

Israel-Kurd Relations in the Middle East Post-October 7

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This policy paper examines the relationship between Israel and the Kurdish nation against the backdrop of the dramatic changes in the Middle East since the events of October 7, 2023. The collapse of the old order in Syria, developments in the Turkish arena, and the deepening confrontation between Israel and Iran have created a new regional reality in which the Kurds—a nation of 40 million dispersed across Syria, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran—have become a significant actor in shaping the regional balance of power. This paper is based on in-depth discussions with senior Kurdish officials and opinion leaders from the four major territories populated by Kurds, and seeks to diverge from an approach that views the Kurds as an assemblage of disparate communities. Consistently emerging from these discussions is the perception of the Kurds as a single nation despite the political and legal differences between their various concentrations, and the expectation of Israel to adopt an overarching long-term policy, tailored to the various Kurdish arenas. From Israel's perspective, its relations with the Kurds should be considered an independent component of its regional policy rather than a by-product of its confrontations with other regional actors. In the Syrian arena, the continued existence of effective Kurdish autonomy serves Israel's interests of decentralization, containment of Turkish influence, and protection of minorities. In the Turkish arena, the Kurd issue is intertwined with efforts to deal with a hostile Hamas-supporting regime, while in Iran, the Kurds constitute a unique opposition with potential for domestic action. This paper was completed shortly before the recent events in northeastern Syria, which included aggressive military actions against Kurd autonomy by the al-Sharaa regime, which threaten the community's very existence. These developments underscore the fragility of the arrangements in the Syrian arena and reinforce the need for an Israeli strategy vis a vis the Kurds. **The English translation of the original Hebrew memo, is published in the midst of the war between the US & Israel and Iran. In which the Kurds, again, might play a crucial role.** This paper proposes a series of actionable recommendations for a proactive Israeli policy based on diplomatic and security tools and on soft-power civilian, academic, and cultural tools, grounded in an understanding that the question is not whether Israel will be forced to take a stand on the Kurdish issue, but how it should do so in an informed, strategic manner.

1. Introduction

The dramatic changes in the Middle East since the events of October 7, 2023 call for a change in the relationship between Israel and the Kurdish people. The collapse of the old order in Syria, the developments in the Turkish arena, and the deepening confrontation between Israel and Iran have created a new regional reality in which the Kurds—a nation of 40 million dispersed across Syria, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran—may play a significant role in shaping the regional balance of power.

The following analysis seeks to diverge from an approach that views the Kurds as a group of separate communities. The analysis is based on in-depth conversations with senior Kurdish officials and opinion leaders¹ from the four key Kurdish arenas, indicating a consistent Kurdish perspective that considers the Kurds to be a single nation, despite the political and legal differences across the various communities. Israel is therefore expected to develop an overarching, consistent, long-term policy that is tailored to the features of each arena.

From Israel's perspective, its relations with the Kurds should be considered an independent component of its regional policy rather than a by-product of its confrontations with other regional actors. In the Syrian arena, the continued existence of effective Kurdish autonomy serves Israel's interests of decentralization, containment of Turkish influence, and protection of minorities. In the Turkish arena, a position on the Kurd issue is part of broader efforts to deal with a hostile Hamas-supporting regime that promotes radical Islamism. In Iran, the Kurds constitute a unique opposition with potential for domestic action while in northern Iraq the Kurds are subject to institutional autonomy that combines stability and high regional sensitivity.

This paper stresses the limitations of a reactive, fragmented, and short-term Israeli policy toward the Kurds, and identifies a window of opportunity for developing a comprehensive Kurd policy: one that is based on shared strategic interests yet is implemented in a calculated, differential manner in each arena. The paper emphasizes the importance of using soft-power tools—academic, civilian, cultural, and humanitarian—alongside security and policy instruments, in order to build trust, promote mutual legitimacy, and deepen ties over time.

Finally, the paper proposes a series of proactive, discrete, long-term, actionable policy recommendations for Israel vis a vis its relations with the Kurdish nation, based on the understanding that the Kurds can be expected to continue to be a key actor in Middle East dynamics. The question facing Israel is not whether to address the Kurdish issue, but whether to do so in a consistent, strategic, informed manner or contend itself with a reactive policy that abandons the arena to other actors.

2. The Kurds and the Israeli Interests in a Shifting Middle East

¹ This policy paper is based on a combination of regional policy analysis and insights from background discussions with Kurdish entities and experts on the relevant arenas. During the preparation of this policy paper, in-depth conversations were conducted with political, civilian, and security entities from Iraqi Kurdistan, northeastern Syria, Turkey, and Iran, and with researchers and members of the Kurdish diaspora in Europe. Most of the conversations took place in discrete conditions and were off-the-record exchanges. Therefore, the positions presented in this paper reflect perceptions, expectations, and concerns that are widespread in the Kurdish sphere, but do not reflect official positions of institutional leaderships.

Why now? The Israeli point of departure

The October 7 events of 2023 and the war that erupted in the aftermath not only constitute a serious security crisis for Israel but also marked a broad regional tipping point that is accelerating changes in the Middle East balance of powers. The growing weakness of the Iranian axis in Syria and Lebanon, and vacuum resulting from the collapse of the Assad regime, alongside the heightened power of Sunni-Islamist-oriented regional actors, especially Turkey—all these have created a new strategic reality that compels Israel to reconsider the assumptions that guided its actions in the past decades.

In this new reality, the regional field of action is no longer shaped solely around sovereign countries,. Trans-border national groups, autonomous arrangements, and nonstate actors with a shared political consciousness and regional presence have become entities with genuine diplomatic influence. For Israel, continued reliance exclusively on formal-state-based policy patterns limits its ability to understand and effectively navigate the emerging regional space.

The Kurdish nation is an integral part of this trend. Although they are dispersed across four countries—Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Iran—the Kurds constitute a single national group with shared historical consciousness, transborder networks, and considerable regional influence. The Kurds are one of the largest national groups in the Middle East, with 35–40 million people in four major countries. They are the fourth largest nation in the region, and the largest ethnic group in the world without a sovereign state of its own. Their demographic significance, combined with relatively continuous geographic dispersion and political-civil presence, with occasional military presence in key arenas, make the Kurds a significant regional actor and not merely a marginal minority.

