



Established by JAFI
Brainstorming Conference 2015
GlenCove, NY | May 18-19

Jewish Solidarity In an Age of Polarization

Background Policy Documents





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Pluralism and Jewish Solidarity in Polarizing Times

A number of internal polarization processes have surfaced in Israel and the Diaspora over the past year. They are influenced in different ways by parallel political schisms taking place in American and Israeli society. In certain areas Israeli and Diaspora Jews may be heading in different directions, and expectations should be re-examined. The political system in Israel and the Jewish communal system in the Diaspora are supposed to facilitate frameworks that can contain a variety of opinions. Traditionally, this has been accomplished through mutual respect and a sense of unity, and through a commitment to certain “rules of the game” that allow us to be, at once, “different” and “unified.”

Coexistence through the careful management of the complexities of human reality -- which doesn't have and doesn't require full consensus on every issue -- offers expression to the pluralistic spirit of a healthy society.

Are these current polarizing processes so extreme that they threaten our “togetherness”? Do they create pressures too weighty for our sense of “mutual responsibility”? How can we mitigate and neutralize this danger threatening the internal cohesion of the Jewish people and its pluralistic spirit: in Israel, the Diaspora, and the interwoven connections between the two?

This is the framework for our brainstorming conference this year, which concludes a series of JPPJ discussion seminars on *Jewish Values and the Use of Force in Armed Conflict* held throughout the Jewish world.

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Table of Contents

Introduction 5
Avinoam Bar-Yosef

**Jewish Values and the Use of Force in Armed Conflict
Perspectives from World Jewry 7**
Shmuel Rosner and Michael Herzog

**The Geopolitical Challenges Facing Israel's
New Government27**
Avi Gil

Participants49

Main Publications of the JPPI51

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Special thanks to **Chaya Ekstein, Dan Feferman** and **Sharon Shilo**

Introduction

JPPI's 2015 brainstorming conference was initiated as the culmination of our 2015 Jewish world dialogue process, and as part of the preparation of our upcoming *Annual Assessment*. In addition to the esteemed group of academics, leaders, and professionals who were invited to take part in these discussions, we are honored to have three distinguished guests with us: The Honorable Dr. Henry Kissinger; Mr. Eric Schmidt, Executive Chairman of Google; and, representing the U.S. administration, Dr. Robert Malley, Special Assistant to the President and White House Coordinator for the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf Region.

The dialogue this year is part of a large project on Pluralism and Democracy, which is supported by the William Davidson Foundation. It focused on Jewish Values and Israel's Use of Force in Armed Conflicts. The first part of this brainstorming conference will be dedicated to its findings and its impacts on evolving processes in the relationship between Israel and the Diaspora.

The second part will concentrate more specifically on possible emerging frictions between Israel and the United States over a nuclear deal between Iran and the six world powers, and their implications for the U.S. Jewish community.

As in previous JPPI brainstorming conferences, we have prepared two background papers. They were written by our senior fellows: Amb. Avi Gil, Brig. Gen. (res.) Michael Herzog, and Mr. Shmuel Rosner.

The first paper in this slim volume is an interim report on JPPI's 2015 world dialogue, *Jewish Values and the Use of Force in Armed Conflict, Perspectives from World Jewry*. Forty-three discussion seminars were held in different Diaspora communities around the world – from Melbourne, Australia and Johannesburg, South Africa through Budapest, London and Paris in Europe; from Washington and New York on the East Coast through Los Angeles in the West; from Toronto, Canada in the north through Sao Paulo, Brazil in the south.

The report emphasizes that, in general, world Jewry believes that Israel makes a sincere effort to act in a moral fashion compared to other countries, but sometimes criticizes the Israeli policies leading to military conflicts. Some of the dialogue participants expressed the feeling that Israel's wars complicate their interactions with the non-Jewish world.

The second paper analyzes the difficult road the new Israeli government is facing in a very complex and dangerous geopolitical arena. Although the Iran agreement, regional Shia-Sunni conflicts and a rampaging ISIS certainly create major and critical challenges, they may also open new windows of opportunity with some Arab states based on common interests and similar threats.

Those areas will be covered deeply in our discussions. An integrative conference summary, along with our 2015 dialogue findings, will be presented to the new Israeli cabinet and major Jewish organizations around the world. In parallel, a special report will be submitted to Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which recently approached and encouraged JPPI to examine the gaps in perceptions between Israelis and Diaspora Jews over last summer's Gaza war.

I would like to acknowledge and express my extraordinary appreciation and gratitude for JPPI's leadership, especially Amb. Stuart Eizenstat, Amb. Dennis Ross, and Mr. Leonid Nevzlin. Their wisdom and guidance are critical to our work. I would also like to thank the William Davidson Foundation for their trust in us and for encouraging our special project on pluralism and democracy.

Avinoam Bar-Yosef
President and Founding Director

Interim Report on JPPI's Jewish World Dialogue 2015:

Jewish Values and the Use of Force in Armed Conflict Perspectives from World Jewry

By Shmuel Rosner and Michael Herzog

"One does not wage war against any human being... until one calls for peace"
(Maimonides, Hilchot Melachim 6.1)

Interim Conclusions from the 2015 JPPI Dialogue

- World Jews tend to believe that Israel makes a sincere effort to wage war in a moral fashion compared to other countries – and they want Israel to continue to do so.
- When they have criticism of Israel's wars, it is usually over the policies "leading to war" and not the conduct of IDF forces during a war.
- Jews believe that Israel fails miserably in explaining its actions to the international community – but they also believe that Israel is unjustly "singled out" for criticism.
- Many Jews believe that Israel at war is a "turn off" for younger Jews. Connected Jews say they tend to feel "proud" when they observe Israel at war.
- Jews feel that Israel's wars impact their lives as it complicates their interaction with the non-Jewish world.

Introduction

This interim report briefly summarizes JPPI's first impressions from a worldwide round of discussions in Jewish communities between January and late April 2015. It includes material from the background paper prepared in advance of these consultations, as well as some preliminary findings drawn from the process. The full report will appear in early summer 2015.¹

This paper explains the context for this discussion on **Jewish values and beliefs, and their possible implications for Israel's use of force in armed conflicts and for Israel-Diaspora relations**. It lays out the reasons this topic requires discussion, at this time, with Jews around the world. It includes several short reference points to historical and philosophical approaches to the use of force by Jews and by Israel; and it frames the main questions under discussion in the dialogue seminars. We also include observations from the discussions held in recent months, and several statistics from the survey all participants in this process completed.²

The 2015 dialogue is part of a larger project on pluralism and democracy in the Jewish world, which is supported by the William Davidson Foundation. Its subject was selected in the wake of the 2014 summer war in Gaza, and was inspired by a letter Israel's Foreign Ministry wrote to JPPI concerning "wide gaps in the reading of realities in the Middle East among Jews in Israel and around the world – gaps that should be expected in a world of diverse views – [and that] justify an ongoing exchange spanning all perspectives and streams." JPPI is slated to share its report with Israel's cabinet, in the summer of 2015, a year after the Gaza turmoil.³

1 Rosner and Herzog head JPPI's dialogue on "Jewish values and Israel's use of force: a world-Jewry's perspective", and Rosner is the principal author of this report. JPPI assistant Chaya Ekstein helped with background research, and was in charge of running the seminar process. This paper was edited by Barry Geltman.

2 More about the process, including details about the composition of the groups that took part in it, and comments about the process' strengths and limitations – at the end of the report. JPPI's full report will include a more nuanced analysis of the composition of the dialogue process.

3 It is worth mentioning that the 2015 JPPI Dialogue comes on the heels of a similar JPPI's 2014 dialogue process, which was conducted at the request of Israel's Justice Ministry. The 2014 effort was part of a larger effort by the Ministry to formulate recommendations regarding a possible "constitutional arrangement dealing with Israel's identity as a Jewish and democratic state." JPPI's concluding report has been recognized as a significant achievement in the dialogue between Israel and the Diaspora. Prime Minister Netanyahu, in a June 2014 Cabinet meeting, encouraged the Institute to continue with this important and timely endeavor. Media coverage of the 2014 report can be seen here: <http://jppi.org.il/uploads/09-07-14%20Selected%20Press%20Clippings.pdf>
The report itself is here: http://jppi.org.il/uploads/jewish_and_democratic-eng.pdf (English) and here: http://jppi.org.il/he/uploads/jewish_and_Democratic-Hebrew.pdf (Hebrew).

The Context for this Year's Discussion

Israel's IDF launched Operation Protective Edge in Gaza in July-August of 2014. Its goal, writ large, was to stop Hamas – the Islamist organization that controls Gaza and other armed organizations in Gaza – from violently terrorizing Israelis (with rockets or through cross-border tunnels), and to deter them from doing so for a long period of time.⁴ Israel withdrew its forces and all settlements from Gaza in 2005. In 2007, Hamas forcibly took over Gaza, and since then Israel has prosecuted three rounds of armed conflict against terror groups there – in 2008/9 (Operation Cast Lead), 2012 (Operation Pillar of Defense) and 2014 (Operation Protective Edge). All three left devastation in Gaza an order of magnitude greater than in Israel.⁵

These recent rounds of armed conflict in Gaza illustrate, better than most other examples,⁶ the complications – operational and moral (sometimes framed as “legal”⁷) – at the core of what some call “asymmetrical warfare,” “low intensity conflict,” or “warfare in densely populated areas.”⁸

The era when Israel fought against regular state militaries and won decisive, unequivocal victories is long gone – the last armed confrontation purely of this type was in 1973. “I am 35-years-old,” a JPPI seminar participant complained, “and I've never seen Israel win a battle.”⁹ Israel's battles of recent decades have been different, more ambiguous and complex in nature. They involve non-state actors who have

4 According to Israeli official data over 14,000 rockets and mortar shells have been fired from Gaza into Israel from 2005 until June 30, 2014, and over 4000 projectiles were fired during operation Protective Edge. See: <http://www.shabak.gov.il>

5 Operation Cast Lead: 13 Israeli casualties and 1,200-1,391 Palestinian casualties; Operation Pillar of Defense: 6 Israeli casualties and 167 Palestinian casualties; Operation Protective Edge: 73 Israeli Casualties and 2,140 Palestinian casualties. See: www.terrorism-info.org.il

6 See: Gabi Siboni, “Challenges of Warfare in Densely Populated Areas,” *Military and Strategic Affairs*, Special Issue, April 2014. “Israel is special because the irregulars who fight it do so not in far-away countries, thousands of kilometers away, but on its own borders, only a few dozen kilometers from Israel's own population centers. And this gives them the unique capability to strike at these centers as their chief strategy”.

7 Obviously, confusing “**morality**” with “**law**” is problematic. But in many countries today, especially in the West, international law is considered as the most specific expression of moral norms that should be expected of countries in armed conflicts. It should also be mentioned that “the **legality** of Israel's actions are not synonymous with issues concerning the **legitimacy** of these actions in the international arena” (See: Pnina Sharvit Baruch, “Operation Protective Edge: Legality and Legitimacy,” INSS, July 2014).

8 Maj. Gen. Dan Efroni, “Challenges Posed by International Law in the Context of Urban Warfare Insights from Operation Pillar of Defense,” *Military and Strategic Affairs*, Special Issue, April 2014.

9 JPPI Seminar, American Jewish University, Los Angeles, April 14, 2015, notes by Shmuel Rosner.

hybridized terror with military capabilities and tactics. Forces with considerable rocket arsenals, such as Hamas in Gaza or Hezbollah in Lebanon, mainly target Israeli civilians. They nest and operate from within their own civilian populations, in fact turning them into human shields against retaliation. Heavy civilian involvement on both sides creates acute dilemmas for Israel. Incessant rocket fire on Israeli civilian populations ultimately pushed Israel to deploy ground troops in Gaza last summer. Almost every move required a balancing act between military necessity and the prospect of inflicting harm on unarmed, often innocent civilians.

