INSTITUTE OF ORIENTAL STUDIES
RUSSIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

A VIEW FROM THE OUTSIDE: **RUSSIAN EXPERTS ABOUT MODERN ISRAEL**

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Данная монография представляет собой попытку представить англоязычному профессиональному сообществу систему взглядов российских экспертов-израилеведов по широкому кругу вопросов, касающихся проблематики современного Израиля. Концентрация на событиях 21-го века повышает практическое значение работы. Проект задуман и реализован усилиями сотрудников отдела изучения Израиля и еврейских общин ИВ РАН. Вместе с тем к участию в нём привлечены эксперты: ИМЭМО им. Е.М. Примакова РАН, МГУ им. М.В. Ломоносова, МГИМО (У) МИД РФ, ТГУ. Книга состоит из введения и четырёх глав. Первая – вводная – глава посвящена краткой истории развития израилеведения в ИВ АН СССР/ ИВ РАН. Вторая глава, состоящая из четырёх частей, посвящена внутриизраильской проблематике, третья, – состоящая из семи частей, – освещению некоторых вопросов, касающихся взаимоотношению Израиля с некоторыми странами мира (акцент сделан на Россию и США). В четвертой главе, насчитывающей шесть разделов, рассматриваются вопросы взаимоотношения Израиля со странами арабского Востока.

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CONTENTS

6 FOREWORD
Michael M. Mirilashvili

8 INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1. ISRAEL STUDIES – A TOUCH OF HISTORY

12 Israel Studies in the Institute of Oriental Studies
Irina V. Masyukova, Tatyana V. Nosenko, Nina A. Semenchenko, Andrey V. Fedorchenko, Tatiana A. Karasova

CHAPTER 2. OUTSIDE LOOK ON ISRAEL INSIDE

24 Political Longevity: Indispensability or Lack of Alternative? (David Ben Gurion and Benjamin Netanyahu)
Irina D. Zvyagelskaya

40 Israel's Economy: Achievements and Unresolved Issues
Andrey V. Fedorchenko

62 Ex-Soviet Jews with Visual Impairments in Israel: Looking for their Place on the Labor Market
Elena E. Nosenko-Stein

87 Soviet Policy in the Middle East in Contemporary Israeli Historiography: Truth and Fiction
Tatiana V. Nosenko

CHAPTER 3. ISRAEL AND OTHERS. SEVERAL ASPECTS

109 Major Aspects of the Current Russian-Israeli Relations
Tatiana A. Karasova

124 The Syrian Dimension of Russian-Israeli Relations
Tatiana A. Karasova

140 Russia – Israel Economic Cooperation. Overview
Dmitry A. Maryasis, Anton I. Bizyaev

175 Ukrainian-Israeli Relations under V. Zelensky: a View From Russia
Elizaveta A. Iakimova

198 American Jews and the Jewish state: Differences of Ideas and Ideals
Luiza R. Khlebnikova

225 Israel and the Neighbors: Facts from Former S&T Cooperation and Science Diplomacy
Natalia V. Zhadovets

233 The Gender Dimension of Israel's International Development Cooperation Policy: Continuity and Change in Golda Meir's Legacy
Ekaterina U. Usova

CHAPTER 4. ISRAEL AND THE ARAB WORLD

265 The Evolution of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Settlement Process
Alexander V. Krylov

297 The 'Jordanian Option' as an Alternative for the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict's Settlement
Artyom V. Gofman

308 Possible Network Solutions to the Israeli-Palestine Crisis
Vladimir M. Morozov

334 Arab Monarchies of the Gulf and Israel: the Evolution of Approaches
Elena S. Melkumyan

349 Saudi Arabia: Normalization of Relations with Israel?
Grigory G. Kosach

372 Digital Economics as a Means to Foster Israeli-Palestinian Economic Cooperation
Dmitry A. Maryasis, Svetlana Y. Babenkova

394 LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS

FOREWORD

It has already been 30 years since the start of the radical transformation of Israel's diplomatic relations with the USSR's successor, Russia. In October 1991, a new chapter began for our states. Lost relationships have been restored, the doors have been reopened for building full-fledged trusting partnerships.

It should be noted that we have made great progress in 30 years. Immigrants from the former USSR today represent a very significant sector of Israeli society. Some of the largest Jewish communities in the world live in Russia and other post-Soviet countries. According to various estimates, about 500 thousand of the Jewish population lives in Russia. We have established full-fledged partnership relations with Russia, a large and influential player in the Middle East. We cooperate and launch many projects in various fields, including scientific ones. Considering all this, the importance of interaction and dialogue between the two countries is obvious.

Unlike today's relationship, our shared past was very far from ideal. This page of history has been turned, but not forgotten. On the contrary, in terms of the development of modern relations, we unite efforts in the study and understanding of history. In 2015, the Governments of Russia and Israel signed a declaration on the joint publication of Soviet-Israeli documents from 1954 until the break in relations in 1967. These documents will help to comprehend the extremely tense relations between the USSR and Israel at the time. It is crucial that reputable scientists from Russia and Israel are working together on this project, as now we can clearly see the impact of scientific contacts on the development of interstate relations.

Not less important in this context is an analysis of the current state of affairs. Especially in light of the dangerous tendency to delegitimize Israel in political and public discourse in the world. In Russia, this phenomenon is still minor, but not absent either. According to the latest analytical reports published by the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress, Israel has a rather

positive image among the majority of Russians. However, we continue to monitor the situation closely. As many cases show, anti-Israeli rhetoric is very often directly related to anti-Semitism and sometimes leads to acts of intolerance and violence towards the local Jewish population. In this regard, the expert assessment of the geopolitical and social processes taking place in Israel, provided in this monograph, is of particular importance. The view of Russian scientific community is important and we are glad to take part in the preparation of a platform for such publications.

The Euro-Asian Jewish Congress pays special attention to scientific work, the purpose of which is to deepen understanding of the role of Israel in global and local political processes. We are pleased with our active cooperation with Israeli and Russian scientists and deeply appreciate the efforts made to develop bilateral relations between Israel and the Russian Federation.

DR. MICHAEL MIRILASHVILI
PRESIDENT OF THE EURO-ASIAN JEWISH CONGRESS

INTRODUCTION

The strengthening of Russia's position in the Middle East leads to an increase in interest, in particular, in the system of views of Russian politicians and scientists on regional processes. In view of the fact that Israel is one of the key regional players that influences the formation of the Middle East agenda, it is especially important to convey the Russian vision of these processes. Soviet-Israeli, and then Russian-Israeli relations are characterized by contradictions. At the same time, at the present stage, they are distinguished by high intensity and multifactoriality with a pronounced positive orientation, which does not exclude the occurrence of conflict situations.

Over the past 30 years, a strong school of Israeli studies has been formed in Russia, developing as a part of oriental studies. The main scientific work is traditionally conducted in Russian. In this regard, the international scientific community learns the system of views of Russian researchers mainly through the speeches of Russians at various international forums. This is clearly not enough to adequately represent the views of Russian scientists on this topic.

Since foreign experts and persons participating in the decision-making process do not always have the opportunity to form a systematic understanding of Russian approaches to the Middle East in general, and Israel in particular, the likelihood of an incorrect assessment of certain actions made by Russian establishment representatives in this direction significantly increases.

When preparing this collective monograph, we set ourselves the task of making it a snapshot of the views of Russian orientalists in relation to the domestic and foreign policy of Israel and other aspects that allow us to reveal the domestic vision on a wide range of issues related to the country studied in this monograph. The work allows to reveal the main approaches to the study of this problem, analytical techniques, angles of view.

Concentration on the events of the 21st century makes it possible to most effectively achieve the stated goal and increase the possibility of practical application of published materials.

Among the authors are well-known Russian orientalists - representatives of leading Russian centers: the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Institute for Asian and African Studies of Moscow Lomonosov State University; Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO University), the Primakov Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IMEMO), the Russian State University for the Humanities, Tomsk State University.

The book consists of four chapters. The first one is an introductory chapter. We wanted to get our foreign colleagues to know about the formation and present day situation with Israel studies in the Institute of Oriental Studies. The second chapter deals with inner Israeli issues: politics, economics, social development. Israeli relations with Russia, Ukraine and some other aspects of its foreign outlook are shown in the third chapter. And the last chapter deals with Israeli relations with the Arab world.

Many orientalists who deal with research in the field of politics, modern history, economics, usually develop several capacities. One of them is to explain to general audience what is going on in the country or region they study; another is to provide decisionmakers with timely assessment including practical proposals; and the third one is to make original research based on academic standards and solid background. As could be seen in the volume, we present all three capacities reflected therein.

We fully understand that this volume does not cover the full scope of Israel studies, just as it does not reflect all issues that Russian researchers deal with. But still we believe it gives an overview of the level of present-day Israel studies in Russia. It should be mentioned here that contributors reflect their own personal viewpoints and not the collective one, as well as they do not reflect official Russian standpoint (even if it corresponds with the views expressed in any part of the book).

We would like to thank all the contributors to the volume. It was a hard work to provide an initial paper, interact with translation, update the content. Israel and Jewish Communities' Studies Department of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences researchers deserve special acknowledgements as they were an important

part in thinking over the project of such a publication and helped a lot at all stages of its development. We also would like to thank those who work with translation and shaping up this volume in English, which is always a hard task to do. We are also grateful to Israel Instituite and Eurasian Jewish Congress for their financial and professional support of our initiative.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION. ISRAEL STUDIES – A TOUCH OF HISTORY

TATIANA V. NOSENKO, IRINA V. MASYUKOVA, NINA A. SEMENCHENKO,
ANDREY V. FEDORCHENKO, TATIANA A. KARASOVA

Israel Studies in the Institute of Oriental Studies

There are two evidently distinctive stages in the study of Israel as a scholarly discipline in the USSR/Russia: Soviet and post-Soviet. During the Soviet period, academic research on the State of Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict was closely tied to foreign policy goals in the Middle East and subordinated to the ideological guidelines which steered the Soviet Union's course in the international arena. The organizational system of scientific research conformed fully to the norms of administrative regulation of the economy, and public and scientific life. The main customers and consumers were structures of the CPSU Central Committee responsible for the development and implementation of foreign policy (International Department, etc.), as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Gosteleradio, i.e. communist party and state organisations. Scientific research was carried out in the institutes of the USSR Academy of Sciences, as well as in the higher educational institutions of the relevant profile, which were fully financed from state sources. Accordingly, ideological and organizational control over the topics and content of research was fully exercised by the state and party bodies.

In the USSR until the early 1970s, in the system of scientific and educational institutions there was no special unit that was dedicated to the study of Israel. Scientific research on Israel was conducted in the context of Middle Eastern studies. Israel was mainly criticised as a state following the 'reactionary policy of imperialism'.

Communist party bodies and, above all, the Propaganda Department of the CPSU Central Committee paid special attention to criticizing Zionism as one of the most hostile ideological trends both at home and in the

international arena. Zionist propaganda, aimed at awakening national consciousness among the Jewish population of the USSR and increasing the motivation for the request to emigrate, fundamentally undermined the concept of the Soviet people's unity and threatened to destroy the entire system of control over the movement of citizens that had been in place for decades. The issue of freedom of exit for Soviet Jews, regularly raised by Israel, and campaigns in support of Soviet Jews in the United States and Western Europe were regarded in the USSR as subversive anti-Soviet activity and as interference in the internal affairs of the Soviet state. Soviet ideologists and propagandists interpreted the main content of Zionism as militant chauvinism and anti-communism. The fight against it took on a redundant character. Thus, in 1970-1971, 59 books were published with a total circulation of 2 million copies in Russian, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, English, French, German, Spanish and Arabic, which exposed the 'reactionary, anti-Soviet essence of the theory and practice of contemporary Zionism'[1]. However, as a rule, these publications were of no scientific value.

Nikitina Galina Stepanovna (1924-1982), a graduate of the legal department of the Institute of Foreign Trade, candidate of legal sciences and doctor of historical sciences, can rightfully be considered the first Soviet Israel Studies professional. As a researcher at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences, G.S. Nikitina published in 1968 the monograph 'The State of Israel'[2] - the first scientific research in the USSR devoted to the Jewish state. Israel was viewed in this work from traditional Marxist-Leninist positions as 'a bourgeois state, the ruling elite of which is closely connected with American monopoly capital and pursues an anti-people policy, distracting workers from the class struggle by preaching nationalism.' At the same time, following foreign authors of left-wing and Marxist convictions[3] (including in Israel[4]), G.S. Nikitina criticized the concept of the connection between Jewish political history of modern times with Hebrew history, according to which the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine in 1948 is viewed as the revival of Jewish statehood[5]. Many conclusions and generalizations of Nikitina's research objectively reflected the features of Israeli society development in the first decades of the state's existence. The Israeli scientist Z. Katz, who visited Moscow in 1979, noted that this is the most complete book about Israel that was published in the USSR, although it is replete with inaccuracies[6].

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the number of Soviet Jews wishing to leave for Israel significantly increased after the Six-Day War in 1967 and the campaign for their rights in the West intensified, there was a demand in Soviet leadership for a more decisive response to the Zionist ideology. In a memo on this, sent to the CPSU Central Committee on 26.02.1971, the Deputy Chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers V.E. Dymshits wrote: 'It is perplexing that none of the institutes is conducting systematic work to study materials on the hostile activities of Zionist organizations and their methods, and to develop proposals for exposing and fighting them. I think that one of the existing institutes studying socio-economic problems should have an organization studying the whole range of questions of the struggle against Zionism and collecting materials on the situation of national minorities in capitalist countries'[7].

On the basis of these proposals in the Central Committee of the CPSU it was decided to establish a unit 'for the scientific struggle against Zionist ideology. This task was entrusted to the Institute of Oriental Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences, where in May 1971 a department for the study of Israel was established, consisting of two sectors: 1. History and Socio-Political Problems Sector. 2. Economics Sector[8]. The Department was further reorganised during the period when the Director of the Institute of Oriental Studies was Academician E.M. Primakov, a renowned Arabist and the foremost expert on the Middle East. In March 1979, 'in order to further improve the work of the Israel Studies Department, to expand research directly related to economic, political and social problems of the country, as well as to more deeply develop the theory and anti-socialist practice of international Zionism,' two sectors were established within it: the Israel Studies and Ideological Sectors[9].

The extremely great ideological and political responsibility entrusted to the Division could be seen from the appointments of its heads then made. The head of the History and Social Problems Department was Dr. V. I. Kiselev (1928-2008), who from 1964 to 1968 was on the international editorial board of the monthly journal 'Problems of Peace and Socialism', published in Prague and supervised directly by the Central Committee of the CPSU. Later V.V. Benevolensky, who supervised IVAN through the KGB, as was the custom in Soviet times, served as the nominal head of the Department.

The unit, created practically from scratch, experienced many difficulties in its work: there were no specialists with knowledge of the Hebrew language, due to the general closeness of the Soviet system, access

to foreign scientific literature was very limited, not to mention scientific trips and contacts with Israeli scientists. However, in the 1970s the first Israel centered research papers appeared at the Institute of Oriental Studies[10]. They considered the internal political problems of Israel, its history, the development of the Zionist movement, and paid much attention to the Middle East conflict and the problems of its settlement. Some of them were published in the special bulletins of the Institute, which were closed editions for official use and were not intended for the general reader. They did not carry such a 'heavy' ideological burden as open publications. At the same time, scientific books on Israel that had passed through ideological filters were published in large (according to modern standards) print runs (2-10 thousand copies). They were quickly sold in specialized bookstores, and entered Soviet and foreign libraries. In the Soviet Union, the so-called ordinary readers paid much attention to the situation in Israel.

Within the system of the Academy of Sciences, and on a national scale as a whole, only the Institute of Oriental Studies had a specialized unit that was engaged in the study of Israel, so it seemed that all anti-Israel, anti-Zionist products, often having an undisguised anti-Semitic tint, came out of the walls of the Institute. However, the bulk of the propaganda 'revelatory publications' of the 1960s-1980s. had nothing to do with the Institute of Oriental Studies. Their authors were employees of other institutes and institutions[11].

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, during the period of exacerbation of the Soviet-American confrontation in the international arena, special attention was paid in scientific research to the nature of the close relationship between the United States and Israel, the dependence of Israel's foreign policy decisions on the American position. These topics were developed at the Institute of the USA and Canada of the USSR Academy of Sciences[12], and at the Nizhny Novgorod (then Gorky) State University[13]. In accordance with the official ideological guidelines, the published works were anti-Israeli and anti-American in nature. The books of Academician E.M. Primakov published during this period were also written in the ideological vein required by the Marxist-Leninist methodology. But they differed in a more balanced analysis of the Middle East events, based on documentary material, personal experience and impressions[14].

At this time, the professionalism of the staff of the Israel Department at the Institute of Oriental Studies increased markedly due to new per-

sonnel, among whom were former employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other related organizations. Some of them prior to joining the department worked in the Soviet embassies in the countries of the Middle East, including Israel. In addition, the Department was replenished with graduates of the Institute of Asian and African Studies at Moscow State University (ISAA), where in 1980 a group was first opened to study Hebrew as the main oriental language. In addition to the most popular topics related to Israel's foreign policy, the Arab-Israeli conflict, the development of a country studies began[15]. One of the most important works in this field was the monograph by T.A. Karasova, published in 1988, 'The Maarah Bloc in the Party-Political System of Israel'[16], which analyzed the stages and features of the formation and development of the Maarah, the largest party bloc in Israel. Outside the Department, I.D. Zvyagelskaya[17], a leading Russian orientalist, professor at MGIMO, currently heading the Center for Middle East Studies at the Primakov Institute of World Economy and International Relations, published her first work on Israel in 1982.

In the 1980s, the propaganda intensity in Soviet scientific works about Israel began to somewhat weaken. They still viewed Israel's foreign and domestic policy from a Marxist-Leninist standpoint, but without those harsh, sometimes offensive, attacks that were characteristic of previous decades. Attempts were made to revise the too absurd formulations, clearly at odds with reality, introduced by anti-Zionist propaganda in the previous years. For example, a well-known Soviet Americanist pointed out the inadequacy of the term 'Zionist capital', arguing that the industrial and financial groups in the United States, whether they included Jews by origin or not, have lost their ethnicity long ago and are an integral part of American big business[18].

In 1986, the newly transformed Israel Department was headed by V.I. Nosenko, who made a significant contribution to the compilation and publication of the first academic guide book The State of Israel[19]. Its team of authors consisted of highly qualified specialists, and although they were constantly under pressure of ideological censorship, they managed to produce a detailed overview of all aspects of Israeli life – from description of nature and geographical conditions to political problems and culture. Despite all the difficulties at the stage of preparation, the guide was published in a circulation of 37,000 copies and quickly spread throughout the country. Later, when the unit was headed by T.A. Karasova the collective work was produced on, the changes in Israeli society

in the 1980s, on complex transformation processes in its economy and politics, which allowed the country to take its place among the highly developed capitalist states.[20]

The turn of the XXth and XXI century saw the beginning of changes in financing and organization of domestic Israeli studies. An important role in the expansion of Russian research on Israel was played by the establishment of cooperation between the two countries in the field of science and education, which began to develop even before the formal restoration of diplomatic relations with Israel in 1991. In 1990, the first agreement was signed between the Academy of Sciences and the Ministry of Science of Israel. There was an active exchange of students between Russian higher educational institutions and large Israeli universities – the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Open University; joint scientific and educational Russian-Israeli projects appeared; Russian scientists were given the opportunity to regularly visit Israel, and Israeli researchers were able to speak and participate in joint Russian-Israeli scientific projects. The first collections of articles, jointly prepared by Russian and Israeli scientists, were published[21].

An important factor that contributed to the emancipation of Middle Eastern studies was the decrease of ideological pressure inside the country. But the ideological confrontation that persisted in Russian-West relations, manifested itself in the direct or indirect pressure of Western donors on Russian scholars claiming this type of funding. The elimination of ideological control led to the emergence of a new, at first glance, paradoxical situation: in the 1990s, difficult for Russian social sciences, a sharp decline in the real income of scientists was accompanied by a sharp increase in the number of publications and an increase in their quality. Numerous publications of the Institute of the Middle East enhanced this process[22]. Moreover, this private entity provided a publications platform for domestic Middle East scholars at a time of an acute public funding shortage for scientific research.

Currently, there is a three-tier system for organizing these specialized studies - institutes of the Academy of Sciences of the Russian Federation, research centers at leading universities, and private research structures. The first link remains dominant. As for financing, the state budget remains the main source and additional sources are Russian scientific foundations and foreign grants. The share of the latter, apparently, has significantly decreased in the second decade of the XXI century as a result of the strengthening of the anti-Russian component in leading

Western countries' state policy. This scheme is typical for the Russian science as a whole.

The number of ordinary readers of articles and books on modern Israel has grown even more. The number of publications distributed over the Internet has increased, making them more accessible. Israel study programs are being developed at the Department of Judaic Studies of the ISAA Moscow State University, at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at MGIMO (U)[23], at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies named after G.I. Mirsky at the Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Sciences and some others.

The Department of Israeli Studies of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences remains the leading unit in Russian Israeli studies. In the works of A.V. Fedorchenko, for the first time in Russian science, comprehensive large-scale studies of the Israeli model of economic development were carried out[24]. Research in the Israeli economy was successfully continued by D.A. Maryasis, who became the department head in 2019[25].

Works by T.A. Karasova[26], who headed the Department in 2004-2019, filled the gaps in the study of the party-political system of Israel.

It should be noted that during this period the area of the department's research was expanded - Jewish communities were also included in the sphere of its 'responsibility', which, in particular, was reflected in its name.

The increased need to study issues that were not previously touched upon by domestic authors was evidenced by works devoted to the history and ideology of Israel's religious parties[27], the absorption and adaptation of Russian-speaking immigrants in Israel[28], the history of Jerusalem as a cult center for three monotheistic religions[29]. The area of research interests of the staff of the Department included such topics as the history of the formation of Israeli civil society; migration processes; history of the presence of ethnic Russians in Palestine / Israel[30].

2005 was marked by the publication of the first monograph in the national historiography on the history of the State of Israel. It was prepared by three authors I.D. Zvyagelskaya, T.A. Karasova and A.V. Fedorchenko[31], leading Russian experts on Israel. In her later work on the history of Israel, I.D. Zvyagelskaya focused on examining the regional and international context in which the formation of the Jewish state took place[32].

A new direction in the work of the Department was opened by

research on Jewish identity in Russia, on the history of Russian Jews[33]. Later, studies of the Jewish community in the United States[34] and the situation in Jewish communities in the former republics of the USSR were developed.

In the 1990s. the first research papers appeared, covering Soviet-Israeli relations, and in particular, the contribution of the USSR to the creation of the State of Israel[35]. A special impetus to this line of research was given by the opening in the 1990s of a number of previously inaccessible Soviet archives, and then the publication of collections of archival materials on the early period of Soviet-Israeli relations, and on the Middle East conflict[36]. This topic was developed in detail at the Nizhny Novgorod State University[37]. Researchers of the Israel Department of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences also presented their views on this issue in publications[38].

The new level of cooperation between Russian scholars and Israeli researchers was evidenced by the holding of several 'round tables' within the framework of the project 'Key events of Jewish history and the State of Israel (1897-2017)' in connection with the anniversary of the formation of the Jewish state. They were organized jointly by the Research Center of the Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center and the Department for Israeli Studies and Jewish Communities of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The two-volume edition The Formation of Jewish Statehood in the Twentieth Century: Key Events[39], published as a result of these activities, has become a kind of summing up of the work of Russian researchers in this area over the past three decades.

Several young researchers joined the department recently. The department members envisage many interesting plans and challenges. Israeli studies in Russia are relatively young to see lots of new horizons beyond but mature enough to reach them.

[1] Russian State Archive of Modern History (RSAMH). Fund 5, inventory No. 63, file 109.

[2] Nikitina G.S. *Gosudarstvo Izrail'* (Moscow: Glavnaya redaktsiya vostochnoy literatury izdatel'stva Nauka [The State of Israel] (Moscow: Main editorial office of Oriental literature of the Nauka publishing house, 1968) (in Russian).

[3] See e.g. Rodinson M. *Israel and the Arabs* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd, 1968).

[4] See on the issue: Nosenko T.V. Razvenchaniye mifov ili razrusheniye gosudarstva: metodologicheskaya diskussiya v izrail'skom obshchestvovedeni, in *Izrail' v sovremennom mire. Sb. statey pod red. Karasovoy T.A.* [Debunking myths or destroying the state: a methodological discussion in Israeli social studies, in

Israel in the modern world. A collection of articles edited by T.A. Karasova] (Moscow, Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS), 2008) (in Russian).

[5] Nikitina G.S. *Gosudarstvo Izrail'*, p. 4 (in Russian).

[6] '7 yamim ve 7 leilot' (7 Days and 7 Nights – In Hebrew), a weekly supplement to the *Maariv* newspaper. 10.12.1979.

[7] Morozov B. *Yevreyskaya emigratsiya v svete novykh dokumentov* [Jewish emigration in the light of new documents] (Tel Aviv, 1998. Document number 21), p. 90 (in Russian).

[8] Archive of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences, order No. 213 of May 12, 1971.

[9] Archive of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the USSR Academy of Sciences, order No. 145 of March 29, 1979.

[10] In 1971, research fellow A.B. Volkov defended his Ph.D. thesis 'Kooperativnoye dvizheniye i razvitiye gosudarstvennogo kapitalizma v Izraile' [The Cooperative Movement and the Development of State Capitalism in Israel]; in 1977, employee of the Israel Department B.F. Yamilinets defended his Ph.D. thesis 'Inostrannyy kapital v Izraile (1948-1973 gg.)' (Foreign capital in Israel (1948-1973) (both in Russian).

[11] See on this issue: Kostyrchenko G.V. Taynaya politika ot Brezhneva do Gorbacheva. Chast' I Vlast' – Yevreyskiy vopros – Intelligentsiya. –M.: Mezhdunarodnyye otnosheniya. (Secret politics from Brezhnev to Gorbachev. Part I Power - The Jewish Question - The Intelligentsia. –Moscow: International relations.), 2019, pp. 511-550.

[12] Borisov R.V. *SSHA: blizhnevostochnaya politika v 70-ye gody* [USA: Middle East Policy in the 70s] (Moscow, 1982) (in Russian).

[13] Kolobov O.A. SSHA, Izrail' i arabskiy mir: o nekotorykh osobennostyakh osushchestvleniya i formirovaniya politiki amerikanskogo imperializma na Blizhnem Vostoke i v Severnoy Afrike v 1945–1983 gg. [USA, Israel and the Arab world: on some features of the implementation and formation of the policy of American imperialism in the Middle East and North Africa in 1945-1983] (Moscow, 1984) (in Russian).

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CHAPTER 2. OUTSIDE LOOK ON ISRAEL INSIDE

IRINA D. ZVYAGELSKAYA

Political Longevity: Indispensability or Lack of Alternative?

(David Ben Gurion and Benjamin Netanyahu)

The issue of leadership in various states and different political systems remains the subject of much academic research. Questions about where people with special leadership qualities come from, how they are integrated into the elite, how they participate in the formation of regimes, and how regimes in turn help shape a particular type of leadership, are not always easy to answer.

Of special interest is the phenomenon of political longevity in formally democratic systems. The reasons for it may be linked to certain public demands and/or to the established dominance of a single party and ideology as well as a shortage of experienced and authoritative politicians representing a political alternative. This paper attempts to examine this issue in relation to Israel, where the longest-serving political Prime Ministers have been the founder of the state David Ben-Gurion[1], and Benjamin Netanyahu.[2]

Where the leaders come from

The reasons for the two politicians' coming into politics, into the traditionally narrow and closed circle of the Israeli political elite, were different; their careers were also shaped by different factors. Each of them, within the framework of the existing political system in Israel, contributed to the creation of their own regime, relatively authoritarian under the first Prime Minister and more technocratic under Netanyahu. A Russian political scientist A.P. Tsygankov rightly points out, 'a regime

is undoubtedly a set of state structures that allow the ruling class to exercise its powers. In some cases, there may be an institution of multipartyism and well-developed civil society structures, while in others political decisions are made and implemented by the regime using fundamentally different structures and mechanisms, without any alignment with the public interest. ... regime, as compared to the system, has its own temporal characteristics. ... the same political system can function in different regimes'.[3]

This conclusion is crucial for understanding how Israel's political system was built up under inherently different regimes, which, in accordance with the demands of the time and the availability of resources, proposed their own mechanisms for addressing the most important problems for society, primarily security issues. Meanwhile, despite the inherent multiparty system, separation of powers, strong civil society and other democratic characteristics of the Israeli political system, decision-making is carried out by a narrow circle of people, various kinds of shadow and 'kitchen' cabinets. Moreover, the Prime Minister may hold several posts simultaneously, among which the post of defense minister remains the most influential.

The credibility of a leader is defined by his ability to find answers to society's most pressing questions, to be convincing, to insure that no one else can do the job better. Ben-Gurion did not just share the public's particular security concerns, he also was able to offer military and security solutions. Netanyahu, who came to power when the might of the Israeli army could no longer be questioned, has also emphasized security in his political program, turning the slogan of the centre-left Avoda party 'territories for peace' into 'peace for security'. He has masterfully exploited public frustration over attempts to resolve the Palestinian problem and concerns about new threats, which has enabled him to remain as Prime Minister longer than his great predecessor.

Ben Gurion's emergence as a politician is closely linked to the era of the search for national identity and the building of a state that did not exist in the modern era. Historical reminiscences about the ancient kingdoms of Judea and Israel could only conventionally be seen as legitimizing Jewish claims to Palestine. The members of the European Jewish communities had no continuous routine history of life in Palestine, no close connection with this ancient land, no names of heroes left in living popular memory that previous generations could still remember, no common language in which they could speak and write. All this was

in fact created under the influence of the Zionist doctrine, born out of broader European nationalism.

The creation of a Jewish state in Palestine required passionately committed people, ready to make sacrifices and suffer for the sake of statehood. Such people also needed leaders with qualities that were far from ordinary, since the goals required complete dedication.

Thus, the chairman of the World Zionist Organization (WZO), Chaim Weizmann, carried out the political task using his own authority and the organization behind him as the resource. He negotiated with the British government for the establishment of a Jewish 'national home' in Palestine, which meant getting the rights to buy land and ensuring an influx of immigrants. His efforts contributed to the emergence of the Balfour Declaration in November 1917.[4]

As for Ben Gurion, he carried out the practical and organizational tasks of establishing and strengthening the dominant political party, forming quasi-state structures and illegal (Haganah) or semi-legal (Palmach) armed formations. Unlike Weizmann, who was estranged from life in Palestine, Ben Gurion controlled the main political and power resources of the Jewish community (Yishuv), which enabled him to count on its support and make decisions of both tactical and strategic nature.

The formation of the future Israeli elite followed a scenario in which the most active representatives of political parties, trade unions, volunteer organizations and military groups were promoted to its ranks. The elites do not always emerge from the state apparatus or large corporations. In a weak state or in the state in the making, or in revolutionary turmoil, a new elite is recruited primarily from 'the armed forces, trade unions, the media, NGOs, any social movement and so on'. However, according to the Brazilian researcher Matias Lopez, 'elite theory acknowledges that elites may come from anywhere, as long as they find the necessary tools to exercise power...However, elite theory limits elites to a necessary minority. Therefore, provided with the necessary tools, *anyone* but not *everyone* could eventually become a member of the elite'.[5]

In other words, personal qualities are the main driving force. It is not the routine reshuffling of political figures or the process of succession, but persistence and charisma that pave the way to the top for the strongest and most ambitious. Ben Gurion certainly possessed charismatic traits - the ability to lead people, to make them believe in them-

selves. This type of legitimacy was described by Max Weber. To sum it up, according to him, the charismatic fold is an extraordinary personal gift (Gnadengabe) or charisma, the total personal devotion as well as personal trust evoked by the leader in his followers. A man of this type is regarded as inwardly 'called upon' to lead people; the latter obey him because they believe in him.[6]

Perhaps only David Ben-Gurion belonged to the ranks of charismatic politicians in Israel, because of his own leadership qualities and because society needed the Leader and, finally, because he fairly quickly lost his political rivals, who progressed with him from young idealists to bureaucrats and apparatchiks. Some of them died, some drifted away, some were politically marginalized. Thus, Ben Gurion found himself alone at the top of the state pyramid he had created. The last of the old guard with whom Ben Gurion forged the Israeli state was the Speaker of the Knesset, Yosef Spinzak. In 1952, after the death of the first president of Israel, Chaim Weizmann, Spinzak tried to run for president. Ben Gurion rejected his candidacy[7] - he was not so much afraid of political rivals as he was trying to prevent the rise of those who had known him in his youth and for whom he was not an unquestionable authority.

Benjamin Netanyahu was not overly charismatic, but had a strong personality which ensured his political career. Netanyahu used to point out that he did not belong to traditional politics. Most of his political life was spent outside the Likud party. In that sense, he was not a traditional apparatchik. Nor was he from the military system. Party activists tend to divide society into Left and Right, friends and foes. Netanyahu insisted in his interviews that this was not the case with him.[8]

Political activism and political succession

The process of Ben Gurion's becoming a political leader was taking place over decades. The political struggle in which he was engaged required him to maneuver and at the same time stick to his principles. His active work in the most influential Zionist parties and organizations eventually brought him to the political top of the future Israeli establishment.

In his long political life, Ben-Gurion has never sought universal recognition. He always took positions that seemed right to him, and which were sometimes at odds with the mainstream. During the First World

War he had already taken a special position concerning service in the British army which became a source of controversy in the Yishuv. Not all Palestinian Jews were sympathetic to military cooperation with Britain, as they did not want to alienate the Turkish authorities on whom their life in Palestine depended. Russia was fighting alongside Britain and France during the war, and under these circumstances the Ottoman authorities deported Russian subjects from Palestine. One solution to avoid this was for the Palestinian Jews to adopt Turkish citizenship, however, this automatically meant that they were conscripted into the Turkish army. Other choice would have put the whole Zionist project at risk, since deportation would have led to a drastic reduction in the small Jewish population. Under the circumstances, some Zionist activists, including the young Ben Gurion, took the initiative to become Turkish citizens and serve in the Turkish army.[9] Later, convinced that Turkey was losing the war, Ben Gurion joined the Jewish Legion established within the British army.

A decisive role in the World Zionist movement of the first half of the twentieth century and in the development of Palestine was played by the socialist movement. At the end of the 19th century, the Poalei Zion Party (Workers of Zion) was established in Russia, uniting Marxists and socialists. The party proclaimed as its goal class struggle and common ownership of the means of production. The general ideological platform was the concept that the Jewish proletariat, while sharing the fate of the world proletariat, nevertheless faced specific problems, and that these could only be solved by concentrating the Jewish working class in Eretz Yisrael. Ben Gurion rose to the top, taking the classic path of a functionary: first working for a political party (Poalei Zion), then working in the secretariat of the Histadrut trade union as well as editing a trade union newspaper. In 1930 he became a head of the new socialist Mapai party, which for many years dominated the political system in Yishuv and later Israel.

In 1929 the Jewish Agency was established to co-operate with the British administration in Palestine in matters relating to the creation of a 'national home'. D. Ben-Gurion was also head of the EA's executive committee from 1935 to 1948.

But Ben-Gurion would not have become a recognized leader had he been content to do only bureaucratic work. Unlike many, he possessed strategic vision and the ability to choose the right course of action. In May 1942, in New York, he took an active part in developing the 'Bilt-

more Program'. It was seen by Ben Gurion and his supporters as a crucial step towards the reorientation of the Zionist movement from Britain to the United States. In its final clause, the Biltmore Program 'declares that the new world order that will follow victory cannot be established on foundations of peace, justice and equality unless the problem of Jewish homelessness is finally solved. The conference urges that the gates of Palestine be opened; that the Jewish Agency be vested with control of immigration into Palestine and with the necessary authority for upbuilding the country, including the development of its unoccupied and uncultivated lands; and that Palestine be established as a Jewish Commonwealth integrated in the structure of the new democratic world. Then and only then will the age old wrong to the Jewish people be righted'.[10]

Unlike activists in the Zionist movement, Chaim Weizmann believed that the possibilities for cooperation with Britain were far from exhausted. He was highly critical of the 'Biltmore program'.

In fact, the 'program' charted a radically new course chosen by Ben Gurion and his associates, whose success depended on Ben Gurion's willingness to take responsibility for its implementation. In the words of Ben Gurion's biographer, Michael Bar-Zohar, he started to chart a new path - the path of militant Zionism, away from England, a turn toward America, a mobilization of American Jewry, a demand for the immediate establishment of a state, a call for a powerful aliyah .... The Ben-Gurion line, in spite of its unquestionable radicalism, proved to be more viable and more in line with the immediate political objectives.[11]

Ben Gurion also secured his place in Israeli history because he was associated with some of the most momentous decisions, which lent a special symbolism to his long service to his country. For example, he insisted on the immediate proclamation of the State of Israel and announced the Declaration of Independence on 14 May 1948.[12]

Netanyahu's political fate was only partially subject to the logic of elite recruitment from party and social structures. Unlike the founding fathers, the unknown migrants from the outskirts of the Russian Empire who later became the Israeli elite, he belonged to it by birth, as a member of the so-called generation of princes. His father, Benzion Netanyahu, was not only a famous historian, but also a revisionist activist. He even worked as the personal secretary for the founder of the movement, Ze'ev Jabotinsky. Thus, Benjamin Netanyahu could claim attention from the right-wing Likud bloc, the successor of revisionist ideas.

However, before Netanyahu took up party work and was elected to the Knesset, he received prestigious education in the US and, most importantly, had got political experience. The then Israeli Ambassador to the US, Moshe Arens, liked the young, well-educated, and ambitious Benjamin. In 1982, he appointed him deputy, and in 1984 Netanyahu became Israel's ambassador to the UN. In 1988 Netanyahu became a member of the Knesset on the Likud list. Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir appointed him deputy foreign minister. Netanyahu eventually began a battle for leadership in the Likud, and he managed to overtake another 'prince', Benny Begin, the Herut right-wing party founder Menachem Begin's son. Perhaps the conservative party apparatus initially underestimated Netanyahu's determination to win without fail. In fact, for the elderly Likud bureaucrats, he was a godsend. Young, charming, with a brilliant English, he attracted the attention of the voters, who were getting tired of the 'old guard'. In 1992 Netanyahu became head of the Likud. In the direct election for the post of Prime Minister in 1996 he won a decisive battle with Socialist Shimon Peres.[13] The margin was slim, but Netanyahu became Prime Minister for the first time, the post he was to contest many times - in 2009, 2015, 2019, 2020 and 2021.

Authoritarianism and ambition

One important feature of Ben Gurion's political style was his own brand of authoritarianism. 'The typically observed consequences of authoritarianism result from an *interaction* between authoritarian predispositions and threat'.[14] There is no doubt that Ben Gurion possessed the traits of an authoritarian leader who did not tolerate objections and pushed for his own approach to most political problems. The testimony of Ben-Gurion's loyal disciple, Shimon Peres, who became President of Israel at the end of his career, is quite saying in this regard. 'I once asked him (Ben-Gurion), 'When did you feel that you were a leader?' He answered me: 'when I looked around me and saw that I had no one to ask'.[15] Was the Old Man (as Ben Gurion was called) sincere when he uttered this phrase, or was he already thinking about his place in history? At any rate, this phrase, to a great degree, epitomizes the Israeli first Prime Minister.

Another reason for Ben Gurion's authoritarian style was his group affiliation. Before the creation of Israel Ben Gurion belonged to a rather narrow circle of like-minded Zionist socialists, who worked under the dif-

ficult conditions of the British Mandate. After independence, the Prime Minister became increasingly oriented towards the Israeli military establishment, repeatedly holding the post of Minister of Defense in addition to that of Prime Minister, and surrounding himself with army officers and bureaucrats from the Ministry. He trusted and promoted members of this group, often at the expense of people with no military experience. Both groups constituted fairly closed corporations with their own rules. Group identity may, depending on the hierarchy built within it, become a source of authoritarianism.

One can agree with the New Zealand researcher John Duckitt, a scholar of authoritarianism, that 'measures of patriotism and nationalism, indexing group identification at the level of the society or nation, have invariably shown very powerful correlations with traditional measures of authoritarianism... Moreover, if authoritarianism is viewed as reflecting the intensity of individuals' group identification and their consequent commitment to group cohesiveness, then a formal definition of authoritarianism follows quite readily. On this basis, authoritarianism is simply the individual or group's conception of the relationship which should exist, that is, the appropriate or normative relationship, between the group and its individual members'... One possible model would be 'the belief that the purely personal needs, inclinations, and values of group members should be subordinated as completely as possible to the cohesion of the group and its requirements'.[16]

This state of affairs, characteristic of both mafia groups and cohesive revolutionary units, tend to endow the leader with authoritarian traits. Interestingly, Ben Gurion was attributed the following statement: 'I don't know what the people want, but I think I know what is good for them'.[17]

In comparison, Netanyahu can hardly be called an authoritarian ruler, but he has always shown himself as a politician with a huge ego. He has been known to be disinclined to consult even his advisers, to assume that his own assessments of the situation are almost always correct, and to push through his own decisions. Perhaps these traits, or possibly a personal experience, led the Israeli journalist Yoel Markus to describe Netanyahu as 'charismatic, driven, from an extremely ambitious family, egocentric, a lone wolf, the kind of person you might say has no God'.[18]

Ambition and determination are considered the main features of Netanyahu's character. Once Netanyahu experienced a great family tragedy. His elder brother Jonathan was the only Israeli commando who

died in 1976 during the hostage rescue in Entebbe.[19] Jonathan Netanyahu became a national hero in Israel, and Benjamin, according to a common belief, tried all his life to be worthy of his memory. He found his own way of doing it.