For Israel, the Kurds' importance stems not only from their status as a large minority with a relatively secular orientation within a region replete with religious conflicts, but also from their geostrategic location and potential influence in two key arenas: Turkey and Iran. Erdoğan's Turkey is establishing itself as a regional power hostile to Israel, with growing presence in Syria and active involvement in the Palestinian arena. In this context both the domestic and the regional aspects of the Kurdish issue are important for understanding the limits of Turkey's power and for identifying indirect levers of influence. Iran remains a focal strategic threat to Israel, and the Kurdish arena in Iran constitutes one of the regime's few points of vulnerability, where national oppression, protest potential, and independent organization capabilities coincide.

The point of departure of this policy paper is that the relationship between Israel and the Kurdish nation can no longer remain at the tactical, ad-hoc, or declarative level. Regional shifts have created an opportunity for a strategic change in this relationship, but also create risks. To realize this potential, Israel needs an informed, consistent, long-term policy based on an appreciation of the parties' mutual interests, internal-Kurdish sensitivities, and the regional constraints within which both parties operate.

The Kurds as a single transstate national group

Despite their dispersion across four sovereign states and disparate political, legal, and security contexts, the Kurds consider themselves, and largely act, as members of a single national group. This perception is not merely an identity narrative but the foundation for a

genuine shared political consciousness, transborder networks, and regional influence that extends beyond their presence in each arena separately.

Kurdish national consciousness is based on a shared language, a collective historical memory of division and oppression, and parallel political experiences of struggles for recognition, rights, and autonomy. Although their organizational frameworks and strategies vary across states—from institutional autonomy in Iraq, through de facto self-governance in northeastern Syria, to political campaigns against oppression in Turkey and Iran—there is a broad common denominator of beliefs, aspirations, and sensibilities.

These ties are not merely conceptual. Transborder networks of families, political activists, civil society organizations, and media effectively facilitate flows of ideas, narratives, and mutual influence across arenas. The developments in one are quickly captured and affect the other arenas as well.

For Israel, this situation has two implications: First, any policy—overt or discrete—toward the Kurds is heeded by the entire Kurdish sphere and not only by one community. Second, a policy that treats the Kurds as an assemblage of local minorities rather than a national group with a shared consciousness may lead to a fragmented, short-sighted policy, and miss the strategic potential of a more consistent and attentive relationship. Still, recognition of the Kurds as a single nation should not come at the expense of a cautious, differential policy adapted to the unique circumstances in each arena.

3. Historical Background – Israel-Kurd Relations Prior to October 7

The ties between the Jewish and Kurdish nations are embedded in deep layers of culture and history. The claim that the Jewish nation's origins are in Kurdistan is heard repeatedly in contemporary Kurdish discourse, also due to the identification of Haran, the birthplace of Abraham, with the historical Kurdish lands. In addition to these narratives, a Jewish community existed continuously in Kurdistan for several centuries, which, according to some traditions, originate in the early Assyrian and Babylonian exiles. The Jews of Kurdistan retained their unique identity for generations, and most emigrated to Israel in the twentieth century, either in the early waves of immigration or after the establishment of the State of Israel, including in Operation Erza and Nehemiah and subsequent immigration waves.

This historical background created a certain foundational consciousness for the relationship between Israel and Kurdish entities, based on a shared minority experience, struggles for national identity, and existence in a hostile regional environment. Nonetheless, the diplomatic relations that evolved since Israel's independence were not based solely on historical linkage, but on a complex combination of strategic interests, covert ties, and regional limitations.

Early ties: The peripheral alliance doctrine (1950s–1970s)

The first ties between the State of Israel and Kurdish elements, mainly in Iraq, developed in the 1950s and 1960s as part of David Ben-Gurion's peripheral alliance doctrine, designed to establish alliances with non-Arab actors in the Middle East to balance the Arab states' hostility to Israel. The Kurds in Iraq, who waged a protracted campaign for autonomy against the central regime in Baghdad, were viewed as a natural ally.

In this period, Israel extended covert aid to the Kurdish revolt led by Mulla Mustafa Barzani, which included weapons, military training, logistical and medical aid, and training in Israel. The decision to grant support stemmed from clear strategic goals: to weaken Iraq's position as a key confrontation state, gather intelligence, and express identification with a national struggle that was considered not unlike Israel's experience. For the Kurds, Israel served as a critical source of aid and a model of a small state that managed to establish its sovereignty in a hostile environment.

These ties were also extremely vulnerable. The 1975 Algiers Agreement between Iran and Iraq, in which Iran committed to cease its support of the Kurd rebels, led to the collapse of the revolt and termination of direct Israeli aid. This move was engraved in Kurdish memory as a painful abandonment and its effects are currently reflected in the Kurds' general suspicion toward external partners.

The 1980s and 1990s: Adapting to a changing reality

Despite the crisis in 1975, the ties between Israel and the Kurds were not completely severed. During the Iran-Iraq war, several opportunities for tactical collaboration arose, albeit on a smaller scale. Israel continued to view the Kurds as a relevant factor in the regional arena but acted with great caution in view of the geopolitical sensitivities.

Another turning point occurred after the First Gulf War in 1991 and the establishment of an autonomous Kurd region in northern Iraq under international auspices. The establishment of the Iraqi Kurdistan government (KRG) created, for the first time, a relatively stable Kurdish governmental framework, making possible overt—yet discrete—relations with Israel. In that period, economic ties were also established, and oil imports from Iraqi Kurdistan to Israel were later reported.

The twenty-first century up to October 7

Following the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, and the official recognition of Kurdish autonomy in the Iraqi constitution (in 2005), the ties between Israel and the KRG deepened. Israel was one of the few countries that expressed public support for the Kurds' right to self-determination. PM Benjamin Netanyahu's proclamation in 2014, and Israel's support for a referendum on independence in September 2017, illustrated the potential, and the limits, of these ties. The referendum never took place due to strong opposition from Baghdad, Ankara, Teheran, and the international community.

Another highly charged civilian expression of this tension was the regional conference held in Irbil in September 2021, in which the Kurdish and Iraqi participants called to promote normalization with Israel. Although the conference did not represent the KRG's official position, it did attest to the existence of a discourse—albeit limited and unofficial—in Kurdish and civilian circles on the possibility of more open relations with Israel. In contrast, the fierce responses from Baghdad and other regional actors highlighted the issue's high political sensitivity and the practical limits of public expressions of such a relationship.

The PKK issue and its impact on the Israeli attitude toward the Kurds

The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), established in 1978, played a key role in shaping Israel's attitude on the Kurdish issue in Turkey and in the entire region. From its inception, the organization adopted a Marxist-Leninist ideology and viewed armed conflict as the primary means for achieving its goals – first, the founding of an independent Kurdish state,

and subsequently, political and cultural autonomy. Over the 1980s and 1990s, the PKK conducted a large-scale armed confrontation with the Turkish state, with thousands of victims on both sides, leaving a deep imprint on the political, security, and social arena in Turkey.