The ambiguity and complexity of the new battleground (together with the controversies of Israeli policy vis-a-vis the Palestinians) make it more difficult for Israel to paint a clear picture of a battlefield on which it holds the higher moral ground. Its operations in Gaza have exposed Israel to the harsh criticism of various governments and institutions. This has fueled the international campaign to de-legitimize Israel, and has led to international investigations of Israel's conduct – most notably the 2009 Goldstone Commission (officially, the United Nations Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict).¹⁰ In 2014, the UN Human Rights Council appointed a commission headed by Canadian academic William Schabas – the United Nations Fact Finding Mission on the 2014 Israel-Gaza Conflict¹¹ – to investigate alleged violations of international law during Operation Protective Edge.

Israel has withheld its cooperation, pointing out that the commission's mandate is biased,¹² and Schabas was later forced out due to bias claims.¹³ In March 2015, the commission declared that it interprets its mandate as requiring it to look into “the activities of Palestinian armed groups in Gaza; including attacks on Israel, as well as the Israeli military operation in the Gaza Strip and Israeli actions in the West Bank, including east Jerusalem.”¹⁴ The commission's report is expected in June 2015.

10 For the full Goldstone report see: <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/12session/A-HRC-12-48.pdf>). The report accused both Israel and the Palestinian armed groups of war crimes, recommending that both sides conduct internal investigations. Goldstone later distanced himself from the report, claiming that if he had known some of the information only subsequently revealed, the report would have been different. see: http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/reconsidering-the-goldstone-report-on-israel-and-war-crimes/2011/04/01/AFg111JC_story.html

11 See: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/SpecialSessions/Session9/Pages/FactFindingMission.aspx>

12 The Prime Minister's Office and Foreign Ministry gave the green light for an unofficial delegation to testify before the group, Times of Israel, Jan. 15, 2015.

13 See, for example: “Gaza conflict: Schabas quits UN inquiry over bias claims”, BBC. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-31107988>

14 See: UN Gaza war probe to also investigate Palestinian human rights violations, Tovah Lazaroff, Jerusalem Post, March 2015.

A report of a "Board of Inquiry" regarding incidents in Gaza during the war was submitted to the UN Security Council at the end of April 2015. This report¹⁵ criticized Israel for attacking "inviolable" facilities of the UN in Gaza and criticized Hamas for "unacceptable" misuse of UN facilities.

In early May, *Breaking the Silence*, a leftist Israeli organization, published its report on the 2014 Gaza war, which includes soldiers' accounts of inappropriate military behavior, including firing under unclear circumstances and the targeting of civilians during the war.¹⁶ In response, the IDF expressed regret that the anonymous testimonies preclude it from investigating the allegations, and encouraged any soldier who can testify about specific incidents of misconduct to come forward and testify officially.

The IDF is in the process of conducting numerous investigations regarding Protective Edge, including cases of ostensible violation of orders and targeting of civilians.

Jewish discontent with Israel at war

Israel's difficulty with international public opinion sometimes echoes in the more intimately involved Jewish world. A spectrum from uneasiness to blunt revulsion has been expressed in articles, statements, and observations by Jewish commentators, leaders, scholars, and rabbis – during and following the war in Gaza. "The Israeli case for the bombardment of Gaza could be foolproof", wrote *New York Times* columnist Roger Cohen – only to conclude that it was not.¹⁷ "I can't defend killing children... I believe Israel should have avoided bombardment of UN safe harbors," wrote a Duke University Professor.¹⁸ A British scholar, who presents himself as belonging to a group of "Jews who have traditionally supported Israel but in recent years are feeling less and less comfortable doing so due to Israeli policy," has raised doubts about Israel's claim that it abides by international law.¹⁹

15 See: *U.N. Says Israeli Military Actions Killed 44 Civilians in Schools in Gaza War*, NYT, April 27, 2015.

16 For the full report see: <http://www.breakingthesilence.org.il/pdf/ProtectiveEdge.pdf>

17 Roger Cohen, "Zionism and Its Discontents," *New York Times*, July 2014.

18 David Schanzer, "Israel Can't Afford to Lose Jews Like Me," *The World Post*. Schanzer's article was written in response to Shmuel Rosner's article in the *New York Times*: *Israel's Fair Weather Fans*, August, 2014.

19 Ilan Zvi Baron, Lecturer in the School of Government and International Affairs, Durham University. See: <http://www.publicseminar.org/2014/08/proportionality-and-the-diaspora-in-operation-protective-edge/#.VJL39dKsWxo>

The *New York Review of Books* reported: “There is a weariness in the liberal Zionist fraternity. Privately, people admit to growing tired of defending Israeli military action when it comes at such a heavy cost in civilian life, its futility confirmed by the frequency with which it has to be repeated.”²⁰ Columnist Jonathan Chait, with a similar weariness, noted disapprovingly: “[T]he unintended deaths of Palestinians is so disproportionate to any corresponding increase in security for the Israeli targets of Hamas’s air strikes.”²¹

Chait’s criticism of Israel, along with others mentioned here, is only the tip of the iceberg. It was dispatched in a manifestly “Jewish” context. And like many other criticisms, it attempts to convince the reader of the author’s instinctive sympathy for Israel – not a hostile critic, but rather a struggling sympathizer, or former sympathizer. Leon Wieseltier, in an article quoted and debated by many other writers, explained, “It is not sickening that Israel is defending itself – it is, by the standard of Jewish historical experience, exhilarating; but some of what Israel is doing to defend itself is sickening.”²²

Do such expressions of unease reflect the frustration of a small group of Jews, or does it express what the majority of world Jewry believes? There are signs that these are not just isolated incidents of Israel-doubt. In a JPPI survey of Jewish experts,²³ participants tilted toward the view that “in the aftermath of this specific conflict,” the “net result” has been “less global Jewish attachment to Israel.” One respondent asserted that “for people with strong prior attachments to Israel, Protective Edge strengthened attachment; for people with weak prior attachments, Protective Edge, further weakened attachment.” JPPI’s round of discussions in Jewish communities could further elucidate such assertions.

In JPPI’s survey of dialogue participants, the majority “strongly agreed” or “somewhat agreed” with the statement: “Israel’s military did as much as possible to avoid civilian casualties in last summer’s armed conflict in Gaza.” However,

20 Jonathan Freedland, “Liberal Zionism After Gaza,” *New York Review of Books*, July 2014.

21 Jonathan Chait, “Israel Is Making It Hard To Be Pro-Israel,” *The National Interest*, July 2014.

22 Leon Wieseltier, “Israel and Gaza: A Just and Unjust War,” *The New Republic*, August 2014.

23 The Delphi survey is conducted in preparation for JPPI’s annual assessment. The snippet presented here is from the first round of questions sent to participants. The full presentation of results will be included in the annual assessment.

there was also a significant number of participants who “somewhat disagreed” with the statement.²⁴

The survey points to one possible reason that some Jews struggle to understand Israel’s actions in Gaza. Many participants “somewhat” agreed with the statement that “Israel is not making sufficient diplomatic efforts to avoid another armed conflict in Gaza,” and, so, is partially to blame for perpetuating a bloody conflict. People are “concerned about the fact that many innocent people get hurt,” a participant²⁵ in an Atlanta JPPJ seminar said.²⁶ In Chicago, a participant argued that within some quarters of the Jewish community “the narrative of Israel as the oppressor wins.”²⁷ At a seminar with Jewish students at UCLA, a participant explained that “the actions taken by Israel impact Jews who don’t always understand the context of its actions.”²⁸

Other data provide what some would see as a more calming assessment of the Gaza effect. Notably, research on Taglit-Birthright applicants and participants found that the war in Gaza, in fact, had a ‘net positive’ effect on the attachment of young Jews to Israel.²⁹ “Between April and August,” the authors argue,³⁰ “connection to Israel increased in all groups... the largest proportional increase was among the liberals” – the group most critical of Israeli policies. Still, in this survey of young people, a large group of Jews contended that Israel had “gone too far” in its response to the conflict with Hamas.³¹ A segment similar in size claimed that Israel’s actions were “mostly” or “completely unjustified.”³²

24 In the final report all numbers will be included. The interim report is based on an incomplete analysis of the survey due to time constraints.

25 All discussions took place under the so-called “Chatham House Rules”, according to which JPPJ can use quotes of participants, but it cannot attribute specific quotes to specific individuals.

26 Atlanta Seminar, March 25, 2015. Notes taken by Shmuel Rosner.

27 Chicago seminar, March 23, 2015. Notes taken by Shmuel Rosner.

28 Hillel UCLA JPPJ seminar, April 15, 2015, notes by Shmuel Rosner.

29 Michelle Shain, Shahar Hecht, Leonard Saxe, U.S. Jewish Young Adults React to the Gaza Conflict: A Survey of Birthright Israel Applicants, Brandeis University, Aug. 2014.

30 “How Do Young American Jews Feel About Israel?”, Tablet Magazine, February 2015. <http://tabletmag.com/scroll/189210/how-do-young-american-jews-feel-about-israel>

31 The survey examined two groups, one of Birthright participants and one of Birthright applicants (that did not take the trip). Of the first group 25% gave a “gone too far” answer, of the second group it was 38%.

32 20% for participants, 32% for applicants.

So the study presents a “half-full, half-empty” dilemma for the observer. The majority of young respondents³³ said they support Israel.³⁴ But the proportion that gave non-supportive or merely half-supportive answers shows that there is a significant group of Jews who were unconvinced by the case Israel made that the war – both the decision to wage it and the way it was conducted – was moral and just.³⁵

Framing the Questions

In light of the data presented above, the many documented expressions of discontent on the part of non-Israeli Jews (alongside many expressions of support for Israel's war), and concerns raised in Israel, we aimed to focus the JPPI dialogue on Israel's use of force through three main prisms:

1. Participants' understanding of the current situation;
2. Participants' expectations of Israel when it is using force;
3. The degree to which this topic impacts participants' lives, thinking, and connection to Israel.

Each prism deserves its own discussion, and contains a variety of sub-questions. All in all, we believe that conclusions and lessons derive from these fields that can serve Israeli institutions and policy makers as they contemplate the impact of Israel's actions on its relations with the Jewish world. We also believe that conclusions and lessons can be drawn that serve the leadership of Jewish communities worldwide as they struggle to understand, educate, and develop their own responses to Israeli policies in this complicated and very sensitive field.

In this preliminary paper, authored on the fly as reports from JPPI seminars were still coming in, we include some of our findings in each of the three fields of interest.

33 Prof. Saxe noted that this is impressive support. “Given the media that they're exposed to, and the views of many of their peers, it is more surprising that they are as supportive of Israel as they are”. See: Shmuel Rosner, “It's official: Taglit-Birthright is a Jewish matchmaker,” *Jewish Journal*, Sep. 2014. For the numbers on the general young American population, see: Aaron Blake, “Young Americans take a dim view of Israel's actions,” *Washington Post*, July 2014.

34 See: Shmuel Rosner, “Three noteworthy post-war trends: Israelis, Jews, Americans,” *Jewish Journal*, Sep. 2014.

35 In surveys conducted during the war among Israeli Jews, over 90% responded that protective edge is justified. See: <http://news.walla.co.il/item/2770297>.

Israel's War Ethics

Israel refers to the IDF as “the most moral army in the world.”³⁶ Its operations are conducted according to a code of ethics called *Ruach Tzahal*, the “spirit of the IDF.”³⁷ Early on it states: “The IDF serviceman will, above all, preserve human life, in the recognition of its supreme value and will place himself or others at risk solely to the extent required to carry out his mission.” In practice, Israel strongly claims to be operating within the lines of international norms and international law.