Perhaps this, too, has determined his political trajectory. He always tried to be the best, he set himself hard goals, achieved them, was not satisfied with partial success and never gave up. 'Netanyahu sees the game of politics as governed by the 'laws of the jungle,' where the strong survive and the weak fall by the wayside. To him, achievement of the goal justifies any political means... In most cases, he does not act out of aggression, malice, or cruelty. His dominance and manipulation stem from cold, rational calculation, directed solely at achieving goals at any cost'.[20]

Reaching his goals at any cost did not always translate into public support for Netanyahu. At times he realized that he had overreached himself. He reached a difficult point in November 1995, when a far-right radical assassinated Prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, who had been trying to resolve the Palestinian problem and had sanctioned direct negotiations with the PLO. These talks and their subsequent results, which became known as the 'Oslo process', led to a revival of far-right activists and parties. For them even a partial withdrawal from the West Bank was unacceptable. The territorial issue was actively exploited by the Likud, which strongly criticized Rabin and whipped up a lot of hysteria about the West Bank. In describing the role of the Israeli right in the events leading up to the assassination, Israeli researcher Itamar Rabinowitz wrote that Netanyahu attended all major rallies organized by the right, including those in which Rabin was portrayed as wearing a Nazi uniform. On 5 October 1994, for example, he spoke at a rally organized by the Likud against the signing of an agreement with the Palestinians. The rally quickly turned into pandemonium and the crowd began shouting 'Death to Rabin!' . The main motive for criticism against Netanyahu was that he failed to condemn the electrified crowd for unacceptable and dirty tricks and thus de facto justified them.[21]

Rabin's murder prompted Netanyahu to lower the degree of confrontation sharply and join the Likud in supporting Shimon Peres PM candidacy as Peres had been working closely with Rabin. In fact he did not have long to wait for his own premiership. In 1996 he defeated Peres in a direct election as Prime Minister.[22]

Netanyahu skillfully exploited not only his oratory skills and youthfulness, but also the real fears of the electorate, faced with the intensification of the terrorist attacks from Hamas and Islamic Jihad that came before the elections. In reality, the struggle for security has always been at the top of his political agenda, and the terrorist attacks gave added logic to his fight against the Oslo process.

Threat response

Both Ben Gurion and Netanyahu consistently emphasized the issue of security and tried to reduce the threats to the state primarily and almost exclusively by force. In fact, the willingness of the leader to escalate in response to the threat, may also be seen as dictated by authoritarian behavior. The willingness to promptly respond to any security threat provided public support for both PMs thus allowing them to resort to rather harsh methods and to entrust the decision making process to a narrow circle of confidents. At the same time, the threats under Ben Gurion and under Netanyahu were different, their respective perceptions of these threats were also different, and they had different resources at hand for deterrence.

Ben-Gurion tended to exaggerate the danger of new wars. He cited the relative weakness of the state and the army during his rule, the small population, the absence of reliable allies, and Israel's non-involvement in military-political alliances. It is no coincidence that the Israeli historian Nir Kedar calls David Ben-Gurion a 'security-minded leader'. According to him, this image 'is also reflected in his conduct during his fifteen year tenure as premier and defence minister: his custom of wearing a khaki uniform; his tendency to glorify the IDF as one of the greatest achievements of the Zionist project; his favourable bias towards former army commanders and defence ministry people ('Ben-Gurion's boys') whom he surrounded himself with and promoted at the expense of other equally talented young men who lacked a military background; and, finally, the all pervasive sense of national emergency that he and his close associates inculcated in the country'.[23]

Ben-Gurion did everything in his power to defy international pressure and the divisions within the Israeli elite in order to develop Israel's nuclear potential, which has never been openly acknowledged by the Israeli leadership. The war with the Arabs on three fronts at once

remained a constant nightmare scenario for him. It is this perception of reality that determined his political downfall.

On the eve of the 1967 Six-Day War, Ben-Gurion showed a lack of realistic assessment of the situation – retired from the government, without any reliable information and cut off from the decision-making process, he had no idea of the dramatic changes that had taken place in the Israeli army and of its newly acquired capabilities. Even less was he able to evaluate the military potential of the Arab states, since the intelligence services were reluctant to share vital information with him. The old statesman was convinced that the war would last for months and would require many casualties, and so he resisted the outbreak of it in every possible way. While at the beginning of the war Ben Gurion was still perceived by many as a most prominent leader of the country, a kind of savior, to whom the wider public would turn in danger, several days later he was a retired politician, an old man, whose time had passed; the fierce battle for Israel was fought by others - they had the laurels of victory.[24]

When Netanyahu was in power the threat of Israel's destruction (which was a nightmare for society in the early years of independence) had long been removed from the agenda. Peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan; the development of informal ties with some Gulf countries and a process of 'normalization' started in 2020; the increasing political marginalization of the Palestinian problem have all contributed to this.

In the view of many Israelis, the Palestinian problem has been gradually becoming an Israeli domestic issue. In reality, this has an increasingly destructive effect on Israeli society, unleashing the most radical, extremist, nationalist forces, which are prepared to go to extremes. For this expanding electorate, Netanyahu was for a long time a most sought-after politician.

Finally, Israel's special relations with the US, which are very different from the US-Israeli relations under Ben Gurion, also play a role in strengthening the premier's position. While the first prime minister was never even invited to the US for an official visit, Netanyahu could count on Washington fulfilling all its obligations regardless of the tensions on certain issues. Since the second half of the 1980s US-Israeli relations have been institutionalized in the framework of strategic cooperation. Trump's rise to President opened a whole new page in the relations between the two countries. The unilateral decisions to recognize the Syrian Golan Heights as part of Israel and Jerusalem as Israel's capital, the pro-Israel

plan to resolve the Palestinian problem (the 'Deal of the Century') were a clear demonstration of his political and personal preferences.

The notion of an existential threat was revived, however, when Iran was named Israel's main enemy. Iranian leaders did indeed at times make harsh and irresponsible remarks about Israel. Reaching an agreement on the nuclear issue was hoped to appease Israel, but it did not. On December 12 , 2017 Israel and the US signed 'a far-reaching joint memorandum of understanding providing for full cooperation to deal with Iran's nuclear drive, its missile programs and its other threatening activities'.[25] The document crowned intensive talks between representatives of the major Israeli and American intelligence and defense chiefs.

The Israeli leadership welcomed the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal with Iran in 2018. In its view, even the remote prospect of Iran possessing nuclear weapons would destroy Israel's nuclear monopoly, and Israeli political and military leaders were prepared to go to extreme lengths to prevent this.

The Netanyahu government highlighted the Iranian threat since Iranian forces appeared in Syria. Israel accuses Iran of strengthening ties with Lebanon's Hezbollah in an attempt to build a 'corridor' from Iraq through Syria to Lebanon, of intending to establish a permanent foothold in Syria. Israel's response has been constant shelling and bombing of Iranian targets in Syria.

The importance of security threat in political mobilization was demonstrated in the April 2019 Knesset elections. The ability to counter threats has become a crucial element not only of the Likud agenda, but also of its opponents, the Kahol-Lavan (Blue and White) bloc, created by former Israeli Chief of General Staff Benny Gantz and bringing together a number of retired senior military officials. The emphasis on security undoubtedly won votes for the new bloc, which unexpectedly managed to garner as many votes as Likud. In the end Likud and Kahol-Lavan won almost equal numbers of seats in the Knesset, although Netanyahu had the advantage in coalition building.

However, Netanyahu was not able to create it, because of the intransigent position of Avigdor Liberman, the leader of Yisrael Beiteinu party. Netanyahu believed that he could get Lieberman to compromise. 'Netanyahu was almost certain of this,' a senior politician was quoted, suggesting that the Prime Minister may not have taken the Israel leader seriously. Perhaps he thought that, as usual, everything would 'blow over

in the 90th minute'[26]. Since this did not happen, and no coalition was formed, the President had to delegate the formation of a coalition to another candidate. This displeased Netanyahu the most, and he initiated the dissolution of the Knesset. New elections were held in September 2019.

During the election campaign, Netanyahu tried to make the most of his foreign policy credentials to raise his domestic profile. It is hardly a coincidence that Donald Trump's 'Deal of the Century' was announced just before the election in order to boost the Israeli prime minister's popularity by emphasizing the special relationship between him and the American president.

Relations with Russia remain no less important to Netanyahu. He attempted to convert them into a strengthening of his political position on the eve of the election. The release of Naama Issahar and her return to Israel on the Prime Minister's private jet were to emphasize the success of Netanyahu's skillful negotiations.

Nevertheless, in October-November 2019, neither Benjamin Netanyahu nor Benny Gantz were able to form a government coalition - both lacked votes to win a parliamentary majority. Blue and White overcame the Likud by a single seat. Nonetheless, the Likud received the mandate from the President but again failed to form a government. Gantz also failed. The President passed the mandate to the Knesset members for 21 days. After no other candidate was offered, the Knesset was dissolved.

In March 2020, the third election was held. This time, Likud gained more seats than Blue and White. Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic in Israel worsened, which precipitated negotiations for a national emergency government. In the end, Benny Gantz decided on an emergency government in alliance with incumbent Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the right-wing parties that traditionally support him. Netanyahu could stay in power for 18 months, until the autumn of 2021. Benny Gantz would have then been entitled to take over. In fact this arrangement was never in the cards.

The Prime Minister had no plans of passing his position to Ganz. 'In retrospect, it became clear Netanyahu had one significant tactical maneuver up his sleeve. Under Israeli law, a national budget must be passed by a specific date, and if no budget passes by that predetermined date, the Parliament is automatically dissolved... the reason Netanyahu refused to pass a budget was to give himself the maximum flexibility

regarding when new elections would be held — in such a way that would deprive Gantz from serving as Prime Minister in the interim'.[27]. Following a failed budgetary vote in December 2020, the government coalition collapsed yet again.

The results of the March 2021 parliamentary elections ended Benjamin Netanyahu's record-breaking term as Prime minister when the Knesset voted to approve the new government formed by Yamina leader Naftali Bennett and Yesh Atid chairman Yair Lapid[28].

The political crisis that erupted was indicative of Netanyahu's main trait - a desire to win at all costs, to find a way out of a seemingly hopeless situation. His defeat was primarily a personal one. All sorts of political achievements that Netanyahu could put on the table did not affect the eagerness of the public and the elites to get rid of him. He was no longer trusted or respected even by his former confidents. According to a Russian scholar Lyudmila Samarskaia, 'being involved in several criminal cases (on corruption, abuse of public trust and fraud), he sought to remain in power even though his removal from the post of Prime Minister became almost the main election promise of many old and new Israeli parties'[29]. In other words, Netanyahu's desire to keep power by plunging the country into a series of elections just to save himself from the Israeli Themis have caused growing public dissatisfaction.

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Political longevity is not an exclusive feature of Israel's political system. It can be found in both authoritarian and democratic regimes. However, if in the first group longevity is provided by the political system, which does not provide for turnover and only imitates elections, then in formally democratic systems it has to be earned. For the same leader to be able to prolong his stay in power through elections, he or she needs public trust and support. This is often won when an 'emergency' situation arises, a real or exaggerated threat, which gives carte blanche to the candidate for the highest office. It makes such candidate seem to have no alternative, empowers him and encourages (apart from personal qualities) authoritarian tendencies. The entry into the elite, the presence of a narrow and reliable circle of like-minded people, personal background and charisma also play a role. In the Israeli case, the growth of ethno-nationalism, the increasing role of right-wing parties and reli-

gious institutions, internal conflicts and external challenges determined the type of leader that was in demand.

At the same time, a long stay in power poses serious challenges even for the most popular politicians. Such leader is gradually losing touch with reality: Ben Gurion was sure that he knew what the people needed, but found himself in the end being far behind the dynamically developing social and military-political processes. The uncontested politician is becoming boring to the public. The younger representatives of the elite are also getting tired and irritated of him seeing no future for themselves under his no-ending rule. As a result, no merit can be a guarantee of lasting popularity and loyalty. People want to see new faces even if these long-awaited personalities may turn out in many respects inferior to their mighty predecessors.

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ANDREY V. FEDORCHENKO

Israel's Economy: Achievements and Unresolved Issues

Israel stands as an example of a thriving economy able to bring forth qualitative development and growth - a trend which is fast becoming paradigmatic in the XXI century. Knowledge, highly skilled workforce, and the quality of human capital in general are becoming the main economic factors. In Israel's case, creativity and entrepreneurial qualities of its people coupled with the support of its allies and the Diaspora, the free-market orientation of the economy (although in a specific form) supported by the relatively well-functioning political system have been able to compensate for the small size of the country and ensure its impressive development. All this happened despite regional tensions and military conflicts.

In the beginning of XX century, the territory of the future State of Israel was a sparsely populated province of the Ottoman Empire with an underdeveloped economy based on agricultural production. Nevertheless, the economy of the independent Jewish state was not created from scratch. During the years of the British Mandate the industrial foundation and economic infrastructure of the Yishuv (the Jewish community in Palestine prior to the establishment of Israel in 1948) were laid. The Arab sector of the local economy also continued to develop.

Metalworking, food processing, diamond cutting as well as mining were key economic activities. Between 1936 and 1945 their share of GDP grew from 23% to 42%, mainly thanks to the Jewish sector of the economy. The foundations of Israeli economy were laid back in the XIX century by small artisan enterprises, largely specializing in the production of agricultural equipment and food processing. Prior to the First World War, a few enterprises that existed in food processing industry, construction, diamond cutting as well as repair workshops had been founded mainly

by the Jewish philanthropists and missionary organizations. The 1920s and 1930s witnessed growth of these industries and the gradual emergence of large mining and energy enterprises.

Diamond polishers who had fled Belgium and the Netherlands after the Nazi invasion contributed to the rapid development of the diamond industry. The emergence of small-scale manufactures that illegally produced rifles and light grenade launchers helped to diversify the economy further. An immigration wave of Jews from Germany brought investment and skilled engineering workforce that greatly contributed to the industrial development of the Yishuv. Economically, these immigrants were the most successful group that had brought not only relevant knowledge, skills and experience in manufacturing and finance but also capital amounting to 63 million Palestine pounds. This spurred investment into metalworking, textile, and chemical industries as well as business services. From 1930 to 1937 the number of industrial enterprises grew from 6 to 14 thousand, the number of workers increased from 19 to 55 thousand. During the same period, the industrial energy consumption increased sevenfold.

By the time WWII broke out, the Jewish sector of the economy had been strong enough to start exporting its products to Egypt, Syria, Lebanon and South Africa. When the rest of the world was still battling with the consequences of the economic crisis of late1920s-30s, the British Mandatory Palestine enjoyed rapid economic growth. In the first half of the 1940s further economic developed was fuelled by sharply increased demand for industrial products —the allied troops based in Palestine needed uniforms, ammunition, canned food, maintenance, and construction services. Also, the country produced anti-tank mines, small arms parts, tank engines, light military vessels, spare parts for cars, military uniforms, medical equipment, and medicines. During the war years, Palestine became the second largest (after Egypt) supplier of goods to the allies in the Middle East.

Rapid economic growth in Palestine before the Second World War and especially, during the war years allowed the young state of Israel to reach a relatively high initial level of per capita GDP (the average growth rate in 1930-1948 was 5%). The GDP of Israel in its early years amounted to US$ 360 per capita and was much higher than in the neighbouring Arab countries. Apart from a sharp increase in labour demand and capital inflows from the Jewish diaspora, rapid economic growth was driven by high demand for various products during WWII.[1]

The War created special conditions for the economic development of the region. One of the notable features of Palestine's economy in the war years was the small difference in the pace of economic development between the Jewish and Arab sectors that corresponded to 12.0% and 8.7% respectively (in pre-war years the gap was measured in double digits). However, if before the war the external factors (such as capital and labour inflows) fostered the development only of the Jewish sector, during the war years they played a significant role in the economy of both communities. The Allied troops were the main buyers of the local goods and services; import substitution production increased; the Middle East countries became a big export market for Palestinian goods. Still, supplying the British army and its allies was the most significant factor that continued to sustain economic growth. The pre-war balance-of-payments deficit was replaced by a large surplus with currency reserves in sterling accumulating in London banks. During the period of the British mandate, the number of industrial workers increased tenfold to about 50.000, the volume of production has increased 25-fold, and the value of fixed capital — 33-fold. At the same time, the absolute volume of production was relatively small.

Agrarian production and the service sector were geared to modest domestic market. When the State of Israel was proclaimed, the agricultural sector was already well developed: a network of agricultural experiment stations and a modern irrigation system had been established with the support of the Jewish Agency.

The settler type of the Israeli economy emerged in the pre-state period, which had an impact on its subsequent development. With an economic structure largely resembling that of a developing country, Israel in its early days was already showing significant differences. In terms of per capita national income, the quality of the workforce, tangible assets, labour productivity as well as the quality of economic and social infrastructure, the country occupied a borderline place between developing and advanced economies. Gradually, the gap between Israel's level of economic development and the majority of developing countries has increased. Still, several international organizations for a long time continued to include Israel in the group of developing countries because of various political and methodological reasons. However, from a purely economic point of view, it was no longer justified. This incongruity was corrected only in 1997 when the IMF included Israel in the category of industrialized countries. When considering the initial level

of Israel's industrial development, it is illuminating to look at the works of Western and Israeli economists dealing with the phenomenon of the 'Israel's Economic Miracle', published in the 1950-1960s. At the time, virtually all of the macroeconomics research focused on Israel's economy as a whole. One of the most compelling was the book by an outstanding economist Don Patinkin 'The Israel Economy: The First Decade' published in 1960. Defining Israel's position in the world economy, the author emphasized that in 1952-54 Israel's GDP per capita was on a par or higher than that of Argentina and Colombia, the most developed countries in South America, and ahead of the less developed European countries with market economies (such as Ireland, Italy, and Austria). To reiterate, at the dawn of its economic development, Israel's place was on the borderline between the developing and developed countries. According to Patinkin, Israel stood out in terms of its economic structure and other characteristics from such countries as Egypt, India and China. Besides, Israel has never suffered from such endemic problems of the underdeveloped economies as highly skilled labour deficit and large-scale migration of rural population to non-agrarian sectors of the economy. The country was able to sustain high levels of capital accumulation and growth. At the same time, Israel developed exceedingly high levels of long-term trade deficits. This chronic problem was, to some degree, softened by the incoming flow of financial aid transfers (either from other states or directly from the Jewish diaspora).

Despite turbulent regional and global political situation, and numerous blunders in the government's macroeconomic policy, Israel managed to cope with major challenges directly affecting the economy. These included absorbing large numbers of immigrants, strengthening national security, creating modern infrastructure, supporting science and research and developing export orientated economy. Within a relatively short period (approximately three decades), the Israelis were gradually able to withstand geopolitical pressures that had a major impact on the country's economy, and to some extent, transform them from obstacles into the driving forces behind rapid economic growth and successful nation building.

Israel entered the new millennium as a country with a highly developed post-industrial economy and macroeconomic indicators to prove it. There is yet no single approach or a set of criteria among the economists to define a country as developed. Here we focus on a group of parameters that help, in our view, demarcate developed from develop-

ing countries. The criteria below work as a kind of 'test' a country must pass in order to enter the club of advanced economies:

- the level of social-economic development (this refers to a set of single and complex macroeconomic indicators and the country's place in the corresponding world rankings – GDP per capita, human development index, inclusive development index, competitiveness index, etc.).
- the type of economic growth (predominantly extensive or intensive)
- industrial structure
- economic mechanism type (a set of organizational and economic relations and institutions that determine the development of the national economy, its internal and external relations.)
- social structure (division of the country's population into groups with different income levels. In this case, the main thing is the presence of a significant middle class and a relatively even distribution of national income.)
- global integration of the economy

For a long time, the gross domestic product (GDP) per capita has been the primary indicator of a country's level economic performance and development. In 2019 Israel had GDP per capita of $43.6 thousand; it was ranked 21st among the developed countries, below Belgium (20th) and above UAE and UK (22nd and 23rd respectively)[2]. Israel's GDP share of the world economy represents 0.27% (with Israelis accounting for 0.1% of the world's population). Despite the general downward trend in the share of advanced economies in the world, the share of Israel is increasing. This achievement is based on high and growing average labour productivity, US$76.6 thousand in the same year (higher than in Japan —US $72.6 thousand).[3]

However, excessive reliance on GDP as the main indicator of economic success prompted many experts at the end of the 20th century to search for more multidimensional indicators of economic progress in addition to GDP. Such indicators aim to measure the extent to which GDP contributes to broader socio-economic progress as manifested by intergenerational equity, foreign direct investment attractiveness, educational and employment opportunities, and other intangible assets (Technology, human capital, quality of social institutions).

Since 1990, UN experts have introduced the Human Development Index (HDI), an annual assessment that aims to provide a more accurate estimation of standards of living and the quality of life. The assessment includes such indicators/parameters as life expectancy, access to education, and GDP per capita. In 2002 Israel's HDI amounted to 0.908 (rated 22d out of 177 countries), while average HDI among OECD countries stood at 0.911.

Israel has shown steady growth in its HDI. Back in 1975 it was 0.794, with national healthcare expenditure standing at 8.3% of GDP compared to 6-7% in developed countries and world average of 2.5%. Since the early 1990s, Israel's annual HDI indicators and HDI growth rate were in line with other OECD countries. At the beginning of the 21th century it even slightly exceeded them. According to the latest UNDP data published in 2017, Israel's HDI ranking was 22 out of 189 countries and territories, which put the country in the very high human development level category. Between 1990 and 2018 Israel's life expectancy at birth increased by 6.2 years and reached 82.7 (rated 7th in the world), while mean years of schooling[4] amounted to 13 years (rated 5th in the world).[5]

In 2017, the World Economic Forum (WEF) initiated and introduced the Inclusive Development Index (IDI), aimed at a more accurate assessment of socio-economic development (inclusive is the term employed to describe when a large number of actors are involved in a process; for instance, it can refer to different population strata). IDI includes 11 other parameters in addition to GDP that provide not only economic indicators but attempt to give a much broader picture of economic and social life. The index has 12 pillars divided into three groups:

Growth and Development

- GDP per capita (in 2010 US$)
- Labour productivity – GDP per one employee (in US$)
- Life expectancy at birth (in years)
- Employment level (in percentage)

Inclusion

- income inequality (from 0 i.e. with no inequality to 100)
- poverty level (in percent)
- wealth and income inequality (from 0 to 100)
- median household income (in $ US)

Intergenerational Equity and Sustainability

- adjusted net savings (% from GDP) (Adjusted net savings are equal to net national savings plus human capital expenditures and minus energy depletion, mineral depletion and carbon dioxide and particulate emissions damage.)
- carbon dioxide intensity of GDP (CO2 emission per dollar)
- state debt (% of GDP)
- demographic pressure coefficient /dependency rate (in %); the indicator is defined as a ratio between dependent categories of the population (under 15 and over 64 years old) and the working age population (from 15 to 64 years old)

Summing up these indicators, we first get group indexes and then a final index as an arithmetical mean. IDI demonstrated how misleading could be ranking based solely on GDP. In 2018, Israel's 80th anniversary, it rated 25th among advanced economies (positioned between Japan and Spain).[6]

The Global Competitiveness Index is another important indicator of a national economic success calculated by using both quantitative factors and a wide range of qualitative criteria.

A large stratum of productivity data is analysed, which is supplemented by expert surveys. According to the World Economic Forum (WEF), since the end of the 1990s Israel has been rapidly improving its position in the third top ten most competitive countries taking 15th place in 2006. In the 2017-2018 Israel ranked 16th in Global Competitiveness Report (24th in 2016-2017) and held the highest position among the Middle East countries. Currently Israel is placed the second top decile along with Norway, Canada, Denmark, New Zealand, Austria, Luxembourg, Belgium, Taiwan, and the United Arab Emirates. Israel lags behind the leaders in such categories as state debt level, budget and foreign trade deficit, but leads in technological readiness (the degree of technological penetration of economy and everyday life – Israel ranked 7th in the world) as well as the quality of healthcare, higher education and training. Israel also performs best in innovation capability: the country rated 3d in this category in the Global Competitiveness Report of 2017-2018. Moreover, the country especially excels in opportunities for innovation, quality of research institutions, R&D expenditure, and R&D cooperation between university and industry.[7]

In 2006 Israel ranked 28th in the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Confidence Index compiled by Forbes magazine. When analysing Israeli market, Forbes experts highly rated the salary level and pricing policy, investment security and minimal fiscal barriers for foreign investment. The negatives included a high level of taxation, excessive bureaucracy, and high monopolization of several industries. In 2014 the country was ranked 24th by the volume of direct foreign investment.[8]

Israel is still lagging behind the majority of the OECD countries in the Index of Economic Freedom. For a long time Israel has been in the fourth decile on this indicator but has been gradually climbing to reach the third decile. According to the Index, in 2017-2018, Israel occupied 31st place among 180 countries, and in the year 2021 it climbed to the 26th place.[9] The statist economic model has had a long-lasting effect on Israeli economy; its real transformation started only four decades after the country came into being in 1948.

To some degree, the Happiness Index, a comprehensive survey tool, shows whether citizens' satisfaction with socio-economic situation and level of well-being in a country they live in. In 2016, Israel came in 11th in the World Happiness Report. However, as the report's authors and experts emphasize, the Index does not always fully correlate to the living standards in a given country and is significantly influenced by economic, social and environmental factors. It has also been shown that in the countries with low-income inequality people tend to feel happier.

In sum, within a few decades, Israel has moved from being a largely developing country to an advanced economy. In 2010 Israel was accepted into the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) – a club of mostly rich nations. Following this accession, Israel's authorities embarked on a challenging task of improving the country's position within this elite league of nations.

Such an accelerated way of economic development was possible due to a number of factors, such as the settlement character of Israeli society, special external conditions (large-scale influx of immigrants, gratuitous financial transfers and elements of productive capital) and rapid growth of the world economy in the second half of the twentieth century. It is highly unlikely that evolutionary development of the Arab and Jewish communities in Palestine or a hypothetical massive Jewish immigration, had it occurred in the 18th or 19th centuries, would have borne similar results. Hundreds of thousands of immigrants flocking

into the new country brought patterns of social organization and economic endowments typical of the more developed European and North American countries they came from. In addition to bringing in tangible assets and labour, the settlement process usually created an energetic, entrepreneurial spirit conducive to development. In line with other settlement societies, entrepreneurship, and a sense of success, stifled for various reasons in the countries of origin, flourished in new conditions. This was reflected in the diversity of economic activities and, ultimately, was an important factor in accelerated economic growth.

It is possible to identify six major growth regimes in the industrial development of the Yishuv and modern Israel. Each of them is characterized by relative synchronization of the main economic indicators, similar vectors of the structural shifts, stability of the ratio of social and economic production factors, a stable institutional structure and a balance between state regulation and spontaneous free market mechanisms:

1. From the end of the XIX century to the first half of the XX century. The pre-state period when the growing Jewish immigration to Palestine created an economic basis of the future State of Israel.
2. From 1948 to the mid-1950s. The period of recovery: economic growth linked to the elimination of the consequences of the first Arab-Israeli war; addressing the problems of mass immigration and creating economic foundations for strengthening the state.
3. From the mid-1950s to mid-1970s. The stage of rapid industrialization; emergence of a macroeconomic structure typical of an industrialized country; militarization of the economy; a gradual transition from import substitution to export-oriented economy.
4. From the mid-1970s to the end of the 1980s. The period of slow yet steady growth attempts to streamline the economy. Israel was facing financial problems caused by macroeconomic imbalance and overlapping on industrial and post-industrial phases.
5. From the late 1980s to the early 2000s. Accelerated economic growth through deployment of new sources of labour and capital; increasing competition and market incentives; consolidation of specialized, high-tech military and civil industrial production and services; rapid globalisation of Israeli economy.
6. The period from 2001 to 2018. The crisis in the high-tech sector due to overheating and the collapse of the US NASDAQ market; a search for new areas in which to further develop Israel's

innovative economy; securing long-term leadership in the new technologies sector; restoring the innovative economy after the crisis; further development of the global international scientific and technical cooperation; emergence of barriers that mark the end of extensive development of innovative economy.

These stages mostly coincide with the analysis given by Israeli economists (for instance, presented in a monograph by Prof. Assaf Razin, Tel-Aviv University) though I was not able to find out direct counterparts to the stages introduced in this paper. It is notable that as Israeli economy was getting more advanced and eventually faced serious financial and economic problems in the second half of 1970s, the majority of foreign researchers focused on the reasons behind the crisis as well as on the particular sectors of Israeli economy. Analysing specific business situations through 'case studies' became really popular among researchers as D. Moravets, A. Globerson, E. Kleyman, J. Metzer and H. Barkai. At the same time, in the 1980s-1990s, a small number of general economic studies was published. Among the fundamental works dealing with Israel's overall macroeconomic problems are the collective monographs 'The Israeli Economy: Maturing through Crisis' (1986) and 'The Economy of Modern Israel' (1993). The first book is the brainchild of 17 academics working at the Maurice Falk Institute for Economic Research at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. The book was edited by I. Ben-Porat, a prominent Israeli economist. The volume presents a detailed account of Israel's macroeconomic dynamics, major factors behind the country's economic growth and idiosyncrasies of Israel's economic system, in particular, the role of the military complex. The authors focused on the causes, dynamics, and consequences of the change in growth regimesdescribed abovethat occurred in the mid-70s. This monograph has become an example of a neoclassical approach prevailing in Israel's economic science. Another comprehensive study was done by professors A. Razin and E. Sadka of Tel-Aviv University focusing on Israel's economic development in the 1980s - early 1990s. They authors identified the main factors that helped Israel to achieve accelerated economic growth. Among them were large immigration levels from the CIS countries and the systemic economic reforms initiated in the mid-1980s. A special chapter was devoted to economic integration between Israel and Palestinian territories under its control.

The majority of monographs by Russian researchers were based on the so-called production cycle analysis, analyzing the production cycle as a whole. Since the 1990s more research has been published focus-

ing on particular problems of Israel's economic development and various aspects of its state economic policy. Of special interest here are the works of the Russian economist Dmitry Maryasis that focus on the development of Israel's innovation-driven economy and digital technology sector.

Economic development of this young settlement country, for all its uniqueness, demonstrated a broader global acceleration of social and economic processes. At the same time, when considering extensive and intensive types of economic growth, the author of the article highlighted their mutability and coexistence with the aim of showing how these growth strategies dominated at different growth regimes of Israel's economic development.

During the first three and the beginning of the fourth regime, Israel's economy developed extensively thanks to deployment of labour resources and material factors of production (assets). In the first half of the 1950s, exploitation of a large pool of human workforce and limited investment into capital assets was the main driver behind economic growth. Later, the country changed its development strategy: investment was rapidly increasing while workforce was losing its dominant role. Slower labour force growth, higher wages, and introduction of a shorter working week, combined with government incentives to invest in capital assets, have resulted in conditions favourable for wider application of technology.

Due to low efficiency of capital assets utilisation in the 1970s, the growth of return on capital assets was accompanied by absolute reduction compared to the previous decade. Israeli authorities were trying to accelerate economic growth at any cost and continued to support high capital accumulation rate. According to the Israeli economist J. Mayshar, they were convinced that expansion of capital investment was synonymous with economic growth. A supportive attitude towards allocation of resources shaped their economic policy in the 1960s and 1970s.[10]

The positive effect of the capital-intensive path that the Israeli economy followed from the downturn of the mid-1970s until the mid-1980s, was increasingly overshadowed by negative effects of extensive growth. After Israel had reached a relatively high level of industrial development, the increase in additional capital expenditure under conditions of low efficiency in the use of productive resources, only aggravated internal contradictions. It led to a slowdown in accumulation, a sharp drop in

return on capital and, consequently, to a slowdown in GDP growth.

The 1973 oil crisis only accelerated the transition to a new economic growth model that had largely been forged by the previous period of accelerated 'catching up' development. It took approximately 16 years – from 1973 until 1989. The recession of 1974 started a long period of stagflation that lasted until 1985. The prolonged 'coexistence' of low economic growth rates and high inflation resulted from exhaustion of extensive ways of development, change in economic growth regimes and search for efficiencies. Besides, the country suffered from unfavourable internal (small domestic market and high militarization of the economy) as well as external factors (low demand for Israeli exports in other developed countries also suffering from stagnation). Unsurprisingly, the fourth regime of Israel's economic development is referred as 'the lost years'.

The economic, military, and political cataclysms of the mid-1970s accelerated industrial transformation which made the country abandon the extensive path of development. The need for such transformation was instigated by Israel's limited, if not scarce, natural resources, and extremely high military expenditure. To prevent further deterioration of expenditure-production ratio, a leap to a more economical use of the previously accumulated resources and human workforce was vital. In fact, Israel has never exhibited a 'pure' extensive type of economic growth. As in many other countries, some elements of intensive development were present at various stages as well.

The conditions for growth regime change in Israel ripened over time. On the one hand, to adapt to the new economic conditions, the economy was going through a deep structural reorganization. This involved intensifying production, increasing specialization, and improving competitiveness. During the fourth regime, developments in science and technology overlapped with the final stages of industrialization. In Israel, however, this transformation took a specific form: a high-tech military industrial complex became the engine for the development of other high-tech industries. A number of formerly inefficient and overstaffed tertiary industries transformed themselves into a highly productive and specialized sector in an increasingly post-industrial economy. This period of Israel's industrial growth can be defined as 'the lost years' only compared with the rapid pace of development in previous decades. Any structural change results in low or limited growth, especially when, as in Israel, it is complicated by multiple financial and foreign policy

problems. Only in the second half of the 1980s, thanks to greater openness, partial demilitarization of its industry, financial stabilisation, and structural changes, Israel was able to overcome a long-term tendency for stagnation.[11]

The successful transition to a dynamic and highly efficient economic model became possible largely due to overcoming structural limitations and raising efficiencies at both macroeconomic to microeconomic levels. As a result, traditionally service-oriented economy was now resting on a highly developed and diversified industrial base thus exhibiting a post-industrial economic structure. The service sector amounted to 70% of GDP, industry, and construction to 27%and agriculture to 3%. A shift of the primary and secondary sectors towards high-tech industries as well as the growth in efficient interaction between industrial production and the service sector were hallmarks of the new model of economic growth. However, the state continued to play a significant role in Israel's socio-economic life; the impasse of the Middle East conflict contributed to an emergence of a large government service sector which was not adequate to the strategic goal of increasing economic efficiencies. It is important to emphasize that in Israel, industry's share in GDP and employment has never reached the level of the countries with developed industrial specialization such as Germany and Japan. From 1991 onwards, the share of industrial sector constantly declined that clearly moved to a post-industrial economic model. In fact, in the1990s the transition to a post-industrial model became part of Israel's economic strategy. To its advantage and unlike other industrialized Western countries, Israel did not go through all stages of industrial development before reaching the post-industrial stage. This was possible thanks to a greater economic flexibility and lack of large-scale, by world standards, industrial enterprises.'Today, Israel is the only technologically advanced country in the world that has skipped some stages of industrial development', Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in 1996.[12] The Israeli service sector has long been slow in adopting new technologies and increasing labour productivity. Since 1948, a predominantly extensive economic model dominated the sector for decades. However, the application of new technologies and training in the service sector as well as lower levels of capital intensity resulted in increased labour productivity. The percentage of industries directly servicing material production also increased (their development was a prerequisite for bolstering labour productivity as well as increasing resource use efficiency on a national scale).

The transformation of the main service industries infrastructure is illustrative. Such traditional services as transport and telecoms, trade, catering and hospitality initially lagged behind the industries that either stemmed from industrial production or were the result of industrial and private consumption diversification, such as finance, insurance, real estate and business administration. Israel was gradually becoming one of the main financial centres of the Middle East. The growth of the large service state sector was driven less by production needs and more by expansion of the economic and social functions of the state in a mixed economic model.

Advanced scientific and high-tech sectors also emerged. Israel stands out as a unique example of a settlement country, where the development of science and technology was crucial in employing national comparative advantages and thus establishing the country's place in the global economy. Annually, over 4% of GDP is allocated to R&D in the civil sector of the economy alone (compared to 2% in France and 3% in Japan). In Israel, there are 135 scientists and engineers per 10,000 employees, giving the country the highest number of engineers per capita in the world (almost twice the level of the United State (70) and Japan (50). In 2000 Israel was ranked fourth after the United States, Finland and Singapore, in Creative Economy Index (CE), which reflects the level of technological development and innovation climate.

For a small settlers' country international economic ties were of crucial importance. Importing goods and services allowed Israel to modernize the economy and meet rapidly growing domestic demand. Israel continued to develop its trade specialization by penetrating into distant and highly competitive foreign markets. Success of Israeli export-oriented industries (i.e. high-tech industries of the secondary sector) and services as well as increasing 'horizontal' international ties testify to the effective use of foreign trade in economic intensification. By attracting substantial foreign financial resources, it was possible to compensate for the biggest structural disproportion - a yawning gap between the volume of GDP and the amount of the total resources used for consumption and accumulation. In terms of per capita financial assistance, Israel ranks first in the world. Similar to many other OECD countries, Israel has a modern export structure with a large share of high-tech products. It also enjoys strong trade and economic ties with European and North American partners and impressive intake of foreign direct investment. Complex Globalization Index (that among other criteria estimates the degree of economic integration) rates Israel number 38 globally. This relatively unimpressive

figure reflects the prolonged protectionist period in the development of the Israeli industrial complex. Moreover, the KOF Globalization Index (produced by Swiss Economic Institute) is rather volatile due to periodic fluctuations in the world economy and changes in foreign trade regulations. Israel peaked in this index in 2007 when it reached 78.08 (with world average of 60.64). However, by 2017 Israel declined to 69.92 with the world average rising to 64.15.[13]

The dominant mixed economy had a significant transformation potential to catalyse and intensify economic growth in Israel. A powerful state sector and active regulation of the economy are typical of many settlement countries, especially at the early stages of their development. However, in Israel, the state, semi-state, and public organizations were heavily involved in economic life until the last decade of the XX century. In the first two decades after 1948, the increasing economic role of the state was, to a great extent, inevitable. This was not so much due to the inertia of the pre -1948 economy with its predominance of 'national institutions' and trade unions, but rather the relatively low initial level of Israel's economic development and the country's low attractiveness for private capital investment. Excessive statism is typical of many developing countries even today. In an underdeveloped economy, especially struggling with war-induced destruction, a statist model can provide an alternative development path yielding very fruitful results.

Interestingly, the Soviet model of planned economy was carefully studied in Israel. Special attention was paid to its resilience during the war years and the impressive results of Soviet industrialization. In the post-war period many countries, especially those recently liberated from colonial dependence (India, China, Algeria, Egypt, etc.) were eagerly searching for the optimal combination of government and free market regulation of the economy and new forms of economic management. At the time, the USSR was an impressive model for successful economic growth that had a long-lasting effect on many. Already in the 1950s, Israel built a special type of hybrid economy in which, alongside with the private sector, entrepreneurship was a sphere where the state, trade unions and a number of other non-government organizations played a major role.

The system of social entrepreneurship was fuelled by immigrants who often professed socialist, egalitarian ideas. This was especially true of the new Israeli citizens from Russia and Eastern Europe. The strong socialist, or rather social-democratic political agenda dominated public discourse and was supported by most Israelis (after 1948 social demo-

crats were in power for more than 30 years). For a long time, the land was state-owned, and cooperatives were the prevailing form of agricultural production. The notable imbalance between the 'public' and 'private' sectors and government vs free-market economic regulation resulted in a significant inertia of Israeli economy. It was only at the end of the 1980s that this specific idiosyncratic economic model was transformed.

The Israelis' own school of economic thought has long been established and represented by numerous scholars working at universities and research centers. Unsurprisingly, opinions of Israeli economists often radically diverged from the official Keynesian economic policies of heavy state involvement and regulation that dominated the long social-democratic parties' rule. In contrast, the majority of academic economists (except for those who were employed to do work for the state, trade unions or cooperatives) expressed neoclassical views. They claimed that balancing supply and demand and achieving sustainable growth were only possible through market forces and competition. The role of the state should be limited to maintaining fair play for private enterprises.

A new push for economic liberalization began in the 21st century, when B. Netanyahu, known for his liberal economic views and approval of US economic policies, tried to radically reduce the state's involvement in economic life and bring the Israeli economy closer to the American model. Apparently, he decided to recall the famous 'Economic Recovery Program' proposed by Ronald Reagan in February 1981, and to implement its key ideas taking into account local Israeli specifics. The course of economic liberalization of Israel's hybrid economy draws it closer to the models established in most Western countries. Russia also has experienced similar problems in transforming its huge state sector, which makes Israeli experience even more relevant and valuable for Russia. It is expected that state involvement in the Israeli economy will soon noticeably decrease, its social orientation will weaken. This may help revive private initiative, the basis, according to Israeli government's thinking, for encouraging future economic growth.

Developing socially-oriented economy and attracting Jewish immigration, which have always been the priority and the strategic goal of the state, fostered a rise in Israel's standards of living. Israel's social structure is that of a typical middle-class society. In August 2015 the average salary was 10,078 shekels (US$ 2,564) per month, and the GINI index fell from 39.2 in the same year to 36.9 in 2018. Israel's GINI coefficient is still

lagging behind small European countries with strong social-democratic traditions and is closer to that of the USA and the U.K.[14] The level of unemployment remains relatively low.[15]

Expenditure on healthcare amounts to 8% of GDP. At the same time, according to a study conducted by the Israeli Ministry of Finance and the OECD data, citizens' satisfaction with housing is low. Perceived high levels of corruption, complaints about a lack of free time and low levels of trust were also noted. However, Israelis are generally satisfied with their health, have more social confidence than the OECD average and are less inclined to violence in everyday life.[16]

Israel's social structure is significantly different from that of the developing countries and is much closer to the OECD states. Thus, in other Middle Eastern countries, the property is often concentrated in the hands of the so-called bureaucratic bourgeoisie, whose influence and prosperity come from access to political power and state property. Excessive bureaucratization and regulation are typical of such economic model and arguably stem from traditional values of Middle Eastern societies. However, such attitudes suppress entrepreneurial initiative and undermine economic efficiency. A weak middle class is one of the core reasons for the slow pace of economic reforms as a source of multiple political, ethnic, and confessional controversies.

For all the impressive positive results achieved by Israel in the economic sphere in a relatively short historical period, the country has not yet managed to completely solve a number of economic problems, both recent and those inherited from the 'catching-up' development period. Here we focus on major problems, such as: high market concentration that feeds monopolistic tendencies and discourages competition; underemployment in the Arab and ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities and some problems in the innovation sector.

The imbalance between state-controlled and private sectors resulted in the marked monopolization of Israeli economy, reaching a historical high by the end of the 1980s. Following the Tel-Aviv Stock Exchange crash of 1983, the four largest commercial banks were nationalized. In the early 1980s these commercial banks were actively involved in securities trading, raising the stock exchange to an unprecedented level that subsequently led to its collapse. At that time, in order to prevent a banking system crisis, the state undertook the obligations of the four largest banks and, in fact, nationalized them by 1988.[17] Thus the balance

between 'public' and 'private' economic sectors have become skewed in favor of the state so much as to seriously undermine the principles of a mixed economy. High corporate concentration of production and capital limited to a handful of companies has increased monopolistic tendencies and reduced competition in major industries. The high rate of monopolization was due to the relatively narrow domestic market dominated by a small number of major producers. Also, the state's protectionist policy caused market distortions and kept foreign companies out of domestic competition.