In the regional context it is important to note that in the 1970s and 1980s, the PKK maintained close ties with the PLO and Palestinian communist factions, especially the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). PKK party members were active in Lebanon, especially in southern Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley, occasionally under the auspices of PLO organizations. In this period, they were also involved in hostile activities against Israel, including training, sharing of operational knowledge, and integration in the Palestinian terror space that attacked Israeli targets from Lebanon. This association reinforced Israel's belief that the PKK was part of the radical anti-Israel space and not merely a national Kurdish organization.

The capture of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in 1999 in Kenya caused another tipping point in the perception of the Israel-Kurd relationship. Although Israeli involvement in the operation was never officially recognized, many Kurd circles believed—and continue to believe—that the Israeli Mossad contributed to the intelligence that facilitated Öcalan's capture. This belief, whether accurate or not, sparked violent Kurdish protests against Israeli representative offices in Europe at the time, and left a deep mark on the relations between Israel and sections of the Kurdish space, especially in Turkey and the Kurdish diaspora.

Following the late 1990s, PKK's ties to Palestinian elements weakened, also against the backdrop of the deep changes in the Lebanese and Palestinian spheres and the organization's own adjustments to changing regional circumstances. Nonetheless, PKK's designation as a terror organization by Turkey, the US, and the EU, alongside its historical baggage of involvement in anti-Israeli activities, contributed to Israel's cautious and reserved policy on the PKK over the years. Israel avoided overt connections or support to the organization, even during periods of acute tension with Turkey, and preferred to focus on ties with other Kurdish elements, especially Iraqi Kurdistan.

Alongside this line, over the years dissenting voices were also heard in Israel. For example, in 2017, at a conference of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, former Deputy Chief of Staff and current leader of the Democrats political party, reserve major general Yair Golan expressed his position that Israel should consider recognizing the PKK and supporting its removal from the western list of terror organizations. Although this was an isolated statement and did not represent official Israeli policy, it left a significant impression on Kurdish circles and indicated that discussions—albeit limited—about the complexities of the issue were taking place in Israel.

The Kurds in Syria and Iran

The civil war in Syria that erupted in 2011 and empowered the Kurdish forces in the north of the country, created a strategic dilemma for Israel. On the one hand, the Kurds were fighting against ISIS and, relatively speaking, constituted a stabilizing factor. On the other hand, their organizational association with PKK and Turkey's fierce opposition to their build up limited any possibility of overt Israeli support. Ties, if any, remained at the covert level. In Iran, due to the regime's hostility to Israel, any connection to Kurdish factors was covert and limited and never evolved into a systematic or overt policy.

The above review indicates that Israel-Kurdish relations were characterized over decades by strategic interests, political caution, and regional constraints. For Israel, the Kurds served as a security, diplomatic, and occasionally financial element; For the Kurds, Israel constituted a source of support, aid, legitimacy, and unique diplomatic experience from which they could learn. Nonetheless, the clandestine nature of the relationship, internal differences, and historical baggage—especially the PKK issue—defined the boundaries of the relationship. Until October 7, 2023, this relationship, especially with the KRG, reached a level of informal coordination and understanding, which constitutes an important yet limited foundation for discussing a potential strategic change.

4. The Kurds in the New Regional Arena – Status, Challenges, and Aspirations

The October 7 events and the war in Gaza accelerated deep changes in the region: longstanding actors in several arenas weakened, the Assad regime collapsed and a new order emerged in Syria, and Turkish intervention expanded. Alongside these changes, escalation of direct Iran-Israel relations during the 12 Day War ("Am Kalavi") underscored regional faulty lines and the significance of peripheral arenas and transborder communities in the struggle for influence and stability.

For the Kurdish nation—divided between Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Iran yet connected by a shared sense of transborder consciousness and ties—this new situation offers several opportunities with heightened risks. This chapter presents the situation across the region's various arenas, and the Kurds' status, challenges, and aspirations in this new Middle East.

The Kurds in Iraq: Institutional autonomy under continual pressure

Iraqi Kurdistan (KRG) has been the most stable and institutionalized Kurdish concentration in the region since the early 1990s, and its status is grounded in Iraq's post-2003 constitutional structure. Nonetheless, over the years, this autonomy has also operated within a restricted space between internal and external pressures: chronic disputes with Baghdad over authority, budgets, oil and gas, and disputed territories, alongside the consistent infiltration of regional actors into Iraqi territory.

Turkey considers northern Iraq as a key site of its campaign against the PKK, and for years has maintained military presence and conducted transborder operations there, in addition to the economic and political pressure levers that it wields over KRG's leadership. For its part, Iran operates to preserve its influence in Iraq and block the emergence of any space that is considered hostile to Iran. For Iran, the Kurdish autonomy region is a sensitive space due to its proximity to the border, its ties to the US and the west, and its relative independence of the pro-Iranian power mechanisms in Baghdad.

At the broader regional level, for years Iraqi Kurdistan has also been considered a relevant arena for a confrontation with Iran for several reasons, including its security-intelligence ties with western and regional entities. In this context, Iranian elements, headed by the Revolutionary Guards, allegedly conducted attacks in Irbil and its vicinity in recent years, as a counter-operation against "Israeli-intelligence presence" in Iraqi Kurdistan. These allegations were not confirmed by international actors or by KRG leaders, but they reflect the consistent Iranian belief that Kurdish autonomy in Iraq is a sensitive link in the regional struggle.

The direct confrontation between Israel and Iran ("Am Kalavi") reinforced this belief and increased the pressure on the Kurd leadership: On the one hand, Kurdish autonomy is based on ties that strengthen its resilience, but on the other hand, the very existence of these ties—and sometimes even the mere attribution of security-related ties to the Kurds—could position Iraqi Kurdistan as a target for deterrence or attack. This tension illustrates the vulnerability of the Kurdish autonomy in Iraq and its need—and the need of its partners—to manage sensitive relationships in this tense, congested arena with caution.