Every Israeli soldier is commanded to internalize and adhere to the principle of *Tohar ha-Nesheq* (purity of arms). It is a principle with a long and winding history,³⁸ beginning in the internal debates of the pre-state Jewish community in Mandatory Palestine.³⁹ Today, it is “a foundational principle in the training of Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers and officers.”⁴⁰

Moral questions are under constant scrutiny and discussion in the IDF, and its moral and legal obligations factor prominently in the calculus of adapting to changing military circumstances.⁴¹ A well-developed mechanism ensures that legal experts take part in operational discussions (down to the divisional level), to determine the legality and permissibility of potential actions before any operational decision is made.⁴²

As to whether the IDF truly deserves the descriptor “moral army,” views, obviously, vary. Critics of Israel and of the IDF tend to judge its conduct more negatively, even harshly.

36 See, for example, this statement of former Defense Minister Ehud Barak, following the 2009 Gaza operation: “I have no doubt that what needs to be probed will be probed, but I also have no doubt in my heart that the IDF is the most moral army in the world.”

37 The full text of *Ruach Tzahal* was provided to all JPPI seminar participants.

38 רונן אביהו, “טוהר הנשק – גלגולי המושג והתפתחותו”, סקירה חודשית, אפריל 1991.

39 See, for example, Anita Shapira’s description of the 1938 debate on “restraint vs. terror”: אניטה שפירא, “בין הבלגה לטרור – הכינוס היישובי ביולי 1938”, בתוך ציונות, כרך 1, בעריכת גדליה יוגב (תל אביב: אוניברסיטת תל אביב, 1981).

40 Benjamin Ish-Shalom, “Purity of Arms” and Purity of Ethical Judgment,” see: <http://www.bmj.org.il/userfiles/articles/new/Purity%20of%20Arms%20and%20Ethical%20Judgement%20Benjamin%20Ish-Shalom.pdf>.

41 See a relatively recent example of this: Asa Kasher, Amos Yadlin, “Military Ethics of Fighting Terror: An Israeli Perspective,” *Journal of Military Ethics*, 2005. The full article was provided to JPPI seminar participants.

42 This mechanism itself is subject to criticism in Israel, by observers believing that a military should not be subjected to lawyerly examination during battle. Former Justice Minister Prof. Daniel Friedman also criticized the high court for “forcing IDF officers to appear before the court during a war, to explain their actions and to specify their actions aimed at defending the civilian population from within which the terrorists operate.” See: דיאל פרידמן, “הארנק והחרב: המהפכה המשפטית ושברה,” (תל אביב: משכל, 2013).

Some argue that particular Israeli policies render all debate over IDF conduct moot, as the policies themselves are self-evidently immoral. Similar views were expressed in JPPI discussions as well. A Toronto participant, for example, asked that greater consideration be given to the “larger context” and Israel’s “policies between wars and not just during a war.” When asked if Israel’s policies “between wars” might make him question Israel’s morality “during a war,” he answered “yes.”⁴³ Yet a significant majority of JPPI participants disagreed with the survey statement, “Israel’s occupation of the West Bank makes all its armed conflicts against Palestinian groups immoral.”⁴⁴

Some critics of Israel’s war conduct dispute the IDF’s battlefield morality regardless of the policies it is commanded to defend. In JPPI discussions critics of this type were a small minority. This is not surprising considering seminar participants also almost unanimously believed “Israel was unjustly singled out for criticism” during the Gaza war.⁴⁵ Participants raised the anti-Israel bias within specific countries and international forums, and expressed in the international media, in almost all JPPI discussions. And, on this issue, there was a significant alignment between the most critical of Israel’s policies and those less-critical participants. “No one is asking how many civilians are killed by Saudi airplanes in Yemen, and I don’t know that they use a ‘knock on the roof’ tactic over there,” a Cleveland participant said, referring to the IDF practice of firing small warning devices to alert civilians to flee the scene before actual attacks.⁴⁶ The assertion that a double standard is applied to Israel is especially pronounced among those who believe that the IDF mostly performs morally under the extremely complicated conditions of warfare in Gaza. Several observers and commentators who wrote about the Gaza war highlighted the success of the IDF in keeping a relatively low ratio of civilian to combatant casualties in urban warfare – compared to other militaries. In some cases this has been acknowledged even by commentators who are, otherwise, routinely critical of Israeli policies.⁴⁷

43 Toronto JPPI seminar, April 21, 2015, notes taken by Shmuel Rosner.

44 Based on incomplete analysis of JPPI survey of seminar participants. Question 5D.

45 Question 6 in JPPI’s survey of participants. The question was: “When Israel was criticized in international forums for supposed immoral acts in recent armed conflicts, did you think that...”, and the three options for answer were: “Israel was unjustly singled out for criticism; Israel was judged like all other countries; Israel was not criticized harshly enough”. The average of all answers to this question very close to 1 (based on incomplete data: 1.08). Namely, most JPPI participants marked option number 1, and very few marked other options.

46 Cleveland JPPI seminar, March 31, 2015, notes taken by Shmuel Rosner, Stephanie Kahn, Naomi Fein, Jen Schwarz, Elizabeth Klein, Carol Wolf, Howard Wolf, Jennifer Stuart Lesch and Shelley Fishbach.

47 See: Will Saletan, “Civilian Deaths in Gaza. Is Israel killing indiscriminately? A closer look at the evidence and context,” *Slate Magazine*, July 2014.

Clearly, there is a sharp divide between the generally high regard Israelis have for the IDF's morality, and the harsh Israel criticism leveled abroad, including by international organizations, foreign governments, opinion makers and, in some cases, Jewish observers. JPPI's 2015 dialogue did not find widespread criticism of the IDF's morality in the Jewish world. JPPI discussants have tended to agree that Israel and the IDF make a significant effort – some say an extraordinary effort – not to harm civilians and to adhere to high moral standards in battle. "Israel is the one that raises the standard of conduct in battle for the rest of the world," argued a JPPI dialogue participant in Dallas.⁴⁸ The following chapters will show how Jews express these beliefs, where they differ from Israelis, and the improvements they would like to see Israel adopt when it is forced to use arms in a conflict.

How Participants Understand the Current Situation

Here are some observations that summarize how JPPI discussants responded to questions about Israeli practices and conduct:

Does Israel, generally speaking, behave morally in the use of its armed forces? (If not, in what way not?)

Most discussants answered affirmatively. "Israel is admirable for taking a moral position," a participant in Ocean City, New Jersey said.⁴⁹ Yet many argued that Israel "does a terrible job" (Washington DC seminar) publicizing the good it does. Complaints about Israel's insufficient *hasbara* were heard repeatedly in almost every seminar room.

Do you see a moral distinction between Israel's actions in war and Israel's actions leading to war? Do you believe that even if Israel wages a just battle from a legal\ moral point of view, its policies deem these actions illegal and\or immoral?

"You cannot separate the military and the political spheres" when you talk about Israel at war, stressed a JPPI discussant in New York. Israel's actions "in between wars" came up in many other discussions – often in a critical fashion. "You can argue that Israel's policy toward the Palestinians is provocative and without them there will be less conflict," a Los Angeles seminar participant argued.⁵⁰ JPPI's participant survey found that many Jews do not believe "the current Israeli government is making a sincere effort to bring

48 JPPI seminar, Dallas, Texas, April 16, 2015, notes by Shmuel Rosner.

49 Ocean City JPPI seminar, March 24, 2015, notes by Shmuel Rosner.

50 LA Federation JPPI seminar, April 14, 2015, notes by Shmuel Rosner.

about a peace settlement with the Palestinians." And many Jews seem to believe that "the question if Israel is moral depends on the process with the Palestinians."⁵¹

How does Israel compare to other countries, and the IDF to other militaries?

In many discussions, participants cited historical examples in claiming that Israel is much more moral than most other militaries, and in most other wars. Two examples repeatedly mentioned were the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the United States and the merciless bombing of German cities like Dresden by the allies in WW2. Another notable and repeated example was the recent Saudi bombing of Yemen about which "no one asks how many civilians were killed" and in which "there was no knock on the roof" by the kingdom's air force.⁵²

Is the world holding Israel to a different and higher standard than other countries are expected to meet?

The expression "double standard" came up time and again in JPPI seminars. Participant surveys clearly reflected the belief that "Israel's military shows more restraint than militaries of other countries." It is interesting to note that many seminar participants raised the concern that some Jews hold Israel to a higher standard. On some occasions this took on a negative tone ("Jews are part of the problem").⁵³ On others it was greeted as a positive and justified standard ("As Jews, we have to set the bar higher").⁵⁴

51 Washington DC JPPI seminar, April 19, 2015, notes by Shmuel Rosner and Alexis Bock Robbins.

52 Stamford Connecticut JPPI seminar, March 29, 2015, notes by Shmuel Rosner.

53 New York seminar.

54 American Jewish University seminar.

Jewish Thought on the Use of Force

The use of force as a “Jewish” subject is too complicated a discourse to be adequately summarized here. Jewish tradition forbids the taking of life, but it also demands the defense of Jewish lives. Thus: “in every war there are two apprehensions: that one will be killed and that one will kill... violations of Torah.”⁵⁵ War, according to Rabbinic sources, is a necessary evil “devoid of aesthetic value.”⁵⁶ Aviezer Ravitzky, a prof. of Jewish Philosophy, contends that “the prohibition [of war] is the starting point for any specific discussion” of the rules of war according to Jewish traditions.⁵⁷ And Prof. Ruth Wisse, in her 2007 book, *Jews and Power*, reminds readers that even before the dispersion of Jews around the world, the Biblical prophets “linked a nation’s potency to its moral strength,” not to its achievement in battle.⁵⁸

The Torah specifies rules for two types of wars, traditionally tagged commanded wars and permissible wars. However, later sources reach little agreement over the applicability of this paradigm to future realities. Michael Walzer, the American philosopher and public intellectual, put it bluntly: “There is no Jewish theory of war and peace.”⁵⁹ And while not all scholars accept so definitive a conclusion, it is widely agreed that to unearth a Jewish tradition of war and peace, one has to use a relatively small number of Jewish sources creatively.⁶⁰

This lack of a common Jewish tradition regarding the rules of war is easy to understand if one considers the historical circumstances of Jewish existence. In all traditions, historical developments greatly influence theological approaches to all

55 Yehuda Amital, “The Wars of Israel According to Maimonides,” (460) in: Aviezer Ravitzky, “Prohibited War in Jewish Tradition” in *The Ethics of War and Peace: Religious and Secular Perspectives*, ed. Terry Nardin (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996).

56 See: Joseph Isaac Lifshitz, “War and aesthetics in Jewish law,” in: *War and Peace in Jewish Tradition*, editors Yigal Levin and Amnon Shapira (Jerusalem: Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, 2006).

57 Ravitzky’s article was one of the articles that were included in a broader form in the appendix: “Prohibited War in Jewish Tradition” in *The Ethics of War and Peace: Religious and Secular Perspectives*, ed. Terry Nardin (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), 115-127.

58 On the meaning of power for Jews during their long history, see: Ruth Wisse, “Jews and Power,” (New York: Schocken, 2007).

59 Walzer and Ravitzky have an ongoing debate on the issue of war in the Jewish tradition. This quote is taken from Michael Walzer, “War and Peace in the Jewish Tradition” in *The Ethics of War and Peace: Religious and Secular Perspectives*, ed. Terry Nardin (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996), 95-114. More from Walzer’s was also presented to participants in the appendix to the background paper.

60 See: משה הלינגר, “מלחמה ושלום במסורת היהודית: בין אידיאליזם לריאליזם,” בתוך מלחמה ושלום, עורך שלמה אבינרי (ירושלים: מרכז שז”ר, 2010), 73-98.

issues, including making war.⁶¹ Jews rarely had the power to wage war, and thus rarely required discussions on the rules of war in any practical context. When they did, it was clear to all that defensive wars are permissible, even mandatory (a "mitzvah").⁶² But the definition of "defensive" could vary, and the permissibility of wars for advancing goals beyond defending against clear and present dangers is debatable. Also of much debate is the question of the authority to wage war. The Rabbinic sources refer to a "king" and to the "Sanhedrin," both of which disappeared from the Jewish tradition long ago. Whether any current institution could stand in for them is an open question.

