



Guiding Principles for a New Israeli Foreign Policy Paradigm

Recommendations of a Mitvim Institute Task-Team

Israel lacks a coherent foreign policy. This has a harmful effect on its position in the world, on the role of its Ministry of Foreign Affairs in decision making processes, and on the conduct of Israel's diplomacy. Israeli foreign policy is subordinated to the security establishment and focuses on public diplomacy (*hasbara*) efforts, rather than advancing diplomatic processes that would enable Israel a fresh start among the nations, regional belonging, and a future of peace, security and prosperity. The Mitvim Institute is working to change that. A multi-disciplinary Mitvim task-team formulated guiding principles for a new Israeli foreign policy paradigm - a pro-peace, multi-regional, outward looking, modern and inclusive foreign policy. This paper presents these guiding principles.

A. A Pro-Peace Foreign Policy

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has a decisive influence on Israel's security, its unity within, its position in the world and its ability to function in the international arena. Israel must **strive for peace** and commit to resolving the Arab-Israeli and Palestinian-Israeli conflicts as one of its central goals.

A resolution to the conflict is a vital national interest of the State of Israel. Therefore, Israel must demonstrate its steadfast support for this pursuit, even when the prospects of peace seem slim. Such a commitment should be reflected in statements and actions aimed at changing the reality on the ground, and displaying a clear message to the world that it is geared toward a change in the status quo, peace and an agreement with the Palestinians. Israel must **take the initiative to promote the two-state vision**, to honor its obligations from previous agreements and to refrain from unilateral measures (including settlement expansion).

Palestinian moves at the UN and the international support they receive prove that **the status quo is unstable and that time is not on Israel's side**. A conflict management approach, which does not recognize the dangers of a lack of progress in the peace process, harms Israel's status on the world stage. An Israeli diplomatic effort to **resolve the conflict** would reduce friction between Israel and the Palestinians would obviate unilateral actions that will impose a settlement, and would reduce the probability of escalations and violent eruptions.

Peace, aside from its significance as a universal and Jewish value, is an essential component to Israel's security and it can be achieved while ensuring the security arrangements vital to protecting Israeli interests. Israel must consider the conflict not just as a security threat but also as a leverage to ensure its lasting security. **Israel should work to determine borders** that are defensible and recognized by the international community. Such borders should be determined through arrangements and agreements with the

Palestinians. Progress in the peace process will increase the possibilities of strategic, economic, and civilian **cooperation with moderate Arab states**.

The conflict is a hurdle facing Israeli diplomacy. **There is a clear link between the conflict and Israel's standing in the world**. Improved relations between Israel and the Palestinians will significantly strengthen Israel's foreign relations, including relations with its allies in the West. On the other hand, a policy of furthering its control in the territories, in particular by expanding the settlement enterprise, will lead to international isolation and increasing foreign pressure. Resolving the conflict would open Israel to **new horizons in the region and the world**, as well as have a positive effect on domestic socio-economic issues. In addition, it would **reduce de-legitimization of Israel and anti-Semitism** in the world and increase Israel's ability to work in multi-lateral coalitions to eradicate them.

Until a final agreement is reached, Israel must **minimize the damage created by its continued control over the Palestinians**. This can be done by strengthening the Palestinian Authority as a separate political entity and to help build a Palestinian state; to **promote cooperation on issues concerning both Israelis and Palestinians** (e.g. the environment and the economy), and; to encourage better relations between Israeli and Palestinian civil societies. Additionally, Israel must find **less antagonistic ways to respond to Palestinian diplomatic activities on the world stage** that distinguish between legitimate, non-violent political actions of a neighboring entity and terror activities of non-state actors.

B. A Multi-Regional Foreign Policy

Israel has come to see its geo-political location in a negative light, mostly as a result from the Arab-Israeli conflict and its subsequent regional isolation. Israel has developed a **mentality of a secluded island**, which is defensive and isolationist in nature and which views the world as a hostile place. And yet, Israel's unique location at the crossroads of three continents should be turned into an asset.

Israel must **strengthen its connection to each of its surrounding regions** (the Middle East, Europe, and the Mediterranean), recognize the interconnection between these different regions, and avoid regional exclusivity. For instance, Israel's activity in the Middle East should be consistent with, and even enhance and complete its presence in the European and Mediterranean arenas.

Israel's foreign policy should **define the regional belonging to which it aspires**. How much will Israel want to integrate into the Middle East, in an era of normalization after the conflict has been resolved? How much does Israel want to gravitate toward the EU at an institutional level? To what extent does Israel view the Mediterranean region as a congruous response to its own complex identity, which combines European and Middle Eastern aspects? These questions remain unanswered to this day, and this prevents a clear vision that Israel can pursue.

A favorable response to regional incentives for peace is a first and important step on the path for Israel to gain regional belonging, while at the same time to advance the peace process. Thus far, Israel ignores these incentives. The **Arab Peace Initiative** did not receive an official Israeli response for over a decade. **The EU's offer to upgrade ties** with Israel to a Special Privileged Partnership status following a peace agreement— an offer introduced in

2013 – has also been ignored by Israel. This needs to change. Israel should **express a willingness to engage with the Arab League and the EU on the incentives offered.**

Within the Middle East, Israel should **deepen its cooperation with Egypt and Jordan** in both security and civilian spheres, by identifying common interests such as combatting terrorism and joint exploitation of energy sources. Israel should also cultivate **relationships with other entities in the region** (Arab and non-Arab, including Turkey) with whom it shares mutual interests. The Arab Spring gave rise to opportunities to build new regional alliances and channels of communications, (official and unofficial) between Israel and the Arab world. Israel's foreign policy should seize these opportunities.

