

## **The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs**

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***April 2016***

The gradual weakening of Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) over the years, especially in comparison to the other entities responsible for various aspects of foreign and defense policy, has a negative impact on Israel's ability to promote its foreign policy and undermines the leadership's decision making process. As opposed to the defense and intelligence establishments, the MFA has been stripped of its routine responsibilities and assignments, which have been scattered among other government ministries. In effect, it has lost its place within the system.

In recent decades, the foreign ministry's area of activity has gradually contracted despite its extensive contribution and that of its staff. Indeed, its contribution spanned all areas of national security and foreign policy all over the world. The erosion in the MFA's role occurred for a variety of reasons, including because the defense establishment, the intelligence community, and often officials in the Prime Minister's Office took part in these efforts.

Israel's defense establishment dominates not only the highest levels of national security decision making, but also the areas that are within the purview of the MFA and at its expense. Thus, for example, the Prime Minister's Office managed diplomatic relations with the leaderships of various countries, primarily the United States. Moreover, for years, emissaries of the Prime Minister have dealt directly with foreign leaders. The Ministry of Defense and the IDF have vast and active foreign relations departments, and the Mossad, too, has special ties with countries and regimes in the Middle East and beyond. At times, it bypasses and does not even inform the MFA of these relationships.

The impression that a strong National Security Council (NSC) undermines the stature or authorities of the foreign ministry is inaccurate. In fact, during my entire tenure in the Prime Minister's Office, I pushed for the strengthening and an increased presence of the foreign ministry, as well as for greater MFA involvement in decision making and for the maximization of the potential of this integral ministry.

There is no advanced country that does not have a professional foreign service and foreign ministry. Often they are exceptionally qualified. The principle of professionalism should apply across the foreign and defense policy

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establishment, and thus this branch must be strengthened. Conducting diplomacy and international relations is a matter for experienced professionals who are on the ground and can be effective vis-à-vis a variety of arenas and governments. The international arena is one in which Israel is currently waging – and will be waging in the future – a difficult battle not only to preserve and advance its various interests but also to stem the tide of attacks on its legitimacy as a state.

In the current state of a full blown diplomatic struggle, it is inconceivable for the foreign ministry, its reach and its capabilities, not to be fully taken advantage of. The increased politicization of the ministry, and its continuous weakening, are thorns in the side of Israel's national security. In a variety of areas, the required skills are those of diplomats – their training, expertise, experience and their belonging to a professional organization. When members of other organizations try to occupy the diplomatic space, their inexperience is very often quite evident. Significant disruptions and missed opportunities are caused by the fact that the full potential of Israeli diplomats is not utilized. Just as faulty intelligence weakens the entire system, so, too, does faulty diplomacy create a feeble and dysfunctional national security apparatus.

Israel needs a strong, top-tier, adaptable and sophisticated foreign ministry. It needs a foreign ministry that is capable of operating in a new world order and in an arena that requires global alliances. It needs a ministry capable of addressing the various global, technological, economic, and political processes that are sweeping the globe and one that is able to fend off diplomatic attacks on its very existence. It needs a ministry capable of maintaining old alliances while seeking new ones in an ever-changing international environment.

What is required is a significant strengthening of the foreign ministry and its standing within the Israeli national security apparatus on all levels – from the field to the corridors of power. The MFA must be charged with discharging all the duties reserved for professional foreign services in developed countries. The strengthening of the MFA is a necessity. A law, such as the Foreign Service Bill, is also necessary in order for proposed reorganization to be supported by legislative measures. In any event, swift reforms are needed to ensure that Israel's Foreign Service adheres to the highest professional standards and fulfills its mission, as required by the challenges of our time and as expected in any developed nation across the world.