The applicability of any tradition to the circumstances of today's modern Israel is another open question. Should Israel refer to Jewish traditions and sources as it contemplates its war and peace policies? Should it use them in a merely symbolic way (as in the Declaration of Independence's vague reference to the Prophets),⁶³ or as a real source for devising policies, as some Religious-Zionist rabbis suggest.⁶⁴ And if so, what should the dynamics between international law and Jewish values and traditions be in informing Israeli policy?

In JPPI seminars, as we will describe later, most participants were uneasy discussing the applicability of Jewish traditions to present-day Israel. The views ranged from "totally irrelevant," in the words of a rabbinical student at a Los Angeles discussion,⁶⁵ to more general statements contending that Israel's moral standards at war should be high since "as Jews the Torah commands us to be light onto the nations," as a discussant in Dallas said.⁶⁶

61 See: James Turner Johnson, "Just War Tradition and the Restraint of War: A Moral and Historical Inquiry," (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981). Many scholars highlight the process that moved Christianity from the more "pacifist" approach that emerges from the scriptures, to a more combative approach of "holy war" (influenced by the theology of St. Augustine) when Christians became more powerful. The Jews made the opposite journey, as their fortunes dictated, from a more combative biblical tradition to a more pacifist rabbinical approach. See: L.B. Walters, *Five Classical Just War Theories*, (Connecticut: Hartford, 1971).

62 See: Ravitzky, "Prohibited War in Jewish Tradition."

63 "It will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel"...

64 Partial discussion of this question appears in Rabbi Yuval Cherlow's article "Questions on the morality of war" (Hebrew: "המלחמה" מוסר על מוסר). See: http://old.kipasruga.com/upload/users_files/889.PDF

65 American Jewish University seminar, April 14. Notes taken by Shmuel Rosner.

66 Dallas seminar, April 17. Notes taken by Shmuel Rosner.

Participants' Expectations of Israel

We asked JPPI discussants to address the following questions:

What should the frame of reference be for Israel's use of force? Should it rely on interpretations of Jewish traditions? Should it rely on international law? Should it reflect both, or neither (what then)? If both, in what way should they be reconciled?

Participants had a tough time answering these questions, and mostly they had a tough time relating to the topic "Jewishly." In many cases, participants argued that Jewish values were "irrelevant" to the topic at hand,⁶⁷ or that there is not a well-delineated definition of keeping with Jewish values in the context of Israel's wars. "The group generally did not think that 'Jewish standards' were either meaningful or applicable."⁶⁸ But in many other cases, Jewish values were used generally to argue for a high standard of morality ("the Jewish past demands a high moral standard from Israel, higher than usual").⁶⁹

What level of morality should be expected of Israel as it uses force in armed conflicts? Higher than other countries? Lower? Similar to other countries? Should it be compared to other forces in the region, or to countries that supposedly adhere to higher standards than others?

"Higher than other countries" was the most common answer. "I wouldn't want Israel to be on the other side," a Clevelander said.⁷⁰ But in some communities – such as in France – participants preferred "international standards."⁷¹

67 American Jewish University seminar.

68 St. Louis seminar, April 7, 2015, Barry Rosenberg, Moderator, Cyndee Levy, Note Taker.

69 Seminar with MASA participants, February 22, notes by Chaya Ekstein.

70 Cleveland seminar March 31, 2015, notes by Naomi Fein.

71 Paris seminar, March 3, 2015, notes by Dov Maimon.

The impact of Israel's use of arms on Israel-Diaspora relations

JPPI discussants addressed the following questions:

Do you feel that the way Israel uses force impacts your life? In what way?

Participants in JPPI discussions shared many stories that offer insight about how Israel's use of force has directly affected their lives. Obviously, impact varies from country to country and from community to community. In France it was said that "synagogues are burned after each conflict," and young MASA participants argued that Israel's actions "create spikes in anti-Semitism... which puts me (the Diaspora Jew) in a stressful position"⁷² – while in the United States, the impact had more personal consequences. A father in Los Angeles admitted to having "already lost three of my children," with whom he can no longer speak about Israel because of the ongoing conflict. Another participant said he was somewhat embarrassed by the fact that he decided during a college tour to remain silent when the guide proudly listed his achievements as an anti-Israel activist. He was not alone. A participant in Tenafly, NJ, also admitted to have "chickened out" on occasion, when there was an opportunity to defend Israel from criticism.⁷³ In Atlanta, a participant said that Israel's war(s) "makes the interaction with non-Jews more difficult." A St. Louis participant discussed a burden that many Jews in many other communities said they share: "Whether or not I want to be, I end up being an ambassador for Israel."

Do Israeli actions affect your view of the country? For the better? For worse? Do you feel they affect how other Jews view Israel?

We asked JPPI survey respondents to answer two questions, one about themselves ("Israel's prosecution of its recent armed conflicts has made you feel more: 1. Proud of Israel; 2. Worried about Israel's character; 3. Detached from Israel; 4. Embarrassed by Israel") and an identical one about the "community" ("Thinking about other Jews in your community..."). Interestingly, but not surprisingly, Jews tended to answer the personal question in a way more favorable to Israel (mostly "proud") than the way they answer the communal question. In other words, they were telling us – in seminars as well – that while their own support for Israel's actions is rock-solid, they

72 Bina's MASA Tikun Olam JPPI seminar, February 22, notes by Chaya Ekstein.

73 Tenafly JPPI seminar with Israeli-Americans, March 23, notes by Shmuel Rosner.

see a fragmentation of views in their communities. In the words of one Clevelander: "Israel's use of force affects how other Jews view Israel, [but] doesn't affect my view."⁷⁴

Participants tended to think Israel has more of a problem with younger Jews. "Young people ask what is the meaning of being Jewish," a Washington participant said, "and if the answer is to be a state that is constantly bombing, maybe there is no point in this." "Young Jews feel that Israel uses too much force," said a participant in Stamford. A Chicago participant said that "the Jewish middle is getting smaller, and the extremes are getting larger." That is to say, staunch defense of and staunch criticism of Israel, and less nuanced support.

Background on the Seminars: Strengths and Limitations

This paper is based on a concerted JPPI effort to arrange, within a short period of time, seminars around the Jewish world to discuss the topic at hand. These seminars – in which approximately 500 discussants took part - provided us with the opportunity to get and assemble first-hand impressions of the views of Jewish leaders, professionals, rabbis, philanthropists and activists. Most seminars took place in March and April of 2015. In addition to these group discussions, all participants were asked to complete a survey. The survey – in addition to providing us with information about participants' beliefs – enables us to draw a more accurate and nuanced picture of the composition of each participating group (such as age distribution, and the number of times participants had been to Israel). It also, when compared to other studies, supplies us with a tool to carefully compare the pool of JPPI Dialogue participants to the general Jewish population.⁷⁵ Other studies, surveys and articles were extensively used in our research leading up to the seminars, and we rely on many of them in drawing our conclusions as well. References to all background materials utilized in the process appear in footnotes.

Naturally, the lessons we draw from the seminars, the survey, and additional materials are subject to all kinds of review and criticism, and we cannot present them without raising a few warning flags, and explain the context in which the seminars were held, and what they can and cannot tell us with certainty.

74 Cleveland seminar, notes by Enid Rosenberg.

75 Comparisons were possible mostly for the U.S., where the number of participants is relatively significant and the data for such comparisons is easily available.

- First and foremost, it must be understood that our process relied heavily on local communities (and organizations). The communities were responsible for gathering seminar participants. Hence, the groups vary widely in character and size, but almost all have one thing in common: the established community – usually a federation, but sometimes another organization – was the convening body. Thus, it is important to acknowledge that discussions mostly expressed the views of those Jews within the so-called "core" Jewish community, and are less representative of Jews with weaker or no ties to established Jewish life.⁷⁶
- JPPI made a concerted effort to include several groups of young participants this year. These included groups at universities (UCLA and American Jewish University, LA) and several groups of MASA program participants.⁷⁷
- It is fair to assume that participants in JPPI discussions all reflect self-selection bias. That is to say, we should suppose that those Jews with little interest in Israel probably did not attend the seminars, even when they had been invited by their local communities to do so.
- JPPI's process included very few ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) participants. This is a recurring problem and our efforts to solve it have not yet borne fruit.⁷⁸
- In some cases we relied on the communities to take notes during the seminars and prepare their own summaries, and in other cases JPPI staff members wrote them. JPPI fellows moderated seminars in some communities, while other communities conducted their seminars on their own. Seminars varied in length, level of discussion, and depth of summation.

76 It is not uncommon for studies such as this one to be somewhat biased toward the core community. See for example this note of caution from JPR study of British Jewry: "It is reasonable, however, to suspect that the communally involved may be over-represented. Because the survey utilised membership and subscribers lists held by Jewish community organisations as a first port of call (followed by referrals made by people on these lists), those Jews on the community lists may have had a larger, albeit unknown, probability of inclusion in the sample" (http://www.jpr.org.uk/documents/Perceptions_and_experiences_of_antisemitism_among_Jews_in_UK.pdf).

77 MASA participants, as a general rule, took part in JPPI discussions shortly after arriving in Israel - as we attempted to minimize the impact that participation in the program would necessarily have on their views. Of course, a group of MASA participants necessarily have a self-selecting bias. These are young people that decided to spend a significant amount of time in Israel.

78 As we explained in our report on the 2014 dialogue, "JPPI has had similar difficulty in producing past reports – for example the one on conversion - convincing Haredi representatives to participate in community-wide discussions". We also wrote last year that "the percentage of Haredi Jews in the world is relatively small, and as their views are known to be different on many issues, their limited participation in the process, while regrettable, is unlikely to result in a misreading of the Jewish world's general view".

Discussion groups by city:

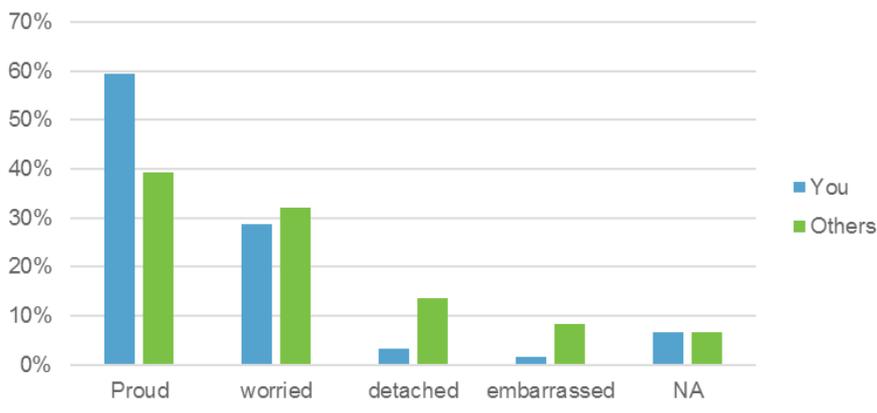
The following communities participated in the Dialogue process:

Atlanta (2 groups organized through The Jewish Federation of Greater Atlanta); **Barnegat** (organized through The Jewish Federation of Ocean County NJ); **Bogota** (organized by CCJC- the umbrella organization for Colombian Jewry); **Budapest** (organized through Mazsihisz - The Federation of Hungarian Jewish Communities); **Chicago** (4 groups organized through JUF- Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago); **Cleveland** (8 groups organized through The Jewish Federation of Cleveland); **Dallas** (2 groups organized through The Jewish Federation of Greater Dallas); **Johannesburg** (1 group held by SAJBD - South African Jewish Board of Deputies); **London** (held by The Board of Deputies of British Jews); **Los Angeles** (4 groups, 1 by The Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles, 2 by The American Jewish University and 1 by Hillel at UCLA); **Melbourne** (held by ZCV - Zionist Council of Victoria); **New York** (organized through UJA-Federation of New York); **Paris** (held by CRIF - Representative Council of French Jewish Institutions); **Perth** (organized by ZFA - Zionist Federation of Australia); **Pittsburgh** (held by The Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh); **Porte Alegre** (organized by The Jewish Federation of Sao Paulo); **Rio de Janeiro** (organized by The Jewish Federation of Sao Paulo); **Saint Louis** (organized by The Jewish Federation of St. Louis); **Sao Paulo** (organized by the Jewish Federation of Sao Paulo); **Stamford** (organized through UJF – Jewish Federation of Greater Stamford, CT); **Sydney** (organized by ZFA - Zionist Federation of Australia); **Tenafly** (organized through Moatza Mekomit – the umbrella organization of the Israeli community); **Toronto** (organized through UJA - Federation of Greater Toronto); **Washington D.C.** (organized through The Jewish Federation of Greater Washington) and 4 young adult groups in **Israel** of Massa participants.

