



Israeli Foreign Policy and the Modern Diplomacy of the 21st Century

Momo Mahadav*

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Israeli foreign policy must adapt to become compatible with the modern diplomacy of the 21st century. It must recognize the increasing role of new actors in the diplomatic sphere and create opportunities for these actors to interface with classic diplomacy, which revolves around embassies. The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs must deploy new and innovate tools in order to use its resources more effectively and efficiently and to train 21st century Israeli diplomats; to create partnerships with Israeli civil society organizations that collaborate with their counterparts abroad and are increasingly playing a role in shaping the global agenda; and to create opportunities to work with Israeli companies that operate abroad. Israel must actively engage in economic diplomacy, which is becoming a central part of modern diplomacy. It should do so by increasing the budget of MASHAV – Israel’s Agency for International Development Cooperation, and broadening its focus to additional countries. Israel must also protect Israeli companies that are the targets of boycott efforts.

A. Changes in International Diplomacy

Recent decades have seen a significant shift in the balance of power in the global diplomatic arena. In the past this sphere was dominated by nation states, but in recent years new actors from civil society, including supranational non-governmental organizations (NGOs), entrepreneurs, and businesses have become more active and have gained greater influence over decision-making processes. At a time in which globalization is increasing interdependence between states in a variety of fields such as climate change, combating terrorism and more, this shift in power has significant sway over the diplomatic arena.

* Momo Mahadav is a task-team member at [Mitvim – The Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies](#) and the CEO of [Maala](#). He has extensive experience in the civil society. This paper was written as part of the project: “Changing the Paradigm – A New Foreign Policy for Israel”.

Traditional diplomacy remained virtually unchanged from its formative period in the 17th century through the middle of the 20th century. However, in the aftermath of World War II a new idea of “democratic diplomacy” began to develop. This evolution seems to have come to fruition in recent decades, prompting a shift in the conceptualization and *modus operandi* of diplomacy – from a closed model conducted primarily through embassies to a more open diplomacy often carried out through conventions and international agreements (e.g. the Kyoto Protocol), and in which the involvement of civil society organizations (NGOs) that aspire to shape the global agenda and decision-making processes is growing. One illustration of this shift is the fact that in 1946 the United Nations recognized only 41 civil society organizations as official observers, thus allowing them to attend international summits and proceedings. By 1992 that number had increased to approximately 3,000, and as of 2014 there were some 4,000 civil society organizations with observer status.

Civil society organizations have astutely developed “civil diplomacy,” which is characterized by three core features. First, these organizations provide a wealth of information and data originating directly from the field. Their reports often are more accurate, and thus more important, than those of official diplomats. Second, these organizations often function as watchdogs, scrutinizing international affairs before during and after the involvement of official diplomats. Finally, civil society organizations can recruit opinion-makers and celebrities to their causes, thus giving their position greater standing and relevance in the eyes of the general public than those of governments.

Empowering civil society requires a profound shift in the way traditional diplomacy is conducted. That being said, this shift is complicated. At times, little correlation exists between the impact of an organization and the scope of its legitimacy and standing in public opinion. In other words, an organization can carry more weight and push an agenda to a greater extent than what would accurately reflect public opinion. Moreover, some issue areas are flooded by a multitude of civil society organizations while others have very few organizations. As a result, certain issues are sometimes overlooked.

Nevertheless, the idea and applications of modern diplomacy are changing in a number of countries around the world, including in Israel. One example is the cooperation between the Israeli Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Environmental Protection and various environmental groups to shape the country’s official position ahead of Rio+20: The United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development. On issues such as human rights and the environment, the growing influence of civil society is increasingly shaping the views and policies of decision-makers on both the national and international levels.

The increased involvement of civil society has also paved the way for greater cooperation between traditional diplomatic frameworks and the private sector. In many cases, this manifests itself through public-private partnerships, bringing together governmental bodies, civil society organizations and businesses. Such

cooperation achieves two overlapping goals that complement one another. The foreign ministry increases its socially oriented activity overseas while simultaneously strengthening its own country's economy. For example, the US State Department explicitly engages in economic diplomacy in order to promote American business abroad and create jobs for Americans, to encourage foreign investment in the United States, and to create conditions for American businesses to be able to fairly compete overseas.