The Kurds in Syria: Autonomy poised between regime change, Turkish pressure, and Israeli interests

In northeastern Syria, a de facto autonomous Kurdish entity formed over the past decade: The AANES (Rojava) and the Democratic Syrian forces (SDF) control a large area with a diverse population and strategic assets, primarily oil fields, borders, and trade routes. Still, the AANES does not enjoy official international recognition and is largely dependent on US presence and aid, earmarked primarily for its struggle against ISIS. This dependence has created fragility: AANES exists between conflicting interests of the US, Turkey, Damascus, and other actors, and any change in the policies of these actors could undermine its stability.

Against the backdrop of the regime change in Syria and the rise of the new leadership there headed by al-Sharaa, the Kurdish leadership announced that it had signed a memorandum of understanding with the new regime. The understandings were presented as a move toward integration within a single Syrian state while protecting political and civilian rights, including a commitment to territorial unity in principle alongside a gradual integration of the Kurdish forces into the Syrian army. The scope of implementation, its schedules, regulation of the local security mechanisms, and translation of the understandings into binding institutional arrangements, however, remained unresolved, mainly due to an absence of international guarantees and significant gaps between the Kurdish conception of self-government and the proclivity toward centralized governance that has characterized the center of the Syrian state over time.

Turkey remains an immediate and persistent threat to Kurdish autonomy. Ankara views the SDF as an agent of the PKK, and uses military pressure, operations deep into Kurdish territory, local proxy forces, and occasional demographic engineering to prevent the existence of a continuous Kurdish entity along its border. US policy continues to be a key source of uncertainty: Its inconsistency over the years, and especially under the Trump administration and Trump's favorable attitude toward Erdoğan have heightened the Kurds' understanding that a permanent guarantee of US protection cannot be presumed and they must prepare for scenarios that include a reduction of US presence or a change in US priorities.

A new regional dimension was added to this situation after Israel's direct military intervention to defend the Druze in the Sweida and in the area adjacent to Damascus. These steps marked a precedent: Israel demonstrated its willingness to operate across the border, not only to prevent direct threats to Israel but also to defend this local minority that is subject to a grave threat. In the broader context, the Syrian arena underscores Israel's interest in maintaining a more decentralized Syrian space that includes local entities that do not identify with the Turkish-led Islamist-Sunni axis, and in preventing a return to the

model of a strong centralized state controlled by a hostile entity. The continued existence of the Kurdish autonomy in northeastern Syria (even if under a united Syrian state) could serve Israel's long-term interests, as long as Israel treads cautiously and refrains from politically "incriminating" the Kurds in the regional-Syrian arena.

The Kurds in Turkey: Continued oppression alongside potential for change

The Kurds in Turkey are the largest Kurdish community in the region, estimated at 15–20 million (accounting for 18–22 percent of Turkey's population). Since the establishment of the Turkish Republic, its policy toward Kurds has been characterized by oppression and exclusion: identity denial, restrictions on culture and language use, and suppression of uprisings. Despite fluctuations, these patterns have continued to shape the country's relationship with its Kurdish citizens in recent decades.

In the past decade, mainly after the failed attempted coup to overthrow him, Erdoğan adopted a hardline policy against domestic and international Kurdish aspirations. The empowered nationalist-Islamist narrative is restricting their civil and political room for action, and is accompanied by arrests, ousting of agency heads, pressure on legal Kurdish parties, headed by DEM (formerly, HDP), and the continued imprisonment since 2016 of its charismatic leader, Selahattin Demirtaş.

The PKK issue is now at a new turning point: After decades of armed confrontation that led to tens of thousands of victims on both sides, and to the organization's designation as a terror organization in Turkey, the US, and the EU, atypical steps to put an end to the armed struggle were observed in 2025. These steps included a call by Abdullah Öcalan (imprisoned since 1999) to lay down the organization's arms, proclamations by the organization's headquarters in northern Iraq, and public ceremonies of destroying weapons. It is, however, premature to determine whether these will lead to a complete and comprehensive disbandment of arms, or whether they are merely declarative steps, with Kurdish distrust in Turkey's willingness to make a profound policy change remaining high.

The Kurds, however, hold a political lever: In Turkey's fractured political system, the Kurdish bloc could tip the scales on constitutional issues and in domestic power struggles. These levers could affect the feasibility of a political settlement— but could also affect the risk that Ankara will make instrumental use of the Kurds for its own power systems.

The Kurds in Iran: National opposition, civilian protests, and organizational capacity

The Kurds in Iran have faced harsh political-security oppression since the establishment of the Islamist Republic, with no institutional recognition or political space for overt action. Nonetheless they remained a consistent and significant component of the opposition to the regime, linking their national-ethnic struggle to demands for civil liberties.

This was clearly the case in the wave of protests in September 2022 that were triggered by the death of Mahsa Amini, a young Kurdish woman, following her arrest by Iran's Guidance Patrol for failing to wear a hijab "properly." The protests began in Iraqi Kurdistan and from there spread across the country, underscoring the Kurds' key role in cross-sectoral protest movements.

The Kurds' distinction in the Iranian arena also applies to the security-organizational level: Iranian Kurdish parties have continuously maintained organized armed groups, especially in border areas, and combine political and social activism with military capabilities. This

combination elevates the significance of the Kurdish arena in Iran—both from the perspective of the regime in Teheran and for regional actors attentive to the domestic dynamics in Iran.

Following the direct confrontation between Israel and Iran in the Twelve Day War ("Am Kalavi"), the Kurds in Iran expressed expectations that the cumulative effects of the attacks on the regime's capabilities could create more convenient conditions for weakening the regime from within. Still, past experience—and specifically the oppression of broad protests without the collapse of power systems—reinforces cautious assessments that a significant domestic change is feasible only if the regime's ability to govern is significantly and persistently weakened.

The Kurds – Heightened opportunities and heightened risks in the New Middle East

The post-October 7 arena creates a paradoxical situation for the Kurds: On the one hand, the disruption of old arrangements and regime changes create opportunities to promote autonomy, recognition, and rights, especially in Syria, and to some extent in Iraq as well, with some chance of political developments in Turkey. On the other hand, new campaigns to gain influence by Turkey, the new regime in Syria, and continued Iranian pressure—subject the Kurds to increasing security, political, and humanitarian threats. The internal divisions, the variance across arenas, and the absence of consistent international support continue to be key obstacles. The Kurds' fate depends on their ability to navigate this volatile situation, maintain cross-border ties, develop effective fronts against internal and external action, and use opportunities wisely—without being crushed by the interests of more powerful regional actors.