Two sample questions from JPPI's 2015 Dialogue survey⁷⁹

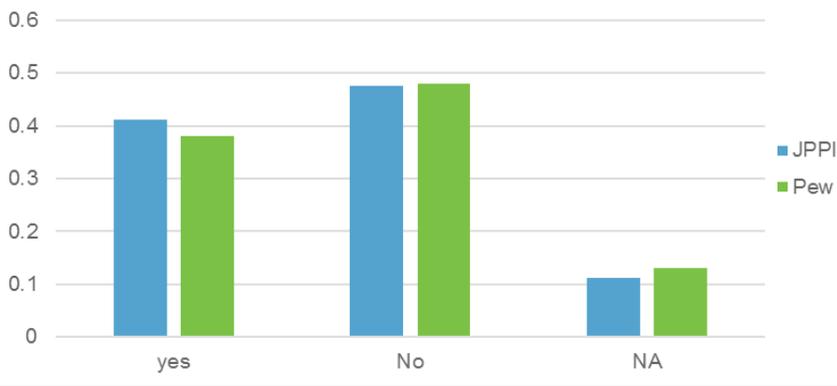
JPPI dialogue participants believe that "other Jews" have a more negative reaction to the war than their own:

Comparing 2 questions: How Israel's recent armed conflicts "made you feel" versus made "other Jews in your community feel":



JPPI Dialogue survey responses to the following question are consistent with responses to the same question asked in the Pew study on U.S. Jewry.⁸⁰

Do you think the current Israeli government is making a sincere effort to bring about a peace settlement with the Palestinians?



⁷⁹ The data used is from the survey distributed to participants in JPPI's 2015 dialogue process. It is based on our initial analysis of the data derived from seminars primarily in North America and does not yet include data from JPPI seminars in Brazil, Colombia, South Africa, Hungary, The UK, South Australia and Western Australia.

⁸⁰ It is important to note that while the question from both surveys is identical, the context and timing (Pew, 2012; JPPI, 2015) are different.

The Geopolitical Challenges Facing Israel's New Government

By Avi Gil

The new Israeli government will have to navigate a complex geopolitical arena replete with dangers. Compared to the last government, the new government that seems to be taking shape will likely have less ideological flexibility. Therefore, the prime minister may be left with limited maneuvering room for diplomatic initiatives to cope with rising challenges.

The current stormy geopolitical environment will not afford the new Israeli government a grace period. The long list of serious dilemmas, complex and intertwined issues, and decisions that will be made (or delayed), are expected to critically influence Israel's future. The main geopolitical challenges within the global and regional framework are also stormy, riddled with question marks and are very much relevant to Israel's fortitude.

The following report is intended to summarize the developments of the recent months regarding the central geopolitical dilemmas and challenges Israel faces:

- Iran becoming a nuclear threshold state.
- The danger of a military deterioration – on the northern front (Hezbollah and Syria), on the southern front (Hamas and terror groups in the Sinai), in Judea and Samaria and in Jerusalem (individual violence, public protests and organized terror).
- Continuing tensions with the United States.
- The continued erosion in the U.S. view of the need to maintain a regional presence and lead the effort of stabilizing the Middle East.
- The push to change the paradigm for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from direct negotiations led by the U.S. to a multinational initiative backed by the UN.

- Realizing the opportunity to improve relations with the moderate Sunni countries (given the Iranian threat and those posed by radical terror elements).
- Israel's dwindling international standing and growing BDS and De-legitimization efforts to inflict further damage.
- The strained resilience of the "triangular relationship": Jerusalem – Washington – U.S. Jews.

Given these various challenges, the need to rehabilitate and nurture the relationship with the U.S. takes ultimate priority – as the U.S. is Israel's only true and significant ally. This task will be complex given the issues at hand – Iran's nuclear program and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its various derivatives – and the substantive differences between Jerusalem and Washington over them. Already inflamed tensions could potentially worsen in the coming months and weigh heavily on the U.S. Jewish community, which may find itself between a "rock and a hard place," further straining the resilience of the "triangular relationship," which has served as a cornerstone of the strength and security of Israel and the Jewish people.

The international System and America's Standing

The "world order" defined by the Cold War, and later, after the fall of the Soviet Union, characterized by a period of American dominance has given way to the current "global disorder" that has yet to coalesce into a stable and functioning international structure. Russian military aggression in Ukraine stokes fears of deteriorating relations between the two powers and makes the cooperation necessary in maintaining global stability difficult. Some commentators even warn that a combination of Moscow's nuclear capabilities with its continuing decline (both economic and demographic) could increase military tensions with Washington.

In parallel to China's rise and the growing geopolitical challenge to Washington from Moscow, America's international standing continues to be confronted. This is especially worrying as the U.S. is the only major power whose friendship and support for Israel are critical. It is also home to almost half the Jewish people, living in an age of unprecedented success. In addition, another development further threatens Israel's basic interests: America's increasing reluctance to become involved in the region. Israel will be affected not just by the qualitative change in its relationship with Washington but also from the shift in America's global standing. Furthermore, the

strengthening of the regional perception that the U.S. – Israel's main ally – is in the midst of a decline and is abandoning the Middle East, serves to further undermine Israel's deterrence power. Developments substantiating the insight that American interest in the Middle East is waning include Washington's pivot to Asia, and forecasts that the United States will soon have no need of imported energy resources.

America's continuing disengagement from Afghanistan (following the withdrawal from Iraq), combined with its avoidance of involvement in Syria even after Assad crossed President Obama's "red line" (the Syrian regime's use of chemical weapons against civilians), signal its desire to cap off the recent period of active military involvement in the region. Many Americans sense that this involvement, which carried a heavy cost – in blood and treasure – held disappointing returns and did not manage to achieve significant goals. The lack of appetite in the U.S. for Middle East involvement is all the more apparent now that the region is in chaos and in dire need of a powerful and stabilizing actor.

However, many commentators reject the "America in decline" theory, and many are convinced that the U.S. cannot completely disengage from the Middle East due to its potential to destabilize international security, instigate a nuclear war, and cause a global economic-energy crisis. (Even if the U.S. is no longer dependent on Middle Eastern oil, instability in the global oil supply could lead to an unstable global economy, of which the U.S. is an integral part and dependent upon.) Obama repeatedly presents as an achievement of his presidency the fact that he ended America's ground wars, which had demanded a U.S. military presence of tens of thousands of American troops in the Middle East. He describes, in an official document, the main guiding principles of his foreign policy as follows: "The question is never whether America should lead, but how we lead... we are stronger when we mobilize collective action... America leads from a position of strength. But, this does not mean we can or should attempt to dictate the trajectory of all unfolding events around the world... As powerful as we are and will remain, our resources and influence are not infinite. And in a complex world, many of the security problems we face do not lend themselves to quick and easy fixes... we must recognize that a smart national security strategy does not rely solely on military power. Indeed, in the long-term, our efforts to work with other countries to counter the ideology and root causes of violent extremism will be more important than our capacity to remove terrorists from the battlefield. The challenges we face require strategic patience and persistence."¹

The Obama administration increasingly describes its approach to the Middle East as a "dual engagement." On one hand, there is a concerted effort to reach a political arrangement with Iran in order to halt progress in its pursuit of a nuclear weapon. On the other hand, there is a similarly concerted effort to bolster the moderate Sunni states, which are worried that the U.S. has yet to determine whether its regional Iran strategy will come at their expense. President Obama's promise to the Iranians that reaching a nuclear arrangement will allow Iran to become a "successful regional power," is stirring fears in Saudi Arabia and the other Sunni states in the region.² They are concerned the United States will strike a "grand bargain" with Iran that will grant it a significant regional role and allow Tehran to proceed with its subversive efforts to achieve regional hegemony.

There are those in the U.S. who are convinced that, in the long term, Iran would be a more preferable ally than Saudi Arabia. Iran has a young, relatively educated population interested in democracy and modernization, and less hostile to the United States. The fact that ISIS is a common enemy further strengthens this conviction. The opposite approach, which refuses to see in Iran an American ally, is strongly articulated by General David H. Petraeus, who claims that the most significant enemy of the U.S. is not ISIS, but rather Iran which is ultimately and at its core hostile to the U.S., and which is part of the problem, not part of the solution to Middle East stability.³

The Iranian Nuclear Program:

Negotiations over Iran's nuclear program resulted in an April 2, 2015 framework agreement, yet to be signed, which actually includes significant gaps in understanding between the sides. Israel has reacted harshly to the framework agreement. Prime Minister Netanyahu defined it as a "bad deal that will threaten Israel's existence. Israel will not be able to reconcile with a deal that will allow a country calling for its destruction to have a nuclear weapon."⁴ Netanyahu even demanded that the final deal include Iranian recognition of Israel's right to exist. The deal's supporters stress that it pushes back Iran's nuclear weapon breakout capability. Accordingly, without such an agreement Iran could achieve a nuclear weapon in two to three months, and the deal will push Iran's timeframe back to at least a year and will allow the U.S. and the international community to know if the deal has been broken through unprecedented inspection and verification procedures, to reinstate sanctions and, if necessary, to use military force.

The framework agreement mainly refers to a 10-15 year period after which most of the limitations on Iran will be lifted. Until then, Iran will need to halt the activity of two thirds of its 20,000 centrifuges. Moreover, it will refrain from enriching above 3.67 percent (the required level for civilian energy needs). The heavy-water reactor at Arak will be replaced so that it cannot produce plutonium. Of the ten tons of enriched uranium currently in Iran's possession, Iran will be allowed to maintain 300 kilograms of low enriched uranium (up to 3.67 percent). The Fordow facility will not enrich uranium, but will rather be converted to a nuclear research facility without enriched material. Additionally, the deal will allow monitoring of all Iranian nuclear facilities, including unannounced ad-hoc inspections at any suspected site. The deal's critics stress that no facility related to Iran's nuclear infrastructure will be shut down, including Fordow, which is hidden deep inside a mountain. Moreover, the deal does not relate to Iran's ballistic missile project (whose sole logical aim is to deliver a nuclear warhead to its destination), and does not relate to Iran's violent regional subversion or its threats to wipe Israel off the map.

In a co-written article, Henry Kissinger and George Shultz determined that the "Negotiations that began 12 years ago as an international effort to prevent an Iranian capability to develop a nuclear arsenal are ending with an agreement that concedes this very capability, albeit short of its full capacity in the first 10 years."⁵ The authors note that the number of centrifuges grew from roughly 100 when the diplomatic process began to roughly 20,000 today.

The Obama administration's goal, at the beginning, was to change the nature of Iran's nuclear program so that it wouldn't be able to create a nuclear weapon. The intention was to leave Iran with infrastructure that allows it to develop its nuclear program for peaceful purposes (research, medicine, etc.), and thereby prevent it from having the infrastructure for a military program. However, the Obama administration drastically changed its earlier defined goal and focuses now on increasing the time it will take Iran to create a nuclear bomb, if it so decides, to at least a year. The U.S. has abandoned its original position and has essentially agreed that Iran will maintain a military nuclear infrastructure, a reality the U.S. unequivocally rejected in the past.