A notable feature of Israel's economy is a much higher concentration of capital in the financial sector relative to that in industry. The framework of Israel's modern banking system was shaped in the beginning of the 1970s. Subsequent structural changes and reforms only altered the balance of power in favor of the largest banks and financial conglomerates. The consolidation of financial power led to a reduction in the number of commercial banks (in 1954 there were 116 of them, and in 1984 only 23) and to the strengthening of the 'Big Three' in the mid-1990s: Bank Hapoalim, Leumi Bank and Discount Bank accounted for about 90% of the assets of banking institutions. Until very recently, bank capital dominated in financing and controlling the leading industrial groups due to the record levels of concentration of the credit and banking sector in Israel's financial system. This was also typical of some other countries in the process of 'catching-up' capitalist development, such as Italy, for instance.

The inertia of the then existing economic model, resistance among monopolists and inconsistency in implementing reforms made it difficult to pursue privatization, limit monopolistic producers and stimulate competition. It took almost a decade to start implementing the declared goals. Only the end of the 1980s marked the beginning of a new era in all sectors of Israel's economy. The economic reform program embarked on by Netanyahu's government in March 2003 was aimed at overcoming the 2000-2003 economic slump and encouraging long-term economic growth. The government embarked on a major privatization campaign by listing public companies on the Tel-Aviv Stock Exchange. It also streamlined the state-managed transport infrastructure: railroads and ports were privatized. As a result, the monopoly of the Ports Authority no longer hampered free competition. Instead of the state-run monopoly, four private corporations were established —three of them operated as seaports and one as a shareholding company.

The Israel Electric Corporation (IEC), the largest supplier of electric power, the counterpart of the United Energy Systems of Russia (RAO UES), is one of the main state monopolies that was also broken down into segments: the energy market now consisted of three distinct sectors: power generation (competitive sector), power transmission (natural monopoly) and power distribution (regional monopolies).

These determined polices of privatizing and segmenting natural monopolies encouraged economic initiatives and competition. However, the ownership structure in the business sphere is still characterized by very high levels of corporate centralization and integration albeit with increased trans-nationalization and permanent restructuring of tradable assets. However, sometimes only the forms of company ownership changed – the state and trade unions as owners of the largest companies were replaced by Israeli and foreign private capital big business.[18]

According to a survey (conducted by the author) among Israeli economists, excessive monopolization was named as the main problem of the Israeli economy. According to official statistics, as of 2020, there were 72 monopolies (out of 112 operating *de facto*). In fact, 12 monopolistic financial and industrial groups have a cartel-like grip over major parts of the economy and own 60% of the total market value of all Israeli companies. Forbes Israel claims that the country has the highest concentration of capital in the world.[19] Many spheres in Israel's economy are still dominated by cartels and monopolies at all stages of production and supply. These are: food industry; housing (land monopoly by the Land Office); transport (Ministry of Transport controls the entire system); banking and financial services (Bank Leumi and Bank Hapoalim duopoly controls 60% of the banking sector); electricity and gas supply. Apart from consumers who pay ridiculously high prices for housing and commodities, small and medium size businesses also suffer from cartelization of many industries.[20]

Until the 1980s, Israel saw a decline in labour force participation from an already relatively low rate. It decreased from 36% in 1955 to 35% in the 1960s; the downward tendency continued in the 1970s, reaching 33%, stabilizing in the 1980s at an average level of 34%. Only the first half of the 1990s saw a gradual increase of this parameter to 37% in 1995.[21] It clearly shows that in terms of labour force participation Israel was significantly lagging behind most industrial countries — in the 1980s by 8-12 percentage points.[22]

However, in later years Israel managed to solve this problem, labor participation level reached that of the USA and exceeded average Western European figures.In 2018 the share of the economically active population in the 15-64 age group was 64.1% (69.5% for males and 58.9% for females).The figures for Western Europe in the same year were 59.0%, 64.7%, and 53.6% respectively).[23] At the same time, the authorities are still quite concerned about the non-participation rate for low-skilled Haredim (Ultra-Orthodox Jews) and – to a smaller degree – of women from Israeli Arab communities and Sephardic Jews.[24] The economic integration of the ultra-Orthodox Jews is seen as one of the ways to accelerate economic growth. Currently, the share of the ultra-Orthodox (U-O) population of Israel (Haredim) is about 11%, projected to increase threefold by 2030. In 2003, nonparticipation rate among Haredim stood at 33% for males and 51% for females, the lowest ever recorded in Israel. The withdrawal of the previously lavish state financial support for the U-O population has become one of pivotal components of the economic recovery program launched by the Netanyahu government in March 2003. The first decade of the 21st century saw a shift in government policy from subsidization of certain groups to encouraging employment. To stimulate integration of the U-O community into mainstream labour market, the government took such practical steps as introducing a negative income tax and a mix of incentives for employers. The state support has been provided for the vocational training of the Haredim population and their integration into the hi-tech sector.

In 2005 the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labour established vocational training centres for the Haredim offering programs in administration and management. More than 25,000 U-O (Haredim) students engaged in vocational training from 2009-2015.[25] Government efforts aimed at increasing employment motivation and social engagement in the U-O community bore fruit: from 2009 to 2015 participation rate among U-O increased by 14% for men and by 10% for women. In 2015, the employment rate for Haredim men reached 49.8% and 73.2%. for women. However, there is a long way to go to resolve the problem, given that these figures conceal widespread part-time employment in the community.

Despite being a leader in many high-tech sectors, at the onset of the 21st century Israel ran into formidable obstacles. According to D. Maryasis, these are: decreasing state support for innovation; a lack of

long-term state innovation strategy; the quality and availability of STEM education; an insufficient level of innovation development of state institutions; excessive dependence on foreign investment; insufficient dissemination of information and computer technologies, and brain drain.[26]

A key problem here seems to be the absence of a detailed, long-term innovation strategy, a factor which may significantly weaken the country's competitiveness over time.

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Outlining Israel's possible economic future, the author believes that the country is no longer a settlement type of society. The economy will continue to develop following its own unique path although being deeply integrated into the wider world economy. The accumulated economic potential is likely to propel Israel further on the path of innovation driven, post-industrial model of development.

[1] See. Fedorchenko A.V. *Ekonomika pereselencheskogo obshchestva (izrail'skaya model')* [Economy of the resettlement society (Israeli model)] (Moscow, 1998), p. 15 (in Russian).

[2] https://statisticstimes.com/economy/world-gdp-capita-ranking.php

[3] http://reports.weforum.org/the-inclusive-development-index-2018/press-release/ - the latest data that the author was able to access.

[4] Mean years of schooling received in a lifetime by people aged 25 years and older among the adult population is based on a knowledge level measured by mean years of schooling at each stage of education.

[5] *Human Development Indices and Indicators: 2018 Statistical Update.* United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (New York, 2018), p. 22. Here we should take into account some changes that took place in the 2000s in the methodology of calculating the educational level indicator and replacement of per capita GDP with gross national income.

[6] Focus on GDP Fuelling Inequality and Short-Termism. http://wef.ch/igd18

[7] The Global Competitiveness Report 2017–2018. *World Economic Forum* (Geneva, 2017), p. 13.

[8] *World Development Indicators: Foreign Direct Investment 2014*.http://worldbank.org/

[9] https://www.heritage.org/index/country/israel

[10] Mayshar J. Investment Patterns. in *The Israeli Economy: Maturing through Crisis*. Cambridge (1986), p. 101.

[11] For more details see Fedorchenko A.V. *Ekonomika pereselencheskogo obshchestva (izrail'skaya model')* [Economy of the resettlement society (Israeli model)] (Moscow, 1998), pp. 80-99 (in Russian).

[12] *Vesti*. Tel Aviv 14.03.1996.

[13] https://kof.ethz.ch/en/forecasts-and-indicators/indicators/kof-globalisation-index.html

[14] *World Economic Forum*. http://wef.ch/igd18

[15] The author does not agree with Israeli economist A. Razin, who claims that Israel has the highest level of wealth distribution in OECD countries (Razin A. Israel and the World Economy. The Power of Globalization (Cambridge. 2018), p. XI. According to the World Bank, the value for GINI index in Israel was 38.90 as of 2016 with the United States (41, 9) and Chile (46, 6) leading in OECD. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI

[16] Quoted from: *Mirovaya ekonomika I mezhdunarodniye ekonomicheskie otnosheniya* (Moscow, 2017), p. 599 (in Russian).

[17] See Filonik A.O., Isaev V.A., Fedorchenko A.V. *Finansovye struktury Blizhnego Vostoka* [Financial structures of the Middle East] (in Russian).

[18] Nitzan J., Bichler S. *The Global Political Economy of Israel* (London, 2002), p. 298.

[19] Izrailem upravlyayut 12 monopol'nyh grupp [Israel is governed by 12 monopoly groups]. https://newrezume.org/news/2015-04-26-8634 (in Russian).

[20] 'Globs': Monopolii i karteli nesut otvetstvennost' za dorogoviznu zhizni v Izraile [Globes: Monopolies and cartels are responsible for the high cost of living in Israel]. URL: https://newrezume.org/news/2019-08-12-33388

[21] Calculated using data from: SAI 1996, pp. 43, 284.

[22] See *Yearbook of Labour Statistics 1982* (Geneva, 1982), pp. 17-31.

[23] *World Bank*. https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.NE.ZS

[24] A low participation rate of women is typical of Oriental (or Levantine) mentality widely represented in this segment of Israeli society. The Eastern culture, lifestyle, specific demographics (high birth rates) of a large part of the population (Sephardic Jews and Arabs) were traditionally associated with low economic activity of women.

[25] Nathanson R., Simanovsky N., Levy R. *Vocational Training*. The Center for Political Economics. http://www.macro.org.il/research-staff/

[26] Mar'yasis D.A. Problemnye zony v sisteme innovacionnoj ekonomiki Izrailya i vozmozhnye varianty ikh ustraneniya [Problem zones in the system of Israel's innovative economy and possible options for their elimination], in *Vostochnaya analitika*. Vypusk 3, 2019, p. 82 (in Russian).

ELENA E. NOSENKO-STEIN

Ex-Soviet Jews with Visual Impairments in Israel:

Looking for Their Place on the Labor Market [I]

Worldwide, people with disabilities make up approximately 10% of the population (currently approximately 850 million people).[1] According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) Disability Report, around 15% of the world's population displays various health-related disabilities.[2] This data is clearly incomplete due to poor record-keeping in the 'global South', areas of armed conflicts, etc. Improved health, increased longevity and improvements in healthcare and health in the 'Global North' (increased survival of severely premature born children, treatment of diseases previously considered incurable, success in gerontology, etc.) also contribute to an increase in population numbers.

Nevertheless, people with disabilities constitute a significant 'segment' of humanity, with specific needs, unique experiences, behaviors and lifestyles.

In Israel, military operations and terrorist acts contribute to the common causes of disability such as various injuries, chronic illnesses as well as consequences of medical treatment. This prompted Israel to pay a great deal of attention to the rehabilitation and adaptation of people with disabilities, especially those incurred while in the military service. The State of Israel and the Russian Federation both ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2012. However, problems faced by people with disabilities in Israel remain, especially with regards to employment. In Israel, this especially affects a group of Russian-speaking Jewish immigrants with disabilities who came to the country after 1989.

[I] The Russian version has been published int: Contemporary Israel: Languages, Society, Cultures / Ed. by E. Nosenko-Stein and D. Sobolev. Moscow, IV RAN, 2021. P. 292-332 (in Russian). The translation has been completed with the permission of the Publishers.

In this article, I analyze the problems related to employment of disabled people using life stories of former Soviet citizens with visual impairments who experienced various difficulties in adapting to the new reality – both in terms their new adopted country and their disability. Blindness (as well as significant visual impairment) are one of the most serious disabilities, and severely limits a person's life choices, such as acquiring education and training, building a career and/or the possibility of keeping a job after losing (completely or significantly) their vision.

Sources and methodology

The article is based on four life histories recorded by me in Israel in 2013. The interviews were conducted with disabled job seekers in Israel. All the interviewees were individuals with visual impairment constituting disability. All the informants talked about their life and 'disability experience' in the USSR or post-Soviet countries (in cases they already had a disability prior to emigration to Israel), including their work, as well as experiences of living with disability in Israel. Recorded and transcribed interviews were analyzed in the light of participants' disability experience and its impact on attempts to find a job. Biographical methods (Life History) were widely employed in this research, drawing on research by ethnologists and sociocultural anthropologists.

The stories analyzed are of one man and three women from Russia, Ukraine and Moldova (specifically, the unrecognized Republic of Transnistria) with varying degrees of disability (from total blindness to varying degrees of what was once termed 'weak of vision' in the USSR). Interviews were conducted in northern Israel: in Haifa and its environs, at the home of informants (in three cases) and in the premises of an organization for the blind (one interview).

These life stories were considered in the context of a wide range of disability issues in the former USSR and the State of Israel. Furthermore, statistical data published by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics, the Ministry of Healthcare and other organizations, research centers and individual specialists provided me with important additional sources.

Defining disability

There is no generally accepted definition of disability as a sociocultural phenomenon in academic literature or international legal docu-

ments. For example, the World Health Organization (WHO) defines disability as the loss of an organ, physical or mental impairment, handicap and disability (i.e. inability or disability resulting from different congenital or acquired impairments).

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, disability is the result of a physiological or functional defect resulting from illness, accident, etc.[3] Hence the great variations in statistical data on disability provided by different organizations and in different countries. These definitions, in turn, determine the availability or otherwise of social benefits, employment schemes and various support programs for disabled people.

Academic interest in the problems of people with disabilities rose after World War II, especially in the 1960s, when various minorities, including the disabled, were fighting for their rights in different corners of the world. Since then, several models or frameworks of understanding disability have emerged in academic literature as part of disability studies.

One model of understanding disability that has become widespread in the past and is still common in a number of post-Soviet countries is the medical model. According to this model, disability is a medical problem (the result of illness, functional impairment, accident etc.) that must be solved by medical means (treatment and rehabilitation). If the problem cannot be solved, then a person with disability must be eligible for social care. According to this model, disability is a personal tragedy causing a serious psychological trauma. People with disabilities are conceptualized as passive recipients of medical treatment and social care and are excluded from decision-making regarding their rights, education, employment, etc.[4]

Currently, the most common approach to disability outside FSU (the Former Soviet Union) is the social model. According to this approach, the disabled are the most discriminated part of an 'abled society', which bears responsibilty for this state of affairs. Disability itself, therefore, is a social construct created by able people to exercise social control and subordination of disabled people.[5] This model has been criticized for its lack of attention to physiological problems of disabled people (including pain, psychological and emotional discomfort, etc.), as well as for its lack of interest in the historical context and cultural characteristics of different societies.

Apart from these most common models, there are several others: for example, the affirmative (positive) model incorporating the unique experience of people with disabilities, their achievements in different areas. The legal model, which emphasizes the equality of all people, including people with disabilities, and which sees its task in asserting their rights; the socio-cultural, or the historical-cultural model, that regards disability as a concept shaped by specific historical, social and cultural contexts.[6]

In this paper, I take the view that disability is a biosocial phenomenon that exists in a specific historical and cultural context. I focus on experiences of disability in the USSR and post-Soviet countries, and compare these with the experiences of Russian-speaking disabled immigrants from FSU to Israel.

Needs-based capacity constraint?

In Israel, as in many countries of the 'Global North', a distinction is made between limited ability or partial disability and disability (this is also sometimes attempted in Russia, albeit inconsistently). Thus in 2013, in Israel, according to official statistics, there were 1,360,000 people with partial disability (*anashim im mugabalut*). However, in 2016 their number increased to 1,450,000.[7] Of these, people of working age (i.e. between the ages of 18 and 67) numbered, according to various estimates, between 800,000 and 1 million.

As for disabled people (*nahim*), their number stood at about 600,000 in 2012.[8] By 2018 their number grew to 704,000, and the number of working age (aged 18-67) people with health limitations reached over 420,000.[9] This is about 6% of the working-age population of the country. Jerusalem Post presented some evaluations that by the end of 2020 disabled persons constituted 20% of Israeli population (without referencing any sources and details).[10]

Partially disabled are considered to be those individuals with 'health problems that affect people's daily activities'. Disability, on the other hand, is defined as a condition resulting from of health problems that has a serious impact on individuals' daily lives. Disability pensions in Israel are granted to people whose ability to work has been reduced by 50% (due to limited capabilities), as well as to housewives whose ability to do domestic work in their households was reduced by 50%. The criteria for determining an individual's ability to work or function are set by Bituach

Leumi (Israel National Insurance Institute).[11] The criteria, although often rather imprecise, are used to determine the disabled status in Israel which in turn allows individuals to receive a disabled person's pension and various other benefits.

The process of disability assessment is somewhat different in Russia, where designation of disability (including its severity, the so-called groups) is more tightly linked to the degree of working ability loss. These disability groups are determined by a special medical and social agency, which determines and assigns a disability group to individuals (from the 3rd - the least severe, to the 1st - the most severe). The disability degree given to a person determines his or her right to work as well as various restrictions down to prohibition to work. The degree also determines the size of pension and various benefits.

According to the Brookdale Disability Research Center, (Myers - JDC - Brookdale Institute,) in the early 2000s in Israel, of all working-age disabled people, 17.8% were individuals with physical impairments; almost 10% with sensory impairments (4.2% blind and visually impaired; 3.7% deaf and hearing impaired); and 2.1% had a disability due to chronic medical conditions. About 16% of disabled people of working age are people with mental and cognitive disabilities. The rest (around 47%) have so-called multiple impairments, i.e. a combination of several of the above impairments.[12]

Among Israeli Jews, the percentage of people with disabilities is 13% of the working-age population, in the Israeli Arab community it is 22%.[13] Moreover, the gap between the two communities has widened over the past 10 years (a decade ago there were 21% and 24% of Jews and Arabs with disabilities, respectively), although the proportion of Arabs with disabilities has decreased slightly. The percentage of disabled people (nahim), with severe disabilities, among the Israeli Arabs is almost twice as high (8.8% vs 4.5% among the Israeli Jews.[14] In recent years, the proportion of people with mental and intellectual disabilities in the country has been increasing, especially among ultra-Orthodox Jews (Haredim) as well as in the Bedouin community.[15] This may be due to an earlier and more complete detection of disability-inducing illnesses. Moreover, intra-family marriages are still relatively common in these groups.

The Russian Federation does not collect accurate statistics on the number of people with disabilities (various agencies give figures between 11 and 13 million people, which constitute less than 10% of the popu-

lation - the usual number in the countries of the 'global north'). Rosstat (the Russian State Statistics Agency) estimated the number of disabled people as 11.63 million at the beginning of 2020. In recent years, the number decreased by 200,000-300,000 people per year, a drop most noticeable in the most severe 1st and 2nd disability groups.[16] This can be explained by the hardening of social policy in Russia towards people with disability. For example, the formal 'transfer' of people with severe disabilities to a 'lighter' cohort allows a reduction in pensions, benefit cuts, etc. Unlike the former USSR where a lot of older people were designated as disabled, in today's Russia it has become exceedingly difficult for people over 70 years of age to get disability status and subsequent benefits. In recent years, the number of people with cancer, as well as mental and psychological diseases has increased among Russian disabled people.[17] Unsurprisingly, after immigrating to Israel, the disabled individuals from Russia and other post-Soviet countries report a notable improvement in their overall situation.[18]

The share of people with disabilities in both countries increases with age (which is unsurprising): in Israel, 12% of people with disabilities are in the 18-25 age group; in the 64+ age group, almost 50%. In addition, about 80% of all Israelis with disabilities received disability status between the ages of 18 and 65.[19] The type of disability given to this age group, the so called 'sudden disability', does not always occur instantly (as a result of an injury), but can in fact develop gradually. The number is slightly below the global average: according to the WHO, the proportion of such people in the world constitutes about 85% of all people with disabilities (the lower number in Israel may be due to the high level of the country's healthcare and rehabilitation programs).

Legal frameworks and rights of disabled people

Israel is considered one of the countries with favorable conditions for people with disabilities. In Israel, just as in Western European countries and the USA, the struggle of disabled people for their rights began in the late 1960s -1970s. For example, in 1972, the Knesset amended the Building Design Act, which specifically provided for the need for people with disabilities to have easy access to public facilities (at that time, disability was mostly applied to individuals with musculoskeletal disorders – MDA. Big changes in this area began at the end of the 1990s and in the 2000s. For example, in 1998, the Equality Act was passed, which set

requirements for achieving equal rights for people with various health limitations. For example, the law obliges municipalities to make all public buildings and spaces (law courts, educational and medical institutions, cinemas, restaurants, parks, etc.) accessible to all people with disabilities (and not just those individuals with MIA-related disabilities). City authorities must therefore not limit their efforts to providing special lifts and ramps, but also take into account the needs of the blind, deaf and a number of other disability categories. For example, for the blind, many public places (bus stops, ATMs, lifts, etc.) must have Braille signs (convex point font); for the deaf and those with impaired hearing, many public building and transport - though not universally – are equipped with high visibility electronic displays. Important laws and regulations were also passed by the Knesset in the 2000s regarding the employment of people with disabilities (including people with cognitive and mental disabilities). These laws also stipulated benefits for such individuals and provided access to inclusive education.[20]

Many people with disabilities came to Israel from the former Soviet Union, of whom 160,000 were registered as disabled (nahim) in 2013 (i.e. more than a quarter of all disabled people in the country.[21] In addition, some became disabled or partially disabled while already in Israel.

In Israel, considerable attention is paid to the comprehensive rehabilitation of people with disabilities. For example, such people (regardless of the specific disability) are accommodated on the ground floor in the municipal housing sector, and the entrance to the building is often equipped with a ramp and special disability-friendly lifts (at least in buildings constructed over the last 10 years). Educational institutions and areas used by students with disabilities are also equipped with ramps. Even people with some mental and learning disabilities (memory problems, ADHD etc.) have access to higher education by law.[22]

Thus the legislation of the State of Israel aims not only to protect the rights of disabled people, but also to improve their quality of life, i.e. make it as fulfilling as possible. The socio-cultural rehabilitation of people with disabilities is designed to facilitate this. Special attention is paid to the so-called primary psychological and domestic rehabilitation of people with disabilities, carried out in designated rehabilitation centers. This is especially important for those who became disabled as adults (people with sudden disability) and did not receive special skills and training in childhood. They are helped to acquire new skills: blind people (or people whose vision has deteriorated sharply) learn to navigate in space, walk

with a white cane or guide dog, use computer sound programs, light a gas stove, make a hot drink. Individuals with musculoskeletal problems learn new forms of mobility using the wheelchair or a walking frame. For most disabled people, it is also necessary to overcome feelings of hopelessness and intense frustration (common after receiving a diagnosis of disability), as well as to understand their employment prospects and, more broadly, their life possibilities.

At the end of 2013, I visited a rehabilitation center 'Migdal Or' (Tower of Light, Beacon in Hebrew) for the blind and visually impaired near Haifa. The center provides rehabilitation programs for people who have lost their sight in adulthood. Among the visitors, there were many people who had come from CIS countries where very few services of this kind were available. For instance, in the former USSR, there were only two centers for the rehabilitation of the blind: in Volokolamsk (Moscow Region) and Biysk (Altai Territory); both are still in operation. However, this is clearly inadequate for the needs of the vast majority of visually impaired people, of whom, according to estimates of experts from the Russian Organization for the Blind, there are about 1,200,000 in Russia.

At the same time, persons with disabilities in Israel, including visually impaired people, experience a number of employment-related problems as evident from the interviews that I conducted. Below I offer several stories that are interesting cases illustrating the issues touched upon in the paper.

Life with disability

Raphael

The first person I interviewed was Raphael; (at the time of our meeting, he was 63 years old). My husband and I came to see him in one of Haifa's new districts, where Raphael and his family lived in a multi-story apartment block although not on the ground floor. (He received his disability status ten years after he emigrated to Israel, despite this he decided not to move house.) Raphael met us alone (it was a work day) and took us into his small office, where there was a computer and many books. He was wearing thick glasses for his severe myopia.

Raphael was born in Odessa, he suffered from problems with his eyes from birth (high myopia, -10D, after graduation myopia increased to

-14D). He attended a regular secondary school and, according to him, did not experience any major difficulties during his studies. There were difficulties with geographical maps, as well as the fact that he did not see what was written on the blackboard (despite sitting in the front row in class). He said the teachers and his classmates helped him by reading out what was written on the blackboard; some teachers let him come close to the blackboard. No one, according to Rafael's memories, teased or bullied him. After finishing school Rafael was hoping to study biology, but the university admissions office explained to him that with his poor vision he would not be allowed to do it. The following year, he applied to the Pedagogical Institute to train as a mathematics teacher and was admitted. There, he said, he did not face any serious eyesight-related problems either:

'Yes, it [his eyesight] was a hindrance, of course, but I got used to it, in general, everything was fine. At that time, we studied mostly from textbooks, but I could read OK from close range, in general, I managed.'

That is, Raphael was not a disabled child, despite his poor eyesight. He experienced the first major constraint when he was precluded from studying biology at the university. However, he was able to realize his potential in another area.

After graduating, Raphael was dispatched to a rural school in the Nikolaev region (in the USSR, university graduates were required to work for three years in a government-designated, often remote area. This was designed to 'compensate' the state for providing free education). However, making his student's homework turned out very difficult for Raphael. He contacted the Ukrainian Ministry of Education and received a permission to find a job closer to home. He returned to Odessa and started working as a computer programmer at the Food Industry Institute. Rafael was not offered a disability status, however. He claimed he was successfully coping with his vison difficulties.

Raphael eventually married a young woman from Tiraspol (Moldova; currently unrecognized Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic), where he also worked as a programmer. It was possible to distinguish images on black-and-white computer monitors at a short distance. Thus the absence of disability allowed Raphael to build a career and have a family. He also managed to successfully cope with everyday problems. He did not want a 'disability status' because of the stigma attached to it in the USSR and later in the post-Soviet countries.

In 1990, Raphael emigrated to Israel with his wife and two sons. He continued to work as a computer programmer in his adopted country for several years. However, after a while, Raphael's vision started to deteriorate rapidly (as is common in most people with high myopia):

'I went through the surgery, on both eyes. My eyesight got better; I was able to see much clearer than before coming here. But it didn't last long. They found retinal degeneration. Then the glaucoma. ... I had to quit my job, I worked as a programmer for an electrical company for 11 years. ... in short, it was clear that I was visually impaired. *They did not want to do business with me* (italics mine - E.N.-S.) despite my experience.' When it became clear that Rafael could not find a job, his wife suggested that he register as a disabled person. However, the doctors treating him did not offer him this option at first: 'Nobody offered me anything. And then I applied to the relevant commission, my eyesight was checked, and it became clear that it was very poor. Disability here [in Israel] is a 50 per cent loss of working ability. And I was given ... I was insured, I had insurance and I started to receive a certain amount ... But unemployment insurance due to disability has stopped. ... This is state insurance, from Bituach Leumi. Moreover, when I reach retirement age, when I'm 65, the benefits will be revised. They will be revised upwards. So I will not have an old-age allowance, but a disability allowance.'

As with most people who have become disabled as adults, Rafael has thus been subject of downward status change. This change in status can be seen as a kind of reverse rite of passage. Unlike the classic rite of passage described in ethnographic literature,[23] when a young man, as a result of an initiation rite, acquired a higher status by becoming a full member of the team, the exact opposite happens when one becomes disabled: a person regresses to a lower status by becoming dependent on the state, relatives, charity organisations, etc.).[24]

As a result, Rafael received a disability ID card and a blind person's card, which gave him a number of benefits which he described as follows: 'So the drugs are not free. There is free travel on buses. This is for urban buses, and a 50% discount on intercity buses. In addition, city taxes, I pay only 10% of regular city taxes, not just me, but the whole family. This is a significant amount; I will tell you that. In addition, I have an allowance for a 'chaperone'. I have received documents that I am blind... In addition, there are benefits for electricity bills. We are looking into these now, we have recently learned about these... These are the main benefits that I receive. In addition, since I have a disability certificate, I

get various benefits - for visiting museums, a zoo, I don't know what not. They [the benefits] can give as much as 60% discount. They come with different IDs. I have a blind person's card and an invalid's card. There are various ways to get these [benefits]. But the main thing, of course, is the city tax [discount].'

Rafael has also joined the so-called Blind Persons Association that regularly organized lectures, meetings, social clubs and special tours for the blind. There was also primary psychological rehabilitation ('Courses for blind persons. And not only for us, but also for husbands and wives, family members, they were explaining to them what to do in such cases. The main thing, we were told: life is not over, that it is also possible to live with it'). It should be noted here that psychological rehabilitation for the blind (……) exists in Russia only in the two rehabilitation centers already mentioned. The numerous branches of the Russian Society for the Blind (RSB) do not provide such services. Psychological rehabilitation for family members of the late-blind (as well as for parents of children with visual impairment) is practically non-existent (with very few exceptions).

In general, such Israeli establishments are analogous to the Soviet and post-Soviet societies for the blind (Soviet Organization of the Blind (AUSB), later Russian Organization of the Blind). In the USSR, the AUSB ran enterprises that employed visually impaired people; these enterprises offered basic manual work (assembly of electrical sockets and switches, production of lids for jars, etc.) that nevertheless provided money-earning opportunities for visually disabled people. Such enterprises had very significant tax benefits (sometimes they did not pay taxes at all). This gave them an opportunity to provide social benefits to their employees (trips to sanatoriums, concerts, excursions, sometimes accommodation, etc.).[25]

At present, the Russian Society of the Blind has practically no resources. Having lost state support, the branches of AUSB, not unlike their Israeli counterparts, have turned into leisure and social centers. Currently they do not employ the blind and visually impaired.[26] In Israel, however, according to Raphael, various aids (speaking clocks, thermometers, scales, electronic magnifiers, etc.) can be purchased from such associations. They also provide audio books, which are brought home by numerous volunteers. Rafael also talked about the 'Migdal O' rehabilitation center.

'This is a kind of cooperative; there are doctors, as well as retired doctors. They are former professors, ophthalmologists, experienced ophthalmologists, and they provide advice. Besides, they provide many different devices for the visually impaired. For example, special lenses, which are yellow, are worn on your glasses. They absorb diffuse light, they only let in polarized light. The sun is bright here [in Israel], so wearing them makes things much better. I bought myself a special monocular device there: you look through it and you see prices in a shop from a distance. <...> There you can also buy helping devices there, including computer programs (at a discounted price) - zoom in (ZoomText), and sound (the so-called 'Balabag')'.[27]

Although Raphael made use of these assisting technologies, despite his efforts, he was not able to find employment. Rehabilitation centers and social clubs for the blind did not provide such opportunities. He explained:

'At the Ministry of Labor, there are such opportunities… if a person is able to work… There are retraining courses which they offered. (Interviewer: Have you been offered such courses?) The thing is, when I applied, it was already too late for them to offer me anything. But I haven't lost contact with them, I said that I could give computer advice over the phone. But the thing is, people at home don't work on such computers. I'm not an expert in those things [home computers]. I can give advice on a user level. And for those who work at home, I am an expert. But the computers [I know well]- they are in banks, corporations, they prefer paid consultants, they have money for it. They do not need me. That's why they couldn't really use me. It just wasn't very clear what they could offer me.'

At home Raphael was able to read emails and news on the Internet. He also helped friends and acquaintances with consultations on computer programs installation. However, even with the help of a text-magnifying programs (multifunctional sound programs like JAWS, NVDA, as well as more advanced MagicEye programs which at the time of the interview were not as affordable and user-friendly as they are now) he could only work for two hours at most. Audiobooks (on CDs at the time) and the Internet provided Rafael with things to occupy his time. His sources of income were his disability allowance as well as his wife's salary.

Another factor hindering Raphael's employment was his limited Hebrew. At the end of our meeting he told the story of his friend Meir, a

religious Jew who, at the age of about 40, suffered from detached retina in both eyes. Despite treatment, his vision had deteriorated dramatically. However, Meir looked for work and found a call center job in Tel Aviv, and later a similar job in Haifa. Raphael admitted that unlike Meir, Sabra (born in Israel), - a native Hebrew speaker, he could not have been able to do the job due to his poor language skills. Moreover, according to Raphael, religious Jews 'support those who are in trouble, on top of what the stat e is doing. Religious people have their own kinds of support networks.' These networks 'are not available' for 'new repatriates'.

Thus, in addition to severely impaired vision and disability status, as well as employers' disinterest in hiring people with disabilities, the employment possibilities for disabled persons from the FSU in Israel are further hampered by age, poor knowledge of Hebrew and the lack of informal support networks. Raphael's 'transition' to disability status was not as sudden and traumatic as for many others: his vision deteriorated gradually, he had obtained working experience in Israel and has done the corresponding payments into the social system. His wife's wages and the fact that his sons were adults and earned their own living meant his economic situation was tolerable. Support from family and fellow blind people he had met somewhat smoothed for Rafael the transition to a life with disability.

Svetlana

We went to Svetlana's suburb in Haifa, where she lived with her husband and two small children. We were met by a friendly young woman with an infant in her arms and were cordially invited to her small first floor flat. At the time of our meeting Svetlana was 36 years old and had been living in Israel for 10 years. Before coming to Israel, Svetlana lived in Klintsy (Bryansk region of Russia) where she worked as a nurse and later got married. However, when she was 24 years old, she completely lost her vision (total blindness) as a result of rapidly progressing diabetes mellitus. Svetlana was no longer able to work as a nurse and stayed at home for almost a year. As she explained, her family was afraid something would happen to her outside her home (it is also possible that they were ashamed to be seen in public with a disabled person, a fairly common pattern of anxiety behavior in the former Soviet Union). In the end, Svetlana told her family: 'I want to live, not exist'. She decided to go to Israel, but since her family - her parents and husband - did not want to emigrate, she left alone.

Svetlana's case is a typical example of the so-called sudden disability, when a person loses a function almost instantly or very rapidly, subsequently experiencing a serious mental trauma and almost instantly loses his or her previous position in society. She did not receive any primary rehabilitation: (psychological or/and domestic help), an experience typical for most people with late disability in Russia. Thus 'a transition to the lower world' is very painful for such people.[28]

Svetlana said that when she arrived, she was visited almost immediately by a rehabilitation specialist (coach). The training began with learning to cope with domestic chores. She was taught to light a gas stove, pour water into a cup and other life skills. She was also trained to use sound computer programs (Svetlana showed me how she worked efficiently with the 'Jaws' program that reads from a computer screen). In addition, the specialist taught her how to walk with a guide dog; we met this cute Labrador dog while Svetlana was making us tea.

'All I can do now is thanks to her [the coach]. Look, I'm confidently able to light the gas (shows) – before, I was afraid to even approach the cooker. I learnt how to handle boiling water and not get burned, how to use the knife correctly - Vera [instructor] showed me [all these things]. She taught me how to walk with the dog, further and further, with more and more confidence. And now I am able to walk everywhere [with her dog].'

As Svetlana could no longer work as a nurse, she decided to go back to university. She enrolled at the University of Haifa to study musicology and successfully completed her degree. Svetlana explained in detail how she studied and lived in a university dormitory. In addition, she was also able to work at the university center for blind and visually impaired students. There she made use of a computer with a so-called 'Braille printer' (i.e. a printer prints convex point text using the Braille system), as well as of volunteer readers. Svetlana dreamed of working in a library, or rather, in the University of Haifa Phono Library (or another major library), where many audio recordings are kept.

Soon after graduation, Svetlana married a Russian-speaking sighted man (from the Baltic States) and gave birth to two children. Hers is an example of a very successful domestic, psychological, and partially social rehabilitation. In addition, Svetlana was able to create a new family.

However, at the time of our conversation Svetlana was unable to find the job she desired. She told us that she gave lectures (often free of

charge) at various clubs; she also gave French lessons. Unlike Raphael, Svetlana spoke fluent Hebrew, her age was not an obstacle either. However, Svetlana claimed that being unemployed and having disabled person's status hindered her employment. Still, Svetlana said that her situation – for as long as the children were young – was overall satisfactory; she was going to start looking for a permanent job more actively in three or four years' time (in the course of our further communication with Svetlana, it became clear that she had not found a permanent job).

This is also a typical example of unsuccessful employment of people with disabilities; it is hindered by both high unemployment and disability status.

Natalia

We met with Natalia in a building of the Association for blind people in Haifa, where we were shown various equipment for people with vison disabilities. I talked to the people who came there as well as the employees. Natalia, an employee of the organization, received us in her office and spoke in detail about many aspects of becoming disabled and blind in Israel. She spoke in detail about the disability assessment process in Israel as well as subsequent benefits and payments. Her story clarified and complemented previous interviews.

Natalia (51 at the time of our meeting) was born in Rostov-on-Don (Southern Russia). She was a visually impaired child (she suffered from nystagmus - an involuntary oscillating high frequency eye movement, often resulting in a significant reduction in vision). She studied at a boarding school for the visually impaired (in the USSR there were boarding schools for the blind and visually impaired where children studied from Monday to Saturday, this was common in large cities where working parents had difficulty escorting their children to and from school due to long distances). According to Natalia, she did not experience significant difficulties during her studies. She also talked about the pros and cons of special schools for disabled people that had become the subject of criticism over the past two decades. Speaking about the benefits of inclusive education, Natalia emphasized:

'The child learns to communicate with people, and he does not perceive himself as disabled, but as a person who has some limitations. And he learns how to establish connections with others, to communicate, and then returns to the larger world, you see?'

At the same time, Natalia also described the merits of special schools:

'But on the other hand, there were benefits [in special schools], I myself attended such a school, I saw that - because classes were small, there were specially trained teachers, and everything was condensed. The standard of teaching was higher [than in an ordinary school]. You see, this is the difference between a class of 40 people and a class of 10 people where the teacher could pay attention to each child.

That is, the pupils' isolation, interaction only with similarly disabled children, as well as the difficulties of staying at boarding school (which Natalia also spoke about) and the resulting difficulties in 'communicating in the larger world' (i.e. going beyond the boundaries of the 'disabled' sociocultural ghetto) was partially counterbalanced by smaller classes, specially trained teachers, individual approach and the availability of special aids and appliances. The same advantages and disadvantages, according to Natalia, applied to special schools in Israel, despite their higher technical level (computers with special programs in classrooms) and the presence of trained psychologists and rehabilitation specialists.

After graduating from secondary school, Natalia went to study history at Rostov University. Despite her disability, she successfully completed her degree. She was greatly helped by her parents. Natalia repeatedly stressed that in Russia and Israel a person with disabilities needs very significant family support to make success in one's life. After graduation, Natalia worked for some time in a boarding school for the visually impaired as an assistant, as it was very difficult to get a job as a teacher. She later left school and worked as a tutor teaching history. Eventually, Natalia got a job at a special enterprise for the blind as a social worker, got married and gave birth to a daughter.

At the end of the Soviet era and during the first years of perestroika, the system of state support for special enterprises for disabled people began to collapse, the employees of such enterprises lost their jobs on a massive scale. Eventually, Natalia and her family immigrated to Israel in 2000.

There, Natalia started working quite quickly (When still in Russia she already taught Hebrew; she worked hard to further improve it when she came to Israel). What is more, her experience in social work with the blind and visually impaired turned out to be an asset: 'I was 37 years old, and I still managed [to change career] before I was 40 years old, [In Israel] I was given an opportunity to get another university degree. And I grad-

uated from university in four years with a degree in social care. Later, Natalia started working as a social worker at the Society for the Blind and Visually Impaired':

'This is a society for the blind <...> . It is an amuta, a private organization, its purpose is to provide various services to the blind, it is not a commercial organization to earn money. It does not make a profit, it is a public organization, <...> where cultural events are held, there are two social workers in this society. I am a social worker for Russian speakers, and I have about 450 people on my books. ... We are a society in Haifa, there are other such societies and centers for the blind and visually impaired in Israel, and we have the Haifa Municipality responsible for them. We work together.'

In addition to cultural events, which Raphael also mentioned, and in addition to giving psychological assistance for the blind and their families, a social worker like Natalia provides very significant assistance in processing disability assessment, obtaining the relevant documents and securing subsequent benefits. In addition, Natalia works as a social worker at the Rambam Hospital (ophthalmology department), where she provides similar assistance in obtaining disability status, but – importantly (and unlike the situation in Russia) - she refers blind individuals, often suffering from the shock of the recent diagnosis, to a psychologist and rehabilitation specialist. Natalia's contribution was all the more important because she knew Russian, and her engagement with the Ministry of Health and the Social Insurance Institute as well as her help with relevant paperwork was very important for Russian-speaking immigrants.

However, according to Natalia, it is much more difficult [for disabled people] to get a job even after completing a good degree. Natalia did not mean employment at the workshops of Migdal or rehabilitation centres (basic manual jobs with minimal pay), but working in a profession or being able to get another qualification. This was especially true for young people:

'Then, if they are young, I send them to the municipal service and there is a special person responsible for retraining.' Natalia continued: 'If a person had previously had good vison, then something happened, such people are given opportunity to re-train. They had to either study further or do something else. This is my responsibility - I must assess his or her level of education, physical and mental condition, emotional

state. Together with the National Insurance Institute, they build a rehabilitation program for such people. If the person is young, under 30 years old, he or she has learned the language, they see that such people have potential, they can work.'

As it was mentioned above, such opportunities are not readily available in Russia. However, despite such services and programs, not all young people in Israel, as Svetlana's case exemplifies, are able to find paid employment.

Individuals over 50 years of age are not offered employment opportunities, rather, they are offered various cultural programs (lectures, excursions, concerts, etc.) Some of them work as volunteers, as Raphael mentioned. I have seen such volunteers helping to organize various events (utilizing both Hebrew and Russian), call clients, serve tea etc.

The middle-aged disabled is the group of people who find gaining paid employment most difficult. Natalia explained:

'Here it is problematic, rather problematic. If, for example, at the age of 40, a disabled person had been able to gain a degree, now there are big cuts. They can offer a course, for example, they love doing it here, they send one to do a course, a massage courses for example, but [afterwards] they don't find work very often. Why not? Because it's hard for even sighted people to start a business and working through a health insurance company is very difficult. If it's private or public, it's very hard to accept a disabled person. If there is an opportunity, if they can work on their own, they can work at a simple [manual] job in this..., it's hard to call this a factory (workshops at Migdal Or). What are they doing there? They pack medical supplies, for example, pack clothes or hats, clean phones, do basic work. Yes, the simplest, very simple tasks. And they get, that's the maximum…well, 800 shekels (around $220).'

As a result, disabled people in Israel often never find a job, although they volunteer, give free lectures at various clubs, etc.

Natalia was a rather rare case when a person with disabilities over 40 (in addition to being a recent immigrant) has successfully socially adapted and gained professional employment. Several factors contributed to this: her good knowledge of Hebrew, prior experience in social work (in this case with blind people) as well as gaining additional relevant degree before the age of 40. Another helping factor was Natalia's relatively good vision, which allowed her to commute to work independently, read documents, etc. Being a disabled person from birth and

having not experienced a sharp deterioration of vision in adulthood, Natalia avoided a serious psychological trauma that many late blind people often experience. Studying at a special education school, although temporarily prevented her from 'communicating with the [normal] world, her school and subsequent work experience in a factory for the blind helped her to successfully 'fit' into a similar area in Israel. Her identity has not undergone as much transformation as the identities of other informants, and this has also contributed to her successful adaptation to her new life in Israel.

