

Recommendations for Israel's New Foreign Minister: Initial Policy Messages

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Israel's new foreign minister should lead a process of fixing Israel's foreign policy. This paper presents recommendations for messages he can convey and actions he can take to improve Israel's regional relations with Arab states, the Palestinians and Europe. It is based on deliberations by a Mitvim Institute task team that includes Dr. Nimrod Goren, Merav Kahana-Dagan, Dr. Roei Kibrik, Dr. Lior Lehrs, Dr. Maya Sion-Tzidkiyahu and former MK Ksenia Svetlova.

A. Israel's Relations with Arab States

1. Israel is interested in bolstering the peace with Jordan and Egypt and achieving peace with additional Arab states in order to normalize relations with its neighbors in the Middle East. Arab leaders are invited to visit Israel.
2. Israel's relations with Arab states should extend beyond the clandestine, security realm to include open diplomatic, economic and civilian cooperation.
3. Israel attaches importance to the Arab Peace Initiative and welcomes the willingness of Arab states to consistently ratify it over time. Israel views the proposal as an opportunity to promote negotiations with the Palestinians. Israel is also interested in launching a regional peace process with the involvement of both Arab states and the Palestinian Authority.
4. Israel believes Arab states could play a significant role in promoting Israeli-Palestinian peace. Such peace would also provide significant opportunities to fulfill the potential of Israel's relations with the Arab world. Israel calls for a regional conference to relaunch the peace process.
5. Israel seeks to cooperate with Arab states on people-to-people projects that could change negative attitudes and forge links of peace. Israel seeks to contribute its know-how in the fields of hydrology, climate, renewable energy and security for the benefit of the Arab states and their inhabitants.
6. Israel believes its unique geopolitical location enables it to assume a significant role in furthering connections and cooperation between Europe and the Middle East. This is already happening in the Eastern Mediterranean, and should be broadened into wide-ranging, institutionalized multi-regional cooperation beneficial to both Israel and Arab states.
7. Israel will give top priority to restoring relations with Jordan and trust with King Abdullah. These relations are of supreme strategic importance and must be bolstered and developed. Israel recognizes Jordan's special status vis-à-vis Islam's holy sites in Jerusalem. It will work to advance new joint projects with Jordan, fulfill past

commitments and is ready to help Jordan deal with the refugee challenge and with threats of terrorism.

8. Israel recognizes Egypt's key regional importance and the vital role it plays in promoting Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and preventing escalation between Israel and Gaza. Israel welcomes the growing cooperation with Egypt on natural gas and will also invest efforts in promoting civilian ties with Egypt. First off, Israel will immediately appoint a new ambassador to Egypt following a lengthy hiatus during which the position was not staffed.

B. Israel's Relations with the Palestinians

1. Israel is interested in peace with the Palestinians based on the two-state solution and will take steps to advance it. Resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, not only reaching an arrangement with Gaza, is a top priority for Israel.
2. Israel is holding out its hand to the leadership of the Palestinian Authority (PA) in a bid to renew dialogue and the peace process and is interested in creating a direct channel between leaders and top officials. Israel also attaches importance to promoting ties and dialogue between the two peoples and building mutual respect and trust.
3. Israel does not want the PA's collapse. It views the PA as a partner for negotiations, and a key partner in resolving the situation in Gaza. Israel chooses to engage with the PA, which recognizes it, rather than with Hamas, which rejects its right to exist.
4. Israel is interested in continuing coordination with the PA to prevent security deterioration and addressing joint challenges and opportunities in other fields. Israel will support the PA's efforts to unite the West Bank and Gaza Strip into one Palestinian entity under its leadership and to hold elections.
5. Israel pledges to help improve living conditions for the Palestinians, not as an alternative to a diplomatic solution but out of a moral-humanitarian commitment. Israel calls on the international community to contribute to this effort as well as to diplomatic efforts to advance peace.
6. Israel is willing to enable the planned construction in Qalqilya to accommodate natural population growth, to avoid demolishing houses and public facilities in East Jerusalem and Area C, to increase the number of work permits for Palestinians, and ease freedom of movement and the transfer of taxes it collects on behalf of the PA.
7. Israel appreciates the efforts invested by the US administration in formulating its vision of peace, but emphasizes that resolution of the conflict must stem from direct negotiations between the sides, with regional and international involvement, taking into consideration the needs and aspirations of both sides to the conflict.
8. Israel will not undertake unilateral annexation measures in the territories, it will freeze construction in the settlements that risks the feasibility of the two-state solution and will preserve the status quo at Jerusalem's holy sites.

C. Israel's Relations with Europe

1. Israel wishes to turn the page on its relationship with the European Union (EU). Israel regards the EU as a friend and partner with which it shares common values and wants to deepen and expand diverse and positive cooperation.
2. Israel will continue promoting bilateral relations with EU member states, viewing them as an effective tool to influence decision-making in Brussels. However, it will not take advantage of such moves to undermine the EU and deepen its internal divisions.
3. As a state committed to the values of liberal democracy, Israel attaches great importance to a strong EU that plays a key role in the international arena and will prioritize ties with European states that share those same values.
4. Israel will continue to criticize EU measures which it opposes, but will do so through open, honest dialogue and in as positive a climate as possible. The new government will cease the harsh rhetoric and incitement against the EU and express its criticism in a professional manner.
5. Israel will continue to boost its alliance with Greece and Cyprus and promote additional cooperation in the Eastern Mediterranean, including the formation of regional frameworks with the participation of European and Arab states, and restoration of relations with Turkey to ambassadorial level.
6. Israel extends an invitation to European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen for an official visit. The Foreign Minister will conduct an official visit to Europe, during which he will seek to meet with EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell.
7. Israel seeks to renew the high-level political dialogue with the EU and reconvene the Israel-EU Association Council, which has been suspended since 2012, in order to update old agreements and discuss new ones.
8. Israel welcomes the 2013 European proposal of upgrading Israel-EU relations to the level of a Special Privileged Partnership once Israeli-Palestinian peace is achieved, and is interested in launching a dialogue on the proposal's potential content.
9. Israel values the EU's support for advancement of Israeli-Palestinian dialogue and cooperation, through civil society organizations and other channels, and its efforts to promote peace and democracy in the region.
10. Israel would like to inform the EU that it seeks the renewal of the peace process with the Palestinians and will avoid unilateral steps that endanger the feasibility of the two-state solution.