5. A Kurdish View of the Opportunities and Challenges of Israel-Kurd Relations

As a result of the dramatic changes in the Middle East following the October 7 events, the Twelve Day War, and the direct Israel-Iran confrontation, including the changes in Syria and developments concerning PKK, Israel-Kurd relations stand at a crossroads. While shared interests and historic relations constitute a potential foundation for closer relations with Israel, the Kurdish position that emerged from the background discussions conducted in the research for this policy paper reveal a complex puzzle of expectations, concerns, and concrete demands. These shape the opportunities that a closer relationship with Israel offers as well as its accompanying challenges and limitations, as seen from the Kurdish perspective.

Opportunities in improved relations with Israel – The Kurdish perspective

The Kurdish position recognizes several key opportunities that Israel could leverage if it decides to adopt a more proactive stance toward the Kurdish people.

Strengthening the pragmatic axis and the "minority alliance" in the Middle East

Many Kurdish elements view Israel and the Kurds as minority groups in the region that share a history of struggling for existence, identity, and recognition, as well as threats from Iran and radical Islamist entities. There is a feeling that the Kurds, who largely have a secular, progressive orientation, can constitute part of what Kurdish discourse conceptualizes as a stable, secular, moderate axis in the Middle East. The Kurds express their satisfaction at the growing weakness of the Iranian axis and at the confrontation between Israel and Erdoğan, whom they consider to be the region's major representative

of the radical Islamist approach. Furthermore, the Abraham Accords are considered by some of the Kurdish discussants as a source of regional justification for reinforcing their ties with Israel, and some even urge to integrate the Kurds, either formally or symbolically, in the diplomatic activities that opened up around the Accords.

Leveraging Israel's influence in the international arena (especially on the US)

Kurdish elements, mainly in Turkey, clearly expect Israel to use its influence on the US and major European capitals to promote Kurdish interests. They expect Israel to engage in advocacy efforts to ensure that the US continues to maintain its presence and support for the SDF, put pressure on Turkey to refrain from aggressive action, and support efforts to promote recognition of Kurdish rights and their structures of political and security autonomy.

Discrete security and intelligence collaboration

While the majority of individuals interviewed for this paper express reservations about overt, direct Israeli military aid—due to concerns about retaliation and transforming the Kurds into an "Israeli paradox"—there is also openness and even expectations of intelligence collaboration and discrete technological-military aid in specific areas. These include anti-UAV and anti-drone defense systems, especially in the Syrian theater. Interviewees also mentioned potential Israeli assistance in military training and technologies in arenas including Syria and even Iraq, similarly to models of aid used by Turkey and Iran to assist regional militia.

Strengthen soft-power ties and people-to-people ties

Many interviewees stressed the significance of ties that are not based solely on security interests. Suggestions included academic collaborations, exchange programs for students and researchers, establishment of departments of Kurdish studies by universities in Israel, and technological and material assistance to Kurdish radio and television stations in order to make Kurdish voices heard in the international arena. Surprisingly, several interviewees pointed to the rights of Arab citizens of Israel—including the recognition of the Arabic language, freedom of religion, and election of local government's leaders—as the model to which the Kurds aspire, especially in Turkey.

Challenges and complexities (and demands of Israel) from a Kurdish perspective

Alongside opportunities, the Kurdish interviewees indicated a series of challenges, concerns, and demands that Israel should take into account

Mistrust and residues of the past

The history of Israel-Turkey relations, and especially the security collaboration that, according to several interviewees, contributed to the arrest of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, continue to be a source of mistrust. Kurds are also concerned that Israel would treat them solely as a tactical tool in its relations vis a vis Turkey or Iran, with no long-term strategic commitment. In several conversations, interviewees expressed broader criticism of what they considered the longstanding tactical conduct of Israel and its intelligence agencies, and the absence of a clear, comprehensive regional strategy.

The need for discretion and the risks of public statements

One of the issues that was most frequently stressed by interviewees was the public statements by senior Israeli officials regarding support for the Kurds, especially when such proclamations are not accompanied by concrete action or continued commitment. Such statements are considered to have greater potential to cause damage rather than benefit. According to the interviewees, such statements provide an excuse for Arab and regional entities to attack the Kurds, targeting the Kurds as Israel's "agent." Therefore, there is a clear preference for actions behind the scenes, quiet lobbying, and assistance that is not reported in the media.

Internal Kurdish divisions and the need for a coordinated policy

The interviewees in this research represent various arenas— Syria, Turkey, Iran, and Iraq— and diverse social and political streams. They stress that Israel must understand this complexity and avoid a uniform approach to the Kurds in all arenas. The relations with KRG in Iraq are substantively different from potential relations with SDF in Syria, or with Kurdish opposition elements in Iran and Turkey.

The Turkish threat and its effects

Erdoğan's Turkey is considered to be an existential threat to the Kurds, especially in the Syrian arena, and an actor that has acted consistently to undermine Kurdish achievements. Kurds expect Israel to take steps, especially vis a vis the US, to restrain Turkey. The recent developments involving the PKK, including Öcalan's call to lay down their arms and his proclamations regarding the organization's dissolution, are considered by the interviewees as a fait accompli that could change the dynamics. It is, however, premature to determine whether the organization will effectively and completely dissolve itself or whether these are declarative statements; Meanwhile, mistrust of Turkey remains high.

Expectations of a coherent long-term Israeli policy

The Kurds are seeking reliable allies and not temporary patrons. They demand that Israel make a long-term investment that includes a deep relationship and ongoing training and collaborations rather than ad-hoc responses to crises. At the same time, the Kurds are concerned that political developments in Israel or in the region will lead to their abandonment by Israel once again.

Local issues – Rojava, political prisoners, and logistic support

The interviewees stressed several key issues that currently concern the various Kurdish communities. In Syria, the threat to Rojava was noted as the most urgent and existential issue. The interviewees emphasized the immediate need there for defenses against Turkish drones and UAVs, a guarantee of continued US presence, and actions to counter the Turkish threat and its effect on the al-Sharaa regime. In Turkey, interviewees called for international support to release Selahattin Demirtaş and other political Kurdish prisoners, and call for recognition of the Kurdish language in the education system. Several interviewees urged Israel to support the PKK's removal from the list of terror organizations. In Iran, interviewees noted a need for logistic, medical, and technological assistance to the Kurdish forces opposing the government. Some interviewees estimated that the cumulative effects of attacks against the regime there could create conditions for more significant domestic opposition action.