Rita

We traveled to a small town in Northern Galilee where Rita lived with her husband in their own house. At the time of our meeting she was 64 years old. She refused to record the interview on a dictaphone, so we had to restore our conversation from memory. Rita was born in Kiev (Ukrainian SSR) . Although suffering from poor eyesight, she had no official disability status and went to a regular school. Rita said she experienced learning difficulties (she could not see the blackboard well but was too shy to say so). Rita later went to a technical school, although her poor eyesight was an impediment there as well. She got married, but soon divorced. She believed that her poor vision played a role in her worsening relationship with her husband. She later found a passion for painting, which she first practiced on her own, and then in various art studios. Painting, according to Rita helped her cope with ensuing depression. In 1992, Rita immigrated to Israel, but could not find a job as an engineer because she was no longer young, had poor Hebrew and poor eyesight, which soon began to deteriorate further.

In Israel, Rita got specialist assessment and received a blindness and disability certificate (which entitled her to many aforementioned benefits, though less than enjoyed by Raphael, who had paid contributions when employed in Israel). Unlike the informants mentioned above, Rita did not join a society for the blind and did not use rehabilitation centers. At the same time, despite the dramatically deteriorating vision, Rita not only continued to paint, but also began exhibiting her works - both online and in small galleries.[29] In some cases, her works sold well, which was of great help to her. The walls of her house were covered with paintings: still lives as well as surrounding landscapes. During the meeting Rita showed me flowers in her garden, noting which of them

served as 'models' for her paintings (it would more appropriate to call her not a 'blind artist', as she is described on some websites, but a 'visually impaired' one). After a few years of living in Israel, Rita married a Russian-speaking Orthodox Jew and began to follow all the prescriptions of Judaism for a woman (including observance of ritual purity, kashrut, etc.): 'I am non-religious, but as it happens, I have to follow it' – she said.

Rita's experience is quite different. Like many visually impaired people who did not have disability status in the former USSR, she could not count on either disability pension or other benefits and social services available to the disabled in the USSR. In addition, unlike many Soviet disabled people, Rita was not in a situation of a 'disabled' socio-cultural ghetto, where people with disabilities studied, worked and spent their leisure time mainly among their own kind, often marrying within the group as well. At the same time, because of her poor eyesight and stigma attached to the disabled in the USSR and post-Soviet countries, Rita was also unable to fully 'fit' into the community of 'healthy' people. The situation changed in part after she moved to Israel, where Rita was granted disability status and corresponding benefits and entitlements. Her paintings, which had some commercial success, not only supported Rita and her husband financially, but also gave her a sense of fulfilment. This is a case of a disabled person's self-realization through creativity, beloved by the media, as well as by supporters of an affirmative (positive) approach to disability, which emphasizes the value and uniqueness of a disabled person's personal experience.[30] In a situation where a disabled person can hardly count on employment (lack of appropriate training or education, age, poor knowledge of Hebrew), realizing their potential through artistic creativity may be a kind of solution to the employment problem.

Rita's unwillingness to come into contact with disabled people through their associations was due to her unwillingness to 'enter' into a 'disabled' ghetto, whose members are often stigmatized and have little connection with the world outside the ghetto, i.e. the world with which Rita wanted to belong to.

Thus, as in her past in the USSR, Rita sought to distance herself from the world of the disabled (although in Israel her official disability status has helped her materially). The situation where the majority seeks to distance themselves from highly stigmatized groups is common in many societies (Hoffmann wrote in the early 1960s about the mechanism of avoidance and distancing from Jews in Nazi Germany[31].

Conclusion

As a rule, it is very challenging for disabled persons in Israel to find jobs, even if they are well educated and their qualifications are in demand. Although disabled people are not legally discriminated, in practice, employers are not interested in hiring a disabled person because they are obliged to provide them with a specially equipped workplace, arrange transportation to and from work, etc. Thus, only 5.4% of employers have expressed their readiness to provide work to people with disabilities. As a result, only 50% of disabled people are employed; by comparison: 72% of conditionally healthy people are employed. Incomes of people with disabilities are on average 1,400 shekels (around $390) less per month than those of conditionally healthy people. It is not surprising that 51% of disabled and partially disabled people in Israel are dissatisfied with their income level.[32] And while people with disabilities had for a long time been reluctant to publicly protest against their low level of welfare out of fear, according to Raphael, of losing what they have, in recent years they have increasingly begun to express their dissatisfaction, including through public protests.[33]

Many people, especially Russian-speaking people with disabilities, whose challenges in finding work is compounded by poor Hebrew skills, are unable to get any employment for years, let alone a job for which they are qualified. Informants and employees of organizations for disabled people and rehabilitation centers have repeatedly told us this, confirming time and again what Natalia said about employment of people with disabilities, especially those over the age of 40. Individual 'inspiring' examples, such as the recruitment of a young blind man into the Israeli Defense Force (he noted to the admissions committee that it is possible to work in the army not only as a sniper, but, say, as a programmer), do not change the overall the situation with employment of the visual impaired. The support given by the Israeli Prime Minister to the case of the blind soldier described above has not seemed to make much of a difference.[34]

The situation is similar with the employment of people with visual impairment (and more broadly, people with disabilities) in Russia. One of my informants, a blind Moscow-based businessman Anton said: 'A blind man in our country can either be pitied or admired.' Granted, such state of affairs is common not just in Russia and Israel, but in most countries, even those that are considered favorable for people with disabilities

(here is an example of how such 'inspiring stories' from the lives of disabled people are perceived in society.[35] The commercialization of many disability issues leads the media to bring to the public either such 'inspiring' examples or tragic stories about distress situations in which people with disabilities find themselves. As a result, many everyday problems experienced by disabled people in the areas of education, employment, rehabilitation, leisure, family and sexual life remain outside public discourse.

Prolonged involuntary idleness leads to a loss of motivation to work, especially considering that the average disability allowance in Israel, although lower than the national average, is higher than the old-age allowance. This discourages disabled individuals to seek work and increases dependency on the state. It should be noted that despite the meagerness disability benefits In Russia (especial outside Moscow), the same phenomenon can be observed.

In Israel, there is a kind of 'gap' between a well-organized system of psychological and domestic rehabilitation, education opportunities (including higher education), for people with disabilities on the one hand and the state's indifference to the employment opportunities of these people. Therefore, after many unsuccessful attempts to find work, people with disabilities often stop looking for paid employment altogether. In Israel, there are approximately 60,000 young people with disabilities between the ages of 23 and 26 who have never worked or studied. This is 14% of all people in this age group in the country.[36] Every year, the chances of employment and successful socialization of such people, especially Russian-speaking immigrants, decrease.

It is true that some rehabilitation centers have special workshops where people with disabilities are able to work, although this is often extremely primitive and monotonous work for a very low wage. 'Migdal Or' employees revealed that such workshops are created for those who do not want to achieve much. This is a kind of degraded analogue of similar workshops for the visually impaired people that existed in the USSR in the 1920s-1930s (for manufacture of brushes, baskets, barrels, etc.).

Natalia's words regarding employment of people with visual impairment are very revealing: 'If we could combine the Russian experience, before perestroika in the USSR, with what exists in Israel, it would be close to an ideal.'

Natalia was referring to the highly profitable enterprises where people with disabilities used to be employed in the USSR. Such enterprises were established in the 1960s and 1970s. She expanded:

'I was working in a kind of blind universe in Russia, I saw the factories, I saw that system and I thought it was optimal! Yes, it was a state-run factory, the state placed the orders. At the factory, there were 51% of disabled people and 49% sighted people, professionals, and they produced goods that were in demand, a person could earn money. He worked 8 hours and received almost the same salary as an abled person working in an ordinary factory. There are no such factories in Israel.'

However, Natalia knows that similar enterprises in Russia have either not been operating for a long time or are working in the 'grey market':

'I know what happened, I know that factories have closed. I know that they have been sold off, I know that people get practically no wages. It is an outrage! For example, people are fired in Russia and then pretend to be taken back, they receive money from the state for the disabled, money from the employment service. And then people with disabilities come to get paid, and they receive five thousand [rubles].'

In Israel, people with disabilities working in the workshops (many of them immigrants from the former Soviet Union) are often either poorly or not properly trained at all. In addition, there are many disabled people from the FSU who do not interact at all with rehabilitation centers. Still, among them, there are also inspiring individuals who not only found their 'niche' in Israel but also realized themselves creatively.

Overall, although Russian-speaking immigrants with disabilities find themselves in a more comfortable environment in Israel than in the countries of origin, they face considerable difficulties in social and cultural adaptation and integration into the host society. This is partially due to language barriers that are common to most new immigrant Israelis. In some cases, indifference and negative stereotyping of disabled people in a wider society also play a role. However, the main reason behind employment difficulties experienced by disabled people is due to the lack of a clearly defined public policy aimed at the integration of such people, which might include, for example, significant tax benefits for businesses employing a certain percentage of disabled people, the creation of social businesses and other measures.

[1] *World Report on Disability 2011* (URL http://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/report/ru. Last accessed - January 21, 2020).

[2] https://www.un.org › desa › uploads › sites › 2019/07

PDF (last accessed: October 10, 2021).

[3] *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (URL: http://www.un.org/ru/documents/decl_conv/conventions/disability.shtml lauary 21, 2020); *World Report on Disability 2011* (URL: http://www.who.int/disabilities/world_report/2011/report/ru Last accessed: - January 21, 2020).

[4] See, for example: Jonston *D. An Introduction to Disability Studies. 2nd ed*. (Oxford: David Fulton Publishers, 2005); *S*iebers T *Disability Theory, Boldly Rethinking of the Last Thirty Years from the Vantage Point of Disability Studies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008); Watson N. Roulstone A., Carol Th. (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Disability Studies* (London: Routledge, 2012); Bolt D. *The Metanarrative of Blindness: A Re-reading of Twentieth-Century Anglophone Writing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014).

[5] (Oliver M. *Understanding Disability: From Theory to Practice*. London: Macmillan, 1996; Shakespeare T. and Watson N. 'The social model of disability: an outdated ideology?', pp. 9 – 28, in Barnartt S. and Altman B. (eds), *Exploring Theories and Expanding Methodologies. Research in Social Science and Disability*, Volume 2 (Bingley: Emerald Group, 2001); Tregaskis C., Social model theory: The story so far, *Disability & Society*, 2002, 17 (4), pp. 457-470; Jonston *D. Op.cit.*; Bolt D. *Op. cit*.

[6] See in more detail: Jonston *D. Op.cit.*; Goodley D *Disability Studies: An Interdisciplinary Introduction* (London: Sage, 2011); Nosenko-Stein E.E. 'Antropologiya invalidnosti: problemy i zadachi' *Etnograficheskoe obozrenie*, 2018. 1: 5-1; Endal'ceva A.S. 'Izuchenie i poiski chistoj modeli: chto ostalos' za predelami vnimaniya na puti mezhdu Global'nym Yugom i Global'nym Severom?' [Exploring and searching for a pure model: what has been left out of attention on the path between the Global South and the Global North?], pp. 43-54, in Kurlenkova A.S., Nosenko-Stein E.E. (ed.). *Obratnaya storona luny, ili chto my ne znaem ob invalidnosti (teoriya, reprezentaciya, zhiznennye stili* [The flip side of the moon or what we don't know about disability (theory, representation, life styles] (Moscow: MBA, 2018) (in Russian); Kurlenkova A.S. *'Invalidnost' kak effekt praktik: popytka novoj konceptualizacii*' [Disability as an effect of practices: An attempt at a new conceptualization], pp. 25-42, in: Kurlenkova A.S., Nosenko-Stein E.E. (ed.). *Obratnaya storona luny* (in Russian).

[7] *People with Disability in Israel* (Jerusalem: Myer's – JDC – Brookdale Institute, 2013); Report: Gaps Between Disabled and General Population Expanding in Israel', *Jerusalem Post*. December 03, 2016 (URL: https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Report-Gaps-between-disabled-and-general-population-expanding-in-Israel-474334 Last accessed: September 21, 2021).

[8] *People with Disability in Israel* (Jerusalem: Myer's – JDC – Brookdale Institute, 2013); Persons registered at Social Service Departments by selected characteristics (2013), in *CBS. Statistical Abstract of Israel* (Jerusalem, 2014), pp. 7, 12.

[9] *Facts and Figures. People with Disabilities in Israel, 2018* (URL: - https://brookdale.jdc.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Facts_Figures_2018.pdf. Last accessed: September 21, 2021).

[10] https://www.jpost.com/opinion/as-2020-winds-down-israel-leaves-people-with-disabilities-behind-651247 (last accessed: October 4, 2021).

[11] *People with Disabilities in Israel, 2012. Facts and Figures* (Jerusalem: JDC Brookdale Institute, 2012): 6; Persons registered at Social Service Departments…

[12] Shemesh A., Nacamulli-Levi D. *People with Disabilities in the Community*. Ministry of Health, Department of Economy and Health Insurance, Planning Surveys and Evaluation Division (Jerusalem, 2009), p. 31.

[13] *Facts and Figures. People with Disabilities in Israel*.

[14] Shemesh A., Nacamulli-Levi D. Op cit; Persons registered at Social Service…; Facts and Figures …

[15] Persons registered at Social Service…

[16] Kolichestvo invalidov v Rossii, 2020 [Number of disabled people in Russia 2020] (http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/population/disabilities/# Last accessed: May 22, 2020).

[17] Ibidem.

[18] Nosenko-Stein E. Byt' invalidom v Izraile. Opyt russkoyazychnykh immigrantov [To be a disabled person in Israel: experience of Russian-speaking immigrants] In *Asia and Africa segodnia,* 2015. 12: 67-72 (in Russian).

[19] Shemesh A., Nacamulli-Levi D. *Op. cit*.; Persons registered at Social Service…; Facts and Figures…

[20] About Israeli legislation related to disabled persons, see: Ben Moshe E., Roffman L., and Haber Y. *People with Disabilities in Israel 2011* (URL: https://www.aisrael.org/_Uploads/dbsAttachedFiles/FACTS_FIGURES2014.pdf :4 Last accessed: September 13, 2021); Commission on Equal Rights for People with Disabilities, 2012. Ministry of Justice, https://www.gov.il/en/Departments/moj_disability_rights Last accessed: September 12, 2021); a list of key laws and amendments to them can also be found in: *People with Disability in Israel…* 2013: 5.

[21] (Persons registered at Social Service… 2013.

[22] See: Nosenko-Stein E. 'To be disabled in Israel'…

[23] Rites of passage have been described by classics of ethnography: Gennep van A. *Obriady perekhoda: sistematicheskoye izuchenie obriadov* [Rites of passage: a systematic study of rituals] (Moscow: Vostochnaya literatura, 1999) (Russian translation); Turner V. *Simvol i ritual* [Symbol and ritual; Russian translation] (Moscow: Vostochnaya literatura, 1983).

[24] Nosenko-Stein E.E. 'Samoreprezentaciya invalidnosti v avtobiograficheskih tekstah' [Self-representation of disability in autobiographical texts]. pp. 96-166, In: Kurlenkova A.S., Nosenko-Stein E.E. (eds) *Obratnaya storona luny…*

[25] For more information about the Soviet Organization for the Blind see: Biryuchkov M.V. Istoriya obshchestvennogo dvizheniya nezryachih [History of the Social Movement of the Blind] (Moscow:: VOS, 1990) (in Russian).

[26] Nosenko-Stein E.E. Nekotorye problemy trudoustrojstva lyudej s ogranichennymi vozmozhnostyami zdorov'ya v Rossii (na primere nezryachikh) [Some problems of employment of people with disabilities in Russia (a case study of the blind)], pp. 431-438. in *Invalidy – invalidnost' – invalidizaciya* [Disabled persons - disability – disablement] (Nizhni Novgorod: NISOTS, 2018) (in Russian).

[27] For more information about the Migdal Or center, see: https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Равда,+8238/аутлет+возле+Бургаса/@42.5223857,27.2253588,10z/data=!4m13!4m12!1m5!1m1!1s0x40a698cc7ee48469:0xa00a014cd0ee6e0!2m2!1d27.6781395!2d42.6442881!1m5!1m1!1s0x40a693e6bab52afd:0x4ee8f6d094f0282a!2m2!1d27.4744635!2d42.5497867

[28] Nosenko-Stein E.E. Rokovoy diagnoz kak nachalo obriada perekhoda: status invalida I otnoshenie k nemu v sovremennoy Rossii [Fatal diagnosis as a beginning of a rite of passage: A status of a disabled person and an attitude towards it in contemporary Russia], in *Etnograficheskoye obozrenie*, 2020. 5: 149-161 (in Russian).

[29] Rita's works can be found on https://artnow.ru/ru/gallery/0/3308.html

[30] For details, see Jonstone D. *Op. cit*.

[31] Goffman E. Stigma and Social Identity, in *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (Prentice-Hall: Englewood Cliffs Publishers, 1963); Allport G. W. *The Nature of Prejudice* (London: Addison-Wesley, 1954,

[32] 2013): 11.

[33] See e.g.: http://mignews.com/mobile/article.html?id=170917_123114_29126; https://www.vesty.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-5438226,00.html

[34] https://stmegi.com/posts/50395/slepoy-soldat-pristupil-k-sluzhbe-v-tsakhale/

[35] http://slon.ru/calendar/event/1115043/)

[36] *People with Disabilities in Israel…* 2013: 14.

TATIANA V. NOSENKO

Soviet Policy in the Middle East in Contemporary Israeli Historiography

Some Critical Reflections

In recent decades, the Six-Day War in 1967 and the ensuing military confrontation, especially between Egypt and Israel, which resulted in the war in October 1973, have produced a large body of literature from both Western and Israeli scholars. Soviet Middle East policy features prominently in these works. However, the studies were based on a rather narrow source base due to the closed nature of archival materials in Russia. The works of Soviet academics were very biased and often presented the history of Soviet involvement in the Arab-Israeli wars in a distorted way.

In post-Soviet Russia in the 1990s and early 2000s, the lifting of strict restrictions opened up freer access to archival materials. After many years of Soviet censorship and bans, the country was hit by a flurry of journalism and memoirs that reflected, among other things, previously silenced facts about Soviet actions in the Middle East. The Israeli authors were able to exploit these opportunities, especially as many of them have an excellent command of the Russian language to work with new sources. It is important to note that they were also able to draw on the relevant archival materials of East European countries, once members of the Warsaw Pact. In addition, they have gained access to previously classified Israeli archival documents, as well as to documents from US archives relating to US Middle East policy. These contain considerable information on Soviet policy as assessed by Israeli and US diplomats and intelligence services.

The past two decades have been marked by the publication of several works by Israeli scholars specifically devoted to Soviet policy in the Middle East. In 2008, a collection of articles entitled *The Soviet Union and the June 1967 Six-Day War*[1] was published, edited by Y. Ro'i, an Israeli

historian and expert on the USSR, and B. Morozov, known for his works on the history of Soviet Jews. Almost at the same time a book by Israeli journalists and researchers I. Ginor and G. Remez, *Foxbats over Dimona* appeared[2]. The latter was much discussed because of the totally revised version of the events in May-June 1967 presented by the authors.

According to the orthodox version, the full-scale war that erupted on June 5, 1967 had been preceded by the crisis in May. The deteriorating situation on the Syrian-Israeli border, the threatening tone of some Israeli political and military figures' remarks addressed to the Syrians, and the unreliable Soviet information about the concentration of Israeli forces on the Syrian border provoked a response from Egypt[3]. Military mobilization was declared in Egypt and Egyptian forces moved into the Sinai peninsular. Subsequently, at President Nasser's request, the UN Emergency Force, which had served as a buffer between Egypt and Israel after the 1956 Suez crisis, was withdrawn from Sinai. On May, 22 Nasser declared the Strait of Tiran closed to ships travelling to Israel. The disruption of the freedom of navigation in the Gulf of Aqaba was perceived in Israel as *a casus belli*. After the failed diplomatic efforts to open the strait and to find a peaceful settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict, Israel decided to launch a pre-emptive strike against its Arab adversaries.

In this context, special attention in Western academic community has been paid to the importance of information about concentration of Israeli troops on the border with Syria conveyed by Moscow to Egyptian leaders in mid-May 1967. Because of the lack of access to official Soviet documents, many interpretations aroused regarding the sources of the 'Soviet message' and its aims. Y. Ro'i in 'The Soviet Union and the June 1967 Six Day War' adds his own version: its source, he believes, could have been intelligence information obtained either from the Soviet Embassy in Israel or from Soviet secret agents working in Israel. It could have been based on the May, 9 Knesset Foreign Affairs and Security Committee deliberations on Syria, but it could also have been, he suggests, a deliberately fabricated Soviet forgery aimed at pushing Nasser to fulfill his obligations under an earlier joint defense pact with Syria. In this way, Ro'i believes, the Soviets hoped to curb the Syrians' excessive radicalism for military action against Israel.[4]

In the same book B. Morozov claims to put an end to the debate over the 'Soviet message' on the basis of Soviet documents that became available during the period of *glasnost*. He argues that the decision to pass on intelligence to Egypt and Syria regarding Israeli military preparations

was taken at the highest level of Soviet government, in the Politburo, although the Soviet leadership was not sure of its reliability.[5] The most probable explanation for this action on the part of the Soviet government, in his view, was to get Nasser involved more deeply in the confrontation with Israel, which in turn, as it was hoped, would have increased his dependence on the USSR. At the same time, by this step the Soviets were trying to bind Egypt to provide Syria's security in a decisive way. Moscow believed, according to Morozov, that the threat of a two-front war would be a deterrent to Israel's military intentions. The 'Soviet message', the author concludes, was aimed at highlighting the Soviet Union's role in consolidating pro-Soviet forces in the Arab world in defending the interests of all Arab peoples against the US pro-Israeli stance.[6]

But Moscow underestimated Nasser's degree of independence in his politico-military maneuvers and had inadequate assessment of Israel's level of combat readiness. This determined the fatal role of the 'Soviet message' in the escalation of the crisis. But the authors' analysis of numerous documents leads them to conclude that Moscow was interested in managing the crisis but not in escalating it to a military phase. They rightly point out that, firstly, the Soviet leadership was aware that the Arab military victory was unlikely. Second, for the Soviets, deterring the Arabs was important to exclude US interference. The Americans warned that in the event of an attack on Israel, the US would be unable to honor its non-intervention pledges in the Arab-Israeli conflict.[7] The USSR therefore tried to prevent war until the last moment.[8]

As it seems, in the debates over the May 1967 crisis the role of the 'Soviet message' as a decisive factor in crisis escalation has been too exaggerated. It is not obvious that it influenced Nasser's decision to deploy troops in Sinai, as Morozov admits.[9] Besides throughout 1966 and the first half of 1967, Soviet official statements repeatedly blamed Israel for escalating tensions on the border with Syria.[10] Ro'i mentions that Moscow had also used tactics of crisis-orchestration between Egypt and Israel in earlier periods.[11] But it was in May 1967 that Soviet warnings became the trigger for the beginning of the war. As many previous studies have pointed out[12], the reasons for this are rather to be found in the regional situation itself: in Egypt, Syria and Israel, tensions had been building up that made war inevitable.

It is true that some recent Western studies have questioned the traditional version of history, which sees the June war as an inevitable consequence of Arab-Israeli strife and the Israeli offensive as preventive

and defensive. According to them, Israel had no need to defend itself, since Egyptian army in Sinai, as the new calculations of balance of forces evidence, was not capable of delivering a decisive blow to its territory, much less invading its borders. According to that logic, opening hostilities on Israel's part was not self-defense, but a clear rational decision in a situation where the balance of power suggested that it was in no danger of military defeat. Adherents of this theory believe that Israel quite deliberately started the war in order to prevent a possible political solution to the crisis, since for Israel it would have been a diplomatic defeat and would not have solved the problems it was facing.[13]

Although this interpretation is based on an extensive study of sources, it is still not free from conspiracy allusions. In particular, that the 'Soviet message' may have been based on false information deliberately fabricated by unnamed actors (obviously, Israelis) and given to Soviet intelligence in order to exacerbate threats to Israel. That would, first, justify a preemptive Israeli attack and, second, give leverage to those in the US who demanded that the administration align US Middle East policy more closely with Israeli interests.[14]

Contemporary Israeli historian G. Laron also believes that 'the focus of the story [of the 1967 war - T.N.] has now turned from the external threat, which had largely been a myth, to the way in which Israel's military establishment manipulated public opinion and strong-armed civilian leaders'.[15] Apparently, such views can explain a contrary emergent trend in Israeli historiography, which aims not only to refute any deliberate Israeli actions to wage war, but also to portray Israel as a victim of hostile external forces. Thus I. Ginor and G. Remez's monograph, *Foxbats over Dimona*, blames the Soviet Union not only for provoking the war but also for planning it in advance.

The authors argue that the 1967 war was the result of a grand Soviet-Egyptian-Syrian conspiracy, the main purpose of which was to destroy secret Israeli facilities in Dimona, where nuclear weapons were being developed. The aim of the plan was to use false warnings about Israel's military intentions towards Syria to provoke a situation threatening Israel in Sinai and thereby force it to make a pre-emptive strike. 'Aggressive' Israeli actions would have allegedly created the conditions and political justification for a retaliatory strike against Dimona by the Egyptian army, supported by the USSR. This plan, according to the authors, was not realized only because of Israel's crushing strike on the enemy's armed forces.

This is not the first time when 'the Dimona factor' has been woven into the history of the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. A number of previous works[16] have considered the possibility of an Arab strike on the Dimona nuclear complex. Israeli historian and diplomat M. Oren, in his famous book *Six Days of War*, which is one of the best documented studies of the 1967 war, believes that Israeli fears over the Dimona reactor were a significant catalyst for the 1967 war.[17]

There is no doubt that Israel's nuclear program was of concern to the Soviet leadership. Israel was seen as an outpost of imperialism in the Middle East and its nuclear program, aimed at producing weapons of mass destruction, was considered part of the anti-Soviet military preparations in the areas neighboring the Soviet Union. M. Dayan[18], for example, saw Moscow, not the Arabs, as the main target of Israel's nuclear deterrent.[19]

A surprising account of the Soviet leaders' views on this issue is given in the memoirs of a prominent Soviet diplomat O.A. Grinevsky. He claims that A.A. Gromyko, at a meeting at the Soviet Foreign Ministry, said that in May 1967 the Egyptians were indeed planning to attack important facilities on Israeli territory, but the Soviet leadership was not then aware of their plans to eliminate Israel's nuclear potential. A message was sent to Nasser urging him not to go to war. '...If we had been clear at the time that the main purpose of the strike was to destroy Israel's nuclear capability, we would not have discouraged Nasser,' the foreign minister said[20]. He believed that this would level up the military capabilities of Israel and the Arab countries, and then Egypt 'would not have agreed to the shameful Camp David peace.' These remarks by Gromyko date from a much later period (the early 1980s), and perhaps they reflected an unrealized thirst for revenge for the defeat suffered by Soviet diplomacy when it lost Egypt as an ally in its struggle 'against imperialism and Zionism'. Still, one can admire the visionary assessment of the Soviet minister, who saw Israel's development of nuclear weapons as political short-sightedness, which would lead other countries in the region to seek 'to obtain nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction only because Israel has obtained them'.[21]

This account by the head of Soviet diplomacy seems to confirm Ginor and Remez's suggestion that Israel's nuclear program was extremely irritating to Moscow. On the other hand, it also refutes any Soviet secret collusion with the Arabs aimed at eliminating the Israeli nuclear site.

The evidence for Soviet military intentions in the work of Ginor and Remez rests on a very shaky foundation: mainly the recollections of Soviet military personnel, written many years after the 1967 events in the Middle East. Thus one of the main pieces of evidence which the authors call the cornerstone of their book is the claim that Soviet pilots on the latest MiG-25 supersonic aircraft flew reconnaissance flights over Dimona in May 1967 to test the capabilities of Israeli air defenses, among other things. The flights were really carried out, but the authors' conclusions as to their aims are not confirmed by various memoir writers and researchers. Moreover, the Soviet test pilot A. Bezhevets, who worked in Egypt at the time, claimed that there were no MiG-25s in Egypt during the Six Day War.[22]

True, there is a mention of a Soviet Air Force unit stationed in Ukraine that received orders from the General Staff in the summer of 1967 to get a regiment of strike planes ready to bomb Israeli military targets.[23] Judging by the haste with which preparations for such an operation were carried out and the ridiculously absurd precautions taken, the Soviet command had no pre-designed plans for military operations in the Middle East. The order was cancelled allegedly because information about the impending attack was leaked to the Western press.[24]

The authors' claims about the Soviets preparing a landing on the coast of Israel are highly questionable. According to the recollections of the former First Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the USSR Navy I.M. Kapitanets, a sea landing operation was indeed planned in May 1967, but on the territory of Syria, in the port of Latakia to repel a possible invasion by Israeli troops.[25] The admiral said that for the landing operation they had tried to train in a short period of time inexperienced cadets on military service in the Mediterranean, and everyone breathed a sigh of relief when the operation did not take place. Russian naval history researcher M. Monakov attributes the military order to gather a landing force of 500 men near Latakia to June 10, 1967, i.e. to the final stage of the war.[26] He believes that 'in the conditions that evolved in the course of military operations between June 5 and 10, 1967, a successful marine landing from the ships of the squadron would hardly have been possible'.[27] The operation would have lacked the necessary logistic, engineering and hydrographic support. All these hurried, uncoordinated measures, taken in accordance with the changing military situation in the region, can only testify to the spontaneity of the Soviet military command's decisions and the absence of preliminary plans for entering the war.

The accounts sited by Ginor and Remez about the Soviet nuclear submarines that were sent to the coast of Israel with the view of potentially attacking the coastal targets are confirmed.[28] However, according to Monakov, the command of the Mediterranean Naval Group would not have been able to carry out this order, because the systems needed for such a strike had been removed from the ships before the outbreak of the June war.[29]

However sparse the information available, it refutes assumptions that the Soviet Union had long pre-existing plans to engage in war in the Middle East. CIA analyses of the period indicated that the Soviet Union was unlikely to use its armed forces to save the Arabs from defeat.[30] The same conclusions were reached by Israeli intelligence. In his article, Israeli author S. Shai provides documentary evidence that on the eve of the Six-Day War, Israel's leaders had correctly calculated that an Israeli military strike would not provoke a Soviet military response. It was this assessment of Soviet restraint that allowed the Israeli leadership to decide on a surprise attack when Washington made it clear that there would be no objection from the American side.[31]

Historians often become prisoners to their own ideas, unable to put the events they are examining into the broader historical context in which certain processes unfolded. I. Ginor and G. Remez provide their readers with a plethora of technical details about Soviet military aid to the Arab states, supposedly intended for a joint war against Israel, but they did not go into details of the international situation in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which was shaping Soviet foreign policy. The Middle East was far from the top of the Soviet foreign policy priorities during that period. The paramount task of limiting the danger of nuclear war eventually forced the USSR and the US to engage in disarmament negotiations. Troubled relations with West European countries and, above all, the rapid economic growth and remilitarization of West Germany were of great concern. The need to maintain control over the East European allies and the worsening relations with Maoist China in the 1960s attracted much attention of the Soviet leaders in the international arena. As CIA analysts pointed out, 'Soviet interests in the Middle East per se are important, but they are less critical than Soviet relations with the US, Europe, and China'.[32] The war in the Middle East would have inevitably entailed a clash with the USA. At a time when the main focus was on reducing international tensions and finding ways to coexist with adversaries in order to avoid a nuclear catastrophe, to plot a big war in

the Middle East would have been unjustified and even suicidal risky for the Soviet Union.

At the same time, it should not be forgotten that Soviet interests in the Middle East were not purely pragmatic. Doctrinal ideological attitudes played an important motivating role in foreign policy decisions. The Soviet leadership focused on expanding its ideological influence in the world, including through effective support for revolutionary, anti-imperialist forces in the 'Third World'. Party documents declared that 'the struggle for national liberation in many countries was evolving into a struggle against exploitative relations, both feudal and capitalist'.[33] In Marxist-Leninist discourse, the Middle East represented precisely the zone of national liberation struggle. Syria and Egypt were named among the countries that were most successful in carrying out the transformations towards a so-called socialist orientation. Soviet Communist party theorists blamed former colonial rulers as well as US - the bulwark of neo-colonialism - for their imperialist policies which allegedly impeded the development of the new independent countries. The Arab-Israeli conflict was therefore interpreted as a confrontation between Arab nationalism, the Arab people struggling for their national independence, and international imperialism, with Israel's foreign policy being its intrinsic part. Much of Soviet foreign policy in the Middle East was driven purely by orthodox dogmatism, even when it was not always in the interests of strengthening the Soviet position in the region.

Some academic studies tend to view the foreign policy aspect of Marxist-Leninist ideology as a propaganda cover for the geopolitical aspirations of the USSR. Evidently for this reason the influence of the ideological component of Soviet Middle East policy is only touched upon in passing in the works of Israeli authors. For example, Y. Ro'i writes that Soviet policy in the Middle East was dictated primarily by the Soviet position vis-à-vis the United States, and regimes in the 'Third World' were evaluated in terms of how they could be used to create instruments of power in accordance with the needs of Soviet foreign policy.[34] This was partly true, and the politico-military dimension was indeed of paramount importance for the USSR's Middle Eastern course. But the Cold War was characterized, among other things, by an acute rivalry between two hostile political ideologies: liberal capitalism and Marxism-Leninism. The prominent American expert in the field of international relations, Harvard University professor S. Walt wrote on this subject: '...each ideology saw itself as universally valid, proponents felt obliged to try

to spread them far and wide'.[35] It was seen as possible to spread these 'universal' ideas by any means necessary, including by supplying weapons to their 'like-minded' supporters, who were often from rather odious and aggressive regimes. By supporting the Arabs in the Middle East conflict, the Soviets were not only concerned with strengthening their own regional position against a global rival, but also counted on strengthening the 'socialist orientation' and anti-imperialist sentiment of the 'progressive Arab regimes'.

An additional important factor in the making of Soviet Middle Eastern policy was the ideological and political struggle with Maoist China for influence in the countries that recently shed colonial dependence. The Soviet leadership viewed the increased Chinese activity in the Middle East in the 1960s very negatively. On the one hand, Moscow feared that the interference of the Chinese, who actively supported Palestinian guerrillas and provided them with arms, was intended to open a 'second Vietnam' in the Middle East.[36] On the other hand, it had to counter Beijing's assertion that the two superpowers were colluding against the Arabs in order to crush their resistance to Israel. Moscow had to demonstrate its commitment to 'proletarian internationalism' against Chinese hegemonic claims, while at the same time seeking to prevent the Middle Eastern conflict from escalating.[37]

This complexity of the USSR's foreign policy in the region and the diversity of national interests as they were perceived by the Soviet leadership contradict the simplistic view presented in Ginor and Remez's book. Focusing on hypothetical Soviet plans for war preparation against Israel, they do not provide convincing reasons as to why the Soviet leadership would disregard the threat of a global war that would inevitably follow Soviet military intervention, and the resulting great damage to the normalization of relations with the West. However, their approach provides arguments for the still prevalent perception that the Soviet Union supported and led 'an ideological offensive against Israel's 'right to exist"[38] and that anti-Semitic sentiments were widespread among Soviet leaders, who saw Israel and world Jewry as a danger second only to their main enemy, the United States.[39]

It cannot be denied that the so-called 'apparatchik's anti-Semitism'[40] which was prevalent in the higher echelons of the Soviet leadership since Stalin's time played a role in Soviet Middle East policy in 1960-70. However, the official anti-Semitic campaign, although undoubtedly fueled by antipathy toward Jews and which became particularly intense

after the 1967 war, seems to have been designed primarily for domestic consumption. Zionism, which was proclaimed as an ideology of militant chauvinism and anti-communism, the Zionist movement, which gained momentum in the Soviet Union after the Israeli prompt victory in 1967 war, carried the danger of undermining socialist values and replacing them by so-called bourgeois attitudes. The 'high politics' demanded that the notion that Israel was a tool of Zionism and imperialism be implanted in the minds of the Soviet public, and this opened the way for propagandists who did not shy away from any means of denigrating the Jewish state.[41]

However, anti-Semitic attitudes were far from widespread among top Soviet leaders. G.V. Kostyrchenko, one of the most knowledgeable Russian researchers on relations between Soviet authorities and Jews, notes, for example, that 'Brezhnev was not personally anti-Semitic'.[42]

Israeli and Western studies often claim that anti-Semitism and rejection of Israel's right to exist played a crucial role in formulating Soviet policy in the Middle East. This, however, is not supported by the documents made available today. Thus, Leonid Brezhnev, in a conversation with Polish leaders in June 1967, explained: 'We recognize the state of Israel and are not going to oppose it, but we are against the aggressive policy of the Israeli leaders. It should be noted that the desire of the Arabs to destroy Israel was a mistake. The war was a harsh lesson, but things could have been much worse if the Arabs had succeeded in occupying Israel'.[43] The Soviet leaders saw their task in the Middle East conflict as preventing Israel from becoming a tool of the imperialist powers to eliminate the 'progressive Arab regimes in the UAR, Syria, Algeria'. Such fears had been fueled by the Suez crisis in the autumn of 1956, when Israel discredited itself by taking part in the Anglo-French military campaign of colonial revenge as Brezhnev pointed out in his report to the plenum of the CPSU Central Committee on the results of the June 1967 war.[44]

Israeli authors sometimes exaggerate the influence of issues related to Soviet Jews in Soviet foreign policy decision-making process regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict. Thus, Y. Ro'i, in his article 'The Soviet Jewish Reaction to the Six-Day War', states that '...the decision to sever diplomatic relations with Israel seems to have been dictated primarily by domestic considerations'. Referring to Israeli diplomats working in Moscow, he suggests that from late 1966, the Soviet government seriously considered cutting relations with Israel in order to impede any contact of Soviet Jews with the Jewish state's representatives.[45]

Ginor and Remez also argue that Moscow had allegedly planned to sever diplomatic relations with Israel in advance of the 1967 war. They consider this an important proof of their version that the USSR was preparing, together with the Arabs, to strike at the Jewish state.[46] As their main argument, they put forward the transmission of Kosygin's message of June 5, 1967 to the Israeli government through the Embassy of Finland (although the severing of relations took place on the 10th). However, on June 7, a statement by the Soviet government containing harsh warnings about the possible consequences for Soviet-Israeli relations if Israel continued military action was also conveyed through the Finnish Embassy in Moscow.[47] Apparently, with these diplomatic steps, Moscow was expressing its distrust of Israel, 'which has unleashed aggression against neighboring Arab states'.

Meanwhile, by the mid-1960s there were no evident signs of worsening Soviet-Israeli bilateral relations. There was even some warming in relations between the two countries, which was due, on the one hand, to the 'overspill' of Khrushchev's 'thaw' in domestic politics to foreign policy as well as the tendency to dampen anti-Semitic, anti-Israeli sentiments within the country. On the other hand, political developments in Israel, and the replacement of David Ben-Gurion - a rather vocal critic of the Soviet Union - as prime minister by the more moderate L. Eshkol, raised hopes for a change in the 'pro-imperialist' course of Israeli foreign policy.[48] Ambassador D.S. Chuvakhin even warned in March 1966: '...if we freeze our ties with Israel at their present level for a few more years, it will adversely affect our state interests in that region'.[49]

It seems that the breaking of diplomatic relations with Israel must be seen as the result of several political considerations. First, the strong anti-Israeli move was intended to alleviate the resentment of the Arabs, who expressed great indignation at the reluctance of the 'anti-imperialist' allies - the USSR and the Warsaw Pact countries - to become directly involved in military action. In terms of domestic politics, the desire to prevent Israel from carrying out propaganda work among Soviet Jews through diplomatic channels was also important. But even more crucial was to 'punish' Israel in order to demonstrate to the Soviet people the unshakable loyalty to the principles of 'anti-imperialist struggle and support for the national liberation movement of the Arab people'. It seems that the decisive role might have played the disagreements among Soviet leaders as to the further policy in the Middle East. Russian authors confirm that A.A. Gromyko proposed this harsh measure

in order to appease the 'hawks' that viewed the crushing defeat of the Egyptians and Syrians as a blow to Soviet political and military prestige and demanded revenge.[50]

For several decades some Western and Israeli authors have argued that it was the military events in the Middle East in May-June 1967 that influenced the reshuffle of the top Soviet leadership during that period.[51] B. Morozov refutes this misconception. On the basis of new archival documents and personal testimonies the author concludes that the reason for the removal of A.N. Shelepin and V.E. Semichastnyj from the central leadership positions as well as the removal of N.G. Egorychev from the post of First Secretary of Moscow City Committee of the CPSU in May-July 1967 was Brezhnev's general endeavor to concentrate the reins of power in his own hands and had nothing to do with the Middle East.[52] The circumstances and methods of Brezhnev's power struggle with his opponents and rivals in the second half of the 1960s are discussed in detail by the G.S. Schattenberg's biography of Leonid Brezhnev.[53] Schattenberg, the German author, fully confirms the conclusions drawn by Morozov. This destroys yet another myth, constructed in its time by Western Sovietologists, about the exaggerated influence of the events in the Middle East on the internal policy of the USSR.

However, the search for the secret, hitherto hidden motives behind Soviet behavior in the Middle East continues. Ginor and Remez's second book, *The Soviet-Israeli War 1967-1973. The USSR's military intervention in the Egyptian-Israeli Conflict*, calls into question the traditional view that Moscow exerted a restraining influence on the Arabs during this period, and seeks to prove that it was pushing Egypt toward military revenge.[54] The authors believe that after the humiliating defeat of Soviet weaponry and military doctrine in Egypt in 1967, the Soviet Union needed something more than just saving the prestige of the Egyptian regime to reaffirm its unwavering support to other regional allies. All diplomatic activity, in their view, served only as a distraction to cover up Soviet military preparations against Israel. In the authors' interpretation, it was Moscow that played the leading role in scheduling the Egyptian-Syrian offensive in October 1973, undertaking in collusion with the Egyptians the deceptive move of 'expulsion of the Soviet advisers' in order to mislead Israel.[55]

For all the many technical details about Soviet military assistance to Egypt gathered in this voluminous work, the reader is left with the feeling that the concept presented there is a mirror image of Soviet assessments of the Arab-Israeli conflict. In the Soviet view it was imperialist

interference and American encouragement of Tel Aviv's expansionist aspirations that caused the conflict in the Middle East. For its part, the book by Ginor and Remez places the Soviet Union as the main culprit in the military confrontation between Egypt and Israel. Just as the Soviets perceived that the conflict was orchestrated by the CIA, Ginor and Remez do not consider it an exaggeration to say that the KGB persuaded President Nasser to begin a 'war of attrition'.[56] What both contentions have in common is a strange disregard for the internal causes of the conflict; its dynamics determined by the interests and needs of the parties to it.