The Office of Global Partnerships, which reports to the Secretary of State, actively promotes partnerships across the globe based on the assumption that the most important global challenges (e.g. climate change, terrorism, poverty, inequality) are too complex and expensive for one government or organization to solve alone. Addressing these issues requires innovation, entrepreneurship and cooperation across various sectors of society. One of the most common ways this office works is by bringing together large corporations, start-ups, civil society organizations, philanthropies, academic institutions, religious bodies, research centers and ordinary citizens, and then pairing them with the resources of businesses to solve the issue at hand.

The Office of Global Partnerships recently published its first report in which it reviews the initiatives it is promoting. These include engaging with global diaspora communities who serve as informal US ambassadors in their home countries, expanding opportunities for veterans, managing sustainability of natural resources, and fostering entrepreneurship and maximizing human potential through partnerships with agencies such as NASA and private sector giants such as Nike.

The State Department regards American business operating overseas as the "face of the United States abroad." Beyond their financial interests in these countries, the State Department asserts that these businesses are "fulfilling an important diplomatic role and contributing to America's overall foreign policy strategy... promoting education, sustainable economic development and humanitarian assistance." One of the tools the State Department uses to pay tribute to businesses for their efforts is the Secretary of State's Award for Corporate Excellence (ACE). In 2010, for example, Cisco received this award for its investments in the economic and technological development of the Palestinian Authority, which in turn strengthened the ties between the Palestinian and Israeli economies. This is an interesting example of how US foreign policy principles are promoted through private sector activity.

B. Guiding Principles for Israeli Foreign Policy

The growing influence of civil society in the international diplomatic arena poses a unique challenge for Israel. The Israeli – Palestinian conflict is at the heart of the agenda of a rising number of civil society organizations across a wide spectrum of spheres including international law, human rights, and more. At the same time, Israel enjoys the unique influence that Jewish communities abroad

have over their respective governments (the best example being the United States). This unique reality – fueled simultaneously by both Israel's challenges and strategic assets – highlights the need for Israel to formulate relevant principles for its foreign policy and the conduct of its foreign ministry vis-à-vis civil and economic diplomatic tracks as these now exist alongside and in tandem with traditional diplomatic ones.

1. Integrative Diplomacy

The Israeli Foreign Service must form partnerships and bridge the gap between the realm of traditional, professional diplomacy and the range of non-state actors that operate in the diplomatic arena today. It must recognize their growing influence and take an active role in empowering global civil society. To achieve this, the Israeli government must work with civil society, business and international companies, social entrepreneurs and a wide-range of communities, including Jewish communities abroad.

- A) Partnering with Israeli civil society organizations with a global outreach** – In addition to its traditional efforts, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs must promote cooperation with Israeli civil society organizations that have good working relationships with their counterparts overseas and partake in shaping the global agenda in international fora such as the UN (the work done on environmental issues is a good example of this).
- B) Branding Israel as a creative, entrepreneurial state that aspires to build trust internationally and to know the “other”** – Israel should seek to involve itself with and promote dialogue about issues that are at the heart of the global agenda. Specific attention should be given to issues that are critical for developing nations such as poverty, water, agriculture and entrepreneurship. These efforts will contribute to the perception of Israel as a country that offers creative solutions and can inspire others to action. Here, too, Israeli companies can play an important role by accentuating Israelis' entrepreneurial spirit and energy. In this regard, recent efforts in the cultural sphere, in the areas of film and literature, have been particularly successful.
- C) Encouraging civil and economic diplomacy** – Israeli civil diplomacy should be encouraged through the harnessing of Israeli businesses and civil society organizations operating overseas. An example of this type of activity is the El Al Ambassadors Program that trains and encourages flight crews to engage in public speaking while they are between flights abroad. Those who participate in such ventures are often seen as “goodwill ambassadors,” especially in light of the fact that they are perceived as opinion-makers both at home and abroad. This type of civil diplomacy can help highlight Israeli society's

multiculturalism through partnerships with various sectors of Israeli society and with their contacts around the world.

- D) Recasting the role of the Israeli diplomat** – The Ministry of Foreign Affairs must define a new set of qualifications and traits that are required of its diplomats. It must offer them relevant training, for example in the fields of social media, building trilateral partnerships and exerting influence without authority. These skills will enable diplomats to create relationships with individuals and organizations both in and out of government whose goals align with their own and will manifest themselves through the creation of issue-related networks that bring together actors from different sectors.
- E) Efficient Resource Management** – The broadening of the target audiences and objectives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order to make them compatible with 21st century diplomacy will require both additional resources and the more efficient management of existing ones. To this end, creative initiatives – some of which are already being made by foreign ministries around the world – will be required. These may include virtual embassies, administrative hubs that service multiple embassies simultaneously, and “reserve” diplomats who can be called up and deployed when needed.