Kurdish positions on the opportunities and challenges of future Israel-Kurd relations outline a new potential horizon for this relationship, but this horizon is replete with obstacles and requires that Israel adopt a measured, sensitive, and long-term policy. The main opportunity lies in the two nations' shared strategic interests and the Kurds' potential to become a regional actor with a secular orientation and ability to contribute to the stabilization of the tempestuous Middle East. Still, realizing this potential depends on Israel's ability to build trust, act discretely and effectively in the international arena, and demonstrate consistent commitment that extends beyond the purely declarative level. The main challenge remains in navigating the tangle of regional interests—headed by Israel's relationship with Turkey—and refraining from actions that might endanger the Kurds more than benefit them. Attention to the Kurds' voices themselves is a necessary condition for developing an effective and informed Israeli policy.

6. Directions for an Israeli Policy on the Kurdish Nation

Guiding Principles

The regional situation that emerged after the October 7 events, and even more strongly so following the developments in the Syrian, Turkish, and Iranian arenas, have infused Israel-Kurd relations with new potential. This potential stems from a combination of overlapping strategic interests, shared threat perceptions, and a general Kurdish consciousness that views Israel as a potential ally. Still, the realization of this potential cannot be taken for granted, and it requires a cautious, conscious, and consistent Israeli policy.

First, a policy on the Kurdish issue must rely on an overall view of the Kurdish nation as a single sphere, albeit spread across multiple states. Their cross-border identity and ties call for strategic thinking that extends beyond ad-hoc responsiveness and accommodates local adjustments to each arena.

Second, Israeli policy must distinguish between various levels of action: overt policy, quiet diplomacy, and discrete collaboration. The discussions with Kurdish elements indicate a clear preference for actions that are not publicized, especially involving sensitive arenas, based on an understanding that declarations that are not accompanied by concrete action may cause more damage than benefit. Therefore, discretion is a key principle of policy effectiveness.

Third, Israeli policy must be based on building long-term trust and not limited to achieving tactical interests. Kurdish mistrust of regional and international actors stems from their past experience of ad-hoc actions devoid of continuing commitment. Any policy that is considered to be similar may rapidly erode Israel's field of influence.

Fourth, Israel should avoid a uniform approach to the various Kurdish arenas. The relations with the leadership of Iraqi Kurdistan are substantively different from the relationship that could be developed with the Kurdish forces in Syria, the Kurdish political actors in Turkey, or the Kurdish opposition activists in Iran. This variance requires differential implementation of shared principles without relinquishing an overarching policy framework.

Finally, Israeli policy toward the Kurds requires an understanding of the complex interests in the region, especially relations with Turkey and the confrontation with Iran. Any action

that is insensitive to these contexts could exacerbate the pressure on the Kurds and undermine their ability to achieve their political and security goals. The main challenge is not maintaining a relationship per se, but rather defining its nature, timing, and scope.

These principles represent a conceptual framework and not an exhaustive action plan. The following sections list of implementable action items that balance between strategic opportunities and tangible risks in each arena.

Syria: Kurdish autonomy as a Kurdish interest and an Israeli interest

Syria is the most urgent and most sensitive arena for Israel-Kurd relations, where the tension between strategic potential and tangible risks is strongest. The collapse of the old order, the rise of al-Sharaa's Syria, and the efforts to develop new political and security frameworks place the Kurdish issue at the heart of efforts to influence the emerging regional order.

Beyond its existential significance for the Kurds themselves, effective Kurdish autonomy in northeastern Syria also serves a pure Israeli interest of restricting Turkey's operational space in the region, and creating a diplomatic-security wedge between Ankara and al-Sharaa's Syria. This wedge could reduce Turkey's ability to project its military and political power deep into Syrian territory and contribute to efforts to curtail Islamist influence in the region.

Main recommendations:

- Support and strengthen the Kurdish autonomy in northeastern Syria (Rojava): take action, primarily through quiet diplomatic channels, to maintain an effective Kurdish autonomy, even within the formal framework of a single Syrian state. This autonomy is a necessary condition for protecting the Kurds' civil, political, and security achievements, gained since 2012, and constitutes a stabilizing factor in the emerging Syrian situation.
- Encourage a decentralized state structure in al-Sharaa's Syria: Support (not public) models of decentralized governance or a de facto confederation in Syria as an alternative to centralization of power in Damascus. Such a structure would allow the inclusion of minority groups, reduce domestic tensions, and lower the risk of a hostile centralized regime.
- Phased protection of Syria's minorities: Take action in the diplomatic and international arenas to promote the phased protection of non-Sunni-Arab minorities— Kurds, Alawites, and Druze, based on the level of threat affecting each community. Israel's model of protecting the Druze community in southern Syria represents the end point on a continuum of intervention and defense and is not necessarily appropriate for all minority communities.
- Use Israeli levers of influence to affect Syria's international legitimacy: Consider the informed use of Israel's diplomatic levers, and especially its influence on the positions of the US and its western partners regarding the reintegration of al-Sharaa's Syria into the regional and international systems. These levers may be used to establish expectations, even if informally articulated, regarding the Kurds' status in the new Syrian order.

- Indirect integration of Kurdish interests in regional security arrangements: Address the option to include Kurdish interests, either directly or indirectly, in US-led security agreements or coordination mechanisms between Israel and Syria, for example through protection of de facto autonomy, regional security guarantees, or mechanisms that constrain Turkish military actions in northern Syria.
- Advocacy for the continued US presence in northeastern Syria: Use Israel's ties in Washington to support the continued US military presence in northeastern Syria, which the Kurds consider to be a key security anchor and a counter-balance to Turkey, al-Sharaa's Syria, and other hostile actors.
- Discrete security-technology aid: Consider options to extend quiet, focused assistance in the form of anti-UAV and anti-drone defense systems. In the discussions with the interviewees, these were identified as the most urgent security need of the Kurdish forces and population in northeastern Syria. Such assistance is considered more legitimate than offensive aid and with less potential to cause escalation.
- Integrating public statements in an overarching strategic move: Make calculated use of public statements by senior Israelis regarding Israel's commitment to Kurdish rights and security, within a broad policy move that is backed by tangible action. Interviewees indicated that while public statements are welcome, discrepancies between declarations and action could undermine trust and increase risks.
- Support civil rehabilitation and development in Kurdish areas: Use international channels and civil joint ventures to encourage and support humanitarian projects and reconstruction of infrastructure and economic development in northeastern Syria, including sharing Israeli knowledge and technology in civilian fields such as agriculture, water, energy, and health, in order to strength the local population's perceptions of the Kurdish government's resilience, stability, and legitimacy.
- Cautiously monitor the implementation of the agreement between the Kurds and al-Sharaa's Syria: Closely follow the implementation of the agreement signed by the Kurdish leadership and al-Sharaa's Syria, including ongoing review of the latter's commitment and actions to integrate the Kurds and protect their achievements, and avoid making prior assumptions about the agreement's success or failure.