External interventions by both the USSR and the US, no doubt, fuelled the conflict. However, the military confrontation that followed the Six-Day War became protracted because of the clash of irreconcilable, opposing positions. Israel, relying on its military advantage, aimed to force the Arabs to make peace, to enter into direct negotiations and to use the captured Arab territories as a bargaining chip, in order to establish borders more conducive to its security interests. The defeated Arab side viewed Israel's gains solely as a result of its aggression. Arab leaders saw no reason to comply with the demand for an end to the state of war as long as Israeli forces were on Arab territories and the Palestinian problem remained unresolved. Such conflict of objectives thwarted all peace initiatives, whether they came from the parties themselves or from external actors (UN, USSR, US).

For example, Ginor and Remez believe that the only moment between 1967 and 1973, when it was possible to turn the tide, was the Israeli cabinet's secret decision on June 19, 1967, to return almost all the occupied territories in exchange for peace and recognition of Israel. But the stubborn desire of the Soviet leadership to avenge Israel's military humiliation of the Arabs got in the way.[57] In fact, such proposals were, above all, unacceptable to the Arab countries, since the withdrawal of Israeli troops was conditional upon the start of negotiations with Israel, including negotiations on territorial issues.[58] The Arabs declared that they did not intend to tie the question of the territorial liberation to the recognition of Israel. For them, the main aim was the *unconditional* withdrawal of Israeli forces from *all of the occupied territories*. Following the famous Arab formula of 'Three No's',[59] Israel totally withdrew the option of returning to the June 1967 lines even in the event of a peace treaty with the Arabs.

The Israeli authors also blame the Soviet Union for the failure of the first Rogers Plan[60] in December 1969. According to their account, the

USSR was already deploying Operation Caucasus to move Soviet military units into Egypt and was not interested in any peace initiatives. But they do not mention that the plan was also rejected by Israel, which saw it as a threat to its vital interests and an encouragement to Arab aggression.[61] The reasons for the Soviet rejection of the American initiatives did not lie in Moscow's belligerent preference of the military solution to the conflict, but rather in its distrust of Washington's unilateral peacemaking. Moscow saw it as American intention to substitute a comprehensive settlement for 'interim arrangements', beneficial to Israel and aiming to enhance US unilateral role as mediator to the detriment of the Soviet positions in the region.[62]

The authors pay special attention to the Soviet operation 'Kavkaz' – the deployment of 10,000 to 15,000 Soviets troops in Egypt in 1970. They believe this to have been part of a plan of direct military intervention, which was developed by the Soviet military command on its own initiative and had the long-term goal of preparing a canal-crossing offensive operation in the Suez Canal zone. The authors argue that the Soviet decision had no connection to Israel's destruction of the Egyptian air defense system in the Canal Zone in 1969 as well as to Israeli air incursions deeply into Egyptian territory to bomb its targets. They question the very appeal of G. Nasser to the USSR for help during his secret visit to Moscow in January 1970, tracing with enviable thoroughness all movements of the Egyptian president between December 1969 and January 1970.[63] Their detective investigation clearly seeks to absolve Israel of responsibility for provoking the swift Soviet response, although even the Israeli participants in the events acknowledged that the Israeli air force raids may have been the decisive factor leading to the Soviet intervention.[64]

A slightly different version of events is presented by D. Adamski, one of the authors of the collection already mentioned here. The deployment of Soviet troops in Egypt, he believes, was just a stage in the grand strategy of creating a regional counterweight to Western forces, following the deployment of Soviet naval forces there that had happened in the previous two years. Initially, the involvement of these forces in hostilities against Israel was not envisaged. However, when the escalation of hostilities by Israel in the Suez Canal zone in July 1969 threatened the Soviet Union's global interests in that theatre, the decision was made to deploy Operation 'Kavkaz'.[65]

Nevertheless, it seems that the dynamics of the Egyptian-Israeli con-

flict played a major role in the Soviet decision to move air defense and air force units to Egypt.[66] The Nasser regime was considered a pillar of Soviet influence in the Middle East. E.M. Primakov stressed the frailty of its position as early as August 1967, saying that 'the very presence of Israeli troops on the banks of the Suez Canal, an hour and a half drive from Cairo, clearly works against the regime'.[67] The Egyptians' helplessness in the face of Israeli incursions in 1969 and early 1970 was a clear sign to Moscow that Nasser was on the verge of political and military failure. Even CIA analysts acknowledged at the time that, for the USSR, the risk of direct confrontation with the US was receding before the threat of losing influence due to the new Arab-Israeli clashes or unfavorable political developments inside Arab countries, especially in Egypt.[68] Had it not been for the devastating attacks by Israel, whose leadership made little secret of its intention to overthrow Nasser,[69] the Soviets might have refrained from taking drastic steps.

The authors build a real conspiracy theory around the story of Egyptian President Sadat's 'expulsion' of the Soviet military contingent in July 1972. Though it has been extensively covered in historiography on the basis of numerous archival documents and personal testimonies, they revise the entire historical background in favour of their 'deception theory'. It presents Sadat's decision as a cunning maneuver, conceived and executed in collusion with Moscow, to conceal the real preparations for war with Israel and to blunt Israel's vigilance. They argue, that on the Soviet side, it was a complex operation, involving a secret agreement between Gromyko and Kissinger which stipulated that in return for the withdrawal of Soviet troops, the US side would seek Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories in accordance with Resolution 242. Since the Kremlin was aware that Israel was unlikely to accept the Soviet or Egyptian formula of reconciliation, 'so Moscow's perennial priority of legitimacy for a military solution would be achieved'.[70]

To begin with, there is not a single document or personal testimony that would confirm the existence of such Soviet-American agreement. The authors' entire theory is based on so-called 'reasoned speculations', which is basically their method of research.[71] As to the 'deception conspiracy', there is a lot of evidence that the Soviet military presence worried Sadat and irritated many in Egypt's political and military leadership. Moreover, getting rid of the Soviets was a signal to the Americans, with whom Sadat started a diplomatic game immediately after Nasser's death

in September 1970 – the fact, confirmed by a bulk of US archival documents, but hardly mentioned by the authors in their work.

Was Israel deceived by the 'expulsion ruse'? According to Dayan's recollections, the Israelis had a clear idea of how the Arab offensive in Sinai and the Golan Heights might unfold.[72] An extensive network of Israeli agents operated in Egypt.[73] As late as mid-1972, Israeli intelligence was giving very accurate data on the Egyptian military buildup in the Canal Zone. Thus the theory that the Soviet troops withdrawal could have affected Israel's military preparedness is unlikely to be justified.

Ginor and Remez built their version of events largely on a terminological confusion. In western accounts the Soviet withdrawal from Egypt was often referred to as the 'expulsion of Soviet advisers'. An important clarification on this point was made by D. Adamski. He pointed out that the Egyptian actions in July 1972 should not be called 'expulsion of advisers'. It was the withdrawal of the Soviet military contingent while more than 1,000 advisers and technicians, as he estimates, remained in Egypt to service combat equipment and to train local military personnel.[74]

The Israeli authors' proposed interpretation of Soviet policy as a triumph of Soviet militarist aspirations in the Middle East does not fit into the real Soviet regional interests. The Kremlin was very skeptical about the likelihood of Arabs' military victories.[75] On a regional level, in case of an Arab defeat it would have entailed great reputational damage for the Soviets, both politically and militarily. From a global perspective, Arab military adventurism could have jeopardized the nascent positive momentum in Soviet-American relations. In Washington, it was concluded that 'since the ouster from Egypt, the Soviets had sought to guard against over-involvement in any one state by developing ties with a larger number of countries in the area'.[76] Importantly, there is no evidence in the available US intelligence and State Department documents of a joint Soviet-Egyptian offensive planning against Israel.

This is only a small part of the episodes on which I.Ginor and G. Remez's conclusions can be challenged. By focusing exclusively on the USSR's interaction with the Arab states, above all Egypt, Ginor and Remez completely excluded Israeli-American relations from the scope of their study. This distorts their assessment of the decisions made by the Soviets and Arabs. In the Soviet-American bilateral negotiations on the Middle East, initiated by Henry Kissinger, the Israeli authors have only emphasized the maneuvering or tactical concessions he made in the interest

of détente or to strengthen his own position in the American administration. The whole complex game that Kissinger played to secure Israel's interests has been left out of the picture.

Despite the controversial nature of the concept put forward in the book, it must be acknowledged that the amount of work the authors have done, the number of sources, memoirs and monographic literature they have used deserves respect. They have gathered much of unknown information about the Soviet military participants in the 'forgotten' war in the Middle East. These people, for reasons of secrecy, were not even accorded the status of war veterans when back in the USSR. Much has recently been unearthed regarding this obsession with secrecy, which was characteristic of the entire Soviet military involvement in the Arab-Israeli wars. While the Soviet government informed Soviet citizens about the 1979 invasion of Afghanistan, the Soviet press indignantly labeled the claims that Soviet troops were fighting in Egypt and Syria as bourgeois propaganda. Until now, as Ginor and Remez rightly point out, there is no access to archival materials from this period either in the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs or in the military and intelligence archives of the Russian Federation. This is indeed an impediment to a truthful and objective study of an important historical phase of Soviet policy in the Middle East.

However, it is doubtful whether the authors' choice of relying on the testimony of the junior military personnel and interpreters who fought on the Egyptian-Israeli front can provide a more accurate picture of Soviet involvement in Middle Eastern affairs than the recollections of politicians, statesmen and diplomats. Human memory is selective, especially if memoirs were written many years after the events they describe. Moreover, the authors, mostly the military men saw the events through the prism of the orders given to them, and in their writings they reproduce the ideology of their military command. This narrows down the idea of the goals that the USSR pursued.

From the outset the authors declare their distrust of traditional memoirs.[77] For example, they call the accounts of the famous Egyptian journalist and political figure M. Heikal a total fabrication aiming to satisfy his personal interests. Nevertheless they happily refer to those excerpts of Heikal's writings that confirm their own ideas.[78] On the contrary, what contradicts their version is declared fiction.[79] The memoirs of the well-known Soviet diplomat V. Israelyan - an authoritative source on Soviet policy in the 1973 war, which completely refutes the version put forward

by Ginor and Remez about Soviet-Egyptian collusion to unleash the war, are hardly mentioned in the book.[80]

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The Soviet policy during the 1967-1973 Arab-Israeli wars was neither a model of 'struggle for peace and brotherly assistance', as Soviet propaganda proclaimed, nor a modern version of a 'crusade' against the Holy Land, as some contemporary authors try to portray it. A complex interweaving of global and regional interests, ideological indoctrination of the leaders and internal political struggles for power influenced the political decision-making process. The collection edited by Y. Ro'i and B. Morozov attempts to comprehend this complex phenomenon in its various aspects on the basis of accepted scientific methodology and analysis of various contradictory sources. Although some of the authors' judgments may raise objections, there can be no questioning of their academic rigor.

The works of Ginor and Remez rather fall in the investigative journalism genre, which is often characterized by a large number of allegedly sensational facts, hiding many essential details of the subject from the uninformed reader. So-called selective authenticity - the choosing of facts and documents in favor of a concept formulated in advance, while ignoring everything that contradicts it, is sadly rather common these days, either in journalism or in biased historical works.

The Israeli authors are also no strangers to drawing dubious parallels: the demonic characteristics of Soviet policy, which, in their view, has always consisted only '*in maximizing its nuisance value against US hegemony*', are compared to the contemporary regional policy of the Russian Federation. All this reduces the credibility of their works presented as a genuine 'new word' in Middle Eastern studies.

[1] *The Soviet Union and the June 1967 Six Day War*. Ed. by Yaacov Ro'i and Boris Morozov (Stanford University Press, 2008).

[2] Ginor I., Remez G. *Foxbats over Dimona: The Soviets' Nuclear Gamble in the Six-Day War* (Yale University Press, 2007) – Foxbat is a NATO designation for the Soviet supersonic reconnaissance jet MiG25.

[3] Up to 1971 Egypt kept the name of the United Arab Republic. In this article the author uses the contemporary name of the state.

[4] Ro'i Y. Soviet Policy toward the six-day war trough the prism of Moscow's relations with Egypt and Syria. In *The Soviet Union and the June 1967 Six Day War*, p. 5.

[5] Morozov B. The outbreak of the June 1967 war in light of Soviet documentation. In *The Soviet Union and the June 1967 Six Day War*, pp.46-47.

[6] Morozov B, pp. 52-53.

[7] *Op.cit*. Ro'i Y., pp .9, 11.

[8] *Op.cit*. Roi Y., pp.7, 8; Morozov B., pp. 54-55.

[9] *Op.cit*., Morozov B., p. 46.

[10] See Record of Conversation, Deputy Foreign Minister V.S.Semenov with the Ambassador of Israel in the USSR K.Katz, November 9, 1966. In *Blizhnevostochnyj konflikt. Iz dokumentov Arkhiva vneshnej politiki Rossijskoj Federatsii*. Otv. red. Naumkin V.V. V.2 1957-1967, p. 506 (Moscow: Izdatelstvo 'Materik' 2003) (in Russian).

[11] Ro'i Y. Soviet Policy toward the six-day war trough the prism of Moscow's relations with Egypt and Syria. In *The Soviet Union and the June 1967 Six Day War*, p. 5.

[12] See, for example, Oren M. *Six Days of War. June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle Eas*t (L.: Penguin Books, 200)3.

[13] Popp R. Stumbling decidedly into the Six-Day war. In *Middle East Journal,* volume 60 №2 Spring 2006; Quigley J. *The Six Day War and Israeli Self-Defense: Questioning the Legal Basis for Preventive War* (Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[14] *Op. cit*. Popp R, p. 293.

[15] Laron G. The Historians' war over the six-day war. Available at: https://www.thenation.com/article/historians-war-six-day-war/ (accessed at: 25/05/2019).

[16] See, for example, Cohen A. *Israel And the Bomb* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1988); Hersh S. *The Samson Option: Israel, America And the Bomb* (London: Faber&Faber, 1991).

[17] *Op.cit*. Oren M. *Six Days of War*, p .76.

[18] Moshe Dayan was Israel's defense minister from June 5, 1967 to June 3, 1974.

[19] Ginor I., Remez G. *The Soviet-Israeli war 1967-1973. The USSR's military intervention in the Egyptian-Israeli conflict* (Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 72.

[20] Grinevskij O. *Stsenarij dlya tret'ej mirovoj vojny. Kak Izrail' chut' ne stal ee prichinoj* (Moscow: Olma-Press. 2002), pp. 112-113.

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CHAPTER 3. ISRAEL AND OTHERS. SEVERAL ASPECTS

TATIANA A. KARASOVA

The Main Factors of Russian-Israeli Relations at the Contemporary Stage

Foreign policy aspects of Russian-Israeli relations

From the standpoint of Russia's national interests, the Middle East is the region of utmost importance, especially considering its influence on the Islamic regions of Russia. This determines the importance of developing a foreign policy that helps preserve the territorial integrity of Russia and protect its economic and political stability and security. From a geopolitical point of view, this region provides Russia with access to the Mediterranean Sea, linking it with the countries of the Eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East and North Africa, home to Russia's potential partners, even though they are not her closest neighbors.

Israel, an emerging regional power in the Middle East, could not but attract Russian interest. In the eyes of the Russians, the importance of Israel as a key player in the Middle East has three dimensions: foreign policy, social and historical-emotional. The foreign policy dimension of bilateral relations has three levels: global, regional and bilateral Russian-Israeli relations. Russian foreign policy is mainly built on the idea of a multipolar world, where Russia sees itself as a great power. Moscow does not impose its political model and foreign policy on other states, stating that there are multiple models beyond Western liberalism and its plans to 'promote democracy' along Western lines. Russian foreign policy traditionally relies on rich historic experience of interaction with different states. We must not forget that Russia only by land borders on 14 states. So, Russia's approach employs various methods and tools to promote its own interests while respecting the interests and historical paths of other countries. It also takes into account recent historical events which have led to fundamental changes globally and in the Middle East.

As the Israeli military and political experts recognize, the United States is no longer the undisputed hegemon in the Middle East. Russia is a military and diplomatic actor in the Middle East. Since well before 2015, when it intervened in the Syrian civil war, Russia has been seeking additional outlets for its military and economic influence in the Middle East. Russia is now a prominent factor in Syria and Libya, a partner of Iran, a partner with ambitions in Egypt, and an interlocutor with the Gulf states (especially the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia), Israel, the Afghan government, and the Palestinians, among many other political entities.

At the regional level, Russia has not fundamentally challenged US and Israeli cooperation in the region, although the widening scope of Russia's activities certainly affects the interests of Israel and the United States. Russia's current Middle East foreign policy does not imply an artificial juxtaposition of East and West. Russia seeks to develop friendly relations with all Middle Eastern countries, including Israel. Russia has positioned itself as a mediator in major regional conflicts, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Moscow's main objective here is to strengthen its status as a key mediator capable of simultaneously balancing the interests of Israel and its Arab neighbors. Russia's working relationship with both Muslim camps, Sunni and Shiite, according to many Israeli political scientists, is an asset that the Americans do not have at their disposal, often allowing the Russians to be at the head of Middle East mediation. The Russian side has tried to reformat negotiating space to help solve regional contradictions. Traditionally, the Middle East vision of the security system is associated with the great powers' perceptions. Today, Russian experts believe, a common conception of regional security needs to be agreed between regional actors themselves on the basis of the so called '3 baskets': security, economy and humanitarian cooperation – that was the Helsinki process format more than 40 years ago.

Regarding its Middle Eastern policy, the Russian leadership has emphasized the importance of Israel's security. Russia has also tried, although so far unsuccessfully, to improve its relations with the West and especially the United States on the basis of its balanced relations with Israel. For its part, although Israel is nervous about the Russian attempts to build relations with such Middle East powers as Iran, and some organizations like Hamas and Hezbollah, the Jewish state hopes for Moscow's deterrent role in relations with its unfriendly neighbors.

Recently, the situation in the Middle East region has been changing rapidly, leaving little time for global players to react. The speed with which Russian and Israeli diplomats and the expert community are able to react depends to a large extent on their involvement in the current political process. Today, more than ever, regional influence depends on the ability to develop instruments in order to resolve regional and global crisis quickly and effectively.

Overall, the development of relations with Israel is certainly in the Russian interest. Israel's high-tech economy, its experience in developing various sectors of the economy under difficult natural conditions, opportunities for joint development of new gas fields, and the fight against terrorism are just some of the areas in which cooperation could benefit the Russians. There are objective overlaps between Russian and Israeli geopolitical and other interests that contribute to the development of bilateral relations. Both Russia and Israel, despite their different scales, occupy an intermediate position between East and West. This can be felt at the cultural, civilizational and geopolitical levels. Security is the most pressing problem for the two countries with Islamic radicalism posing both internal and external threats for them.

In our view, Israel, for its part, is also interested in improving its relations with Russia. For Israel, diversification of foreign policy was becoming increasingly necessary in order to bolster cooperation in fighting terrorist threats but also due to the difficulties in Israeli relations with Europe, and the impending withdrawal of the United States from the Middle East. During the long premiership of Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel tried to forge a more independent foreign policy, including economic and military spheres which prompted the country to develop relations outside the West - with Russia, China, India, Brazil and other important powers.[1]

The current stage of bilateral Russian-Israeli relations is characterized by complexity and ambiguity. The substantive part of bilateral relations still cannot be assessed unequivocally. The sides recognize that over the last few years they have generally been able to conduct an open dialogue on major issues of international politics and bilateral relations. However, this is often where the achievements are exhausted. Even when sharing general common values, the two countries' understanding of events in the region diverge significantly, resulting in rather contradictory positions.[2]

There are a number of problematic 'sore points' between Russia and Israel that have a significant impact on bilateral relations. It is no secret that the state of Russian-Israeli relations is very sensitive to what is happening in Russian relations with Iran and Syria. Thus the bilateral relationship between Russia and Israel can only be grasped in a wider global context. Russia's interests as a global power are broader than Israel's regional interests and may differ from them.

The nature and complexity of conflicts in the Middle East often exacerbates differences in the Russian-Israeli relations. Russia actively supports the development of the peaceful nuclear program of Israel's main strategic adversary, Iran. Israel and the West have no doubt that Iran's nuclear program has a military component but Moscow, as well as Beijing, categorically rejected any initiatives by Americans and Europeans to increase pressure on Tehran. Then, Russia does not consider Hamas and Hezbollah terrorist organizations, which is fundamentally different from how Israel sees these groups. And finally, in contrast to Israel's position, Russia sees the Palestinian-Israeli conflict as 'pivotal' for the entire situation in the Middle East and highlights its key role in threatening the security and stability of the region as well as efforts to eradicate extremism and terrorism. Indeed there are several key strategic issues on which the two parties disagree. The most significant of these concern Iran, Syria, and Palestine.

According to most Israeli analysts, although the recent turbulent events in the Middle East region (increased tension in Libya and Iraq, aggravation of the situation between the US and Iran) have reduced the importance of the Palestinian conflict, the disagreements with Russia on this issue persist. Indeed, great differences remain in the Russian and Israeli approaches to the parties of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Russia is consistently favoring the creation of a Palestinian state and is trying to bring the conflicting parties' positions closer together. This goal was, for example, the subject of President Putin's meeting with the PNA leadership in Bethlehem in January 2020. The Russian President, when attending the international Holocaust remembrance forum in Jerusalem (it attracted representatives from 49 countries), held talks with the PA President on the pressing problems of Palestinian-Israeli relations. Vladimir Putin said that Russia was ready to 'increase cooperation' with the PA in economic and humanitarian fields, as well as to actively assist in resolving issues related to the Arab-Israeli settlement. Russia supports a two-state solution for Israeli-Palestinian conflict and has relations with

several Palestinian political parties. Russia does not consider Hamas as a terrorist organization and continues to diplomatically negotiate with it. Russia obviously has its own interests and remains loyal to her long-time friends, including the Palestinian Authority. At the same time, Russia cooperates with Israel and enables her to pursue her security interests, while Israel refrains from criticizing Russia.

The United Nations, Russia and the European Union met virtually in May 2021 to discuss relaunching their long-stalled efforts to get Israel and the Palestinians to negotiate a two-state solution to the decades-old conflict. A brief statement from the four Middle East mediators, known as the Quartet, said envoys discussed returning 'to meaningful negotiations that will lead to a two-state solution, including tangible steps to advance freedom, security and prosperity for Palestinians and Israelis, which is important in its own right'.[3]

Russo-Iranian relations have some special characteristics. The two states have different approaches to the issues of the future prospects for the Middle East. Russia has no wish to be a part of pro-Shiite, or pro-Sunny camps, but has to take into account the 17 million Sunnis living in Russia. Iran was perhaps concerned that Russia's military involvement had overshadowed the Iranian assistance in Syria. Differences between Russia and Israel in the approach to the Iranian nuclear program are particularly acute. In Israel, the threat of Iran acquiring nuclear weapons is perceived as existential. In the face of ongoing security problems Israelis see any, even hypothetical possibility of challenge to Israel's monopoly on nuclear weapons in the Middle East as completely unacceptable. There are significant differences of opinion between Russia and Israel on the Joint Comprehensive Action Plan (JCPOA) - the agreement reached in 2015 on Iran's nuclear program. Russians viewed the withdrawal of the US from the nuclear deal with Iran under Trump as having a negative impact on the situation with nuclear weapons worldwide. Moscow took the American démarche on withdrawal from the agreement as a further confirmation of Washington's unilateralism. Such a step, according to the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. would 'clearly harm the predictability, security, stability and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons around the world', could aggravate the problem of the 'Iranian nuclear dossier' and lead to other unpredictable consequences. Moscow believes that the Agreement must be complied with. Otherwise, Russia might have to deal either with Iran, which tacitly possesses nuclear weapons, or with a large-scale war near its southern borders.

Jerusalem is against the prospect of the United States returning to the Iran nuclear deal, from which Trump withdrew unilaterally back in 2018. Regardless of any pro-Israel assurances uttered by the current administration, Biden again is seeking to revive the JCPOA and the two-state solution, both of which have been rejected by Israel. Though the Biden administration hasn't rejected the Abraham Accords, their involvement in them and in the final negotiations with Saudi Arabia to join the Accords will co-opt the Arab states to once again back the two-state solution and other anti-Israel measures they intend taking. The results of the last Iranian presidential election in June 2021 perhaps could strengthen the antagonism of Iranian hardliners who consider the restart of the JCPOA deal as a waste of time.[4]

Russia sees no fundamental incompatibility between maintaining its relations with both Iran and Israel. Moreover, Russia emphasizes developing mutually beneficial ties with these two key power centers in the Middle East region. By maintaining and developing relations between them, Moscow would like to play the role of a potential mediator between major players in the Middle East in many conflicts in its tangled politics.

Perhaps Israel's rapprochement with Russia creates additional potential for tension between Russia, Israel and US. Despite Biden's inevitable focus on domestic problems, he won't be able to ignore the Middle East. His task is to reduce US involvement in the region without allowing Russia to take advantage.[5] Russian presence in the Middle East is not intolerable at current levels. It does not necessarily run counter to core US interests in the region; but it does complicate the realization of these interests and is detrimental to the degree that Russian policy is motivated by the goal of limiting US influence and damaging US prestige.[6] The new US administration will also possibly face difficulties in its relationship with Israel. Biden opposes the expansion of Jewish settlements, he does plan to return to the Iran nuclear deal.

It is also worth noting the differences in the approaches of Russia and Israel to the situation around Syria. The Russian strategic line on Syria was based to the opposition to the regime change of the legitimate Syrian government by Islamic radicals opposing it, including jihadists. For Israel, the main threat was an Iran-Assad-Hezbollah axis, which led to the creation of a powerful military 'fist' in Lebanon aimed at Israel.[7] Events in Syria developed for Israel in such a way that it was in need of an influential intermediary in its efforts to counter Hezbollah as an Iranian 'proxy'

and maintain security in the Golan Heights. This view was confirmed by the Deputy Israeli Prime Minister for Diplomatic Affairs and former Israeli Ambassador to Washington Michael Oren. He believed that the US cannot be a mediator between Syria, Iran and Turkey. Although the US remains a strong Israel's ally, the US had little leverage on the ground. 'America did not invest in Syria. It is not in the game,' commented Oren.[8]

As the Syrian conflict escalated, Israeli-Russian relations were seriously tested. In September 2018, Syrian air security systems mistakenly shot down an Ilyushin-20 Russian reconnaissance aircraft during an attack by Israeli F-16 aircraft on targets in the province of Ladhiqiya. Nevertheless, benevolent bilateral relations have generally been maintained. Although Russia has strategic interests in Syria, it has no intentions to keep a military presence there forever. During the civil war in Syria the Russian leadership assured Israelis that Russia's military actions would not pose a threat to Israel security. Putin and Netanyahu reached mutual understanding how the two militaries can 'de-conflict' in Syria. Israel had security coordination with Russia on the ground as well in the air. On March 2019 Netanyahu announced the establishment of a joint Israeli-Russian team to pursue the withdrawal of all foreign troops deployed in Syria.[9] Russian interests for today are to keep good, friendly relations with Syria, to maintain its naval base in Tartus and remain the arms supplier to Syria. As for political resolution of the situation in Syria, Russia supports the Syrian people who elected the Assad government and is ready to participate in the humanitarian revival of the country.

However, the threat of further aggravation of the situation in Syria does not disappear completely. Russia's position on this issue aims to maintain a power balance. Moscow is interested in preventing a conflict that could lead to a revival of the Islamic State. It also wants to avoid a large-scale war between Iran and Israel, as it could undermine the Russian success in Syria. Most regional players rely on Russia as a guarantor of stability, and Moscow does not want to lose this status.[10] However, there is a risk that Russian influence alone will not be enough to achieve all these goals.

Israel reacts painfully to any kind of friendly Russian activities such as Russian military-technical cooperation with Syria, the work of Russian specialists in the construction of a nuclear power plant in Iran, and the invitation of the Hamas representatives for talks in Moscow have provoked strong reactions from Israeli officials. However, each time such crisis situations ended with mutual recognition by both sides of the non-

conflictual nature of mutual relations and unwillingness to inflame the situation.

It is important to emphasize that the Russian-Israeli relations have been developing within clearly defined diplomatic and political boundaries that are well understood by both parties.[11] The positive steps taken by Israel towards Russia, such as Israel abstaining in the March 2014 vote in the UNGA on the Crimea and not joining the US and European sanctions against Russia, strengthened the bilateral relationship. For its part, in the same 2014 Russia not only gave up its usual criticism of the Israeli military operation in Gaza in response to the shelling of Israeli territory, but President Putin also expressed his understanding of the reasons for this military action.[12] Moscow also recognized West Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in April 2017, at the same time reaffirming its position on East Jerusalem as the future capital of Palestine.

In the current situation in the Middle East, the problem of choosing a regional and strategic partner according to the formula 'who is 'friends' with whom and against whom' is particularly topical. Israel, like Russia, is seeking to expand its capabilities on the global and regional arena by seeking reliable strategic partners. For Israel, this is primarily a matter of further developing ties with Russia. A change in the role of the 'Russian factor' in the current global and regional political situation, on the other hand, may contribute to a change in the Israeli foreign policy doctrine in the direction of Russia towards a qualitatively new level of bilateral relations.

Indeed, despite significant differences, overall bilateral relations at government level are developing rather successfully. Among Israel's political class, there is an understanding that Russia is a friendly state and that many political, economic and even demographic problems are similar in the two countries. Currently, Russia considers Israel to be its potential partner on the international stage, especially as a deterrent to the radical Islamist threat. Apart from terrorist organizations Russia has no enemies in the Middle East.

Given that the terrorist threat has now become comprehensive, and the Middle East is one of the most challenging regions in this respect, it is paramount to develop mutual cooperation at all possible levels. Tangible progress has been made in recent years in the fight against radical Sunni terrorism, exemplified by such organizations as al-Qaeda and the Islamic State (ISIS). Russia, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of

Israel, has made a huge contribution to the anti-terrorist struggle in the Middle East.[13]

Social and humanitarian dimension of Russian-Israeli relations

In addition to the specific foreign policy components of Russian-Israeli relations, the connections that Bar-Ilan University specialist Joshua Krasna defines as 'soft components' of interstate relations - social, cultural and historical - are of growing importance.[14] For Russia, Israel is a country that shares its spiritual, cultural and historical heritage. Russia and Israel, according to some experts, are bound by some special 'tacit' bonds.[15]

The process of forming bilateral relations has its own history. Despite the almost total isolation between the Soviet Union and Israel during the period of broken diplomatic relations, there were still some humanitarian and cultural ties between the two countries. These ties helped the Russians to raise the veil over the events and processes taking place in Israel and to get to know its life.

Traditionally, cooperation in science and education, social and humanitarian interests are linked to the so-called 'Russian factor' - the 'Russian' community in Israel and Jewish communities in Russia. In turn, a large well-developed Jewish community in Russia is of particular importance to Israel. This has been linked to questions about the role of nongovernmental contacts in Russian-Israeli relations, and ethnic aspects of relations. An important component of improving relations with Israel is a fundamentally different attitude to the Jewish question at the state level in modern Russia. The key ideological and political issue in Israeli foreign policy commitment to protect Jews around the world. The Jewish community in modern Russia, as J. Krasna puts it, 'thrives in the atmosphere of tolerance of the (Russian political - T.K.) regime'.[16]

Among Israeli academics, there are certain differences in their assessment of the role of historical and socio-cultural ties in Russian-Israeli relations. In our opinion, cultural cooperation and humanitarian ties are vibrant and sustainable aspects of Russian-Israeli relations. Russian culture has always been and will continue to be significant in Israel's cultural space, due to historical reasons: the founders of the Yishuv and later the Israeli state were mainly from Russia. The large Russian-speaking segment of the population makes it possible to maintain cultural ties with

Russia. However, according to the Israeli art historian Y. Tavor, mutual enrichment in music, theatre and literature not only reflects the needs of the Russian-speaking audience, but also works as a cultural bridge between Russia and Israel.

Many Israeli diplomats, officials and analysts underestimate the importance of these connections for Russia, believing that the main driver of bilateral relations is purely pragmatic state interests. However, Russian history and its artifacts 'occupy an important place in Israeli social consciousness'.[17] Russian culture, worldview and lifestyle have become a part of both the Russian-speaking community in Israel as well as a factor in bilateral relations.

Indeed, the so-called 'Russian factor' brings a certain specificity to the Russian-Israeli relations. The 'Russian-speaking community' creates the need for Russia to maintain good, friendly relations with the Russian-speaking population of Israel, at the same time acknowledging Israel's connection to the Jewish community in Russia. Russia is interested in ensuring that the Russian-speaking Israelis, while remaining loyal citizens of Israel, perceive Russia positively and maintain close relations with it. This is facilitated by such initiatives as the restoration of Russian citizenship, payment of pensions and giving the right to vote for the Israelis of Russian origin.

Many Israelis of Russian origin still maintain close ties with Russia by reading Russian literature and the press, they follow Russian television channels. The Russian authorities see them as an important factor in the development of bilateral relations. Moreover, the existence of the Israeli 'Russian community' is in the broader context of those who, in the words of Russian political scientist Mikhail Suslov, make up the so-called group of 'global Russians', the individuals who left Russia 'voluntarily'.[18] In our view, the development of bilateral relations has been influenced by similarities between Russia and Israel in terms of their respective historical self-consciousness and self-perception. This similarity stems from the ideological continuities that grew out of the countries' respective histories and which still influence their domestic and foreign policy. Not least, this also applies to the history of bilateral relations.

Let us turn to those socio-cultural aspects of bilateral relations that are larger than the Russian-speaking sector of Israeli society. These aspects include the memory of the Second World War and the terrible crimes of Nazism such as the Holocaust. Among its victims are the millions of Jews

- citizens of the Soviet Union. The State of Israel has always considered the role of the Soviet Union in World War II as the liberator of Europe and savior of the Jews. Israel has never equated Stalinism with Hitlerism, indicating that the Nazi regime unleashed the Holocaust and that the USSR made a decisive contribution to the victory over Nazi Germany and the liberation of Jews from concentration camps. Thus the time when Jewish soldiers in the Red Army fought the Nazis for a common victory created the future foundation for the partnership between the two countries. From this point of view, many Israeli researchers consider the nature of Russian-Israeli relations unique, since both countries are united in opposing the threat of neo-Nazi ideology and organizations.[19]

The historical memory of the Palestinian Yishuv population was deeply shaped by the events of World War II. The Jews who lived in Palestine during the war followed with increasing concern the actions of the German General E. Rommel's army, who in February 1941 was assigned by Hitler to command the African Corps. His goal was to occupy the Suez Canal and cut the British oil supplies, to open the way to the oil fields of the Middle East, and to reach Iranian and Baku oil fields in the Caspian Sea. The African Corps made its way to Tunisia and Libya. According to Richard Evans, the author of *The Days of War 1939-1945*, the victories of Rommel's African Corps led to the terrible suffering of Jews who had long lived in Tunisia. Walter Ralph, chief of the Gestapo in Tunisia, unleashed a wave of terror against Tunisian Jews.[20] Their property was confiscated and over 4000 Jewish youths were sent to labor camps near the front line. German historians at the University of Stuttgart, who worked with archives from Nazi Germany, wrote, that Hitler, in accordance with his program to exterminate Jews living in non-European countries and Russia, planned to exterminate Jews living in Palestine. Specifically, Athens-based SS units were under orders to exterminate around 500,000 Jewish refugees from Europe after the planned invasion of Palestine.[21]

After the end of WWII, the question of establishing a Jewish state was raised again. The role of the USSR in this was paramount. The Soviet foreign minister Andrey Gromyko's speech to the UN General Assembly in favor of creating a Jewish state was crucial. In May 1948, when the state was proclaimed, the first to recognize it de facto and de jure was the USSR and the USA (who recognized it de facto).

The memory politics of the Second World War has become an important element of Israeli state policy. The Israelis are deeply grateful to the western allies for their great contribution to defeating the axis powers.

The recognition of the decisive role of the Red Army in the victory over Nazism is the distinguishing feature of Israeli leaders regardless of their party affiliation. Many party leaders, in particular former President Sh. Peres and Israeli Prime Minister B. Netanyahu, spoke about the decisive role of the Red Army and the people of the Soviet Union, which made it possible to achieve victory in World War II.[22]

One of the main factors that shaped the Israeli official attitude towards World War II in Israel was the mass immigration of Soviet Jews into Israel in the 1990s and the subsequent establishment of the Russian-speaking community. Jewish immigrants from Russia changed discourse on WWII in Israel revealing important facts that native Israelis had been often unaware of. For example, that half a million Jews fought in the Soviet Red army during World War II and 200,000 of them died in battle. There were more than 300 Jewish generals and admirals in the Red Army, and 148 Jews received the high title of Hero of the Soviet Union. The Nazis killed one third of Europe's Jews - 6 million out of 18 million, but 1.5 million at the same time fought in the allied armies of the anti-Hitler coalition.

About 20,000 Great Patriotic War veterans came to Israel from the Soviet Union. In Israel, the veterans are socially active to preserve the memory of the war, the victory, their battle glory and heroism, for a place in the Israeli collective memory. As a result of the inclusion of the Russian-speaking community in the domestic political agenda, changes in the attitude of Israeli society to the memory of the Second World War have intensified. In fact, the veterans' movement today is the most organized and Russian-speaking public organization in Israel with many branches throughout Israel.

Decisions at the state level to officially recognize veterans and provide financial support through legislation did not come about immediately. The official doctrine today is: 'The State of Israel owes its existence to those who shed blood in the fight against the German death machine that exterminated millions of Jews'. Of particular importance was the World War II Veterans' Status Act, which was adopted in 2000.[23] This law officially recognized Victory Day in Nazi Germany as Israel's bank holiday and established a number of benefits for war veterans. Since 2015, Victory Day in World War II has been included in the Jewish religious calendar. This holiday commemorated the fact that 70 years back this day marked the beginning of a new era in Jewish history, when the Jewish people escaped the threat of physical destruction by the German Nazis, embarked on the path of rebirth and soon returned to their country. This

day was officially included in the calendar of Jewish holidays and commemorative dates at a meeting of the Israeli Parliament (Knesset).

Monuments of WWII heroes are being immortalized. The Israeli state is actively involved in this process. Israel already has 42 monuments and memorial steles in honor of Soviet soldiers-liberators. In 2012, a memorial to Soviet soldiers who died in the war against Nazism was created in the Israeli coastal city of Nethanya.

Of particular importance for the development of Russian-Israeli relations became the International Forum dedicated to the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz by the Red Army and to Holocaust remembrance held in Jerusalem in January 2020. It was one of the largest events attended by the world leaders in Israeli history. As part of the Forum, a memorial devoted to the victims of the Leningrad blockade was unveiled in the Gan Sacker Park in Jerusalem. On the eve of Putin's arrival at the Forum, the Israeli leadership within the legal process transferred to Russia proprietary rights for the Alexander Metochion in the Old City of Jerusalem. All of the above is directly related to forming a shared understanding of WWII history in Russian-Israeli relations.

Conclusion

The prospects for Russian-Israeli cooperation, in our view, should be approached with restrained optimism. The situation in the world, and even more so in the Middle East, is changing rapidly. The causes of contradictions and tensions between the national interests of our countries may be changing. The main task in these conditions, not just for the governments but also for the expert community, is to establish the kind of framework that will help us to preserve the positive trajectory of Russian-Israeli relationship in the face of current and future difficulties.

The importance of the leaders' relations – Russian and Israeli – could not be overestimated. Israeli ex-Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu prided himself on his close relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Observers also point to the personal chemistry between Putin and Netanyahu. They are each one of the other's most frequent foreign interlocutors. Putin and Netanyahu knew how to overcome all political traps and to preserve 'special relations' between the two countries. But for today, after the new Israeli leader took the Prime Ministry office, the question asked by Israeli author Ksenia Svetlova is highly relevant: Can

Israel keep playing the same game during Biden's presidency, and avoid choosing to side with one party at the expense of another?

The answer is pretty simple. As for Putin, he has had positive relations with previous Israeli prime ministers and if Russian interests prescribe it, then this trend will likely continue under future leaders.[24] The first summit between Putin and the new PM Bennet since he took office at the head of Israel's new coalition government was in June 2021. The discussion focused on topical issues of bilateral cooperation in politics, trade, economic and humanitarian affairs. Special attention was paid to preserving the historical memory of the Great Patriotic War, preventing any attempts to review its outcome, to glorify Nazism, to deny the Holocaust and the Red Army's decisive contribution to Victory.[25] The workable and friendly atmosphere of the summit gives hope for future fruitful cooperation.

Since 2019 Israel and Russia objectively have some common problems. They had to grapple with medical, economic, and social difficulties. Until recently, the efforts to curb the coronavirus pandemic severely aggravated the two states' internal situation. To make matters worse, it does not seem that the situation will get better anytime soon: the coronavirus pandemic is far from over; the economic difficulties are expected to worsen. The first issues Moscow and Jerusalem should discuss is how best to conduct bilateral relations, including consideration of what further steps make sense at this point. Russia and Israel need to activate a dialogue touching upon each other's domestic and foreign affairs, the goals of which would be a sustained serious bilateral dialogue on strategic stability, the development of a set of rules of the road to manage interactions in cyberspace and climate change.

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SERGEI G. MELKONIAN

The Syrian Dimension of Russian-Israeli Relations

Russian position on the Syrian conflict

The military-political crisis in Syria has attracted the attention of both regional and key world players. We believe it is important to consider the Russian factor in Israel's policy towards Syria, as Russia is one of the most important participants in the Syrian political crisis settlement.

Moscow's official position on the military-political crisis in Syria is set out in the Russian Foreign Policy Concept of 2016, which underlines that 'Russia supports the unity, independence and territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab Republic as a secular, democratic and pluralistic State with all ethnic and religious groups living in peace and security and enjoying equal rights and opportunities'.[1] Following this approach, Russia provided appropriate political and diplomatic support to the official authorities in Damascus, by, for example, vetoing those draft resolutions in the UN Security Council which blamed the Syrian authorities, holding them responsible for war victims, and imposed sanctions such as suspending diplomatic and economic relations with the Arab Republic.

This broad Russian stance on stabilization in Syria can be complemented by three approaches that were developed as the situation in the country evolved. First, for Russia it was important to prevent the internationalization of the conflict, which would only complicate the search for a solution to the crisis. Second, Russia has traditionally insisted on a broad, inclusive format for a political settlement. The initiative to convene a 'Syrian People's Congress' in Sochi in 2017, as well as Russian efforts within the Geneva format, can serve as an example. Third, in view of the negative experience in Libya, it was extremely important to avoid external military intervention under the pretext of humanitarian goals. Such attempts have been blocked by Moscow and Beijing.