This integrative diplomacy approach could have significant implications for the unique challenge that Israel faces in the shape of calls for economic and cultural boycotts against her. Since those who promote these boycotts often come from within the civil society sphere, creating and using networks of Israeli civil activists could provide an effective group of front-line responders to those who want to boycott Israel.

2. Involvement in Global Issues

Israel must continue to work on global issues where it can contribute to the greater good, especially in fields where the international community already recognizes it as a leader. Such involvement could strengthen Israeli society and its economy. The formulation and effective communication of a clear Israeli policy regarding its role on global issues would both augment Israel's involvement and the positive exposure that would follow worldwide.

- A) Involvement in the global effort to promote sustainable development, and to tackle poverty, food and water shortages, especially in developing nations** – Israel is already involved to some extent in these areas. One example is the “Entrepreneurship for Development” resolution Israel promoted at the UN General Assembly in 2012. Israel has proven abilities in the field of food, water and agriculture-related technologies, which could all be a source for international investment. The fact that these issues are at the heart of the agenda of international organizations

such as the UN and the World Bank creates an opportunity for the Israeli government to increase its involvement and to position Israel as a global leader in these fields.

B) Sharing best Israeli practices in the field of promoting social change

– Israel must strive to export its best practices in the civil society arena. Such efforts could be especially productive in light of the activities of Israeli civil society organizations in education, culture, entrepreneurship and more. Many Israeli organizations have relationships and partnerships overseas, including ties to Jewish philanthropists and communities. It may be possible to leverage these in order to “sell” this knowledge around the world, especially to countries where the evolution of civil society now mimics that which occurred in Israel in recent decades.

C) Promoting personal security in light of the spread of global terrorism

– This issue is worth mentioning due to its centrality on the international agenda and to the fact that Israel is regarded as an expert in the field. The issue is probably already being addressed in discrete frameworks without much public attention. However, greater Israeli efforts and a decision to bring them to light could provide Israeli diplomats with a significant area for new activity. Israeli technology’s ability to combat terror and minimize both harm to innocents and any infringement upon human rights (e.g. at airports) should be harnessed. Because these issues are constantly being discussed by human rights organizations, a more proactive Israeli approach could help change Israel’s negative image in this regard.

D) Providing humanitarian assistance in international crises

– Israel receives much credit internationally for its excellent capabilities and quick response to emergencies and natural disasters. This strength demands further development in order for it to reach its full potential and requires examining opportunities for partnerships with Israeli businesses operating abroad.

3. Economic Diplomacy

Governments around the world are expected to continue investing in economic diplomacy. For a small country like Israel, this issue is of paramount importance in order to guarantee that its public resources are used as effectively as possible. The Ministry of Economy is currently working to expand the number of its commercial missions overseas, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should tend to this matter as well.

A) MASHAV: Israel’s Agency for International Development Cooperation

– MASHAV’s budget must grow and be allocated towards countries whose economies offer opportunities for Israeli companies. This would improve Israel’s image and help Israeli businesses succeed. The work of the US Agency for International Development (USAID) is a model that could be

studied. While USAID is sometimes the target of criticism because working with it requires cooperation with American companies, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton explained that this condition was necessary to guarantee political support to approve the US foreign aid budget. Creating a similar linkage between Israeli aid and Israeli companies could help promote Israeli businesses abroad.

B) An “Iron Dome” for Israeli companies operating abroad – The foreign ministry must be proactive in protecting Israeli companies against international BDS efforts (Boycotts, Divestment & Sanctions). It must approach and analyze the problem from the perspective of the companies themselves, provide intelligence about boycott efforts in real-time and represent the interests of both the State of Israel and Israeli companies in international fora. Israeli companies cannot and are not interested in taking upon themselves the role of the political representative of the State of Israel. Indeed, their primary goal is to avoid crises that will disrupt their business activities and tarnish their image. Because the tactics used by the pro-BDS community rely on drumming up media attention, the foreign ministry must take steps to minimize the potential reputational damage to these companies and the media circus around such efforts. First and foremost, the tools and capacity to map out how BDS organizations and initiatives operate, as well as the capability to quickly respond to requests from companies who encounter BDS and to provide initial assistance must be created.

Sources

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