Israel should **encourage interfaith dialogue** by emphasizing the similarities between the monotheistic religions in the Middle East, which can help create the basis for co-existence in the region. In addition, Israel must **preserve the heritage of the ancient Jewish communities in Arab countries** and provide assistance to the remnants of these communities in the Middle East. This should be done **in coordination with the states concerned and with the consent of the communities** involved.

Alongside developing its relations in the Middle East, Israel must also **strengthen its relationship with the EU**, both at the political-diplomatic and socio-economic levels. Israeli Heads of State should conduct **official visits to EU institutions** in Brussels, which they have avoided so far. Israel's foreign policy should not focus only on individual EU member states. It should view the EU as an equally important actor. Progress in the peace process will bring about a real change in Israel-European relations, and will enable Israel to strengthen its cooperation with the EU in the areas of **economics, society, science, culture and even security.**

The discovery of natural gas deposits along the Mediterranean basin increases the importance of Israel's coastal waters in the nation's foreign policy. Israel should promote **cooperation with other Mediterranean countries** on the production and marketing of natural gas, maintain the security of extraction facilities at sea, and protect the environment. Furthermore, Israel must avoid becoming a pawn in conflicts between other countries in the region (i.e. Greece, Turkey, Cyprus and Egypt), and should instead position itself as a **moderator that can help resolve and prevent conflicts** along the Mediterranean.

C. An Outward Looking Foreign Policy

History shows that **Israel is not doomed to isolation and boycott**, but that isolation and boycott are also the result of its own actions. The country's motto should be that of its second prime minister, Moshe Sharett: **"Israel shall not be a people that dwells alone, not in the Middle East and not among the nations of the world."** This shall be the base of Israeli foreign policy, and not Balaam's biblical curse, "They are a people that shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations" (*Numbers 23:9*).

The special relationship between Israel and the US is the most important strategic asset for Israel in the global arena. It is imperative that it be maintained and strengthened. On the American domestic level, Israel must **address the erosion of support** for it in specific circles, re-establish its position in the bi-partisan consensus, and **shy away from being identified as a closer partner to the Republican Party only.** Israel should also **prepare for the demographic changes in the US** and foster relations with new audiences,

especially Hispanics and young people. In the Middle East, Israel should **become a strategic asset** for the US by promoting peace and cooperation with countries in the region.

At the same time, Israeli foreign policy must **adapt to changes in the global balance of power**. In the second decade of the 21st century, the global balance of power has shifted more intensely. Centuries of Euro-Atlantic hegemony (first Europe, then the US) are coming to an end with the re-emergence of Asian countries, especially China. In light of this, Israel should **increase its presence in Asia, as well as its cooperation with China**. By doing so, however, Israel needs to protect its special relationship with the US, while striving to maintain **good relations with the two centers of global power**.

Israel must reshape its relations with the international community, and transition **from contrarianism to integration**. Israel must see itself more as **part of the family of nations**, become more internationally engaged, and establish relations with the world in **new and diverse fields**, including research and development, desertification, agriculture, conflict resolution, social change, emergency response and emergency medicine. Israel should **take a more committed role in international institutions**, and should increase its share of foreign aid, international humanitarian aid, and efforts to solve long-standing issues in the developing world concerning poverty, health, food and water, alternative energy, and infrastructure.

Israel should formulate a **foreign policy that takes into account world Jewry**, weighing the impact of its actions on the safety of Jews around the globe. Israel must adapt some of its internal institutions and legislation so as to enable **genuine Jewish pluralism**—an important value in Diaspora Jewry. Moreover, in light of current trends in the American Jewish community, Israel must strive to identify **new common ground on which to build Israel-Diaspora relations**—relations that produce real partnership and are not only based on a philanthropist-recipient model.

D. A Modern and Inclusive Foreign Policy

In recent decades, there have been **significant changes in global diplomacy**. In the diplomatic arena **new actors** have emerged, including international bodies, NGOs, businesses and entrepreneurs. All of these are gaining influence in decision-making processes on the world stage and within states. **Modern diplomacy in the 21st century** is no longer centered on embassies. It is more open, more civilian, and makes use of new and diverse tools. Israeli foreign policy is now required to adapt to these changes, to **recognize the growing role of new actors**, and to create interfaces between them and the official (traditional) diplomacy.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs should establish and strengthen **partnerships** with those Israeli **civil society organizations**, which work with international counterparts and which take part in shaping global agendas. It should also highlight **Israel's innovative and entrepreneurial side**, which seeks cooperation and trust with the international community. Furthermore, it should create avenues for joint activities with **Israeli companies doing business abroad**, formulate a new set of skills and modern training needed for the **new Israeli diplomat**, and effectively and creatively manage the **limited resources** available in the ministry.

In modern diplomacy, governments around the world are expected to invest resources in **economic diplomacy**. In a small country like Israel, it is especially important for optimal utilization of public resources. To do this, Israel should **increase the budget of MASHAV** – The Center for International Cooperation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and focus its efforts not only in developing countries as it has in the past, but in a **broader range of countries** to which Israel can contribute and where there is relevant economic activity for Israeli businesses. Further, Israeli foreign policy should provide an **umbrella of protection to Israeli businesses against calls for economic boycott**.

The rise of new actors in the field of foreign relations should also be reflected in Israel itself. Progress must be made toward a **more inclusive Israeli public discourse on the subject of foreign policy**, which should invite the participation of as many groups as possible of the Israeli society. Specifically, there needs to be an **increase in the involvement of Israel's Arab minority** in shaping Israel's foreign relations, and special effort should be made to combat de-legitimization regarding **participation of the Palestinian citizens of Israel in decision-making processes** in the field of foreign policy.