Israel's position on the Syrian conflict

Since Israel appeared on the map of the Middle East, despite attempts at negotiation, Syria has maintained the most hostile and uncompromising stance in relation to the Jewish state. In Israel, the current regime of Bashar al-Assad was perceived as a conduit of Iranian influence, making Syria part of an 'axis of resistance'. For this reason, when the civil war began, Israel effectively became part of the international coalition that held the current Syrian president responsible, indicating that he had no moral authority to govern.[2]

However, increased fighting subsequently led to an increase in the influence of Iran and Hezbollah - a key security threat to Israel, according to the first edition of the 2015 Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Doctrine,[3] as well as other organizations affiliated with and controlled by Tehran. As a response, Israel established the so-called 'red lines' in the conflict – those actions to which it was ready to respond with armed forces if they were 'crossed'. Such actions included giving support to Hezbollah, Quds Force and proxy forces, moving them towards the Golan Heights as well as supplying advanced weaponry to Hezbollah (especially air defense systems).

The Syrian issue in the Russian-Israeli relations before the military operation

The Syrian issue was an important item on the bilateral agenda before Russia's direct involvement in the conflict. As the Syrian civil war entered its acute phase, Israel and Russia addressed the Syrian situation at the highest political level. The first discussions were launched during President Putin's visit to Israel a month after his inauguration in June 2012.[4] However, more specific statements were made after President Peres' visit to Moscow in November of the same year. In particular, he stated that the situation in Syria constituted a danger not only for the Arab Republic, but also for all of the Middle East. Peres also added that Russia could stop the bloodshed in Syria and bring peace and security to the region.[5] Such statements indicate that Israel attached special importance to Russia's positive role that it can play in regional affairs. The Syrian issue, as well as Iran's nuclear programme, continued to be a key topic during high-level Russian-Israeli contacts. Importantly, the last meeting between the heads of state prior to the Russian operation took

place nine days before the Russian Aerospace Forces were dispatched to Syria. During the visit, Prime Minister Netanyahu identified the main threats emanating from the Syrian conflict, including the strengthening of Hezbollah and Iran's creation of a second front against Israel in the Golan Heights. He added that it was particularly important to clarify the Israeli position and do everything possible to ensure that no misunderstandings arise between Israeli forces and Russia's forces in the region.[6] Thus, Israel was interested in continued cooperation with Russia regarding Syria after Russian direct involvement in the conflict.

There are two important factors behind Russia's importance to Israel regarding the Syrian conflict. First, Moscow has traditionally opposed unilateral action against Syria. It also provided diplomatic support to the Syrian regime, which Israel and other US allies considered illegitimate. Second, there were regular media reports of a Russian military presence on the territory of the Arab republic. The Russian military were said to provide support to government forces in the form of advice and guidance, as well as infrastructure development based on the Material-Technical Support Point in the Syrian city of Tartus, which Russia retained after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Prior to the official deployment of Russian troops, Stratfor news agency published an analysis using satellite imagery confirming the construction of infrastructure facilities intended for a full-fledged military base.[7] Third, Israel is paying particular attention to the Russian air defence systems that are in service with the Syrian Armed Forces. In particular, the outdated S-200 systems, which are unable to level the Israeli Air Forces' capabilities, could be complemented in 2013 by the more modern S-300 systems that pose a more serious threat to Israeli warplanes and unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) trespassing Syrian airspace. An agreement was signed between Moscow and Damascus in 2010 for the deployment of S-300 systems by 2013. Moscow thought it important to avoid a repeat of the Libyan scenario, in which an airborne intervention by Western Powers led to chaos. Since the idea of using such a tool began to be voiced after the use of chemical weapons in Syria, for which the international community tried to blame official Damascus, Russia considered it possible to minimize the likelihood of so called 'humanitarian intervention' by strengthening Syria's air defense systems.

Overall, it can be argued that Russia has been sympathetic to Israel's concerns regarding the developments in Syria. This is evidenced, first, by Russia's restrained attitude towards Israel joining the 'anti-Assad'

camp, which aimed to undermine the legitimacy of the incumbent Syrian regime. Supporters of the anti-government camp accused the Syrian regime of human rights violations, the use of chemical weapons and blamed Damascus for what was unfolding in Syria. Second, the Russian side did not make hostile statements regarding violations of Syrian airspace by Israeli pilots and strikes against positions of government forces and groups that fought both the armed opposition and terrorist organisations. Understanding also came from the Israeli leadership, which, unlike its allies, did not engage in political and diplomatic pressure on Russia to force concessions in the Syrian conflict.

Russia's military operation in Syria

As of 2019, Russia was one of only two states that had a legal base[8] of military presence in Syria. Referring to the 1980 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation between the USSR and the SAR and the 2015 Agreement on the deployment of an air group of Russian Armed Forces on Syrian territory and following a formal request for military assistance by Syrian President Bashir Assad, on 30 September, 2015, Russia sent its Aerospace Forces to Syria. According to President Putin, the main goal of the operation in Syria was to support the country's legitimate authorities in stabilizing the country and to create conditions for political settlement.[9] The main task for achieving this goal was to eliminate terrorist organisations and restore the territorial integrity of Syria by returning the territories held by illegal militant groups under the official authorities' control.

Initially, Russia's first foreign military operation involved 32 warplanes and at least 1,500 troops as part of the ground force guarding the Khmeimim airbase and the port of Tartus, where the Russian military contingent was stationed.[10] With the start of major offensives against the main terrorist organisations Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra,[11] the number of Russian troops increased.

The direct Russian involvement in the political and military crisis in Syria has led to a more engaged level in relations with many states in the region. In this light, Israel, which was indirectly involved in the conflict, was no exception. It was after Russia's decision to deploy a military contingent in Syria that one could observe increased contacts at all levels between Russia and Israel. While initially the two countries cooperated mainly on the political level, military cooperation in the Syrian conflict between Russia and Israel subsequently came to the fore.

Key dimensions of the Russian-Israeli cooperation in the Syrian conflict

The deconfliction mechanism has become a key format of work between Russia and Israel on the Syrian track. This mechanism was developed on the basis of mutual desire of the parties to avoid any negative events involving Russian or Israeli military. It has been functioning since the beginning of the Russian military mission in Syria and has shown its high efficacy.

Importantly, Israel was the first state in the region to express interest in establishing such a cooperation mechanism. During working contacts between the defence ministries of the two countries in September and October 2015, an understanding was reached on the importance of establishing 'principles of action' by the Russian and Israeli militaries to prevent undesirable incidents. The coordination mechanism was launched at the level of the Russian and Israeli Chiefs of General Staff during Prime Minister Netanyahu's visit to Moscow in September 2015. The Israeli leader was accompanied by IDF Chief of General Staff Gadi Eisenkot, who met with his Russian counterpart Valery Gerasimov. It is important to note that an appropriate technical mechanism for coordination with the Russian side was developed by Israel for Netanyahu's visit to Moscow.[12] Subsequent meetings to establish a coordination mechanism took place at the level of their deputies, as they chaired the Russian-Israeli commission on coordinating the actions of their states' armed forces in Syria (in the air, at sea and in various technical activities). During the visit of Deputy Chief of General Staff Mikhail Bogdanovsky to Israel, who met with his counterpart Yair Golan at the Kirya military complex, the practical implementation of previously reached agreements was discussed. According to former IDF spokesman Avi Benayahu,[13] three important issues were addressed during the meeting: aircraft identification, dividing areas of responsibility within Syria[14] and sharing intelligence in the fight against international terrorism.

As M. Khodynska-Golenishcheva notes, a hotline of communication between Khmeimim and Tel Aviv (Israeli air defence headquarters) was promptly established, and as early as 15-16 October 2015 a training session was held during which a Russian warplane deliberately approached Israeli borders, was 'intercepted' by the Israeli Air Force and escorted in a non-confrontational manner (with radio communication conducted on established frequencies) away from Israeli airspace. The measures were

taken in a timely manner.[15] According to former Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon,[16] Russian-speaking officers are on duty on the hotline between the Russian headquarters at Khmeimim and the headquarters at Kyria (Tel Aviv) on the Israeli side, in order to minimize the negative consequences of potential misunderstandings. He also noted that there have been enough cases where this mechanism has saved the lives of Russian pilots. For example, in the first months of operations, a Russian pilot crossed the Israeli airspace in the Golan Heights. The pilot and the headquarters at Khmeimim were promptly alerted and the incident was avoided. Had the plane in question belonged to the Syrian Air Force, Israeli air defence systems would likely have attacked it. The high level of proficiency of the Israeli armed forces makes it possible to quickly identify military aircraft, thus guaranteeing flight safety for Russian pilots in case they enter Israeli airspace.

Two months after the launch of the deconfliction mechanism, the Russian and Israeli leaders met on the margins of the UN climate conference in Paris. Both leaders praised the work of the mechanism.[17] This statement is especially important against the background of a tragic incident that took place shortly before the meeting. A Russian plane that mistakenly violated Turkish airspace was shot down by a Turkish fighter jet.

No incidents have occurred during the three years of the mechanism's operation - Israeli pilots and UAV operators have conducted their operations from Syrian, Lebanese and Israeli airspace, striking weapons and positions of Iranian and loyalist forces, while Russian pilots have conducted their sorties without worrying about being hit by a missile as they flew into Israeli airspace.

The only serious malfunction that the mechanism caused occurred on Judgment Day according to the Jewish calendar - 17 September 2018: Syrian air defenses mistakenly shot down a Russian Il-20 reconnaissance aircraft. The problem was caused by the fact that there there were also Israeli fighter jets in the air on a combat mission in the area where the incident took place. They were the main target of the Syrian S-200 systems.

The Russian side put full blame on the Israelis for a number of reasons. First, according to Russian Defence Minister Sergey Shoigu,[18] the Israeli air command announced the operation just one minute before the strikes began. This was a direct violation of the agreements between the two countries, as both sides should have announced their intentions

well in advance. Second, the minister said the Israelis had misled their Russian counterparts by naming northern Syria as the location of the operation, when the strikes were carried out in Latakia province – in the west of the country. Third, according to Russian Defence Ministry spokesman S. Konashenkov in a briefing,[19] following the strikes carried out by the Israeli F-16 fighter jets, they returned to their patrol area in the Mediterranean, whereas one of the aircraft manoeuvred towards the Syrian coast, approaching the Russian Il-20 which was coming in for a landing. Syrian air defences perceived the Israeli fighter's return as a continuation of the attack and struck in its direction. The Syrian missile hit a larger target in its path, which was the Russian plane. Thus, according to the Russian defense ministry, the Israeli pilots deliberately took cover behind the Russian plane, resulting in the death of the 15-member crew.

Russia responded by taking a number of steps to ensure the safety of its military aircraft. The most sensitive for Israel was the shipment of the advanced S-300 systems to the Syrian armed forces within only 14 days. An agreement to supply these systems was reached long ago, but it was suspended in 2013 at the request of Israel. Apparently, Russia granted the Israeli request, for two reasons. First, the new systems would have been more effective against Israeli aircraft, which could have led to an escalation of the conflict. In addition, the Israeli Air Force was striking targets that were deemed as threats to Israeli security. Thus, wishing to maintain stability, the Russian side suspended the transfer of the S-300 complexes, despite the fact that the Syrian military had already received special training and the complex was ready for shipment.

An alternative view of the tragic incident was presented during the visit of Israeli Air Force Commander-in-Chief Amikam Norkin to Moscow immediately after the incident. During a meeting with his Russian counterparts, Norkin stated that all responsibility lies with the Assad regime for the following reasons. First, the Syrian Air Force fired indiscriminately without ascertaining whether there were other planes in the air. Second, the Israeli F-16s were already in Israeli territory when the Russian plane was hit.[20] According to President Putin, what happened was 'a chain of tragic coincidences', and Russia's position was reflected in a speech by Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu.[21] Thus the Russian leader cautiously blamed the Israeli side for the tragic incident. Despite the cooling of relations, the defence conflict de-escalation mechanism continued to function, as it was clear that Israel would continue to attack potential threats emanating from Syria to ensure national security.

On the day of the incident, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu contacted the Russian leader to express condolences and assure that a thorough investigation into the incident would be carried out.[22] It is worth noting that the number of high-level contacts between the two countries increased dramatically since the start of the Russian operation. Between September 2015 and 2019, the two leaders held 37 telephone conversations and 12 meetings to discuss the Syrian issue. In the context of the face-to-face meetings, two important facts are worth noting. First, most of the meetings took place in Russia, and only one in Paris during the climate summit. The Russian leader refrained from travelling to Israel during the entire period in question. Second, the two visits Netanyahu made to Russia in 2018 are particularly telling. Both visits took place on important dates for Russia. The first meeting took place on 29 January, the day the siege of Leningrad was lifted, and the second on 9 May. It is important to emphasize that Netanyahu was one of only two foreign leaders who wished to take part in the Victory Day parade. This move had special significance for the Russian side: at a time of political and diplomatic pressure on Moscow, the visit by the prime minister of Israel, a strategic ally of the United States, was particularly significant because it coincided with the Victory Day in the Great Patriotic War. In recent years Russia has been advocating the inadmissibility of falsifying the history of the Second World War and the need to combat the glorification of Nazism. In Israel, Moscow found a valuable ally ready to support its policies in this regard.

Thanks to its alliance with the US and its close contacts with Russia, Israel could serve as a bridge for dialogue between Moscow and Washington, in particular regarding the Syrian situation. Such an attempt was in fact made by the Israeli leadership. Thus, a trilateral Russia-Israel-US summit was held in Jerusalem on 25 June 2019 at the initiative of the Israeli side, attended by Russian Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev, US Presidential National Security Aide John Bolton and Israeli National Security Council head Meir Ben-Shabbat. While the US-Russia bilateral format discussed the agenda of the forthcoming meeting of the heads of states in Japan, the key topic of the trilateral format was the Syrian conflict. Patrushev's statements characterizing Russia's approach to Israeli policy regarding Syria should be noted: it was stated that Russia wanted existing threats to Israel's security to be eliminated, while at the same time it was important to acknowledge the regional interests of

other states.[23] It was also stressed that Russia pays serious attention to ensuring Israel's security.[24]

Taking advantage of the format of these consultations, the Israeli side attempted to engage directly in the process of discussing the Syrian issue between two key extra-regional players that directly impact the processes taking place in Syria. The meeting also demonstrated the Russian side's willingness to participate in ensuring Israel's security by implementing the necessary measures to neutralize the threats emanating from the Syrian conflict. Moscow has demonstrated this in practice at least twice: by participating in the conflict de-escalation mechanism, allowing the Israeli Air Force to strike at the positions of organizations that were situational allies of Russia in the Syrian conflict, and also by taking into account the interests of the Jewish state when creating a de-escalation zone in southern Syria.

The Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation zones in the Syrian Arab Republic of 4 May 2017,[25] signed by Russia, Iran and Turkey in Astana (Kazakhstan)**,** established the so-called 'southern zone', which included the provinces of Dar'a and Quneitra on the border with Israel and Jordan. The document called for a cessation of hostilities and the establishment of security lines, along which checkpoints and observation points were to be established. A working group was formed to define the boundaries of the zone and resolve technical issues, with Russia, the US and Jordan as members. According to Khodynskaya-Golenishcheva, Israel was also 'invisibly' present in this group, and its interests were guarded by its strategic ally, the United States.[26] It is important to note that Russia also made a concession when creating this group, since it agreed to work without Iran's participation, which the United States and Israel insisted on. The problem was that the efficacy of a working group depends on the capacity of external actors to influence the situation on the ground. Since Iranian forces, as well as other Iran-backed forces, were present in the areas in question**,** it would have been logical and appropriate for Tehran to be included in the working group. However, the Israeli and American sides were unwilling to have direct contacts with the Iranian side. In this connection, Russia, in order to preserve the format, acted as an intermediary between the working group and Iran for the subsequent implementation of the agreements. Despite the US and Israel's refusal to engage in dialogue with Iran on the southern regions of Syria, both countries were well aware that only Tehran could influence the groups under its control to achieve the implementation of the de-escalation zone agreements.

While in this case Russia, desiring an early and peaceful resolution of the situation through the creation of de-escalation zones, made a concession and agreed to the removal of Iran from the talks, during the negotiations Moscow's position regarding Israeli demands was tougher. For example, the US side insisted on creating in the southern zone, the areas along the Syrian-Jordanian and Syrian-Israeli borders, a demilitarized zone. In this way, the US, defending Israeli interests, tried to localize the presence of Iranian military formations and Iranian controlled groups far from the Israeli border. Thus, the logistical corridor from Iraq to Lebanon, which Iran had been actively using to move its forces and aid, was threatened. At the same time, such a measure created conditions for the infiltration of fighters operating in Iraq into Syrian territory. Moscow rejected such proposals, and the original proposal was accepted. After another round of consultations in Amman and on the sidelines of the G-20 summit in Hamburg, Foreign Minister Lavrov announced that an agreement had been reached to create a de-escalation zone in south-west Syria. He said the memorandum included three areas: Quneitra, Suweida and Dar'a, where a ceasefire will apply.[27] Russia and the US assumed responsibility for compliance with the regime. It was therefore decided to establish a joint monitoring center in Jordan. In the initial stages, security was provided using Russian military police forces in coordination with the US and Jordan.

The deployment of Russian military police near the Golan Heights created at least two pitfalls for Israel. First of all, in such a scenario, the Iranian military and the groups under their control found themselves covered by the Russian military behind them, making it difficult for Israelis to conduct operations. Therefore, such a measure allowed Iran and Hezbollah to consolidate their positions in the southern regions of Syria. Moreover, the Russian troops were able to stay permanently in the southern provinces. This allowed them to monitor any activities of the armed opposition with contacts to Israel and also deprived the Jewish state of the buffer that these formations served. This prompted the US side, at Israel's request, to insist on the need to hold further consultations on the deployment of Russia's military police, thereby delaying the process of forming the de-escalation zone. However, Moscow, guided by the Memorandum, proceeded to implement these measures. During a briefing by Colonel-General Sergei Rudskoy, Chief of the Main Operational Directorate of the Russian Armed Forces General Staff (GFO), it was stated that to ensure the cessation of hostilities on 21 and 22 July

2017, the Russian Military Police deployed two checkpoints and 10 observation posts along the agreed sections of the contact line to the south-western de-escalation zone, stressing that the closest post is 13 km away from the disengagement zone of the Israeli and Syrian forces in the Golan Heights, previously agreed and fixed by international agreements.[28]

Israel's subsequent negative reaction after the signing of the Memorandum was also due to the territorial extent of Iranian forces' presence, which was also the subject of consultations. Initially, the Israeli side insisted on keeping the IRGC, Hezbollah and other pro-Iranian formations at a distance of 40 km from the border with Israel, which it argued offered security guarantees. The issue was also discussed during Defence Minister Shoigu's visit to Israel in October 2017. During his stay, the Russian Minister of Defence met with his Israeli counterpart Lieberman and Prime Minister Netanyahu. Importantly, ahead of the Russian minister's visit, the Israeli air force carried out further strikes near Damascus, destroying a Syrian air defence system. Since the target of the strike was not Hezbollah or Quds positions that pose a direct threat to Israel's security, the strike can be seen as an attempt to demonstrate the Jewish state's resolve to continue operations despite the Russian minister's visit. According to Israeli diplomatic representatives, Russia refused Israel's request for a 40-kilometer (25-mile) buffer zone, but expressed its willingness to extend a 10-15-kilometer exclusion zone that would exclude Iranian and Hezbollah forces.[29] Such a decision shows that the interests of Russia's allies in the Syrian settlement in the Astana format are a priority, but also that Israel's position is a factor in the final decision. The agreements reached between Russia and the US, taking into account the Israeli position, formed the basis of the Memorandum of Principles for De-escalation in Southern Syria signed on 8 November 2017 in Amman. The text also included an important point insisted upon by the US and Israel: there should be no non-Syrian armed formations within the perimeter and inside the zone. The measure ruled out the possibility of an official presence of Iranian forces if Tehran sought to take part in patrolling these areas in cooperation with Russian military police or government forces.

Another important consequence of the de-escalation zone was the elimination of terrorist organisations and the resumption of the UN mission in the Syrian Golan Heights (United Nations Disengagement

Observer Force, UNDOF). According to Colonel General S. Rudskoy, during operations to eliminate terrorist groups in the southern de-escalation zone, in which government forces, the Russian Airspace Forces and representatives of the Syrian moderate opposition wishing to protect civilians took part, the Russian military units regularly informed Israeli and Jordanian partners about the operations in order to avoid possible incidents. In parallel, by reaching an agreement with the armed opposition, Damascus regained control of all areas of the south-west of the country. This created all the conditions for the return of the UNDOF patrolling the Syrian-Israeli border in the Golan Heights in accordance with UNSC Resolution 350 of 1974. The Blue Helmets abandoned their positions in 2014 after 45 peacekeepers from Fiji were kidnapped by the terrorist organisation Jebhat al-Nusra. Thus, accompanied by Russian military police, after a four-year break, the patrolling of the demarcation line between Syria and Israel was restored.

Russian and Israeli interests in the Syrian conflict

All external actors directly or indirectly involved in the Syrian crisis have overlapping and divergent interests. In the case of Russia and Israel, divergent positions on both strategic and tactical issues prevail. For example, since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis, the Israeli political establishment and the expert community have not concealed their enthusiasm regarding the prospect of the fragmentation of Syria along ethnic and confessional lines.[30] Such a scenario was most favorable to Israel because: the weakening of the Syrian regime and/or its removal would deal a blow to Iran's influence in the country. A weak and decentralized Syria would no longer be a potential security threat to Israel; and the emergence of new entities (autonomous regions run by the Druze, Kurds, etc.) would create opportunities for extending Israeli influence throughout Syria. At the same time, Russia has traditionally argued for no alternative to the incumbent Syrian regime which it considers to be legitimate. Russia has also insisted on the respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity in agreements for a political settlement. After the launch of the Russian operation and the establishment of the conflict de-escalation mechanism, one can observe a softening of Israeli rhetoric regarding the future of Syria and the demand for Bashar al-Assad to leave as soon as possible. While initially the Jewish state was part of an informal bloc that insisted on the mandatory removal of the Syrian

leader, who was seen as root of all Syrian problems, the Israeli leadership subsequently markedly lowered the intensity of its criticism. This may be the result of a compromise between Russia and Israel or the realization by the Jewish leadership that this approach is futile because of two factors: the launch of a political settlement in which the current government was involved and the military successes of Syrian Armed Forces. During the operation at the southern de-escalation zone the Israelis were unwilling to prevent the full return of Syrian government forces to control the territories bordering the occupied part of the Golan Heights.

If the question of the Syrian regime's future could be taken out of the Russian-Israeli dialogue, the Iranian military presence and its activity in Syria would become a key one in this context. Iran remains Russia's main ally both in the political settlement in Syria within the framework of the Astana Platform and in combating terrorist organizations in the Syrian territory. At the same time, as noted earlier, Iran's presence in Syria, as well as that of the armed groups it supports and controls, is seen in Israel as a threat to national security. In these circumstances, Russia has become the main link between the sides in the Syrian conflict. In practice it was evident in the agreement on the security zone during the formation of the southern de-escalation zone, where the Israeli and Iranian positions were taken into account. Despite the fact that Russia and Iran have become situational allies in the Syrian conflict, Moscow does not plan to take Tehran's position in the Israel-Iran standoff for two reasons. First, Russia is not interested in an escalation of the situation between the two sides on Syrian territory, as this could lead to the erosion of the gains that had been achieved during the ground and air operations. Secondly, the role of Israel as a deterrent in the face of the expanding scale and geographical spread of Iranian military presence in Syria, as well as its potential dominance in the post-conflict Syria, is seen in a positive light by Russia. It is important for Russia not to be the solitary, but the key provider of Syria's security and to play a leading role in the internal political settlement. The presence of a tool to weaken Iranian influence in the long term could play a decisive role in the distribution of spheres of influence in Syria.

Thus we can draw the following conclusions. Russia's role in the Syrian conflict plays a largely negative role for Israel due to the following factors. First, Russia's direct involvement in the conflict has not only strengthened the incumbent, but also the Iranian presence. Second, despite the existence of the conflict de-escalation mechanism, the

Russian presence does not freely allow the Israeli air force to strike at will. Moreover, the situation worsened after the tragic incident with the Russia Il-20 reconnaissance aircraft, which led to the delivery of more advanced air defence systems to the Syrian Armed Forces. Notwithstanding this, the current power configuration has made the issue of Israel's security not the determining factor, but just an important one in the development of Russian policy towards Syria (particularly in the south of the country). This, in turn, also influences Russia's dialogue with its allies regarding the settlement, mainly Iran. For its part, Russia wants to build a constructive dialogue with the countries of the region, taking their interests into account. This should allow Moscow to strengthen its position both in Syria and in the region as a whole. At the same time, Israel, which cannot ignore Russia's role in Syria, was forced to take Moscow's interests into account. This became the basis for the emergence of negotiation formats regarding the Syrian crisis in order to formulate various respective positions and actions.

That said, despite the tragic incident that occurred as a result of the apparent failure of the conflict de-escalation mechanism, good working relations between Russia and Israel have been maintained. Moreover, the growing number of high-level contacts testifies to the increased engagement between the two countries. On the one hand, one can observe a conflict of interests in the most sensitive area, Syria, and on the other, an intensification of dialogue on other issues on the bilateral agenda. It can be assumed that such a configuration indicates the formation of a qualitatively new model of bilateral relations. Within this model, the parties pursue mutually exclusive goals, but refrain from confrontation by drawing red lines. This allows Russia and Israel to solve important tasks without damaging the interests of the opposite side. Both countries have maintained this delicate balance over the past five years.

The Russian-Israeli relations at the current stage are not free of potential crises because the interests of the two states in the region do not always overlap. However, Israel takes the Russian interests into account in implementing its foreign policy in the Middle East. The existence of a similar agenda may serve to offset potential costs in the short term. A demonstration of a systematic approach to building Russian-Israeli dialogue on the Syrian track is the preservation of all the agreements after the change of leadership in Israel.

[1] Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (approved by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin on November 30, 2016). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation – URL: https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICkB6BZ29/content/id/2542248

[2] Ambassador Ron Prosser to UN makes statement about Syria. Consulate General of Israel to the Mid-Atlantic. – URL: https://embassies.gov.il/philadelphia/NewsAndEvents/Pages/Situation-in-Syria---Statement-by-Amb-Ron-Prosor-.aspx

[3] 2015 ,צה"ל. אסטרטגיית - c.9

[4] Meeting with Prime Minister of Israel Binyamin Netanyahu. Presidential Executive Office. – URL: http://kremlin.ru/catalog/countries/IL/events/15728

[5] Statements for the press following Russian-Israeli talks. Presidential Executive Office. – URL: http://kremlin.ru/catalog/countries/IL/events/16773

[6] Meeting with Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu. Presidential Executive Office. – URL: http://kremlin.ru/catalog/countries/IL/events/50335

[7] Confirming Russia's Expanded Presence in Syria. Stratfor. – URL: https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/confirming-russias-expanded-presence-syria

[8] Russia and Iran are the only two countries that operate in Syria at the invitation of the official authorities. Other countries do not have an official invitation or a UN mandate

[9] Putin nazval osnovnuyu zadachu rossijskikh voennykh v Sirii. Putin named the main task of the Russian military in Syria. Interfax – URL: https://www.interfax.ru/russia/472593

[10] *Siriiskiĭ rubezh* [Syrian frontier] / M. S. Barabanov, A. D. Vasilev, S. A. Denisentsev, V. V. Kipshidze, A. V. Lavrov, V. R. Legoĭda, N. A. Lomov, Yu. Yu. Lyamin, A. V. Nikolskiĭ, R. N. Pukhov, M. Yu. Shepovalenko; pod red. M. Yu. Shepovalenko. – 2-e izd., dop. (Moscow: Tsentr analiza strategiĭ i tekhnologiĭ, 2016), pp.106-107.

[11] On December 29, 2014, at a closed session, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation made a decision on recognizing Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State as terrorist organizations and banning their activities on the territory of Russia

[12] צה"ל מקים מנגנון לתיאום התנועה האווירית בסוריה עם צבא רוסיה. – URL: https://news.walla.co.il/item/2891324

[13] Sova E. Koordiniruyut li Rossiya i Izrail udary v Sirii? Sova Ye. Are Russia and Israel coordinating strikes in Syria? BBC. - URL: https://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2015/11/151103_russia_israel_syria_coordination

[14] Perhaps it is about identifying areas in which Israel can conduct air operations, as well as informing the Israeli side about the areas in which the Russian military contingent is present

[15] Khodynskaya-Golenishcheva M. S. *Doktorskaya dissertatsiya. Siriiskii krizis v transformiruyushcheisya sisteme mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii* [Doctoral Dissertation. The Syrian crisis in a transforming system of international relations], p. 787.

[16] Eks-ministr oborony Izrailya: v Sirii russkie ne meshayut nam, my ne meshaem im. RIA Novosti. Former Israeli Defense Minister: In Syria, the Russians do not interfere with us, we do not interfere with them. RIA Novosti – URL: https://ria.ru/20180505/1519900982.html

[17] Meeting with Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu. Presidential Executive Office. – URL: http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50847

[18] Zayavlenie Sergeya Shoigu ob otvetnykh merakh Minoborony Rossii posle krusheniya Il-20 v Sirii. Minoborony Rossii [Statement by Sergey Shoygu on the retaliatory measures of Russia's Defense Ministry after the crash of the Il-20 in Syria. Defense Ministry of Russia]. – URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-4hNUswgc9I

[19] Spetsialnyi brifing Minoborony Rossii ob obstoyatelstvakh krusheniya Il-20 VKS Rossii u poberezhya Sirii. Minoborony Rossii [A special briefing by Russia's Defense Ministry on the circumstances of the crash of the Il-20 of the Russian Aerospace Forces off the coast of Syria. Defense Ministry of Russia] – URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QKOyBb2QHhA

[20] מנגנון מניעת החיכוך ימשיך לפעול כסדרו. – URL: https://www.idf.il/מאמרים/צהל-תקף-ציוד-לנשק-מדויק-עבור-/איראן-וחזבאללה/

[21] Press conference on Russian-Hungarian talks. Presidential Executive Office. – URL: http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/58586

[22] Telephone conversation with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Presidential Executive Office. – URL: http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/58589

[23] Netanyahu, Bolton and Patrushev give statements before Russian-US-Israeli talks. Ruptly. – URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P2Dp8k7i6fc

[24] M Netanyahu Meets Secretary of the Russian National Security Council, Nikolai Patrushev. Israeli PM Office. – URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OeKhsygkqSk

[25] Memorandum on the creation of de-escalation areas in the Syrian Arab Republic. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. – URL: https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2746041

[26] Khodynskaya-Golenishcheva M. S. *Doktorskaya dissertatsiya. Siriiskii krizis v transformiruyushcheisya sisteme mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii* [Doctoral Dissertation. The Syrian crisis in a transforming system of international relations], p. 732.

[27] Vykhod k presse Sergeya Lavrova na sammite G20 [Sergei Lavrov's press scrum at the G20 Summit] – URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1n5G37v-98Q

[28] Nachalnik Glavnogo operativnogo upravleniya Genshtaba VS RF general-polkovnik Sergei Rudskoi provel brifing dlya predstavitelei SMI. Ministerstvo oborony Rossiiskoi Federatsii. Briefing by Colonel-General Sergei Rudskoy, Chief of the Main Operational Directorate of the Russian Armed Forces General Staff – URL: http://syria.mil.ru/news/more.htm?id=12134419@egNews

[29] Russia agrees to keep Iran, Hezbollah forces away from Israeli border. Jerusalem Post. – URL: https://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Russia-agrees-to-move-Iran-Hezbollah-forces-away-from-Israeli-border-507727

[30] Melkonian S. Izrailskii stsenarii budushchego Sirii. Rossiiskii sovet po mezhdunarodnym delam. [Israeli scenario for the future of Syria. Russian International Affairs Council] – URL: https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/izrailskiy-stsenariy-budushchego-sirii/

DMITRY A. MARYASIS, ANTON I. BIZYAEV

Russia – Israel Economic Cooperation. Overview

This article is an attempt to look at the overall picture of bilateral relations in what is often referred to as 'economic' or more broadly 'socio-economic' relations. The main part of the paper is an analytical overview allowing us to get a general idea of the level at which Russia and Israel have approached the beginning of the fourth decade of bilateral cooperation. In doing so, we have also tried to give our own assessments of the prospects for the development of this or that area highlighted in the paper. It should also be noted that the statistical data are mostly limited to 2018. This was done in order not to affect 2020 and 2021, where economic development was significantly affected by the new coronavirus pandemic; besides, the Russian-Israeli track has not seen any fundamental changes in indicators in recent years.

The restoration of diplomatic relations between Israel and Russia in 1991 signaled the beginning of economic cooperation between the two countries. This event is rightly considered a starting point for the transition from the mutual hostility that characterized relations between the two countries during the Soviet period and precluded any possibility of developing economic ties, to forging a cooperative relationship in the new political and economic reality.

The change in the political landscape after 1991 was not the only reason for the re-establishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and Russia. As Robert Friedman notes,[1] there were a number of reasons for restoring relations between the two countries, and economic considerations were not insignificant. In 1994, Israel and Russia signed co-operation agreements in the areas of economy and trade, agriculture, healthcare, education, culture and tourism, as well as an agreement on the prevention of double taxation. In 1996, Israel became Russia's sec-

ond trading partner after Turkey in Middle East, supplying Russia with agricultural as well as high-tech products such as mechanical engineering manufactures. Russia's exports to Israel included rough diamonds, fuels, metal and timber.[2]

The 1990s saw rapid interaction growth between companies and business structures in the two countries, with a number of major Russian and Israeli companies opening representative offices in Israel and Russia respectively. Umbrella structures have also been established to promote mutual economic ties, such as the Israel-CIS Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Joint Russian-Israeli Commission for Trade and Economic Cooperation. Key joint economic projects included equipping Russian-made aircraft with Israeli electronics, modernizing a number of Russian agro-industrial enterprises with the help of Israeli specialists and developing cooperation in healthcare and pharmacology.[3]

Finally, Israel was interested in maintaining the flow of Jewish immigration from Russia.[4] In the ten years following the collapse of the USSR, some 1 million Jews from Russia and the CIS countries arrived in Israel, a large proportion of whom were scientists and engineers. These individuals subsequently played a huge role in the development of Israel's high-tech sector and the Israeli economy in general.

The evolution of Russian-Israeli economic relations after 2000 continued the positive trends established in the 1990s. Both countries have, due to a number of circumstances, opted for a strategy aimed at rapprochement and build-up of closer economic cooperation. During 2000s, large Russian companies such as ALROSA and Yandex opened their offices in Israel; in turn, large Israeli companies such as El Al, Tadiran and Israel Aircraft Industries opened offices in Russia.[5] In 2010, the two countries' industry ministers signed several agreements on joint development of the high tech and industrial sectors. The Russian-Israeli Business Council was established in 2010, whose main tasks include strengthening the relationship between the business communities of the two countries.[6] Regular high level meetings have been held between Russia and Israel, aimed at discussing pressing economic issues and potential areas for joint development. During Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev's visit to Israel in 2016, a number of agreements were signed on customs cooperation, cooperation in the agricultural sector, and cooperation in the construction and housing sectors.[7]

It should be noted that, according to our estimates, bilateral trade and economic relations are increasingly less dependent on the political component of Russian-Israeli cooperation, although these areas are certainly not completely independent of each other.

Below we consider the most significant areas of Russian-Israeli cooperation separately.

Foreign trade

There have been no fundamental changes in either the volume or the structure of trade turnover for a long time.[8] It seems that despite all the attempts of some public and political figures on both sides to gloss over the situation, it is difficult to expect significant changes in the current model of bilateral trade and economic interaction.

The structure of exports and imports at the end of 2020 is shown in the chart below. We can clearly see that Russia mainly exports to Israel raw material of different kind and imports agricultural produce, textiles, and chemicals from the country.

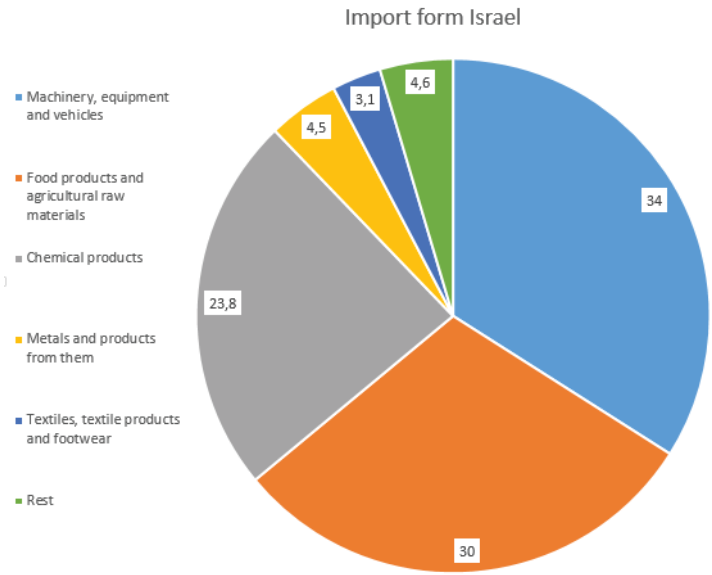

Figure 1. Russia-Israel Turnover Composition, 2020 (%)

Source: Russian trade with Israel 2020 (2021, February, 14). Russian Foreign Trade Online Portal. https://en.russian-trade.com/reports-and-reviews/2021-02/russian-trade-with-israel-in-2020/

Overall, we can speak of a positive trade dynamics between the two countries. Despite discrepancies in Russian and Israeli statistics on trade caused by different methods of recording flows of goods,[9] there has been a clear growth in trade between Russia and Israel. As seen in Figure 2, the positive trend has twice been interrupted: first by the global financial crisis in 2008 and then by the economic slump in Russia in 2015. Nevertheless, each time the trade dynamics between the two countries returned to an upward trajectory.

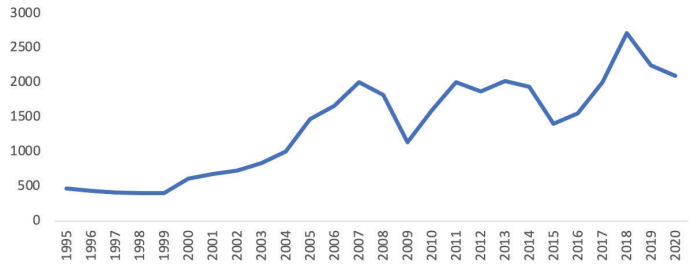

Figure 2. Russia-Israel trade, $ mln.

Sources -Fedorchenko A.V., Zajceva O.A., Mar'yasis D.A. (2004) Izrail' v nachale XXI v. [Fedorchenko A.V., Zajceva O.A., Mar'yasis D.A. Israel at the beginning of 21st century]. (Moscow: Institut Blizhnego Vostoka, 2004), p. 158 (in Russian). Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS - Israel). Statistical Abstract of Israel (SAI) 2003, 2006, Table 16.5, Jerusalem, 2003, 2006); Russian trade with Israel – Reports for the years 2018–2020. Available at: https://russian-trade.com/countries/israel/ (accessed 10.08.2021).

Moreover, even taking into account the unrecorded commodity flows between Russian and Israel, we have to admit that currently mutual trade represents a very small share of each country's foreign trade. Israel's share of Russia's foreign trade turnover in 2018 was 0.4%[10]; Russia's share for Israel in 2017 was 1.5 %.[11] We can talk about fluctuations due to various economic phenomena of an exogenous nature, but unfortunately, currently there is no noticeable upward trend in foreign trade between the two countries today.

The commodity composition of the foreign trade exchange largely follows the export-import patterns of both countries. Today we can speak of a fairly high level of complementarity between the economic structures of Russia and Israel. However, the raw material orientation of Russian exports hardly corresponds to the place Russia is striving to occupy in the international division of labour.[12]

Trade in services

In terms of trade in business services[13] between Russia and Israel, the picture is similar to that of trade in goods. From 2005 to 2012, the trend was negative, followed by a rather significant increase in absolute

volume of trade in services, which continues to this day (Figure 3). However, Russian business services account for less than 2% of total Israeli foreign trade in business services (see Figure 4). There are two potential reasons for the 2005-2012 increase. Firstly, in 2011, the Israeli Consulate General in St. Petersburg was opened, making it Israel's first diplomatic mission in Russia outside of Moscow, and the country's first consulate general in the whole of Central and Eastern Europe. The consulate's main priorities include fostering various forms of cooperation between the two countries, including assistance to Israeli businesses interested in the Russian market.[14] Secondly, the Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Israel in 2012 with an aim of forging cooperation on a wide range of political, economic, scientific, cultural and economic issues between the two countries.[15]

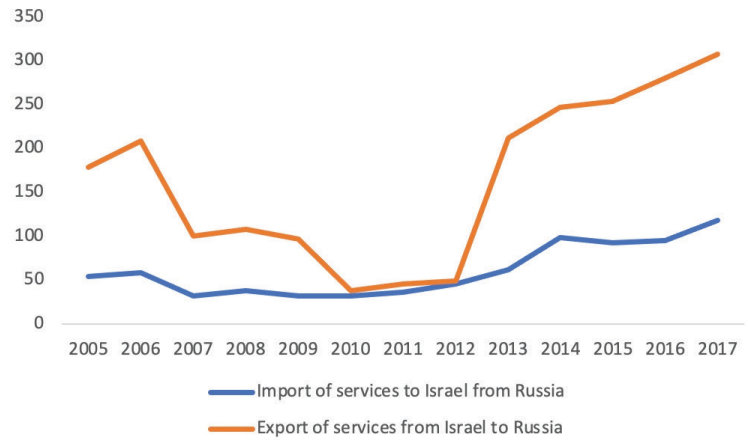

Figure 3. Israeli trade in services to Russia, US$ mln.