Turkey: Diplomatic pressure, human rights, and addressing a hostile regime

Turkey's policy under Erdoğan positions Turkey as a regional actor that is hostile to Israel, both in view of Turkey's practical and declarative support for Hamas during the war, and in view of its efforts to promote radical Islamist ideology in various Middle East arenas. At the same time, the Kurds in Turkey—the largest Kurdish community in the region—have suffered persistent political, cultural, and legal oppression since the establishment of the Turkish Republic. The Kurdish issue in Turkey is not merely a matter of minority rights, but a significant element in a broader regional struggle against Turkey's aggressive and hostile stance toward Israel.

Main recommendations:

- Quiet diplomatic pressure and support for liberal and Kurdish elements: Use discrete diplomatic channels and Israel's influence on the US and European states to encourage efforts to place continuous pressure on Turkey on issues involving human rights, minority rights, and the rule of law. At the same time, encourage non-governmental Israeli entities—including democratic and liberal political parties, NGOs, and human rights organization—to express public support for the release of

Selahattin Demirtaş and other HDP/DEM leaders and public activists imprisoned in Turkey, and support for the recognition of basic cultural rights for the Kurds, especially the right of education in the Kurdish language.

- Reassessment of Israel's policy on the PKK: Israel should re-assess its policy on the PKK and push x the US and other international partners to make a similar change. Such a re-assessment is not derived from Turkish interests, but rather based on a broad Israeli interest of dealing with a hostile government that supports anti-Israeli terror organizations, including Hamas. This re-assessment should also consider supporting the PKKs' removal from lists of terror organizations, as part of a comprehensive strategic approach and not as a response to specific developments in the Turkish arena.
- Promote a dialogue with moderate Kurdish opposition entities through moderate entities in Israel: Israel should recognize that the composition of Israel's current government does not enjoy wide public legitimacy in Turkey and that a direct dialogue between Israeli government entities and the DEM could adversely affect Kurdish entities and create problems for them in the domestic sphere. Therefore, i a space for effective dialogue could be found mainly between Israeli entities that are considered to be moderate in Turkey and oppositional to the current Israeli government—including democratic and liberal political parties such as the Democrats and Yesh Atid, and NGOs, research institutions, and policy think tanks. Such a dialogue could pave the way toward building new ties, cultivating greater understanding of mutual positions, and reinforcing the international legitimacy of the Kurdish opposition without increasing its vulnerability vis a vis the Turkish government.

Iran: The Kurds as an oppositional element with unique action potential

The Kurds in Iran constitute a key and constant element of opposition to the regime. In contrast to other civilian opposition elements, the Kurds combine a distinct national identity, longstanding experience of confrontation with the government, and organizational infrastructure that is also based on armed force. The protest events surrounding Mahsa Amini—a young Kurdish woman who was killed after her by the Guidance Patrol for allegedly not wearing the hijab in accordance with government standards—illustrated how a Kurdish issue can become a catalyst for widespread protest involving all sectors of the Iranian population, and place the Kurds at the heart of the oppositional dynamics.

Main recommendations:

- Recognition of the Kurds as a specific strategic target in Israel's policy on Iran. Develop a specific approach to the Kurds in Iran within a comprehensive approach to the Iranian government, and not merely as a humanitarian or community-focused element of such an approach. A specific approach also requires allocating specific attention, resources, and work channels.
- Institutionalize the infrastructure for maintaining continuous ties with Kurdish-Iranian elements: Develop and maintain continuous and discrete communication channels with political and civilian Kurdish elements outside Iran, as far as possible, to map their needs and capacities and set up the infrastructure for long-term cooperation.
- Technological and professional aid to reinforce domestic capacities: Prioritize aid that enhances survivability and continued capacity for action, such as secure means of communication, tools for dealing with surveillance and suppression, documentation and

dissemination capacities, urgent medical care, and logistic knowledge— as means of strengthening resilience and organizational capacities over time.

- Preparations for scenarios of regime weakening and domestic mobilization: Re-assess scenarios of escalation or partial collapse and how Israel can diplomatically and analytically prepare to understand the risks and limits on potential action in real time.
- Reinforce the international legitimacy of the Kurds' role in the opposition: Take action with the US and European states to ensure that discussions on the opposition in Iran systematically include the Kurdish arena, based on the Kurds' role in the struggle for national rights and human rights, and their historic role in opposition to the regime.
- Distinguish between public declarations and effective action: Any public Israeli statements regarding the struggle against the Iranian regime should be backed by steps with practical implications for the opposition entities.
- In the context of armed capabilities, stress unique Kurdish aspects: Consider that the Kurds in Iran, as far as we know, are the sole oppositional entity that also possesses an organized armed force. This fact creates potential for action but also increases the risks and demands a cautious, gradual policy.
- Indirect civilian-humanitarian aid to Kurdish targets: Encourage, through international partners and NGOs, the delivery of medical and civilian aid to Kurdish communities that suffer oppression, especially during waves of arrests, injuries, or internal displacement, as part of the efforts to strengthen community resilience.

Iraq: Institutionalized autonomy, Iranian sensitivity, and cautious sphere of action

The Iraqi arena offers Israel; a unique combination of strategic opportunity and high regional sensitivity. Kurdish autonomy in northern Iraq is the most institutionalized, stable, and longstanding of all Kurdish concentration, and the community maintains extensive ties with regional and international actors. At the same time, this arena is subject to deep intervention and constant pressure from Iran, which considers northern Iraq a critical area of influence and security. This situation demands that Israel adopt a cautious, consistent, and long-term policy.

Main recommendations:

- Maintain and strengthen Kurdish autonomy in Iraq as a regional anchor of stabilization: View the continued existence of the autonomy as an important regional interest, and take action to protect its institutional, economic, and security capabilities while avoiding actions that might undermine its status vis a vis Baghdad or other regional actors.
- Deepen discrete long-term ties with Iraq-Kurdistan leadership: Establish continual, quiet ties based on trust, continuity, and a long-term strategic perspective.
- Prioritize quiet diplomacy and avoid public declarations: Refrain from making public statements that might put the autonomy at risk from Iran or pro-Iranian elements in Iraq.
- Civil, economic, and technological assistance: Encourage focused civilian collaborations with the Kurdish autonomy in northern Iraq on non-security issues, especially agriculture, water, health, civil energy, and public service management technologies. Such collaborations might include professional knowledge transfers, training, and consultations, preferably through non-governmental channels.
- Indirect support for the community's autonomy status in international forums: Use ties with international actors, headed by the US, to contribute to the protection of

the Kurds' autonomy status and prevent steps that might weaken it—including efforts that are not necessarily publicly attributable to Israel.