In the understandings publicized, there are some positive elements that can potentially diminish Iran's nuclear capabilities, although there are already disagreements as to the Iranian interpretation of some elements. Moreover, there are still critical issues that have yet to be translated into a detailed operational language.

The devil is indeed in the details here, and there are many details. Especially with respect to the inspection regimen, the "snapping back" of sanctions if violations occur, the issue of future nuclear research, the process in which current sanctions will be gradually lifted as Iran fulfills its part of the agreement, the lack of a credible Iranian explanation as to the possible military dimensions of its program in the past, and more. There is much work to be done before a final agreement is signed (by June 30), and it will be difficult and complicated. Therefore, a signed deal is not a fait accompli. The real test of any deal will be the ability to supervise and enforce it.

Moreover, one cannot ignore the Iranian counter-campaign of speaking out against Israel's nuclear program. Iran's Foreign Minister Zarif noted, at a NPT meeting, that the non-aligned bloc of nations wishes to turn the Middle East into an area free of nuclear weapons, and demands that "Israel, the only country that has not joined the NPT – and has not announced its intent to do so – renounce its nuclear weapons."⁶

The Israeli government was not impressed by President Obama's promises that "there is no formula, there is no option, to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapon that will be more effective than the diplomatic initiative and framework that we put forward."⁷ Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon clarified that as far as Israel is concerned, the choice is not between a bad deal and war. "The alternative is a better deal that significantly rolls back Iran's nuclear infrastructure and links the lifting of restrictions on its nuclear program to an end of Iran's aggression in the region, its terrorism across the globe and its threats to annihilate Israel."⁸ And therefore, Israel is seeking to improve the deal before it is finalized: decreasing the number of centrifuges Iran is allowed to maintain; shutting down the underground Fordow facility; ensuring a phased lifting of sanctions as Iran fulfills its part of the deal; revealing the details of the past military dimensions of its nuclear program; removing enriched uranium from Iran; and guaranteeing invasive inspections with no limits on any Iranian site, including military sites.

While Israel works to improve the elements of the forthcoming deal with Iran, it should also prepare for various scenarios: from an unacceptable deal through no signed deal at all, leaving Iran a threshold nuclear state just two to three months away from a nuclear weapon. Israel will have to decide whether to reluctantly accept these scenarios or to take military action, in line with the prime minister's statement that "Israel will not accept an agreement that leaves Iran as a threshold

nuclear state."⁹ Israel also has the option of conducting a dialogue with the U.S. in order to translate America's stated commitment to Israel's security into operational and practical terms. Thus, for example, President Obama's statement that the U.S. is "absolutely committed to making sure that they [Israel] maintain their qualitative military edge, and that they can deter any potential future attacks... [and the U.S. will convey] a very clear message to the Iranians and to the entire region that if anybody messes with Israel, America will be there."¹⁰

The Palestinian Arena:

The collapse of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations reinforced the Palestinians' propensity to unleash a campaign of political and legal warfare against Israel in the international arena. At the same time, they seek to undercut the "direct negotiations with American mediation" model with an alternative one – "a multinationally initiated solution backed by the UN" model. "There are Palestinians who refer to these steps – including increasing BDS and de-legitimization steps against Israel – as an "international intifada." Abu Mazen is 80 and nearing retirement. He is looking to leave behind a legacy of achievements, and is not seeing results from the reconciliation agreement with Hamas. Hamas is dependent upon the Palestinian Authority to pay its Gaza-based employee salaries, to channel the flow of aid money to rebuild Gaza, and to operate border crossings that allow Gaza's residents freedom of movement in and out. However Abu Mazen does not believe that Hamas intends to disarm itself or commit itself to the principle of "one government – one gun." He is even wary that Hamas will reach an indirect long-term ceasefire agreement with Israel and will gain international legitimacy for its Gaza regime, thus perpetuating the inter-Palestinian split. A victory for Hamas supporters in the student council elections at Bir Zeit University (on April 22, 2014) could signal a change in the political atmosphere in the West Bank, to the detriment of Abu Mazen and Fatah.

The turning point in Palestinian strategy already played out politically toward the end of the last round of failed negotiations with Israel. The Palestinians presented requests to gain membership in 15 UN treaties, and, through Jordan, petitioned the UN Security Council for recognition of a Palestinian State within the 1967 borders, and bring an end to the occupation within two years. However, the Palestinians failed to convince a majority of the nine member states, which spared the U.S. the need to use its veto. (The permanent Security Council members that supported the petition were: Russia,

China, and France. The U.S. objected and the UK abstained.) Following this failure, Abu Mazen signed (December 31, 2014) accession agreements to 22 additional international treaties including the Rome Treaty, which paved the way to joining the International Criminal Court in the Hague. This new reality puts Israel at risk of war crimes charges. Fatou Bensouda, the chief prosecutor for the ICC, approved an open-ended preliminary investigation of alleged crimes committed within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has already been initiated, however it is not defined as an official investigation.¹¹ That said, the assessment of various legal experts is that the court will not rush to involve itself in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, so investigating Palestinian complaints could take many years. Furthermore, the PLO Executive Committee authorized Abu Mazen to implement the decision to cease security cooperation with Israel (March 19, 2015). Abu Mazen has yet to decide whether or not to implement this decision, but he continuously threatens to do so.

Given the stalled political process, France has increased its involvement aimed at relaunching the peace process. The French initiative is based on achieving a Security Council resolution that defines the principles of a final deal, especially borders based on the 1967 lines with agreed adjustments. French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius explained that the initiative is guided by the need to change the way in which negotiations are conducted, implying it should be led by the international community. Fabius essentially came out against American exclusivity in managing the peace process thus far. "We want to avoid the pitfall of endless negotiations... Clear parameters for resolving the conflict adopted by the international community in advance will provide the basis for future negotiations. And we must set a timetable..."¹² The French are interested in convening an international conference to jump-start the negotiations that would follow the Security Council's resolution. In the context of Israel's recent elections, the French were persuaded to hold off until a new government is formed and can reexamine Israeli positions on the Palestinian matter.

The Americans have made it clear that they have yet to rule out the possibility of supporting the French move, but continue to press the French to postpone their move until after the nuclear agreement with Iran is signed (June 30). The White House suspects that opening an additional front vis-à-vis the Israeli government would make gaining congressional approval for such a deal more difficult. Fabius referred to the timing of the tabling of the French proposal, noting, "We think that soon, not within days but soon ... we need to agree on timing with John Kerry. There

are other issues to deal with. One negotiation should not hurt another, but at the same time, there's always a lot going on, so the risk is we never find the time."¹³

Netanyahu's election day remarks (March 16, 2015), that a Palestinian State would not be established under his watch, gave the French plan a second wind.¹⁴ Netanyahu's attempt to walk back his reversal of the policy stated in his Bar-Ilan speech (2009) did not succeed in winning back the international community's trust in his commitment to the principle of a two-state solution. Netanyahu told NBC in an interview: "I haven't changed my policy, what has changed is the reality, I want a sustainable, peaceful two-state solution, but for that, circumstances have to change."¹⁵

The White House, however, did not accept Netanyahu's explanation, and administration spokespeople made it clear that the U.S. would reassess its options in the wake of his new positions on the Palestinian issue. White House spokesman Josh Ernest, clarified that the U.S. government "has doubts" about Netanyahu's reassurance to the American media that he supports a two-state solution, "There now is doubt about whether or not this is what the true view is of Prime Minister Netanyahu and the government that he will form."¹⁶ President Obama himself said (March 25, 2015): "We believe that two states is the best path forward for Israel's security. ... and Prime Minister Netanyahu has a different approach.... We can't pretend that there's a possibility of something that's not there. And we can't continue to premise our public diplomacy based on something that everybody knows is not going to happen.... The question is, do you create a process and a framework that gives the Palestinians hope, the possibility, that down the road they have a secure state of their own ... it's hard to envision how that happens based on the Prime Minister's statements."¹⁷

The near future will reveal whether the new Israeli government has a real interest and the political wherewithal to present a diplomatic plan that will gain the trust of the international community. Similarly, it is important to note that in his speech to the UN General Assembly (September 29, 2014), Netanyahu announced his willingness to make "a historic compromise" and called on Arab countries to "update the old template for peace.... Israel is prepared to work with Arab partners and the international community. Together, we can strengthen regional security... I believe the partnership between us can also help facilitate peace between Israel and the Palestinians. A broader rapprochement between Israel and the Arab world may help facilitate an Israeli-Palestinian peace.... And therefore, to achieve that peace, we must look not only to Jerusalem and Ramallah but also to Cairo, to Amman, Abu

Dhabi, Riyadh and elsewhere."¹⁸ However, the option to craft a regional political initiative that would essentially "skip" over the Palestinian issue is unacceptable to the Arab world. Egyptian President Al-Sisi described the Arab position (October 12, 2014) when he called on Israel to adopt the Arab Peace Initiative, which includes the establishment of a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders with agreed adjustments and a capital in east Jerusalem, as its focus.

The diplomatic deadlock is encouraging various parliaments around the world to pass decisions calling on their governments to recognize a Palestinian state (in Europe, such decisions were made in Belgium, the UK, Denmark, France, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal, Spain and in the EU parliament). Although these decisions amount to little more than a recommendation, they reflect the political trends in Europe. Until now, the Palestinians have gained recognition in 135 countries (80 percent of the world's population). However, of the 50 countries that have yet to recognize the country of Palestine are three of the five permanent Security Council members (the U.S., UK and France), and a number of other important countries such as Germany, Canada, Australia, Italy, and Japan.

If the diplomatic deadlock continues, the balance of international support for a Palestinian state could shift, and we could see an increase in other anti-Israel measures. These could also come as a result of continued settlement construction. In this regard, 16 EU foreign ministers sent letters (April 16, 2014) to EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini calling for labels on goods produced in the settlements and sold in European retail outlets. The ministers wrote that: "the continued expansion of illegal settlements on occupied Palestinian territory and other territory occupied by Israel since 1967 threatens the chances to reach a final and just peace agreement."¹⁹

The Regional Framework and the Map of Security Threats:

The events of recent months show just how turbulent, violent, and challenging the Middle East can be for Israel. Iran is on the verge of becoming a threshold nuclear state, is increasing fears among the Sunni countries, and is heightening the incentive for a possible nuclear arms race in the region. Tehran's appetite to enhance its influence in the region is growing and its leaders are flaunting their control of four Arab capitals: Beirut, Baghdad, Damascus, and now Sana'a. ISIS continues to control vast swaths of territory in Iraq and Syria, and is contributing to the collapse of the nation-state system in the

region. It is also fomenting the "failed state" phenomenon, when governments cannot regain control over their sovereign territory from radical anti-state actors (such as in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Libya, and Yemen). Jihadist organizations throughout the Middle East are declaring their allegiance to ISIS and committing brutal acts of murder and violence, destroying economies and infrastructure, and rendering recognized international borders irrelevant.

The civil war in Syria continues to rage as the death toll nears a quarter of a million. Four million people have lost their homes, many of them have fled Syria and others are displaced persons in their own state. ISIS controls roughly half of Syria, while the balance of forces between Assad and the rebel groups continues to shift. Earlier this year it seemed that Assad had the upper hand, which brought about a shift in the tone of the U.S. and the West regarding his regime. Considering the anarchy, which had been only expected to increase in his absence, Assad was increasingly seen by many as a part of the solution, the best of the bad options at hand. However, currently, due to a number of losses at the hands of rebel groups, and the loss of the city of Idlib and other territories, commentators are once again discussing Assad's eroded power, and some are forecasting his coming fall.