Source: Israel Central Bureau of Statistics. Statistical Abstract of Israel. Imports and exports. URL: https://www.cbs.gov.il/en/Pages/search/yearly.aspx

Figure 4. Russia's share of trade in services in Israel, %

Source: Israel Central Bureau of Statistics. Statistical Abstract of Israel. Imports and exports. URL: https://www.cbs.gov.il/en/Pages/search/yearly.aspx

Russia-Israel free trade area

The possibility of establishing a free trade agreement (FTA) between Russia and Israel was a significant step in the development of bilateral economic ties between the two countries. The prospect of an FTA was raised in 2016 by the Russian and Israeli agriculture ministers. They discussed trade in agricultural products, establishment of joint ventures in the agricultural sector and the development and implementation of new agricultural technologies.[16] Since that ministerial meeting, however, the question of an FTA between Russia and Israel received little publicity. It was not until 2019 that Russian President Vladimir Putin, speaking at the Keren HaYesod Foundation Congress, announced that preparations for an FTA between Russia and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) were entering their final stages. The president noted the importance of strengthening trade and economic relations with Israel, praising the cooperation between the two countries in the sphere of agro-industry and opportunities in the scientific and innovation spheres.[17]

The forging of an FTA with Israel is part of the EAEU strategy to expand the network of its trade partners (for example, a similar agreement was recently signed with Singapore). Israel is of interest for the EAEU because of its prowess in energy, military, digital, medical, biological, transpor-

tation, education and other types of technologies. In addition, Israel is a valuable cooperation partner in the agro-industrial, pharmaceutical and tourism sectors. From Israel's point of view, such an agreement will help to diversify the country's range of foreign economic ties and reduce dependence on the US. The EAEU can provide Israel with new prospects for cooperation in sectors such as agriculture, energy, oil, and consumer goods industry, as well as open new opportunities for cooperation in the fields of culture and education.[18] The establishment of a FTA between Russia and Israel could give a significant boost to bilateral economic relations and allow both countries to better realize their opportunities and potentially open new areas for cooperation. Meanwhile, we believe that in view of the overall situation in the development of Russian-Israeli trade, the creation of an FTA will have limited effect.

Tourism

The tourism industry is one of most important areas of economic cooperation between Israel and Russia. The key event in the development of tourism between Israel and Russia was the signing of an agreement to abolish tourist visas between the two countries on September 20, 2008. Thanks largely to this agreement, Israel was able to double the number of tourists from Russia from 205,000 in 2008 to a record 410,000 in 2014 (see Figure 5). However, the Russian economic crisis of 2015 disrupted the positive trend: as seen in Figure 5, tourist arrivals in 2015 and 2016 fell to 266 thousands from its 2014 peak. In 2017, however, growth in tourism from Russia resumed. In 2018, 381 thousand Russian tourists visited Israel (including one-day visits), the number second only to tourist flow from the US. The share of Russian tourists in Israel was 9 per cent in 2017. By comparison, from 2001 to 2006, their share was just 4% (see Figure 6).

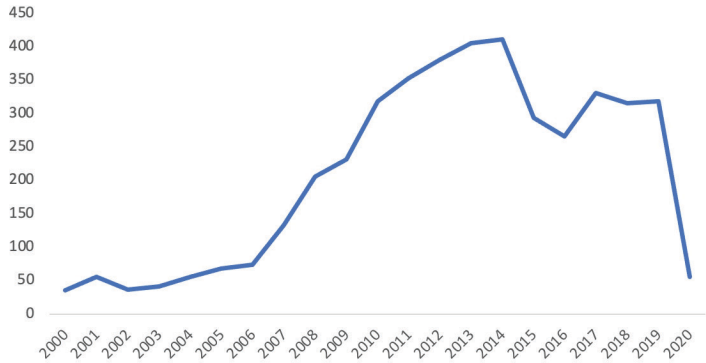

Figure 5. Russian tourists visiting Israel, OOO persons

Source: Israel Central Bureau of Statistics. Statistical Abstract of Israel. Tourism. URL: https://www.cbs.gov.il/en/publications/Pages/2021/Tourism-and-Accomodation-Services-Statistical-Abstract-of-Israel-2021-No.72.aspx

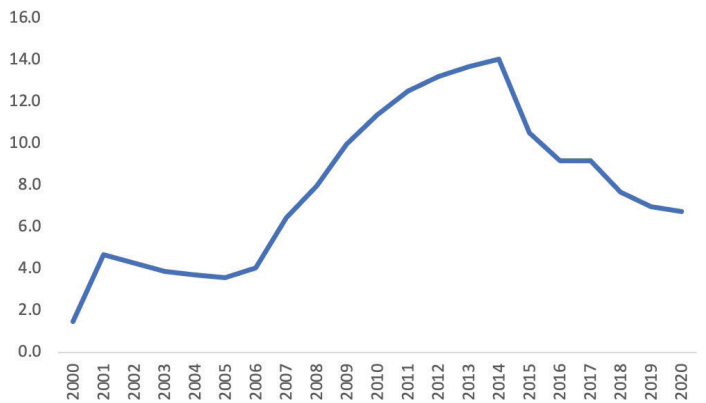

Figure 6. Russian tourists share in Israel, %

Source: Israel Central Bureau of Statistics. Statistical Abstract of Israel. Tourism. URL: https://www.cbs.gov.il/en/publications/Pages/2021/Tourism-and-Accomodation-Services-Statistical-Abstract-of-Israel-2021-No.72.aspx

By contrast, the tourist stream from Israel to Russia is much smaller. According to Rosstat (Russian state statistical agency), the number of Israelis visiting Russia over the last five years has averaged 170,000 per year. Meanwhile, as Table 1 shows, after a brief decline in 2015, there has been an annual increase in the number of Israeli tourists visiting Russia, reaching 182,000 in 2017. While the numbers of Russian tourists in Israel and Israeli tourists in Russia are comparable in absolute terms, in relative terms the share of Israeli tourists visiting Russia represents a very small part of the total tourist flow to Russia. In 2014, for example, their share was only 0.59 %. Nevertheless, this number is gradually increasing, and by 2019 stood at 1.05%. On the whole, a pronounced positive trend in tourism between the two countries can be observed not only on the Israeli side, but also on the Russian side. The development of the tourism sector has a positive impact on the economies of both countries and is likely to maintain the positive trend in the future.

Table 1. Israeli tourism to Russia

Year	Number of tourists from Israel to Russia (000. persons)	All tourists (000. persons)	Total share of Israeli tourist in Russia (%)
2014	150	25438	0.59
2015	132	20672	0.64
2016	179	24571	0.73
2017	182	24390	0.75
2018	225	24551	0.92
2019	257	24420	1.05
2020	31	6359	0.49

Source: Chislo v'ezdnyh turistskih poezdok inostrannyh grazhdan v Rossijskuyu Federaciyu. Rosstat. – 2021. URL: https://tourism.gov.ru/contents/analytics/statistics/chislo-vezdnykh-turistskikh-poezdok-inostrannykh-grazhdan-v-rossiyskuyu-federatsiyu/. (accessed at: 10.08.2021)

Migration issues

Migration is an important aspect of cooperation between the two countries. Today, immigrants from FSU countries work in a wide range of economic sectors in Israel. As of 2015, among immigrants from the FSU, 23% were employed in industry, 4.2% in construction, 10.8% in commerce, 6% in media, 4.5% in administration, 17.5% in health and social services and 34% in other economic sectors (see Figure 7). Respective shares for native Israelis are presented in Figure 8.

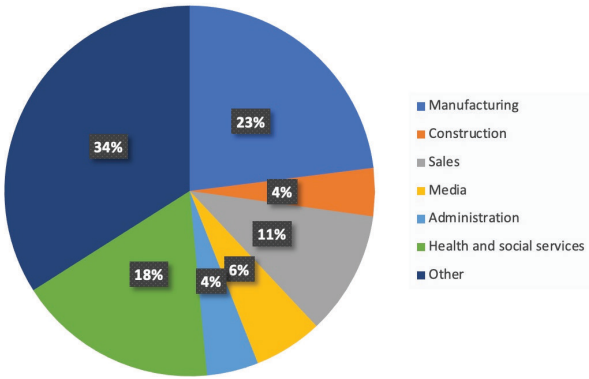

Figure 7. Employment of FSU immigrants in Israel by economic sector

Source - Immigration from the former Soviet Union. Israel Central Bureau of Statistics. - URL: https://old.cbs.gov.il/statistical/immigration_ussr_h148.pdf

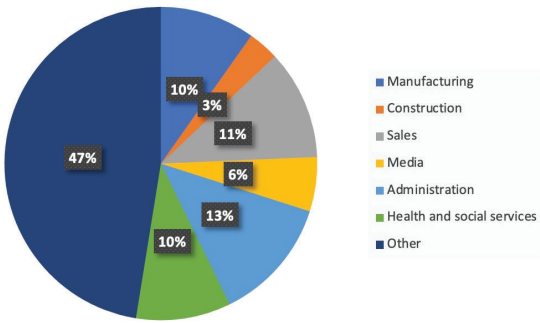

Figure 8. Employment of native Israelis by economic sector

Source - Immigration from the former Soviet Union. Israel Central Bureau of Statistics. - URL: https://old.cbs.gov.il/statistical/immigration_ussr_h148.pdf

Regarding the occupation distribution, 23.9% of FSU immigrants were employed in research and higher education, 13.4% were engineers, 29% worked as managers, civil servants and service providers, 19.9% held skilled jobs in industry and agriculture, 8% worked as unskilled workers and 5.8% were employed as directors and managers.[19] However, a comparison with native Israelis shows that immigrants from the former Soviet Union had slightly lower proportions of individuals working in academic and engineering occupations. Moreover, the share of unskilled labour is twice as high among FSU immigrants (8%) compared to the native population (4%), while the share of managerial positions is two and a half times lower (6% among immigrants compared to 14% among the native population) (see Figures 9 and 10).

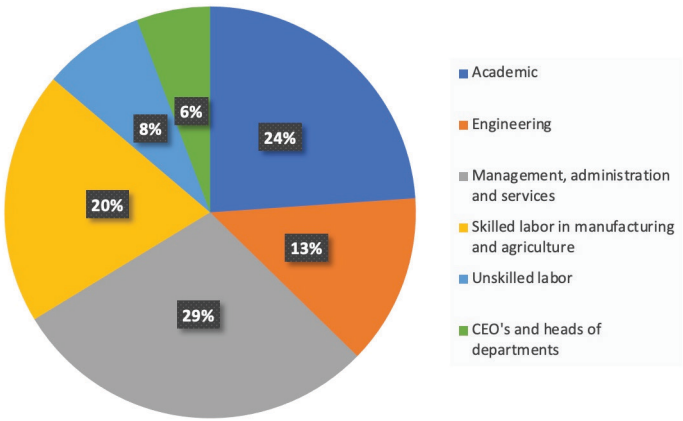

Figure 9. Employment by occupation of FSU immigrants in Israel

Source - Immigration from the former Soviet Union. Israel Central Bureau of Statistics. - URL: https://old.cbs.gov.il/statistical/immigration_ussr_h148.pdf

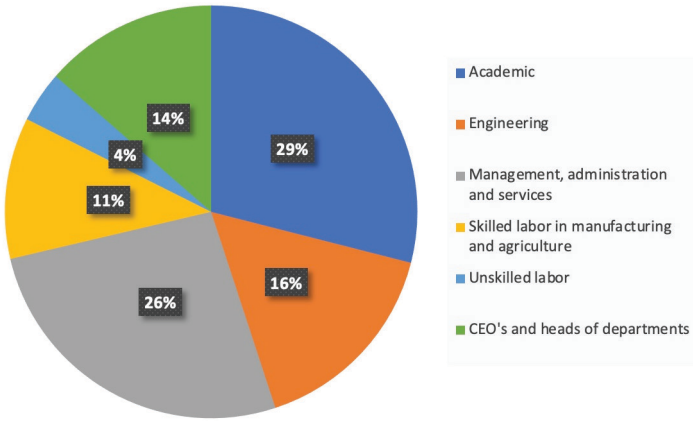

Figure 10. Employment by occupation of native Israelis

Source - Immigration from the former Soviet Union. Israel Central Bureau of Statistics. - URL: https://old.cbs.gov.il/statistical/immigration_ussr_h148.pdf

Finally, it is instructive to look at the dynamics of emigration from Russia to Israel. As can be seen from the data of the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics, the number of Russian immigrants in Israel has been steadily increasing since 2008 (Figure 11). At the same time, the share of Russian immigrants in Israel's total immigrant population, long standing at 20%, began to increase after 2015, reaching a record high of 37% in 2018 (see Figure 12).

It should be noted that the term 'immigrant' refers to persons who have become Israeli citizens. This does not necessarily mean, however, that these people reside in Israel. Since Russian and Israeli laws do not prohibit their citizens from holding several passports (except special cases), many Russian Jews obtain an Israeli passport for a variety of reasons, while remaining resident in Russia. Often the reason for gaining second citizenship is obtaining 'insurance' against perceived future political and economic instability in Russia. However, for the Russian Jews, an additional and very common reason is to gain access to the Israeli first-class healthcare system.

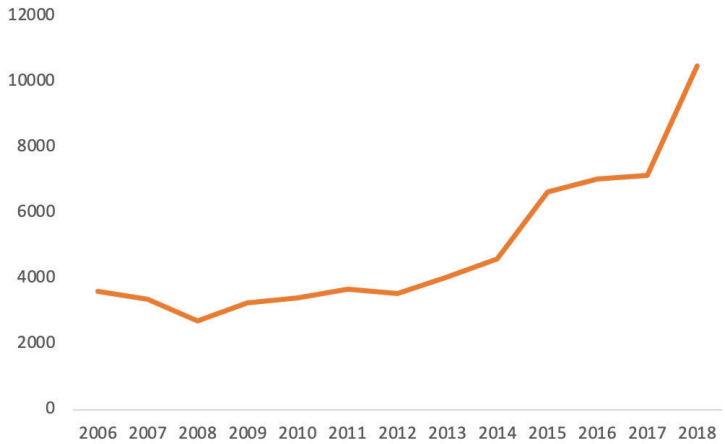

Figure 11. Russian immigrants in Israel, persons

Source - Israel Central Bureau of Statistics. Statistical Abstract of Israel. Immigration. URL: https://www.cbs.gov.il/en/Pages/search/yearly.aspx

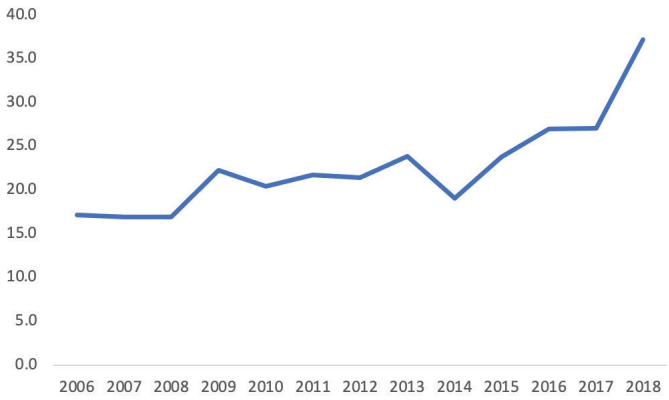

Figure 12. Russian immigrants as a share of total immigrants in Israel, %

Source - Israel Central Bureau of Statistics. Statistical Abstract of Israel. Immigration. URL: https://www.cbs.gov.il/en/Pages/search/yearly.aspx

Cooperation in Defense Industries[20]

Attempts to improve bilateral industrial cooperation in the field of defense industries date back to the 1990s. One such example is the attempt by Israeli aviation firms to partner with the Russian Yakovlev Design Bureau in developing the Yak-48 business jet (Astra-4 after the Israeli designation) as part of the Galaxy project. The project was not realized because of the Russian partner's financial problems.[21]

Both Israel and Russia were actively trying to establish mutual production of military equipment for third countries. Thus the Israeli company Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) and the Russian Kamov design bureau (KB) have developed an attack helicopter Ka-52 Hokum-B for Turkey, (equipped with Israeli self-guided anti-tank missiles NT-D developed by the Israeli Rafael company).[22] However, the helicopter tender was not won. This could have been due to prior unsuccessful experience of military cooperation between Russia and Israel described below, which, according to some experts in the field, undermined Israel's position on the global arms market.

The Russian state defense Rosvooruzhenie company signed a contract with the Israeli Elta firm on 17 June, 1997 to build an airborne early warning system (aircraft A-50). For this purpose, the updated Russian-made Ilyushin 76 transport aircraft was supposed to be equipped with Israeli Phalcon airborne radar.[23] Moreover, in 1999, a $250 million contract was signed with China to supply the Ilyushin airplanes to the Chinese air force. Israel, under US pressure, had to pull out of this contract, which resulted in IAI - the project's leading company - losing $10 million in fines alone for breach of contract,[24] not to mention the loss of expected revenue from the contract and considerable reputational losses.

However, there have also been a number of successful bilateral defense projects – developing military equipment for a third country. For example, Russia and Israel worked together to deliver three Phalcon LRAD systems for the Indian Army. The $1.1bn contract to buy three EL/M-2075 Phalcon MRBMs from Israel's Elta and install them on Russian Ilyushin -76TD aircraft was signed by India's Defense Ministry in March 2004. This was the first joint project between Israel and Russia for the Indian army. Until then, Israel had acted independently in this market. In 2009–2010, within the contract framework India had received three planes.[25] The Indian Air Force appeared to have been pleased with the

order. At the end of 2010, it initiated the process of acquiring two more IL-76-powered Phalcon airborne early warning aircraft.

The successes of bilateral cooperation also include an agreement between Israel and Russia dating back to late 1990s to prevent the production and sale of images of Israeli territory (such an agreement had already existed with the US). Russian ground and space images are considered to be the most detailed and, moreover, the most accessible. This posed a crucially important issue for Israel due to the difficult security situation in the region coupled with Russia's traditionally good relations with the Muslim countries.

The spring of 2009 marked a milestone in the development of military-technical cooperation between the two countries. The Russian Defense Ministry's purchased a small shipment of Israeli unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) commonly known as military drones worth $50 million. According to high-ranking officials of Russian Defense Ministry, the UAVs were not designed to be used by the Russian army, but were intended for studying the experience of foreign manufacturers of such equipment.[26] The very fact that the Russian Defense Ministry purchased foreign-made products is significant, as is the fact that the purchase was made from Israel.

In April 2010, it was announced that IAI and Rostechnologii were to create a $300 million joint venture in the field of drone technology. Russia then expressed interest in deploying production of some of IAI's most advanced platforms, especially the Heron MALE medium-altitude UAV and the Heron TP long-endurance UAV. However, in June of the same year, negotiations reached a stalemate. The reason was reportedly the Israeli side's concern regarding transfer of sensitive technologies to Moscow that the joint UAV production on Russian territory would involve.[27]

In early September 2010, Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak visited Moscow and held talks with his Russian counterpart. According to official Russian sources, an agreement on long-term military cooperation between the two countries was signed. This appeared to be a framework agreement defining the general directions of military co-operation between Russia and Israel. In October of that year, IAI signed a contract with the Russian company Oboronprom to supply it with UAVs worth $400 million over 3 years.

The initial procurement of ten Forpost (Searcher MkII) was followed by the substantially greater order of UAVs. In 2012, a $400 million con-

tract was signed to assemble the IAI-developed UAVs under license, of which $300 million was allocated to pay for 10 Forpost complexes.[28] In 2015, another contract for 10 more such complexes was signed.

In 2016, the Russian Ministry of Defense announced plans to purchase about 30 Forpost UAV complexes in the next 5-10 years. These IAI-designed drones are licensed Searcher Mk2 UAVs assembled in Russia. The complex includes three aircraft – accordingly, within 5-10 years the Russian Ministry of Defense is to receive 90 Forpost drones. Thus, the total volume of Russian cooperation with IAI may amount to $1.7 billion.[29]

Interestingly, Russian arms experts have diverging opinions regarding Russia's acquisition of Israeli drones. On the one hand, the Georgian campaign in August 2008 unambiguously demonstrated Russia's lagging in developing this type of weaponry. On the other hand, some Russian specialists doubt both the quality of the Israeli UAVs and the need for purchasing foreign-made UAVs, especially taking into account the need to encourage Russia's existing own developments in this field.[30] In any case, in terms of the development of military-technical cooperation between Israel and Russia, the aforementioned contracts of cooperation in the military-industrial sphere are undoubtedly important. The very fact that Russian Armed Forces purchased foreign made equipment on this scale is remarkable.

During Ehud Barak's visit to Moscow in September 2010, the possibility of equipping Israeli aircraft with Russian airspace and laser technology was discussed. It also transpired that the two countries were working on the possibility of placing on Israeli territory a Russian laser ranging station (to monitor space satellites), which could operate as part of the GLONASS system.[31]

Thus, we can identify two main areas of Russian-Israeli military cooperation: joint projects on the 'Russian hardware platform - Israeli electronics model' for export to third countries; and Russia's purchase of Israeli armaments.

At the initial stage of bilateral cooperation in all spheres, Russian representatives often struggled to free themselves from the negative image of Israel created by Soviet propaganda going back to the middle of the last century. This was especially noticeable in the military-industrial cooperation, since the Israelis had long cooperated closely with the United States and Russia had been active in selling its weapons to the Muslim countries of the Middle East. However, it seems that in the early 2000s the problem of mistrust became much less acute.

Of greater concern to the Russian side today is the Israeli approach to conducting business. In its business dealing Israel is known for its assertiveness, bordering on impudence, and its desire to maximize profits, often to the detriment of its partners. This strategy has proven to be quite successful in the high-tech sector, but it is inappropriate in the defense sphere. The Russian way of doing business, on the other hand, is also distrusted by the Israelis. General lack of transparency, common preference for the most opaque, often corrupt schemes of doing business, make the vast majority of Russian foreign partners uneasy, and the Israelis are no exception.

On top of that, currently, Russia has also grown dissatisfied with the 'Russian platform-Israeli electronics model' of military-technical cooperation. From Russian point of view, it does not stimulate the development of the domestic military-industrial complex and is inconsistent with the leading role Russia wants to play on the international arena.

For their part, the Israelis see Russia's willingness to sell its weapons to Syria and Iran as a problem, mainly because they often end up in the hands of terrorist organizations fighting against Israel.

It appears that in order to resolve these problems and create a long-term sustainable relationship for bilateral PTS, a cooperation model based on joint defense R&D is needed. On the one hand, the implementation of such a model would greatly enhance the effectiveness of military-technical cooperation. On the other hand, Russia will be able to preserve and even increase its military know-how in the future, and deploy idle defense manufacturing capacity with orders based on joint developments, as Israel cannot match Russian material, technical and resource base.

Still, currently in the sphere of defense cooperation between the two countries the political rationale prevails over scientific, technical, or economic incentives. The situation in Syria and Russia's cooperation with Iran make next to impossible to further develop Russian-Israeli military-technical cooperation, which, as of early 2020, has become virtually nonexistent.

Fuel and energy complex

The discovery of offshore gas fields was a game changer for Israel. The Tamar offshore natural gas field was discovered in 2009, followed a year

later by the discovery of the larger Leviathan field. The amount of gas in the Israeli fields is estimated to be more than 32 trillion cubic meters of gas, which is enough to cover the country's needs for 150 years.[32]

Thanks to these recently discovered fields, Israel is now fully self-sufficient in natural gas. However, the question of export markets for the surplus gas remains an open one. Israel has been actively cooperating with Egypt in the energy area. An agreement was signed in 2019 to start construction of a gas pipeline between the two countries at the end of the year 2021. However, similar initiatives between Israel and Egypt had been sabotaged many times in the past, which is reflected in the current acute perception of possible risks in Israel. Another major development has been the signing of an agreement between Israel, Greece and Cyprus to build an offshore gas pipeline through Cyprus to Greece, for the delivery of gas to Italy and onto the rest of Europe.[33] However, the project requires a large investment ($6-7 billion) and with an estimated payback period of over ten years, which makes the project less attractive to investors, especially considering the tense relations between Israel and Turkey.[34]

Russia could be a potential partner in this project, but cooperation with Gazprom would entail a number of important political and economic consequences. On the one hand, such a move would give Russia additional geopolitical leverage and reduce competition for Gazprom (see below). However, the Israelis understand that dealing with Gazprom is bound to provoke negative reactions from the United States and the European Union. Gazprom has attempted several times to enter the Israeli natural gas market, but failed each time for various reasons. On the other hand, strengthening Russian-Israeli relations will help to diversify Israeli foreign policy and guarantee the security of Israel's gas infrastructure thanks to Russia's political weight in relations with Iran and Hezbollah.[35]

Today, Israel is more of a natural gas competitor to Russia, as in Europe Israel is seen as an alternative to Russia as a natural gas supplier.[36]

One of the most promising areas of cooperation between the two countries lie in the natural gas production and processing technologies. Russia has unique experience in this area, and Israel is interested in Russian technologies for compressing natural gas.[37]

The most active attempts to enter the Israeli energy market have been made by Gazprom. Rosneft also tried, but in 2006 the attempt was

foiled by Israel's General Security Service (Shabak) due to the company's active work with Arab countries (this was put forward as the official reason). In 2012, there was renewed talk about Rosneft's interests in Israel following Vladimir Putin's visit to the country, however, no concrete steps have been taken.

In our view, there are three main reasons for the failures of Russian oil and gas state companies in Israel:

1. Both Gazprom and Rosneft (especially when headed by Igor Sechin – Putin's confident) are perceived in Israel as instruments of Moscow's political influence. Some elite groups seriously fear that their country will be held hostage to the Kremlin's political ambitions exploiting its 'hydrocarbon leverage'.
2. The Russian energy giants maintaining very close ties with the Russian government tend to overestimate the role of business arrangements between Russia's President and the Prime Minister of Israel. While the Russian President can indeed influence the situation, the Israeli Prime Minister has little or no leverage over Israeli business and is only able to mitigate political risks.
3. 3. Lack of expertise regarding Israeli business environment on the part of Russian companies and, consequently, an absence of well-thought-out strategy for entering the Israeli market, taking into account all the specifics of the country's business environment.

At the same time, some Israeli experts welcome the possibility of having a Russian company take control over Israeli gas exports. This interest stems from the fact that Israel has virtually no experience in this field. In addition, Russian companies, which mainly work with Russian natural gas, are independent of the situation in the Arab world (e.g. the situation with Qatar).

Nuclear energy could be another promising area of engagement for Russia and Israel. The construction of a nuclear power plant in Israel has been discussed for many years, but so far with no results. In 2017, Israel's Ministry of Energy conducted a survey, according to which 70% of those surveyed were not opposed to the development of nuclear power in the country.[38] Developing its own nuclear energy would allow Israel to reduce its dependence on hydrocarbons, enhancing national security. On the other hand, a nuclear power plant could become the target of

terrorist attacks, and the potential negative consequences of damage to or destruction of a nuclear power plant are enormous.

Still, in the area of nuclear energy, cooperation with Russia can provide Israel with access to the necessary technology and expertise. Russia has extensive experience in building and operating nuclear power facilities, and the common understanding between Russia and Israel in the field of counterterrorism could play an important role. This factor could be key in the decision to build a nuclear power plant in Israel.

Space research

In 2011 Russia and Israel signed a framework agreement on cooperation in outer space research. The agreement includes areas such as astrophysics, space biology and medicine, development of satellites and aeronautical delivery vehicles. The agreement also provides a tentative framework for developing scientific exchange and intellectual property rights in this area. The agreement is part of a series of similar documents previously signed by Israel with the European Space Agency, as well as the French and Italian space agencies.[39]

One of Israel's achievements in the field of aerospace research has been to reduce the size of equipment sent into space. Because of the difficult geopolitical situation, Israel is forced to launch its satellites from its territory in a westerly direction, that is, in the opposite direction to the rotation of the Earth. As a result, Israeli researchers have developed expertise in reducing the weight and size of aeronautical equipment to make it easier for satellites to reach their orbits.[40]

As far as we are aware, since 2011 there is no information on further cooperation between Russia and Israel in this area. Unfortunately, the difficult geopolitical situation coupled with specific Russian-Israeli problems in scientific collaboration (discussed further in detail) hinder fruitful cooperation in such an important area. However, we suggest that this difficulty is temporary and that providing that they are overcome, Russia and Israel will be able to focus on space research cooperation again.

Agriculture

According to the Russian Ministry of Agriculture, agricultural trade between Russia and Israel grew by 8.9% in 2018, exceeding $500 million.

Exports from Russia increased by 38.3%. Russia exports grain, various foodstuffs and vegetable oils to Israel, while importing fruit, juices and flowers.

In 2016, Russia and Israel signed a roadmap for cooperation in agriculture.[41] The document covers dairy production, water treatment technology and food storage. The roadmap is the result of lengthy negotiations and numerous meetings between the two countries. Agro-technology and technology development cooperation are pivotal to this project.[42]

Modern dairy farms are to be built in Russia using Israeli technology. Voronezh, Leningrad and Tambov oblasts and the Republic of Tatarstan were chosen as pilot regions.[43] Cooperation in the field of irrigation and water supply will be continued, primarily with the use of drip irrigation technologies, as well as in the area of agricultural product storage.[44]

A cooperation agreement was also reached between the Russian State Agrarian University and the Volkani Agricultural Research Institute in Israel with an aim to increase milk production in Russia through a mutual research project.[45]

In February 2019, the Russian Republic of Bashkiria agreed with private equity fund AVG Capital and Israeli company LR Group to build a large cattle-breeding complex for 7,000 cattle in the Kushnarenkovsky district in 2019-2020. The total investment amounts to RUB 10bn. (approx. $137 mln). The project, which was initiated by Bashkir-Moloko, envisages the use of advanced Israeli technologies to facilitate production of up to 75,000 tons of milk per year.[46]

Financial sphere

The development of the banking sector in Russia since 1991 has facilitated contacts and exchange of business services between Russian and Israeli banks. In 2004, a system was approved whereby Russian banks that take credit for export-related activities from Israel receive a 10% reduction in Russian income tax. At the same time, cooperation between Russian and Israeli financial institutions is still in its infancy.

There are a number of problems in the development of cooperation in the financial sector between the two countries. The 2008 crisis revealed the financial sector to be the most volatile sector of the economy to dramatic changes in the economic situations and government

policies of the two countries. There is next to no Israeli banking presence in Russia. While Israelis are attracted to the vast and still underdeveloped Russian financial services market, the bureaucratic and economic barriers hinder the entry of foreign banks into Russia. Political and economic instability are also a risk. That is why, for example, the decision to open a Russian office of Israel's largest bank Hapoalim was postponed several times.[47] Moreover, according to the Russian and Israeli press, in 2007, the bank held talks about buying Russian SDM-Bank.[48] However, in January 2009, the Israeli side refused to close the deal, the main reason being the global financial and economic crisis, which forced Israeli bankers to cut costs.

The experience of the Israeli Tamir Fishman Fund to enter the Russian VC market is also illustrative. Tamir Fishman Fund became one of the co-founders of the Russian management Finanstrast company selected to receive funds for management from the then newly-created RVC. After a scandalous interview with Oleg Shvartsman, Managing Director of Finanstrast, with Kommersant newspaper on 30.11.2007,[49] the Israelis were forced to withdraw from the project. Some time later, Tamir Fishman returned to do business in Russia, but with reduced ambition and scope. The Fund has not achieved much success in Russia.

In 2011, the Russian company Rosnano attempted to create a joint Russian-Israeli VC fund. A prominent Israeli firm Catalyst was chosen as the management company. As of fall 2016, it did not manage to raise the agreed-upon $50 million for the first investment round (another $50 million was provided by Rosnano). There are other examples of Russian VC investors trying to establish operations in Israel.

Likewise, there is no presence of Russian banks in Israel. The Israeli banking sector is controlled by the local banking oligopoly, protected by Israeli legislation and is very closed to newcomers. Both the Israelis and the Russians are interested in mutual investment and joint projects with venture capital funds, but the level of engagement remains low. Strengthening mutual trust and cooperation in this area could facilitate the emergence of intermediary banks, which could provide sustainable mechanisms for financial interaction between different economic sectors of the two countries, ultimately making possible a wide range of joint economic projects between the Russian and Israeli sides.

Science and Technology Cooperation

Israel is of interest to Russia not only as a source of valuable know-how but also as an important, if not strategic, partner for cooperation in various segments of the innovations-based economy. Here we consider both the conventional models of bilateral cooperation and our own concept of prospective partnership in this area.

As early as 2006, Fedorchenko and Maryasis wrote that Russian-Israeli innovation economy cooperation may be beneficial to both parties for a number of reasons. Russia is lagging behind in some innovation areas and its desire to develop domestic high technologies will enable cooperation with Israel on a parity basis. This could be important for Israel, as it often plays second fiddle in its economic relations with the West.

Second, the de facto absence of a language barrier between Russian scientists and Israeli scientists – immigrants from the Soviet Union, if properly managed, can potentially create the kind of technology transfer infrastructure that will greatly reduce the brain and technology drain from both countries to the US.[50] Here, however, an important caveat must be made. On the one hand, the absence of the language barrier simplifies communication between scientists, businessmen, security services and politicians. However, in Russia, Russian-speaking Israelis stand for Israelis in general, and the same individuals are taken as representatives of the Russians in Israel. This often leads to stereotypes on both sides and, consequently, to mistakes in making important decisions. In order to establish an effective inter-cultural dialogue, it is necessary to systematically study the socio-cultural specificities of respective political and business cultures. In Russia, this problem was recognized by the end of the 1990s, at least at the expert level. By now, this has led to an increase in the use of area studies at the decision-making level. Such a process has not taken place in Israel, however. After the collapse of the USSR, interest in the systematic study of Russia waned, and attempts to revive it have so far been unsuccessful.

Third, as part of the technological chain of technology transfer, it is absolutely feasible to establish high-tech production in Russia deploying Israeli technology and, quite possibly, management. Israel would benefit from Russia's considerably cheaper production costs. For Russia, the attraction is the establishment of new production capacity and reanimation of hitherto flaccid industrial facilities - new jobs will be created with the positive effect on the economic and socio-political situation in the country.

Fourth, such cooperation can significantly expand the markets for innovative technology products for both countries. Israel, a country deeply integrated into the developed markets of the West, can serve as a conduit for Russian products, including products produced with Israeli expertise. Russia, on the other hand, has long-established ties in the Muslim East, a region with significant demand for new technologies. Israel, on the other hand, currently has no access to a large part of these markets for a number of political reasons. Thus, Russia can serve as a conduit for Israeli and co-developed products to these markets.[51]

Table 2. Main parameters of the bilateral R&D call for proposals

№ round	Year	Total amount from both sides ($ million)	Areas	No of projects funded
1	2006–2008	1,6	Mathematics, physics, geology, geophysics, new materials	27
2	2009–2010	1,2	Nanomaterials, Green Energy	16
3	2011–2012	1,2	Nanomaterials, computer technologies	16
4	2016–2018	0,96	Topology, Mechanics	8
5	2019–2021	2,5	Health, functional materials	10

Compiled from the official website of the Ministry of Science and Technology of Israel, Available at: https://www.gov.il/he/Departments/General/most_intl_relations_ru; https://www.gov.il/he/departments/publications/Call_for_bids/1_most_rfp20181112.

The issues discussed above are still valid today. In general, there has been some progress in bilateral cooperation in science, technology and innovation in the years since our previous publication. For example, since 2006, the Russian Foundation for Basic Research (RFBR) and Israeli Ministry of Science and Technology held competitions for joint research projects. As shown in Table 2, as of the end of 2019, four rounds of this

competition have been held and a fifth is in progress. The parameters of each round are also reflected Table 2.

Possibly, due to importance given to nanotechnology development in both countries, Rusnano's Infrastructure and Education Programmes Fund and the Ministry of Industry's Office of the Chief Scientist (OCS), had held seven rounds of joint R&D competitions on the subject as of end-2019 and had closed the eighth in that year.[52]

In Israel, the Russian tech companies and organizations such as Rosnano, Skolkovo and Yandex are on the lookout for new technologies. Yandex took a precedent-setting step in 2014, becoming the first Russian company to open an R&D centre in Israel. In 2015, one of the world's most successful Internet security companies, Kaspersky Lab, did the same by opening a small (6 employees) R&D centre in Jerusalem.[53] In 2017, it was expanded with the addition of the Future Technology Lab.[54] Ariel University in Israel holds seminars for Russian scientists and researchers on technology transfer. The Israeli pharmaceutical giant Teva opened its production facility in Yaroslavl in autumn 2014. There are a number of other examples of such mutual cooperation.[55] Nevertheless, despite the real potential and proclamations on both sides, no sustained cooperation in the field of innovations has happened so far.

It is normal that certain obstacles appear on the way to the development of bilateral cooperation. The main question is to what extent they are surmountable and whether both sides are ready to overcome them. This question Dmitry Maryasis tackles in his paper for Tel Aviv-based Institute for National Security Studies (INSS).[56] Here we are not going to discuss it. We shall just touch upon several aspects that are relevant for S&T, and innovations cooperation between the two countries, so as to give an example of our way of thinking.

There have been several attempts to make up for the lack of financial instruments to facilitate cooperation. The situation in this area is somewhat complicated by the fact that Russia is increasingly pursuing isolationist policies, where investments by Russians abroad may be perceived as unpatriotic. Moreover, the current geopolitical realities nudge Western countries to reduce their cooperation with Russia, which in turn affects their allies, including Israel. Finance is a very sensitive area, and in such climate of mistrust it is difficult to create an effective mechanism for financing bilateral innovative cooperation. It is in this area that government structures can play an important role. In particular, it would

make sense to create a Russian-Israeli fund to support R&D, following the model that already works effectively between Israel and the five countries (USA, Canada, Singapore, South Korea, India). State-backed funds and guarantees would help to attract private capital. A successful implementation of projects using this model could stimulate the development of other forms of funding for bilateral innovation cooperation.

Such scheme would also allow the Israeli partners to overcome their prejudice against the present state of Russia's high-tech industries. The process of establishing R&D centres of Russian companies in Israel (as Yandex has done) could serve the same goal, as R&D in Israel does not preclude a similar process in Russia. This would only enhance scientific and technological exchange within the company. Successful examples of such exchange will improve the image of Russian high-tech and Russia as a country. In an environment where reputation is key this aspect can hardly be underestimated.

A promising form of cooperation is the so-called 'triangle'. This refers to the involvement of a third country in bilateral cooperation. Such a scheme may be a solution to a number of problems, including project financing. For example, if the Russians want to attract foreign investment, and the Israelis are reluctant to invest, a vicious circle occurs. However, if a third party e.g. the US provides investment it creates a win-win combination for all. The Russians get foreign investment and Israeli technology, the Israelis get the opportunity to enter the Russian market, and the Americans get a potentially lucrative return on investment in one of the largest and most promising global markets. Several configurations of such 'triangles' are possible. In addition to the US, China, India and EU countries could also be potential partners. Both Russia and Israel are interested in developing business relationships with these countries. Thus involving them in Russian-Israeli dialogue could produce significant results. Expanding the number of partners beyond three seems undesirable, as it would lead to a reduction in the interaction efficiency.

Bilateral cooperation in the field of education is another important factor in addressing many of the issues outlined in this chapter. This involves two parallel processes. First, the active involvement of Israeli specialists in Russian higher education. This is especially pertinent in courses that cover technology transfer systems, venture capital, and innovation processes management. Relevant internships for Russian students in Israel also seem promising. Second, the quality of educational programs in Israeli studies for graduates in Russia should be improved

(such programs now exist at ISAA Lomonosov Moscow State University and MGIMO University). Similar programs covering the Russian economy should be developed for Israeli university students. This is important because the two countries, due to their different historical development paths, have different political, economic and societal traditions. Mutual understanding is key to successful economic cooperation.

As part of the development of bilateral innovation cooperation, a unique area that seems to fit within the 'triangles' concept is the creation of triangular R&D and technology commercialisation teams, with participation from the Palestine Administration or Jordan or Egypt. Some clarification needs to be made here.

The conventional wisdom is that Middle East Muslim countries lag far behind most developed and even some developing countries in economic development. In many respects this is true. However, in recent times great changes have been taking place in this vast region. In particular, the governments of Jordan, UAE and Qatar have been actively investing in modernizing their infrastructure and IT sectors as part of their development strategies.[57] Analysts predict a steady increase in the number of internet users in the Arab world. Liberalization processes have also started in the telecoms sector, in particular the privatization of mobile phone service providers.[58] As the American entrepreneur and investor Christopher Schroeder convincingly demonstrated,[59] a new class of innovative entrepreneurs has emerged in the Middle East. A number of regional start-ups have even achieved global success. For example, the Egyptian startup Weather HD has become one of the most popular weather apps for smartphones. The Lebanese startup Butterfleye has invested in development teams in France, the UK and the Netherlands to cement its earlier achievements and ensure further expansion. These three countries (more correctly, two countries and one territory) especially stand out in the region for their innovation and entrepreneurship.

At the same time, the innovation ecosystems of these Arab countries are developing completely separately from that of Israel. Paradoxically, despite having a direct border with one of the most advanced innovation economies in the world, the innovation communities of the PNA, Jordan and Egypt have no direct contacts with their Israeli counterparts. Nor do they benefit from Israeli achievements, infrastructure, scientific and technological potential. This could be written off as a classic market failure or one of the most prolonged conflicts of the last century - the

Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The political situation is so tense, this explanation goes, that outright direct cooperation, even in such an apolitical sphere as hi-tech and, more generally, innovation, is impossible at the moment. Moreover, this applies not only to the PNA itself but also to the countries with which Israel has peace treaties - Egypt and Jordan.[60]

Meanwhile, even without an in-depth analysis, the potential synergies of such cooperation are clear. Arab countries not only would gain access to a well-developed, innovative economy, but also create new jobs by establishing production facilities on their territory and stimulate the development of their economy as a whole. At the very least, Israel would get outsourcing opportunities, at best, access to the Middle East market as the goods would be labeled as produced in one of the Arab countries.

What is Russian role in all this? Russia has the potential to become a real, not virtual, platform for innovative cooperation between Israel and the Arab states. All preconditions for Russia working as a kind of link already exist. Firstly, Russia has well-established good relations both with Israel and Arab countries of the region. Moreover, it is equidistant from the parties to the conflict. This will enable Russia to maintain a friendly attitude to all members of the alliance, to act as an arbiter in disputes that may arise, and to help (especially at first) to ease tensions between Israeli and Arab partners. Second, Russia has a physical infrastructure that is often lacking in Arab countries. Using Russia's science and technology base will allow the Arab members of the alliance to become more productive. Third, Russia's relative geographic distance from the Middle East allows it to serve as a physical meeting place for representatives of the Israeli and Arab innovation communities. Fourth, Russia's existing industrial facilities may be utilized for manufacturing of mutually developed products. Fifth, the Russian educational system can provide appropriate support to Arab innovators, giving them the opportunity to fill the lack of knowledge and skills in case they do not have such opportunities in their countries or elsewhere in the world.

For Arab and Israeli participants in this kind of Triangle, the benefits of such cooperation are clear. The existing potential for bilateral cooperation between them is enhanced by the fact that Russia itself is a large market. Moreover, employing the same marketing strategies, there is also the possibility of entering other international markets.–

Russia, for its part, will be able to employ more fully its scientific and technological resource, including Russian scientists. Participation in an international project of this kind will boost the Russian scientific, technological, and business community to gain the necessary experience in commercializing technologies and managing innovative projects in a more familiar environment for them. Russian hi-tech products will be able to access new markets. An equally important positive factor for Russia is its effective return to the Middle East as an active economic player. As a result, the country will be able to gain influence besides and beyond its foreign policy in the region.

