Israel — perhaps precisely because France has led the European campaign over the past year against the Netanyahu government policy in Gaza. These contradictory messages from the Israeli public are exactly what worry the French: the sense that in Israel, the humanitarian crisis in Gaza is largely underreported, and it is only in recent weeks that any meaningful public debate on the suffering of Gazans has begun. Not only do 44% say Israel bears no responsibility for the crisis, but 32% think Israel should act to address it only for reasons of self-interest (to improve its international standing), while just 15% say action is a moral imperative and a matter of urgency. In this sense, it appears **the Israeli public has "bought into" the Netanyahu government's narrative that there is no famine in Gaza and that Israel is doing everything it can to help Gazans. The survey results essentially confirm the claim voiced by left-wing parties in Europe and France that Israelis do not recognize their responsibility for Gaza's humanitarian situation.**

Prof. Arie Kacowicz, Mitvim Research and Policy Fellow: A review of the September 2025 Mitvim Survey on Foreign Policy leads me to two main conclusions, taking into consideration the similarity of the results to the poll of September 2024. The similarities point to a high degree of consistency and continuity in Israeli public opinion, to common sense, and to a pragmatic and sober reading of Israel's foreign policy challenges. First, most Israelis are aware of Israel's poor standing in the world due to the ongoing war, and of the government's very poor performance in managing its foreign policy (a score of 4 out of 10). Most respondents agree on the need to maintain solid relations with Jordan and Egypt, on the importance of Israel's continued belonging to the liberal-democratic camp, and on the nefarious consequences of the Gaza War for Israel's relations with moderate Arab states and with the world in general — including possible European sanctions. Second, when asked in a focused way, out of the broader context, most Jewish Israelis today oppose the establishment of a Palestinian state in the immediate term. However, in the broader context of ending the Gaza war and advancing peace in the region alongside the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, **a majority supports a regional/international solution that would eventually include establishing a demilitarized Palestinian state alongside Israel, together with peace and normalization agreements between Israel and the entire Arab world — above all Saudi Arabia.** In the immediate term, there is also broad support for deploying an international/Arab peacekeeping force to govern Gaza after the

war, even as many respondents support Israeli military control of Gaza in the aftermath of the war. How to reconcile these obvious contradictions? Here, Mitvim has an important role to play in persuading and explaining to the Israeli public the need for an Israeli-Palestinian (and broader Israeli-Arab) settlement based on a two-state solution. Most Israelis are still traumatized by the October 7 massacre, and therefore many still believe (or want to believe) that Hamas can and must be eliminated militarily. We must explain that establishing a Palestinian state alongside Israel is not a reward for terror or for Hamas, but their ultimate punishment.

Camille Moradian, Mitvim Resource Development Director: The average level of satisfaction with Israel's global standing within Israeli society is strikingly low—just 4.39 out of 10. Similarly, the average rating of the government's performance in foreign policy is even lower, at 3.93 out of 10. What is particularly revealing, however, is that when these figures are connected to survey results on attitudes toward military operations, a large portion of Israelis still support continued military action across the region. This is despite the clear evidence that Israel's declining international standing is directly linked to its military campaign and ongoing occupation. The question, then, is: where is Israeli society's red line? At what point does patriotism become indistinguishable from blind support for government policy, regardless of its costs? If global standing is a concern, why does militarism and occupation continue to be chosen over diplomacy**?** This contradiction is echoed in the responses on Iran. Half of Israelis believe Israel should continue military operations there, yet in a separate question, 40% also acknowledged that dialogue between Israel and Iran would be beneficial. Does society not realize that dialogue cannot emerge from the shadow of constant military force? The lesson is clear in the case of Saudi Arabia, where diplomacy—not war—opened doors. The "peace through strength" strategy has proven to be a façade, and it is deeply troubling that, after years of military campaigns with little to no strategic success, over 60,000 dead in Gaza, and a society mired in grief and trauma, so many still cling to the belief that militarism provides meaning or security**.** Survey data also highlights the steep decline in the perceived importance of France among Israelis, a trend directly connected to President Macron's recent recognition of a Palestinian state. Many Israelis now view any state or leader that acknowledges Palestinian autonomy as an existential threat. This reflexive fear was cultivated long before the current far-right government and continues to shape public opinion today. Yet when asked directly whether they would support a Palestinian state under very specific conditions, 47% of Israelis expressed some level of support. The message is clear: a Palestinian state is acceptable only if it exists entirely on Israel's terms- while Israel itself faces no conditions, even as it wages a campaign of ethnic cleansing and mass violence**.** Finally, survey results reveal that 50% of Israelis believe there is little or no connection between annexation and judicial reform—yet many still fear Israel becoming a pariah state. This moral disengagement is staggering, underscored by the 39% of Israelis who believe it is not Israel's responsibility to address the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. **As long as Israelis refuse to acknowledge the direct link between annexation, occupation, judicial overhaul, and international isolation, and as long as they fail to resist these policies, society itself is complicit in Israel's trajectory**.

Dr. Roee Kibrik, Mitvim Research Director: Last year's survey showed a clear public call for decisions on key foreign policy issues. Although the public was divided on the nature of those decisions, it sought to abandon the long-standing policy of "conflict management" and the status quo, and to finally decide on a direction. A year later, it seems the Israeli public has adopted a different strategy for coping with its complex reality, with the trauma, polarization, and exhaustion that make decision-making difficult. In many ways, the public has chosen to detach itself from complexity and to simplify reality. **The 2025 Mitvim Index**

reveals a troubling picture of a public choosing preferred policy options in a simplistic manner, without considerations of feasibility, and without connecting cause and effect. For example: the public sees Egypt as Israel's most important Middle Eastern partner by far, but about half reject the need to take Egypt's positions into account regarding Gaza; 57% support military force against the Iranian threat, but at the same time many support establishing a dialogue channel with Iran (only 18% oppose it); 52% support transferring control of Gaza to a multinational force, but most oppose cooperation with the Palestinian Authority, which is necessary for that; and a large majority (85% of those with an opinion) wants Israel to belong to the liberal-democratic camp globally, but around 35% support annexation of the territories in violation of international law, many do not recognize that the settlements are illegal in the eyes of international law and the liberal world, and 51% deny Israel's responsibility for Gaza's humanitarian situation — in direct contradiction to the prevailing global view and the values and norms of the liberal democratic order. It is unclear whether this picture stems from the public's psychological state or from general ignorance about foreign policy and causal relationships. Either way, as with children learning to connect dots into a coherent picture, the Israeli public must mature and understand that there is an objective reality out there, that every action or inaction has consequences, and that there are causal links between different factors. And like every child, the public needs a good teacher — to guide and explain the connections. Not everyone has the time, access, or resources to study foreign affairs deeply. This is the role of academia, opinion leaders, think tanks, and certainly political leaders who want to mobilize public support and pull Israel out of the abyss in which it finds itself.