- Awareness of Iranian sensitivities and risk of escalation: Act in a calculated manner, continually taking into account risk assessment, based on the understanding that Iran considers the Iraqi arena a critical space of action.
- Distinguish between the Iraqi arena and all other Kurdish arenas: Avoid applying patterns of action from Syria, Turkey, or Iran to the Iraqi arena: A specific policy approach that matches the characteristics of Iraq is needed.

Overall Policy Thinking: Building a Foundation for Long-Term Israel-Kurd Relations

In addition to adjustments to each arena, the overarching Israeli policy on the Kurdish nation should generally be based on civilian and international soft-power tools. Tools at this level allow the parties to build trust, deepen mutual familiarity, and create a foundation for long-term relations, even when the potential for diplomatic-security action is limited.

Key recommendations:

- Encourage research and academic dialogue: Support the establishment of departments, centers, and curricula on the Kurds in Israeli universities and research institutions, and encourage joint research projects involving Israeli and Kurdish researchers.
- Promote people-to-people ties: Encourage meetings, dialogues, and joint projects involving NGOs, intellectuals, academic scholars, and cultural professionals from Israel and Kurdish communities.
- Assistance to independent media and communication tools: Consider technological and material assistance to independent Kurdish media with the aim of assisting them to make their voice heard in the regional and international spheres.
- Consider integrating the Kurds into regional forums: Take steps to promote the integration of Kurdish representatives in regional forums for dialogue and cooperation, according to developments in the field, including representatives of the KRG in Iraq or the AANES in Syria, and in projects that promote regional connectivity such as IMEC; and consider extending the Abraham Accords in the long term or creating similar frameworks.
- Promote a dialogue with the Kurdish diaspora: Cultivate channels for institutionalized communication and ties with influential organizations and individuals in the Kurdish diaspora in Europe and the west.
- Promote visits of Kurdish leaders and representatives to Israel: Permit and encourage visits to Israel of Kurdish political leaders, intellectuals, academic scholars, and civil society representatives, in a gradual process according to the circumstances.
- Integrate structured visits to Arab and Druze settlements during said visits: Include tours, encounters, and seminars in Arab and Druze settlements in Israel during said visits, as well as meetings with elected local leaders, educators, and social activists, with emphasis on issues such as minority status, language, freedom of religion and culture, and democratic local government. According to the interviewees, Kurdish elements, especially from Turkey, are interested in direct access to Israel's civil sphere, which they view as a significant relevant model for comparison.

- Foster the joint heritage and reinforce collaboration with Kurdish elements in the region and the Kurdish diaspora.

Mechanisms of implementation and control

- Set up a designated coordination entity: Consider establishing a designated coordinating desk or entity in the National Security Council or the Foreign Ministry that will be in charge of concentrating information, developing policy, and coordinating Israeli activities vis a vis the Kurds across arenas. This entity will help ensure a systemic, coherent, and continuous policy perspective.
- Periodic assessments: Conduct periodic senior-level status assessments and strategy discussions to adapt Israeli policy to the dynamic developments across the Kurdish arenas and across the region.

7. Summary and Conclusion: An Overall Kurdish Policy as a Strategic Choice for Israel

This policy paper proposes a change in perspective and policy regarding Israel's approach to the Kurdish nation and the Kurdish arenas. The dramatic changes in the Middle East since October 7—specifically the collapse of the old order in Syria, developments in the Turkish arena, and deepening of the confrontation with Iran—not only have created new challenges but also have opened a rare window of opportunity for developing a proactive and long-term Israeli policy.

The Kurds are not merely a marginal regional "community," but rather are a nation of tens of millions of individuals with a shared national consciousness, who are dispersed over a broad geographic area, with significant presence in strategic locations across the Middle East. Despite the political, legal, and security differences between the various Kurdish concentrations, the interviews conducted for the purpose of this policy paper indicate that Kurdish elements consistently consider themselves members of a single group, and believe that relations with Israel can be built on mutual interests rather than ad-hoc tactical responses.

From Israel's perspective, the relationship with the Kurds should be considered an independent component of Israel's regional policy and not merely a by-product of its confrontations with other actors. In the Syrian arena, the continued existence of an effective Kurdish autonomy serves clear Israeli interests: decentralization, constraining Turkish influence, and protecting minorities. In the Turkish arena, the Kurdish issues aligns well with Israel's broad actions to address a hostile Hamas-supporting government that undermines regional stability. In Iran, the Kurds are a unique oppositional force with potential for action from within, while the Kurds in northern Iraq benefit from institutional autonomy that serves as an anchor of stability, although this arena is also sensitive and warrants caution. Each of these arenas requires a designated policy, but they all must derive from a single, coherent overarching policy.

One of the main conclusions arising from this policy paper is the limitations of a short-term, fragmented, responsive policy. The Kurds themselves express their mistrust of what they view as Israel's continued tactical conduct and they expect Israel to develop a consistent and discrete, yet committed, policy line based on an understanding of their internal complexity and willingness to make long-term investments in a relationship with the Kurds. In the absence of such a policy there is a genuine chance that the current window of opportunity will close and mistrust might even deepen.

Finally, this paper stresses that Israeli policy on the Kurds cannot be based solely on narrow security considerations. Soft-power—academic, civilian, cultural, and humanitarian—tools are not marginal policy addenda but rather strategic components of trust building, forging mutual legitimacy, and deepening bilateral ties over time. The connections to a joint heritage, to Kurds in Israel, to the Kurdish diaspora in the west, and to the civil spheres in Israel that are considered to serve as a comparative model for the Kurds—all reinforce the human foundation on which a stable strategic-diplomatic policy can be built.

The choice that Israel faces is not a choice between absolute involvement or absolute avoidance, but between a continuation of its ad-hoc conduct and the development of an overarching informed, consistent, and long-term Kurdish policy, adjusted to each arena yet based on a single strategic logic. This policy paper seeks to lay the foundation for such thinking, based on the expectation that the Kurds will continue to be a significant actor in the changing Middle East. The question is not whether Israel will be required to address the Kurdish issue, but how it will do so.