In parallel, Washington sees ISIS as the central threat, and American warplanes are hitting it from the air as Washington supplies intelligence to forces fighting it on the ground. (This essentially creates a reality of indirect cooperation between the U.S. and Iran, which sees the murderous Sunni organization as a dangerous enemy and is thus helping the Iraqi government in its fight against it.)

The Shi'i Houthi militias fighting in Yemen with Iranian support succeeded in toppling the Sunni government in Sana'a. This development created a direct threat to Saudi Arabia, which is attempting – with help from additional Arab armies and without an American military presence on the ground – to push back the Houthi militias. The possibility that the Houthis' military success could endanger maritime freedom through the Straits of Bab al-Mandab could threaten the regional and global economy. An open question is whether the change of regime in Riyadh following the death of King Abdullah (January 23, 2015) and the subsequent crowning of King Salman signals a shift in Saudi Arabia's long term character, and its willingness to act more aggressively against regional challenges: Iran, jihadist terror, the Houthi rebels in Yemen, and more. A series of adjustments announced by King Salman to various senior posts in the kingdom as well as to the chain of succession (April 29, 2015)

might just imply such a shift. The joint Arab military force that was formed (March 29, 2015), comprising forces from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, Sudan, and Jordan, may indicate the beginning of long process in which Arab countries gradually cease counting on the U.S. as the "regional policeman."

However, Israel should have some apprehension over the formation of a joint Arab military force that gains experience in coordinated complex military action. Thus, while this force is currently composed of regional moderates, and while it is focused on fighting regional extremists, such a force could theoretically turn on Israel in the future. If this weren't enough for concern, it should be noted that in the event the U.S. signs a nuclear deal with Iran, it would likely compensate the Sunni Arab camp with further advanced arms sales.

Egypt and Jordan continue to cope with difficult security challenges of their own. The terror threat combined with the inherent threat of Iran's growing presence creates an infrastructure that invites increased cooperation with Israel. Egypt, which is fighting terror groups in Sinai, sees Hamas as an enemy that aids the terrorists in their fight against it. President al-Sisi has not hesitated to destroy vast built-up areas in order to create a security buffer on the Egypt-Gaza border, while fighting a bitter battle to destroy the smuggling and terror tunnels that run underneath. In early April of 2015, the U.S. cancelled its freeze on arms shipments to Egypt. The American strategic preference of promoting democracy and human rights in Egypt was pushed aside by the urgency of helping Egypt maintain stability, preventing alternative arms deals with Moscow, ensuring maritime freedom in the Suez Canal, and maintaining the peace treaty with Israel. Jordan as well, perhaps America's closest ally in the fight against ISIS, is in dire need and receives American support (Jordan absorbed roughly a million Syrian refugees). The video showing ISIS burning a Jordanian air-force pilot alive (February 3, 2015) increased the internal pressure in Jordan to take revenge and bolstered Jordan's centrality in the fight against ISIS.

The harsh upheavals in the Middle East appear to demand the intervention of a stabilizing power. However the U.S. is not interested in deepening its involvement in the region, is not interested in sending (back) its soldiers to shed their blood in the Middle East, and prefers to "lead from behind." Moreover, it doesn't seem that the U.S. and Russia can, at this point, cooperate effectively in order to jointly bring about regional stability. Putin's aggressive moves in Ukraine and the Western sanctions

against Russia and Putin's inner circle, do not facilitate the necessary infrastructure for cooperation, but rather enhance competition and conflict. Therefore, Russia's announcement (April 13, 2015) that it will thaw the long frozen deal to sell the advanced S-300 surface to air missile system to Iran exemplifies of the current gloomy state of affairs.

Direct Threats to Israel

One significant bright spot that stands out against the barrage of challenges is that Israel does not currently face any significant conventional military threats from sovereign states as it did in the past. The security threats to Israel today primarily emanate from terror organizations that operate from an ambiguously defined political entity (Hamas), or from within failed states (Lebanon and Syria). These enemies are asymmetric in strategy and increasingly hybrid in nature. They choose to operate from within densely populated civilian areas with murky political sovereignty. Knowing they cannot defeat Israel militarily, they opt for a three-pronged approach: forcing Israel into complex and often urban territory where much of Israel's conventional advantage is neutralized; fighting from within civilian areas that force Israel to restrain its firepower and when fire is used, to harm enemy civilians; and manipulate the international media once civilians are hurt to damage Israel's international standing and increase international pressure on her. So while the threat to Israel's national security from a military perspective is diminished, the challenges from asymmetric warfare are ultimately more complex, and not going to disappear any time soon.

Hamas – Operation “Protective Edge” ended (26 August, 2014) without a decisive defeat of Hamas. Israel was able to cause significant damage to the organization's military infrastructure, destroyed many of the terror tunnels, severely damaged civilian infrastructure, and was able to intercept with the Iron Dome ballistic missile defense system most of the rockets aimed at Israel's civilian population centers. However, Hamas was able to withstand 50 days of fighting while continuing the rocket fire on Israel's cities, including Tel Aviv, throughout the entire period. Hamas even succeeded in shutting down Ben Gurion Airport to foreign airlines for a day.

The promises of reconstruction have yet to be translated into reality in Gaza. Its residents are becoming frustrated and many of them describe themselves as having nothing to lose. Hamas' relations with Turkey and Qatar are not making up for the loss of support of other countries Hamas had been accustomed to in the past. Hamas is attempting

to resurrect its relationship with Iran and even with Hezbollah, to break the current isolation forced upon it after its leadership was expelled from Syria (due to its support for the Sunni rebels), and the conflict with the Al-Sisi regime in Egypt (after overthrowing the Muslim Brotherhood – Hamas' parent organization). Egyptian pressure on Hamas, combined with the delays in Gaza's reconstruction, increase the chances of another outbreak of Palestinian violence against Israel from Gaza. Indeed, Hamas is working to rebuild its tunnel system, is conducting rocket fire tests, and is generally preparing for its next conflict with Israel. (The threats on the Southern front are not only limited to the Gaza Strip. Terror elements in Sinai who have already committed terrorist attacks against Israel could return to attempting to strike Israeli targets.)

At the same time, the Arab press is reporting on disputes between the military and political wings of Hamas in regards to the possibility of an indirect long-term ceasefire with Israel. In exchange, Israel is expected to refrain from steps that would complicate economic reconstruction in Gaza and ease the naval blockade currently in place. The military wing prefers developing its relations with Iran, and may try to prevent such a deal by executing an attack on Israeli targets.

Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria – The continuation of the political paralysis could lead to a deterioration in the security situation in Judea and Samaria, and even to a third intifada, not necessarily identical to the previous ones. Experts assess that Israel could end up facing a wide-spread civil disobedience campaign combined with popular violence not necessarily coordinated by a central actor. A warning sign for this mode of action could be seen in the violent events in Jerusalem that erupted in June 2014, following the search effort and arrests in connection with the kidnap and murder of three Jewish teens by Hamas terrorists. The chaos increased significantly after the immolation of a Palestinian teen by Jewish extremists (July 2, 2014). The sharp rise in terror attacks in Judea and Samaria and in Jerusalem during Operation Protective Edge teaches us about the potential of outbreaks of violence in these areas. The massacre of four Jewish worshippers and a Druze policeman who came to their rescue by Palestinian terrorists (18 November 2014) is a worrying indication as well. Various initiatives by right-wing activists to change the status quo on the Temple Mount have also added to the already tense atmosphere (and also upset the Jordanians).

Hezbollah – Hezbollah's support of Assad hurts the organization's standing in the Arab world, and especially in Lebanon. A few thousand Hezbollah fighters are operating in Syria alongside Syrian troops. Hezbollah conceals the number of fighters

it's lost in Syria, but the number is most likely in the hundreds. This reality undermines Hezbollah's claim that its military capabilities are meant to protect Lebanon from Israel. Hezbollah fighting on behalf of the despised Assad is seen as taking the Shia side against the Sunnis and pulls the rug from under the feet of the image Nasrallah has been working to build for so many years, that Hezbollah works in the interest of all of Lebanon's citizens. Hezbollah's involvement in Syria has turned Lebanon into a theatre of battle in Syria's civil war and has led to domestic bloodshed and instability. Hezbollah, which has remained deterred from opening a front with Israel, has been restrained from responding to occasional attacks connected to Israel meant to take out strategic arms transfers from Syria and on storage sites of advanced missiles that are smuggled from Iran through Syria and on to Hezbollah in Lebanon.

A significant and severe event happened on January 18, 2015 when Israel struck a convoy on the Syrian side of the Golan Heights. Imad Mughniya's son, Jihad, was among the dead as was an Iranian general. In response, Hezbollah fired anti-tank missiles at an IDF vehicle patrolling the border with Lebanon, killing two soldiers. The incident exposed a joint Iranian-Hezbollah effort to reclaim territory Assad lost to the rebels in 2014 in southern Syria and in the Syrian Golan Heights, and expand the possible confrontation ground with Israel. Hezbollah's efforts to continue arming with advanced Iranian and Syrian weapons, and Israel's dogged efforts to thwart them, could lead to an escalation, revenge terrorist attacks against Israeli or Jewish targets abroad, or even another war. Hezbollah could even decide that only a violent confrontation with Israel could return its lost support in Lebanon and the Arab world.

Moreover, the fact that Assad has recently lost control over a number of towns could signal to Hezbollah that it will soon lose its critical logistical bridge to Iranian arms. Fears such as these could lead Hezbollah to incite an escalation with Israel. Hezbollah has over 100,000 rockets, many of which can reach deep inside Israel and are far more accurate than those Hamas fired during Protective Edge. Hezbollah chief Nasrallah has even threatened that in the next conflict with Israel, his fighters will fight on Israeli territory, and some are even concerned that Hezbollah may be working on constructing its own terror tunnels from Lebanon to the Galilee. Rational assessments of Hezbollah's situation indicate that the organization has no interest in opening an additional front with Israel. Its forces are fully engaged in Syria, where their losses of life and morale are heavy. However, one cannot disregard the possibility of an unintentional escalation with Israel that may lead to another war, contrary to the "rational calculations" of both sides.

The Relationship with the U.S. and the Resilience of the Jerusalem – Washington – U.S. Jewry Triangle:

Recent months uncovered some silver linings in Israel's standing in the international system. These were expressed, for example, in the IAEA General Assembly's decision to delay the Arab League initiative to censure Israel and try to place its nuclear sites under international supervision.²⁰ Also the election of Narendra Modi as Prime Minister of India, who is known for his friendship to Israel, opens new opportunities to increase Israeli cooperation with an India that is becoming more and more central to the global economy.

The manner in which China is focusing its investment efforts in Israel is particularly impressive. From Beijing's perspective, Israel is a strategic "trade junction" for China's economy leading to Europe. In parallel to the large trade deals, such as purchasing control over Makhteshim or Tnuva, China stands, in the coming year to open and operate large transportation projects in Israel estimated in the tens of billions of shekels.²¹ Israel's attraction of foreign investors and the high regard for Israel's high-tech sector, point out the significant achievements and the potential promised in the Israeli market. However, the difficult diplomatic situation could serve as an obstacle for Israel's economy that could become an increasingly common target for BDS and de-legitimization efforts.

Israel is often criticized and its international status is eroding due to a number of factors, including the violent conflicts with the Palestinians, the lack of any progress toward a peace settlement with the Palestinians, construction beyond the 1967 borders, and claims of abuse of the democratic rights of Israel's Arabs. The tensions in the special relationship between Israel and the U.S. also work to diminish Israel's status as they signal a break in support for Israel from the world's strongest power.

Operation Protective Edge brought about a crisis in Israel's relations with a number of South American countries who recalled their ambassadors in protest (Brazil, Ecuador, Chile, Peru). Other countries enacted a freeze, limitation, or reassessment of arms sales to Israel (Spain, the UK and even the U.S.).²² As far as settlements, recent months were chock-full of international reactions in response to building or Israeli announcements of its intention to build in Judea and Samaria. These reactions are not just rhetoric either. Thus, 17 countries from the EU issued warnings to their citizens regarding investing or transacting with businesses based in the settlements or entities connected to them.²³

Often times Israel responds to criticism of its behavior with harsh language that intensifies and exacerbates the diplomatic discourse and highlights Israel's isolation. Thus, after Sweden gave notice that it intended to recognize an independent Palestinian state, the Swedish ambassador was summoned for a "rebuke" in the foreign ministry²⁴, and Foreign Minister Lieberman responded that, "The Swedish government should understand that Middle East relations are more complex than a piece of self-assembled IKEA furniture, and the matter should be handled with responsibility and sensitivity."²⁵ Prime Minister Netanyahu also criticized Europe's relationship with Israel in harsh terms: "We saw today shocking examples of European hypocrisy. It seems as if there are too many people in Europe, the land in which six million Jews were slaughtered, who haven't learned a thing. But we in Israel learned the lesson. We will continue to defend our people and our state against the forces of terror, tyranny and hypocrisy."²⁶ Even the carefully groomed relationship with Russia has taken a hit of late in the wake of the framework agreement with Iran, and Putin's unfreezing the S-300 missile deal with Iran. In response, Israel lowered the rank of its attending representative at a ceremony to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the USSR's victory over the Nazis (May 9, 2015).

Recent months have also been filled with incidents that show the tension and strained relations between Israel and the U.S. – in policy and strategy matters as well as the personal relations between Obama and Netanyahu. Israel and the U.S. disagree on a few key issues. Chief among them are the Iranian nuclear program and the Palestinian issue, specifically construction beyond the 1967 borders. The White House's discomfort with Israeli policy has prompted sharp reactions from all levels in the White House. When the White House refers to construction plans on Givat Hamatos which is beyond the "Green Line" in Jerusalem, it noted: "This development will only draw condemnation from the international community, distance Israel from even its closest allies; poison the atmosphere not only with the Palestinians, but also with the very Arab governments with which Prime Minister Netanyahu said he wanted to build relations."²⁷

Columnist Jeffrey Goldberg famously quoted senior administration officials who called Netanyahu a "chickenshit" and a "coward." Goldberg continued, quoting the official who remarked that: "The good thing about Netanyahu is that he's scared to launch wars," the official said, "The bad thing about him is that he won't do anything to reach an accommodation with the Palestinians or with the Sunni Arab states. The only thing he's interested in is protecting himself from political defeat. He's not

[Yitzhak] Rabin, he's not [Ariel] Sharon, he's certainly no [Menachem] Begin. He's got no guts."²⁸ Netanyahu, from his point of view, harshly rejected the criticisms regarding construction in Jerusalem and called them "statements disconnected from reality."²⁹

The American criticism touches also on deeply shared values that are at the base of the special relationship between the two countries. The U.S. State Department, when discussing the proposed "Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people" law stated: "Israel is a Jewish and democratic state and all its citizens should enjoy equal rights. We expect Israel to stick to its democratic principles."³⁰ The administration also responded sharply to Netanyahu's warnings to voters on election day that Israel's Arab citizens "are going to the voting booths in droves." The White House spokesman said in response, "The United States and this administration is deeply concerned by divisive rhetoric that seeks to marginalize Arab-Israeli citizens. It undermines the values and democratic ideals that have been important to our democracy and an important part of what binds the United States and Israel together."³¹ President Obama himself stated that the unequal treatment toward Israel's Arab community "starts to erode the meaning of democracy in the country."³² One should not take lightly a situation in which disputes between the U.S. and Israel are diverted to a critique of the shared values between the two countries. The "conservative" characteristics of the new government that seems to be taking shape in Israel appear to American liberals as contrary to the very values they hold dear to their hearts.

As the U.S.-led talks with Iran near conclusion, tensions between Washington and Jerusalem are increasing. Netanyahu's appearance before Congress (March 3, 2015) was met with rage in the White House, which accused Netanyahu of meddling in domestic American politics in order to improve his reelection chances in Israel. The president and vice president refrained from meeting with the Israeli prime minister, claiming that Netanyahu was destroying a crucial asset in the relationship between the two countries – Israel's bipartisan support in Washington. The day before Netanyahu's speech, National Security Advisor Susan Rice said at the annual AIPAC policy conference that it was "destructive of the fabric of the relationship."³³

As far as the administration's attitude toward the Israeli prime minister, what stands out is the lack of trust. When Netanyahu clarifies that he remains loyal to the principle of a two-state solution (despite that on the eve of Israel's elections he stated that there won't be a Palestinian state on his watch), White House Chief of Staff Denis McDonough remarked at a J-Street conference that the White House

refuses to accept Netanyahu's clarification: "We cannot simply pretend that those comments were never made, or that they don't raise questions about the prime minister's commitment to achieving peace through direct negotiations,"³⁴ President Obama himself even responded, saying: "We take him at his word when he said that it wouldn't happen during his prime ministership and so, that's why we've got to evaluate what other options are available ... we are going to continue to insist that from our point of view, the status quo is unsustainable, and that while taking into complete account Israel's security, we can't just in perpetuity maintain the status quo, expand settlements, that's not a recipe for stability in the region."³⁵

When American Jewish leaders asked President Obama if he would soon invite the newly re-elected Israeli prime minister to Washington, he responded that at this time, he would suffice with a phone call.³⁶ At the same time, it was reported that since December 2013, Israeli Ambassador to Washington Ron Dermer has met only once with the White House.³⁷ This difficult reality was further expressed in an uncharacteristic Israeli Foreign Ministry document leaked to the press that warned that Israel will pay a heavy price on a number of diplomatic and security issues due to the "harsh, continuing and public crisis" in relations with the U.S. The document pointed to a clear connection between the crisis in the relationship and the deteriorated nature of the dialogue and Israel's ability to advance, with U.S. help, its critical security interests.³⁸

It should be noted that the White House has made every effort to convince Israel and its supporters of U.S. commitment to Israel's security. This effort is aimed, of course, at persuading those opposed to the Iran deal that Israel will not be harmed and will always have the protection of the United States. Thus, for example, the White House publicized a document that details steps taken by President Obama in favor of Israeli security and economic resilience, "in ways that are unprecedented."³⁹ From aid money to the Iron Dome system, through U.S. assistance in various international fora ("On five occasions last year, the U.S. cast the only "against" vote on unfair anti-Israel measures in the UN's Human Rights Council."⁴⁰) However, one cannot ignore the fact that the administration delayed a helicopter-based missile shipment and other urgent military equipment during Protective Edge as it was uncomfortable with the continued fighting in Gaza.

The murky relations, continued political deadlock, and settlement construction could lead the U.S. to take concrete steps against Israel. (There are even those who

claim that the U.S. is taking a stronger stance on the Palestinian issue, especially settlement construction, in order to push Israel into a defensive position and thus complicate Israeli efforts to thwart the Iran deal.) The U.S. could withhold its UN Security Council veto power when the French proposal comes to a vote, especially if the wording seems fair to the U.S. and in line with its principles regarding the outlines of a final status deal between Israel and the Palestinians. The U.S. can also withhold its veto on decisions regarding settlements (as it has in the past), and in a more radical instance could even level sanctions similar to the 1991 freezing of loan guarantees under President Bush Sr. and Secretary of State Baker. The U.S. could also be less enthusiastic when it's called upon to help Israel in international fora, where Israel is isolated, and could stand less firmly by Israel in various international struggles: against de-legitimization, boycotts, and more. Thus, Under-Secretary of State Wendy Sherman warned: "If the new Israeli government is seen to be stepping back from its commitment to a two-state solution, (it) will make our job in the international arena much tougher... it will be harder for us to prevent internationalizing the conflict."⁴¹

The way things are playing out currently could lead the new Israeli government to treat President Obama's remaining time in office as a period of containment with the hope that the policies of the next president will be vastly different. Some will claim that the U.S. elections are so critical to the Israeli government that it should take a chance and support the election campaign of a president whose pro-Israel policies are not in question. The "temptation" to do so comes up, among others, in the statements of Republican presidential candidates. Thus, for example, Jeb Bush harshly criticized the Obama administration's policies on Israel, when he said: "Then Obama threatened to downgrade the U.S.-Israel relationship and permit a series of anti-Israel resolutions to pass the United Nations Security Council without firm American opposition.... This is no way to treat an ally."⁴²

Finally, one cannot ignore the effect tensions between Jerusalem and Washington have on the U.S. Jewish community. While most U.S. Jews are generally ardent Democrats, many are increasingly displeased with the way the Obama administration handles its Israeli portfolio. According to recent polls, Jewish support for the president dropped in 2015 (according to Gallup, from 61 to 50 percent).⁴³

Israel's centrality in the highly charged American foreign policy debates is alarming to many Jews. Some of them see a risk that Israel will be blamed for trying to alter American policies "against its interests" (as Israel was blamed in the run-up to the

Iraq war in 2002). They also see a risk of Israel becoming a partisan cause in a way that could force them to have to choose between their support for Israel and basically every other issue near and dear to the hearts. This is not to say that levels of support for Israel among American Jewry are not high – they are. But on issues of dispute between Washington and Jerusalem, such as Iran's nuclear program or the peace process with the Palestinians, the conversation about Israel often becomes toxic and the mainstream leadership and communities increasingly prefer to leave these issues off their agenda.

Summary

The new Israeli government will have to navigate a complex geopolitical arena replete with dangers. Compared to the last government, the new government that seems to be taking shape will likely have less ideological flexibility. Therefore, the prime minister may be left with limited maneuvering room for diplomatic initiatives to cope with rising challenges. Decisions that will be made will have a crucial effect on the future of the state and the resilience of the Jewish people. Israel must decide how it will handle the Iranian nuclear challenge, prepare for actual threats that could stem from a military escalation with Hezbollah or Hamas, and should also plan for a possible outbreak of violence in Judea and Samaria and Jerusalem.

In light of all this, the need to rebuild the damaged relationship with the U.S. – Israel's sole and significant ally – takes priority. This task will not be simple as the main issues at center stage – Iran's nuclear program and the various aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – have caused substantive disagreements between Jerusalem and Washington. Without decision makers' careful attention the coming months hold the potential for an increase in tensions between the countries that could weigh heavily on the U.S. Jewish community and erode the resilience of the “Triangular Relationship” that has served as the cornerstone of Israel and the Jewish people's strength.

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The Jewish People Policy Institute (JPPI) is an independent professional policy planning think tank incorporated as a private non-profit company in Israel. The mission of the Institute is to ensure the thriving of the Jewish people and the Jewish civilization by engaging in professional strategic thinking and planning on issues of primary concern to world Jewry. Located in Jerusalem, the concept of JPPI regarding the Jewish people is global, and includes aspects of major Jewish communities with Israel as one of them, at the core.

JPPI's activities are action-oriented, placing special emphasis on identifying critical options and analyzing their potential impact on the future. To this end, the Institute works toward developing professional strategic and long-term policy perspectives exploring key factors that may endanger or enhance the future of the Jewish People. JPPI provides professionals, decision-makers, and global leaders with:

- Surveys and analyses of key situations and dynamics
- “Alerts” to emerging opportunities and threats
- Assessment of important current events and anticipated developments
- Strategic action options and innovative alternatives
- Policy option analysis
- Agenda setting, policy recommendations, and work plan design

JPPI is unique in dealing with the future of the Jewish people as a whole within a methodological framework of study and policy development. Its independence is assured by its company articles, with a board of directors co-chaired by Ambassadors Stuart Eizenstat and Dennis Ross – both have served in the highest echelons of the U.S. government, and Leonid Nevzlin in Israel – and composed of individuals with significant policy experience. The board of directors also serves as the Institute's Professional Guiding Council.

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