Of course, securing financing is key issue to success such of such ambitious projects. The brunt of the costs will likely to fall on the two sides of the 'triangle' - Russian and Israeli. However, the potential benefits may more than justify the investment. Undoubtedly, this is a bold and high-risk undertaking but the one inherent to any innovative development. Healthy caution and a comprehensive business plan and selecting potential partners from the Arab and Israeli sides are key. (El Bawader and Takwin Labs, the recently created institutions for innovation development in the Arab sector of Israel's economy, may become just such partners and co-investors). It may well turn out that such an unconventional idea will materialize as a working project, kickstarting a systemic cooperation between Russia and Israel in the field of innovations. However, in the absence of any serious progress in settling the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, realizing such ambitious projects is currently highly difficult.

Conclusion

The modern history of Russian-Israeli economic cooperation dates back to the 1990s, when the collapse of the USSR, which changed the political and economic landscape in many parts of the world, provided Russia and Israel with the opportunity to renew their foreign relations. It also opened up completely new avenues for economic cooperation. Since then, several trade and cooperation agreements have been signed between the two countries in various economic spheres. Joint industrial investment projects have been set up, as well as cooperation projects in the field of military research and development. Major Russian companies opened their representative offices in Israel, and Israeli companies opened their offices in Russia.

Today it is possible to claim that one of the most successful areas of economic interaction between Russia and Israel is tourism. In recent years, barring years of economic slumps, there has been a steady growth in tourism between the two countries. In addition to the growth in absolute figures, the share of Israeli tourists in Russia is also growing. Until 2015, the share of Russian tourists in Israel grew rapidly, reaching a record 14 percent in 2014. However, after the economic crisis in Russia, their share dropped significantly, and so far we are only talking about restoring pre-crisis figures. In addition, tourist numbers from Israel to Russia are far smaller compared to tourist flow from Russia to Israel. However, with the right approach, the number of tourists from Israel to Russia could be significantly higher.

Foreign trade between Russia and Israel has been growing despite recurrent economic difficulties. Still, the volume of trade between the two countries remains modest in absolute terms and ranks very low in percentage terms for both Russia and Israel. The trade structure is also 'typical' for Russia: Russia exports raw materials to Israel and imports food, equipment, and industrial products from Israel. Even considering the overall positive dynamics of trade, one can hardly talk today about a significant breakthrough in trade between the two countries. This would require Russia to transform not only its trade with Israel, but its foreign trade strategy in general. However, the question of export diversification of Russian exports is beyond the scope of this study.

A potential boost to Russian-Israeli economic cooperation could be provided by the creation of a free trade area between the two countries. This issue was first raised publicly in 2016, and since then the FTA has been under development. The creation of the FTA has the potential to increase the volume of foreign trade and widen cooperation between the two counties. However, the FTA itself is unlikely to fundamentally change the structure of foreign trade between Russia and Israel. Currently, Russia is interested in Israeli technologies, Israel is interested in Russian oil, both countries want to develop tourism. According to the authors, a more important role is played by the transition from trade on the basis of 'raw materials in exchange for technology' and 'raw materials in exchange for industrial products' to trade on the basis of 'technology in exchange for technology'. The authors see the free trade area not so much as a catalyst for foreign trade relations 'in itself', but rather as a platform for further cooperation agreements between the two coun-

tries, including cooperation in science and technology which potentially can yield remarkable results in the long term.

As for promising areas for cooperation, the energy sector takes center stage. The discovery of significant natural gas reserves in Israel has raised a number of questions for the Israeli authorities, which are not only economic and political, but also of a purely technical nature. The Israeli scientific and technical community, for obvious reasons, has little experience in the energy sector, in contrast to Russia, where this field is very well developed. In this light, we consider to be promising the development of scientific and technical cooperation between Russia and Israel in the construction and operation of Israeli gas infrastructure. Removing the barriers on the way to implementing agreements between Russia and Israel on the 'gas issue' may be the basis for further academic research.

In order to strengthen Russian-Israeli economic relations, the countries need to focus on scientific and technological cooperation. Although there are a number of formidable barriers in this sphere, such as lack of mutual trust and lack of bilateral financial cooperation mechanisms, they can all be resolved. Russia and Israel have significant potential for mutually beneficial cooperation in the high-tech field. The realization of this potential, in our opinion, will make S&T cooperation between Russia and Israel a foundation for long-term Russian-Israeli cooperation and will bring economic relations between the two countries to a fundamentally new level.

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ELIZAVETA A. IAKIMOVA

Ukrainian-Israeli Relations under V. Zelensky: a View from Russia

Ukraine has never being among Israel's top foreign policy priorities; however, the republic has a certain significance for the Middle Eastern country in a variety of areas, ranging from economic cooperation to the support in the UN, which is necessary, at least quantitatively, to overcome the Arab majority. In recent years, the importance of bilateral relations has increased markedly due to the changing political realities in both states. Ukraine began to overcome the consequences of political crises, which made it possible to hope for a solution to a number of long-standing problems in contacts between Kiev and Jerusalem.[1] Moreover the election of a new president created conditions for positive developments in the spheres of national policy and counteracting anti-Semitism. In Israel, a series of four election campaigns to the Knesset raised the profile of the Russian-speaking electorate. In order to win their votes the leading political forces needed to find a balance in cooperation with Moscow and Kiev. The final change of power in Israel, in turn, creates the basis for the implementation of the states' plans to increase cooperation in the field of economy and innovation.

The aim of the article is to identify the specifics of Ukrainian-Israeli relations under President Volodymyr Zelensky. The analysis includes three dimensions: political dialog, economic cooperation and the potential for interaction in the field of national politics and the politics of memory. The historical factors of interstate relations since the early 1990s, are examined separately. The article also attempts to use the example of V. Zelensky's experience to determine the extent to which the turnover of power affects the relations between Israel and Ukraine, as well as to analyze the peculiarities of the identity and self-identification of the Jewish population of the modern republic.

Retrospective analysis of bilateral Relations

The history of Israel's contacts with independent Ukraine dates back to the 1990s, when Jerusalem became interested in the possibilities of strengthening its position on the international stage by establishing diplomatic relations with the 15 states that emerged after the collapse ot the Soviet Union. In doing so, the Israeli Foreign Ministry paid particular attention to such factors as the size of a country, its political and economic position in the region, as well as the presence of a Jewish community and its potential for immigration to Israel.[2] Already at that time, the main directions of interaction between Jerusalem and Kiev were outlined, many of which do not lose their relevance even today. A number of potential problems also emerged during the first years of cooperation. Among them are the countries' approaches to the politics of memory that do not always coincide: while for Israel the issues affecting the Holocaust, including the topic of local collaborators to the Nazis during the Second World War are of fundamental importance, Ukraine, being in need to build its own national policy, started rethinking history in the attempt to show the negative impact of Soviet rule on its development in the past.

Another important dimension was the future of Aliyah. The authorities of the republic promised not to impede the freedom of immigration. As a result, from 1992 to 1995 more than 70,000 people moved to Israel.[3] The issue acquired relevance again in light of political crises in Ukraine. During the first four months of 2014 alone, the aliyah from Ukraine increased by 142%.[4]

As the first Israeli ambassador to Moscow A. Levin, who stood at the origins of the formation of relations with all the new independent states, wrote in his book, Kiev paid particular attention to the perspectives of economic ties, hoping to focus on Jewish business as a kind of 'bridge' for building direct contacts between representatives of the enterpreneural environment of the two countries.[5] At the same time, according to the Israeli diplomat, during the ceremony of exchanging diplomatic notes on December 25, 1991, which became the formal symbol of the start of official contacts, the first foreign minister of independent Ukraine Anatoliy Zlenko hinted at the republic's dissatisfaction with Russia's pressure in regard to energy supplies.[6]

In the 1990s, another meaningful area of relations between the states began to gradually build up —cooperation in the UN. A dialogue on this

issue was also launched at the above-mentioned meeting in December 1991, when the parties discussed the reversal of the United Nations General Assembly Resolution No. 3379, in which Zionism was named as one of the forms of racial discrimination.[7] In 1975 the Ukrainian SSR, which had a separate voice in the Organization, supported the document. At a more modern stage, the issue of interaction in the UN was raised by Zeev Elkin, who was Israel's deputy foreign minister. In 2013, he called for the application of the principle of symmetry at the United Nations making Jerusalem's position on the recognition of the Holodomor in Ukraine as an act of genocide dependent on Kiev's support for the Israeli interests in voting on the Palestinian issue.[8]

Up to a certain point, cooperation between the two states had no strategic significance for the Russian foreign policy. This can be explained by the fact that, despite the desire of the Israeli authorities to maximize the circle of the country's partners in the international arena by establishing diplomatic relations with all the newly independent states, in Moscow it was understood that Kiev was no match for Russia with its influence in the Middle East, including matters affecting Israeli interests. The energy issue, to which Ukraine was trying to draw attention, was more important for Israel than for Russia, as Jerusalem feared that the desire to diversify its sources of supply could push Kiev to rapprochement with the Middle Eastern states hostile to Israel.[9]

A noticeable transformation of Moscow's approaches towards relations between Kiev and Jerusalem was associated with a series of political crises in the republic that provoked its conflict with the Russian Federation. On the one hand, Israel began to figure among possible mediators for the settlement of Russian-Ukrainian contradictions. On the other hand, Jerusalem's position in this conflict began to matter to the United States. As a result, the Israeli government chose neutrality. However, in some cases it deviated from this policy, because issues connected with Ukraine were used as political instruments in containing undesirable activity of Moscow in the Middle East.

The UN voting statistics of Israel illustrate this. On March 27, 2014, a resolution on the territorial integrity of Ukraine was presented to the General Assembly. The reason behind the document was the referendum held in the Crimea and Sevastopol, whose results were used as justification for their subsequent return into the Russian Federation.[10] The Israeli representatives to the UN did not participate in the vote, using a strike in the Foreign Ministry as an excuse. However, this explanation

was unacceptable either for the USA or for Ukraine.[11] On December 17, 2018, the UN General Assembly put to a vote a resolution on the 'militarization of Crimea and Sevastopol'.[12] Israel supported the document, and this political move was interpreted as an evidence that Jerusalem halted its neutrality. However, there is an opinion that such a kind of voting behavior was the consequence of the crisis after the incident with the Russian Il-20 plane in Syria, when the Russian Ministry of Defense came to the conclusion that the actions of the Israeli military were the reason for the plane wreck.[13]

Political crises in Ukraine raised the question of a special Jewish agenda in the Maidan protests, which resulted in a discussion about anti-Semitism in the republic. From the point of view of Ukrainian experts, there was no special Jewish issue in the political crises and local Jewish population in the majority of cases supported particular political forces according to the geographic principle.[14] The problem of anti-Semitism was more complicated. On the one hand, Jewish communities of Ukraine in rapprochement with Europe saw certain guarantees for themselves in terms of protecting the rights of national minorities. On the other hand, the issue of hatred towards Jews has also become a tool of internal political struggle. Moreover, this technique was used even during the 'Orange Revolution'. Research on this topic was published in the journal Yevrei Yevrazii by Vyacheslav Likhachev. He noted that the main essence of the tool was to form the image of candidate Viktor Yushchenko as a radical nationalist, and in order to intensify this perception of the politician it was necessary to show, among other things, the anti-Semitic sentiments inherent in him and his surroundings.[15]

The author saw as an additional confirmation of his theory some cases of closure of opposition newspapers on the basis of accusations of anti-Semitism. For V. Likhachev, the most illustrative was the example of Selskie Vesti, the publication of which was temporarily suspended due to the appearance of anti-Semitic articles in 2002 and 2003.[16] The reason for considering this incident as an instance of the use of PR-technologies for the author stems from the fact that the materials were published on a commercial basis and were prepared not by the newspaper itself, but by the director of the Interregional Academy of Personnel Management (IAPM) Vasiliy Yaremenko, who previously wrote a book about Jews in Ukraine.[17] However, it was Selskie Vesti that became the focus of attention and the subsequent trial, which contributed to the deterioration

of the reputation of the opposition parties that collaborated with the newspaper.[18]

In Russia, the attitude towards such publications is completely different. Taking into account the peculiarities of the politics of memory, analysts refuse to see in these materials PR-technologies. For instance, researcher P. Polyan in the book Between Auschwitz and Babi Yar. Reflection and Research on the Catastrophe calls them 'blasphemy'.[19] At the same time, it is important that he uses the same examples as V. Likhachev, namely, the article prepared by V. Yaremenko for Selskie Vesti, but according to P. Polyan, publications of this kind were not a tool in the struggle for power, but carried a real danger of incitement.[20]

The crisis of 2014 affected not only the Jewish community of the republic but also Israelis of Ukrainian origin. For a long time, Jerusalem and Kiev were drafting the social security agreement for the former citizens of Ukraine who immigrated to Israel. The states held several rounds of consultations as a result, the document was signed on September 28, 2012 and the Israeli side promptly ratified it. However, subsequent events in the republic prevented the agreement from coming into force: after President Viktor Yanukovych was ousted from power, the agreement was withdrawn from ratification.

The final chord in Ukranian-Israeli relations was the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) signed on 21 January 2019 under President Petro Poroshenko. Its main aim, as defined by the Ukrainian side, was the liberalization of agricultural and industrial markets. In accordance with the document, it was planned to reduce import duties by 70% of Israeli and 80% of Ukrainian industrial products.[21]

This 'legacy' was left to President V. Zelensky by his predecessors. Difficulties were observed in most areas of cooperation: some of them resulted from modern political crises, others were the consequences of the policies pursued in the process of formation of an independent state, starting from the 1990s. The FTA was of particular importance to the new administration. On the one hand, it provided groundwork for strengthening contacts that had been shaken by internal instability in Ukraine. On the other hand, in order to mark in the history of Ukrainian-Israeli relations, the new leader was faced with the necessity to do something no less important than the FTA, but by the time he took office, he did not have resources for this, first of all, economic ones.

'Jewish Question' for the President

The Ukrainian presidential campaign of 2019 found itself on the periphery of Israeli media and political discourse since it was overshadowed by the US. recognition of the Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights. Moreover, the importance of the republic for Israeli politics has decreased significantly because of the Ukrainian political crises that undermined country's credibility as a reliable partner. Besides, after the resignation of Avigdor Lieberman from the post of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the interest of Jerusalem towards the countries of the former Soviet Union significantly declined.

Russian media preferred not to deal with the Jewish origin of V. Zelensky. It seems that for the majority of journalists and experts the answer to the question was obvious, being based on jokes of the future president of Ukraine while he was playing in KVN. V. Zelensky himself avoided to comment on this issue. This was his fundamental difference from a presidential candidate, the head of the All-Ukrainian Jewish Congress Vadim Rabinovich. Taking part in the election campaign in 2014, he spoke openly about his origin.[22]

In general, this situation reflects the peculiarities of Jewish population statistics in Ukraine, where only those citizens, who call themselves Jews are counted as such. For this reasons, the data on the number of the Ukrainian Jewish community varies considerably depending on the source. For example, the Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities of Ukraine tells about 108556 people[23], while the Federation of Jewish Communities estimates there are as many as 500 thousand Jews in the country.[24] A similar situation is observed, when counting the number of the Jewish communities in the post-Soviet space. The calculation are often based on the percentage of the Jewish people that take part in community events. In the European part of the former USSR, it is traditionally considered lower than in the Caucasus or Central Asia.

However, the reluctance of V. Zelensky to touch upon the issue of his origin was interpreted by skeptics as an attempt to avoid negative consequences in the future. They meant the prospect of an outbreak of anti-Semitism based on dissatisfaction with the decisions of the Jewish president. The economic situation in Ukraine seemed especially dangerous in this case. On account of this Israeli media even warned about the possibility of spreading the 'the Jews are responsible for all' sentiments in the society, especially taking into account the fact, that the head of

the government was Volodymyr Groisman.[25] Partly such assumptions were warranted taking into account, for example, the situation in Latvia, where similar stereotypes revived in the context of the intensification of the process of Jewish property restitution.[26] However, there was also the opposite opinion, the supporters of which, on the contrary, expressed hopes for a change in national and historical policy.[27]

An attempt to get to the truth was undertaken by an Israeli newspaper The Times of Israel. The journalists applied to two Jewish organizations of country - the United Jewish Community of Ukraine (UJCU) in Kiev and the Chabad Lubavitch in Odessa, although V. Zelensky himself was born in the city of Krivoy Rog. The UJCU reported that the politician is a Jew by mother, however, does not take part in community life.[28] This version may be partially confirmed by the data from Krivoy Rog: the chief rabbi of the city argued that there was no active Jewish life in the city until the 2000s.[29] The Odessa Chabad focused on the religion of the presidential candidate, considering him a Jew converted to Christianity by indirect indications. In particular, representatives of the organization referred to an interview with V. Zelensky in which he said that he was the godfather to some of his acquaintances' children.[30]

Interestingly, the latter part of the article reflects a kind of conflict on the understanding of the Jewishness within the framework of the former USSR. For Ukrainian, as well as for Russian Jews, who were raised in the Soviet Union, religion is not considered a necessary prerequisite for characterizing themselves as Jews.[31] While, for example, in Germany, where a significant part of the Jewish population from the former USSR/CIS settled, they are often reproached for this.[32] The religious factor, as is well known, is also of great importance in disputes about 'Russian' Jews in Israel.

The discussion on the issue of president's origin continued in a large interview with V. Zelensky to the Times of Israel before his visit to Jerusalem for the 5th World Holocaust Forum. In the conversation with the Israeli journalist he noted that he has a lot to do with Israel. The politician said: 'I have relatives there - my mother's aunt and her relatives. Some of them moved to Israel about 10-15 years ago. Perhaps earlier. In the late 90s'.[33] The title of this exclusive interview included the phrase 'I have Jewish blood. And I'm President. Nobody cares'.[34]

Indeed, as it turned out, from the point of view of the Jewish agenda and anti-Semitism in Ukraine, the tenure of a president of Jewish origin

was received in the republic much softer than reports of the same kind regarding the iconic political figures of the crisis period, such as Yulia Tymoshenko. She, for example, was suspected of being Jewish by Halakha and therefore prone to promote Israeli interests after coming to power.[35]

Discussions about the nationality of the President of Ukraine are also interesting from the theoretical point of view, since the way V. Zelensky spoke about his ethnicity can by analyzed through the constructivist theory of Jewish identity by Michael Krausz, according to which Jewishness is not a given fact, but a certain combination of practices, interactions and the environment, including the historical period.[36] Respectively, at the stage of the presidential election campaign it was necessary to show that ethnicity is not an impediment to gaining a presidential position in the republic, as well as to prevent fueling 'Jews in power' stereotypes that spread during the crisis. On the other hand, communication with Israel, on issues of historical memory required the opposite approach. This can explain why Zelensky initially avoided questions about his origins but later became more candid prior to his visit to attend the 5th World Holocaust Forum in Israel.

Political dimension of cooperation

Within the framework of this sphere of relations between Jerusalem and Kiev it is necessary to pay attention to two aspects. The first one is internal and is associated with a sequence of election campaigns in Israel that started in April 2019. As a part of the struggle for the Prime Minister's post, Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu, among other things, relied on friendly personal relations with the heads of foreign states, which, in his opinion, proved his experience in external affairs. Of course, special emphasis was laid on the ties with the Presidents of the United States and Russia, Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin. However, as it turned out, there were difficulties with the latter in terms of gaining popularity among the Israeli voters. Maintaining positive relationships with Russia was vital for Israel, considering its involvement in a wide range of Middle Eastern issues. Nonetheless, political crises in Ukraine divided the Russian-speaking community in Israel into two camps: the proponents of Kiev and those of Moscow. As a result the mention of V. Putin, for the former became a reason not to choose B. Netanyahu. Moreover, as Israeli sociologist Larissa Remennik noted, this trend fits in with a characteris-

tic of the 1.5 generation of immigrants from the former USSR /CIS, who were also unhappy with the Kremlin's reaction to the protests of non-systemic opposition supporters in Moscow.[37] So, probably to keep the balance, B. Netanyahu decided to include a stopover in Kiev in his program of pre-election visits.

The Israeli prime minister has not arrived in Kiev since 1999. It is noteworthy that the previous visit was also made by B. Netanyahu heading his first government. One of the important topics on the agenda of the meeting between V. Zelensky and B. Netanyahu in August 2019 was the Ukrainian Embassy move from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. The issue began to be discussed already at the stage of the run for presidency in the republic, when Ukrainian businessmen Ihor Kolomoisky, who was an active supporter and sponsor of the development of Jewish life in Ukraine, and until a certain point was considered to be close to V. Zelensky, hinted in Israeli media that the win of V. Zelensky would significantly simplify the solution of the issue in favor of Israel. However the round of communication between the two sides in Kiev ended with messages only about Ukraine's readiness to open a business mission in Jerusalem, which, however, was perceived as a preparatory step to embassy move.

Contrary to expectations, this event again did not take place during V. Zelensky's return visit to Israel in January 2020. According to one of the versions, Kiev first wanted to see the opening of an Israeli business mission in its territory, which is related to the implementation of the FTA, as a precondition to the embassy move.[38] However, there was another, political explanation, connected with I. Kolomoisky. The issue of the location of the main diplomatic mission of Ukraine in Israel arose in his interview to Makor Rishon not by chance but in connection with rumors that allegedly ex-president P. Poroshenko was trying to negotiate with the government of B. Netanyahu on the extradition of the Ukrainian oligarch in exchange for moving the embassy to Jerusalem. Therefore I. Kolomoisky himself signaled that an easier way to agree on the location of the embassy would be a discussion with V. Zelensky.[39] Later, I. Kolomoisky left Israel for fear of extradition to the United States. In parallel, the topic of the embassy faded into the background.

The rapprochement between Kiev and Jerusalem was continued by the team of V. Zelensky after the shift in power in the Middle Eastern country. First, the Ukrainian president called his newly-elected counterpart Isaac Herzog to congratulate him and express the hope to deepen contacts in the future. The special emphasis was laid on the plans to

open simultaneously innovation offices in the capitals in order to boost joint work in the sphere of R&D.[40] Later V. Zelensky was among the first leaders who called N. Bennett after the formation of a new Israeli coalition government. In a telephone conversation with the Prime Minister of Israel, the emphasis was again placed on high-tech. Also N. Bennett received an invitation to attend the opening ceremony of the Memorial in Babi Yar. The latter can be considered not only a derivative of the cultural and historical factors of bilateral relations, but also an attempt by the Ukrainian side, albeit delayed, to smooth out political difficulties that stemmed from V. Zelensky's participation in the 5th World Holocaust Forum.

The second paramount aspect of the dialogue between the two states relates to the foreign policy sphere. Under V. Zelensky the issue of cooperation within the UN received a boost. It is noteworthy that on this track the mentioned principle of symmetry again manifested itself, but this time it was used in a positive way. In August 2019 in Kiev V. Zelensky thanked B. Netanyahu for supporting Kiev's position on Crimea at the UN. In January 2020, the Ukrainian side announced its withdrawal from the UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. This institution under the UN General Assembly is engaged, among other things, in the drafting of resolutions on the Palestinian issue, and therefore its activity in Israel is perceived as biased.

However, Ukraine's voting behavior in the UN was not totally determined by V. Zelensky. In March 2019, the republic's representatives already supported Israel at the UNHRC when discussing the 7th item of the permanent agenda which focuses exclusively on the Middle Eastern country. There were various motives behind Kiev's actions. On the one hand, Ukraine was really interested in expanding economic ties with Israel. On the other hand, many European countries, including Austria, Hungary and the Czech Republic, spoke out against the anti-Israeli resolutions. So, it may be assumed that by changing its voting pattern Ukraine was affirming its course on the so-called 'European Choice'. A similar practice, for example, was spread among Baltic States during the period of their accession to the EU.[41] Finally, in 2018 the USA left UNHRC, explaining the withdrawal by the support of its main Middle Eastern ally. Thus it is possible that in this case Kiev tried to pave the way to Washington through Jerusalem. Similar means of getting closer to the Trump administration, for example, were typical for the member-states of the Visegrad group.

The desire of Ukraine to consolidate the progress in cooperation in the UN was especially clearly manifested during the visit of I. Herzog to Kiev in October 2021. V. Zelensky expressed the hope that the Israeli side would share the views of the republic on its territorial integrity, especially in the context of its plans to submit to the UN General Assembly until the end of 2021 a resolution on human rights and the so-called 'militarization' of the Crimea. At the same time, in seems that there was not only the desire to develop cooperation within this organization, but also an intention to involve Israel in the Crimea Platform, which already includes Israel's partners rom Europe and the Mediterranean. The President of Ukraine twice conveyed to Israel an invitation to join this format of cooperation. The first time was in August 2021 during a telephone conversation between V. Zelensky and N. Bennett, held on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the republic's independence. It is curious that the call was made a day after the founding meeting of the Crimea Platform. The second time personally during the first visit of I. Herzog to Kiev. The Israeli Embassy's Twitter account also mentions a telephone conversation between Israeli Foreign Minister Y. Lapid and his Ukrainian counterpart D. Kuleba, which took place a few days after the first summit of the Crimea Platform.[42] It can be assumed that in this conversation the topic received attention, although it was not central. On the one hand, it is obvious that Israel on this issue takes into account the position of Russia and its influence on the situation in the Middle East. On the other hand, in promoting the Crimea Platform, Kiev is also trying to use non-political factors. The latter is expressed in the emphasis on the country's involvement in international cooperation in various areas, including the UN framework, as well as on economic potential.

Under Predident V. Zelensky, the importance of Ukraine for Israel also increased in terms of solving Middle East problems. However, the main role here was played not by Kiev's policy in the region itself, but by external factors. The assassination of the commander of the IRGC's Quds Force Q. Suleimani, which in turn resulted in the crash of the Ukrainian civil aircraft shot down by the Iranians, increased the the country's significance in the context of strategic security risks for Israel, but the republic was supposed to be entrusted purely with practical tasks. Israel Hayom military observer A. Lapidot expressed the opinion that Kiev could play an important role in the investigation of the circumstances of the aircraft crash.[43] In particular, he suggested that if Iran refuses to allow US representatives to participate in the investigation, Ukraine would have to

demand flight recorders from the downed plane to ensure the arrival of international experts in its territory.[44]

Subsequently, Ukraine published a recording of a conversation between an Iranian air traffic controller and the pilot of Aseman Airlines aircraft who was landing just before the crash of the Ukrainian liner and saw the missile. According to President V. Zelensky, this fact proved that Tehran was aware of the real causes of the crash and tried to conceal them.[45] As a result, it was decided not to send Ukrainian specialists to Iran to participate in the investigation and to request flight recorders to Kiev. This provoked a negative reaction in Iran, although it was in Israel's interests, as it showed that the Iranian regime was misleading the international community.

In this context, it was of particular importance for Israel to be able to influence the Europeans by showing them the threat posed by Iran that spreads beyond the borders of the Middle East and thereby try to adjust their policy towards Iran in general and the JCPOA in particular. So, it is no coincidence that, in A. Lapidot's version, it was expedient to involve France to help Ukrainian specialists in decoding the 'black boxes' of a downed aircraft.[46] Kiev, in turn, received an opportunity for rapprochement with Western countries through a new area of cooperation.

The incident, as already noted, was an example of ad hoc policy, although in general Kiev does not have a sufficiently developed Middle East strategy that would allow it to work more closely with Israel. Nevertheless, the scope for dialog in this field also has not been exhausted. If earlier the republic received practical tasks related to the demonstration of the Iranian threat, then in the new reality, characterized by the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, Kiev and Jerusalem share common strategic fears. They consist in increasing the risks of a reduction in the American presence in all regions where Washington had previously assumed special responsibility. Despite the fact that Israel cares about the Middle East, and Ukraine about the space of the former USSR, the states may face increased responsibility for their security and national interests, while the senior partner only provides them with support from overseas.

Finally, under V. Zelensky the possibility of using Israeli mediation efforts to overcome the contradictions between Russia and Ukraine remains relevant. There was no request for this from any of the parties to the conflict, although A. Liberman, while holding the post of Foreign Minister, pointed out that only appeals from Moscow or Kiev could

become a real basis for increasing the involvement of Jerusalem in the process of settling disputes between them.[47] However, the 5th World Holocaust Forum, held on January 23, 2020, showed that Israel may provide the representatives of the two states with a platform for informal dialog. In particular, before the event, there were reports that Ukraine made a request about a possibility of communication between V. Zelensky and V. Putin during the visits of the two leaders to Jerusalem. The fact that the Ukrainian president is not perceived as a personal enemy of his Russian counterpart contributes to the spread of the version about Israel's chance to play a positive role in this conflict. Especially in Israel, due to the interest in ties with I. Kolomoisky, V. Zelensky is often presented as an opponent of P. Poroshenko who defeated him and is pursuing a political course different from his predecessor.[48] Accordingly, in theory, the contradictions between them are not of a fundamental nature.

Economic dimension of cooperation

Prior to his resignation, President of Ukraine P. Poroshenko managed to sign the FTA with Israel. This event received positive official evaluations, although behind the scenes there were quite a few skeptical voices as well. Traditional fears were expressed in Israel that Ukraine is still politically unstable, which means that no one can give guarantees that it will fulfill its economic obligations. Ukrainian economists, in turn, stressed that the FTA would not bring the republic the desired effect. On the one hand, the lifted limitations on agricultural products turned out to be noticeably lower than those for industrial goods and averaged 7-9%.[49] According to the agreement there was also a 3-year transition period for this group of exports.[50] In this regard, the executive director of the Economic Discussion Club Oleg Pendzin warned about a change in the balance of trade, negative for Kiev. However, the main drawback was that liberalization did not affect the service sector, the potential driver of Ukraine's economic recovery.[51]

The latter has become for President V. Zelensky, who is interested in high technologies, a direction in which he can significantly improve what the previous administration managed to achieve in relations with Israel. That is why during the talks with B. Netanyahu in Kiev the Ukrainian leader stressed the idea of opening a business mission focused on innovations. Due to this, the country hoped to stimulate the creation of joint start-ups, as well as to establish contacts with the United States through

Israel.[52] These statements were repeated in conversations with I. Herzog and N. Bennett.

At the same time Ukraine should take into account that Israel is currently trying to change the model of innovative entrepreneurship in order to develop its own human capital and reduce the impact of politics on the high-tech sector. In particular, such goals were set by a new Chief Executive Officer of the Israel Innovation Authority Dror Bin. He sees one of the obstacles to the development of Israeli innovations in the restrictions on work associated with religion, and their elimination, in turn, will entail the refusal to transfer many processes to outsourcing abroad, including Ukraine.[53]

In the context of Russian-Israeli relations the issue of the FTA between Ukraine and Israel arises in connection with Jerusalem's efforts to make progress in cooperation with the Eurasian Economic Union. In this regard, there is an assumption that the success in signing the agreement with Kiev was partly facilitated by the fact that Iran began to outstrip Israel in obtaining preferential conditions for interaction with the EAEU. At the current stage the effect of these two deals on the Israeli economy would be incomparable, since Russia is the main driving force of the five EAEU states while the agreement between Kiev and Jerusalem has limited political effect. However, if the intensity of the negotiation process between Israel and the EAEU remains low, Jerusalem's interest in the deal will also decline, and the Middle Eastern country will give priority to bilateral agreements with the countries of the region, following the 'Ukrainian' scenario. In this case, in the long term, a unified trade regime can be created, which, however, will not take into account the EAEU standards.

The free trade agreement between Jerusalem and Kiev has a certain significance in the context of Israel's relations with the EU. In particular, the document recognizes as Israeli products those that were produced in areas covered by the customs legislation of the state.[54] Taking into account the controversial status of the so-called 'occupied territories' in trade between Israel and the EU, Ukraine indirectly contributes to the fight against the boycott of the country's products,[55] and if European integration continues, the republic can be involved in the promotion of Israeli business interests, in the same way as the state uses ties with the Visegrad group.

The question of social security of immigrants from Ukraine in Israel remains difficult. In August 2019 V. Zelensky promised to make progress in the implementation of the agreement. However, there are great doubts about the country's suitability for this. First of all, this is due to the fact that the country needs to carry out an internal pension reform and improve the socio-economic situation of its citizens, including the older generation. Accordingly, in such circumstances, the beginning of payments abroad is fraught not only with economic consequences, but also with an increase in protest activity.

Politics of memory and anti-Semitism

Under V. Zelensky several important steps were taken in this area. However, it seems useful to start with the Babyn Yar Memorial. The decision to create it was made under President P. Poroshenko. It is also interesting that the Foundation's Supervisory Board, which oversees the project, includes a Ukrainian musician Svyatoslav Vakarchuk. It was him that some experts considered as a candidate for the presidency, supported by the United States. However, several clarifications need to be made here. S. Vakarchuk was a candidate favored by the Democratic Party. For example, the ex-US ambassador to Russia M. McFaul in his twitter wrote about him as a presidential candidate.[56] Moreover, S. Vakarchuk was trained at Stanford University, where the former diplomat now works. It is also curious that after a concert in Israel, a Ukrainian musician with political ambitions said that Kiev could learn a lot from Jerusalem in the field of public administration.[57] Thus, if D. Trump had not been elected in the United States, the outcome of a similar race in Ukraine could have been different, and with it the configuration of Ukrainian-Israeli relations would have been different from that which we observe under V. Zelensky.

The current president takes an interest in the memorial complex, emphasizing the importance of such aspects as memory of the victims of the Holocaust and the Ukrainian Righteous Among the Nations. In addition, much attention is paid to the place of the memorial in Ukraine's politics of memory. Here attention is focused both on the perception of this policy among Jewish communities abroad and on non-repetition of the mistakes made by Ukraine's neighbors in post-communist Europe. The first task is solved through consultations with the World Jewish Congress and personally its president Ronald S. Lauder, the second - by

involving in the work on the memorial Poland's ex-president Aleksander Kwasniewski.

Complete work on the creation of the entire memorial complex was not completed by the beginning of the events dedicated to the 80th anniversary of the Babi Yar tragedy. However, on October 6, 2021, Marina Abramovich's sculpture 'The Crystal Wall of Crying', included in the Babyn Yar memorial project, was officially unveiled with the attendance of the President of Ukraine and his counterparts from Israel and Germany.[58] Speaking at the ceremony, the leaders of the three countries emphasized the need to combat anti-Semitism. In this case, it should be noted that Ukraine was inscribed in the European context, while earlier for a number of studies, including from Russia and Israel, as will be described below, it was more common to compare the republic with Russia.

The participation of V. Zelensky in the 5th World Holocaust Forum in Israel caused lots of controversy. Initially, the Ukrainian side did not confirm the visit for a long time, referring to the plane crash in Iran, which required the presence of the president in Kiev.[59] However, there was also an opinion that V. Zelensky was ignoring the event, since the organizers refused to give him the floor. Finally, a wave of harsh criticism was provoked by the subsequent decision of the Ukrainian leader to transfer the right to attend the Forum to a Holocaust survivor. Despite the fact that some Israeli ministers did the same, V. Zelensky was accused of disrespect and inconsistency.

The situation at the Forum, nevertheless, does not remove the question of what V. Zelensky might have said if he had an opportunity to speak. Based on the already mentioned interview with the Times of Israel and his comments on the Babyn Yar Memorial, it can be assumed that the main focus would have been Ukrainian Jews who died in the Holocaust, as well as local Righteous Among the Nations.

A topic that would have also inevitably received attention, if not at the Forum itself, then in the media, would be the local collaborators with the Nazis during WWII. If V. Zelensky addressed the subject, he would have been condemned in Ukraine. This follows from the fact that a more serious scandal broke out between Israel and Poland and gave rise to the opinion that B. Netanyahu organized the event in a clearly pro-Russian spirit. In light of this, criticism in Ukraine was caused by the fact that V. Zelensky simply agreed to participate. Thus a member of the Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian parliament), former head of the The Ukrainian Institute

of National Memory Volodymyr Vyatrovich, in this regard, noted that Israel is 'flirting with Moscow'[60], which, according to him, indicates 'disrespect for the memory of millions of Ukrainian Jewish victims', as well as 'humiliation' of Ukraine. To V. Zelensky, if he indulges in such actions, the parliamentarian recommended to go to Moscow on May 9 and 'congratulate the Russian army from the rostrum of Lenin's Mausoleum'.[61]

Nevertheless, Ukraine will have to work on this issue. This is required not only on considerations of the future of relations with Israel, but also in view of the country's desire to integrate itself into the EU. The Baltic states have already travelled along a similar path in the process of joining the European Union. Moreover, they also showed a kind of model according to which the responsibility of representatives of the population of these states for collaboration can be acknowledged, while simultaneously mentioning the negative impact of the Soviet totalitarian regime. The Presidents of Lithuania and Latvia A. Brazauskas and G. Ulmanis made just such acknowledgments in their speeches in 1995 and 1998.[62]

Recognition of responsibility for the crimes against Jews in this spirit will be accompanied by the inevitable criticism of Russia, but can possibly be met with understanding in Israel. On the one hand, the basis for this is the already existing experience of apologies from Latvia and Lithuania, mentioned above. On the other hand, the Jerusalem Forum was followed by adjustments related to the representation of the role of the USSR in World War II. For example, the Yad Vashem memorial sent a letter to the Haaretz newspaper, informing about the 'distortions' committed during the event.[63]

It is noteworthy that there is also a request for a certain revision of historical issues in Russia. Thus, in the opinion of RISS expert Oleg Nemensky, the term 'liberation', for example, in relation to Poland does not really look quite right. According to Nemensky, it would be more correct to replace it with 'salvation', as in Warsaw 'liberation' is understood rather as liberal values, which they do not associate with the Soviet Union in any way.[64]

On the whole, the incidents, connected with the participation of V. Zelensky in the Forum, can be considered as another manifestation of polarization in Israeli society in relation to Russia and V. Putin, who became an important figure for B. Netanyahu's election campaign. Consequently, a significant part of the criticism does not concern Moscow,

but is an additional element in the struggle for power with a political long-liver. However, for Jerusalem, especially after the adoption of the Basic Law 'Israel - the Nation-State of the Jewish People', the importance of relations with states that have a clear national policy rose increasingly. It is no coincidence that in order to receive support after the passage of this law in the Knesset, B. Netanyahu went to a summit with the leaders of the Baltic states. Thus, Ukraine does not automatically alienate Israel with its approach to the interpretation of history and national politics. However, the most important condition for continued cooperation is a clearer position on the issues of Holocaust memorialization and the fight against anti-Semitism.

Speaking of anti-Semitism ,V. Zelensky refers to the latest data published by Pew Research in 2018. At that time, it was found that only 5% of the population of the republic were against Jews.[65] According to the study, the same figures for Russia were 13%.[66] In general, the question of anti-Semitism in the two countries and their comparison arises quite frequently. This is the case, for example, with the report of the EAJC Israel Institute. In this report, Pew Research's data has placed alongside, for instance, the statistics of the Ukrainian Jewish Committee headed by Eduard Dolinsky who claims that 13% of Ukrainian Orthodox Christians and 21% of Catholics do not want Jews as their neighbors.[67] At the same time, the author of the report Zeev Khanin notes that Ukraine has not conducted any research on anti-Semitism which could be compared with Russian data on the subject. In addition, in most cases, the published data is correlated with political stance of the organization that distributes them.[68]

In September 2021 the Parliament of Ukraine passed a Law on Prevention of and Counteraction to anti-Semitism in Ukraine that includes the interpretation of the term as 'a certain perception of the Jews, expressed as hatred of the Jews'.[69] According to the text, 'rhetorical and physical manifestations of anti-Semitism are directed at Jews or non-Jews and/or their property, institutions, religious places'.[70] Finally, the law lists possible manifestations of antisemitism, which, however, do not contain references to anti-Israel criticism, as is the case in the working definition of anti-Semitism suggested by the International Holocaust remembrance alliance.[71]

The need for this legislative initiative was explained by the fact that the lack of a clear definition of anti-Semitism created a legal vacuum that led to impunity for offenses and crimes against Jews.[72] Besides,

Kiev notes that the tightening of policy in combating any manifestations of intolerance in society is 'one of the conditions for Ukraine on its path to the European community'.[73] At the same time, the reference to the definition of the IHRA, contained in the explanatory note to the law, may indicate that the republic is ready to formally join it, as well as a number of the EU member-states, if its integration policy succeeds.

Anyway, the document was signed by the president on October 10, 2021, and for now at least symbolically has become the step that was expected from V. Zelensky in the field of guarantees of security of Jewish life in the republic. Moreover, from the standpoint of some Jewish organizations, the law could become a model for other states in terms of legislative counter anti-Semitism at a national level.[74]

In general, 2021 is the year of the 30th anniversary of Ukrainian-Israeli relations. Ukraine reached this milestone under the leadership of V. Zelensky as a promising partner for Israel in a number of areas. Unlike previous periods, now there is an opportunity to involve the republic into the resolution of Middle East problems, even if it's not so much an achievement of its diplomacy as a combination of circumstances. Significant political moves are expected from V. Zelensky at bilateral level. There are two possible ways to strengthen the ties – the implementation of the social security agreement and the improvement of the FTA. The first one depends on Kiev, which does not yet have enough resources for this. The second depends on Jerusalem which restrains the potential for cooperation due to fears of new political crises in the republic. Multilateral cooperation both within the framework of the UN and taking into account Ukraine's ambitions to join the EU also has a certain potential. In the latter case, the ability of the republic to take into account the positive and negative experiences of the countries of post-communist Europe that have already passed a similar path will be of significance for the dialog between Jerusalem and Kiev.

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LUIZA R. KHLEBNIKOVA

American Jews and the Jewish State: Differences of Ideas and Ideals

Over the past five years, it has become obvious that the crisis in the relations between the American Jewish community and the Jewish state is not only tangible, but deep, serious and seemingly continuous.[1] In the long history of American Jewish Diaspora-Israel relationships it is not the first time when conflicts of interest and collision of values have emerged between them. For example, in the beginning of the 1980s, during the Israeli military operation against the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) in Lebanon called Peace for Galilee, there was a clear increase in criticism of Israel in the American liberal Jewish community.[2] During the Oslo process in the 1990s, key American Jewish organizations were dissatisfied with Benyamin Netanyahu's clashes with US President Bill Clinton.[3]

In the first twenty years of the twenty-first century, the American Jewish Diaspora-Israel relations began to face increasing problems, both internal and external, including the conflict within American Jewry over Israel's policies, growing dissatisfaction between American liberal Jews and the Israeli government, misunderstanding of each other's perspectives and priorities and the broader rise of antisemitism in the world. In 2020, Isaac Herzog, then Head of the Jewish Agency (2018 - 2021) and now the President of Israel, said that he, from his perspective, sees this crisis as 'an enormous historic challenge'.[4]

The relevance of studying American Jews' changing perception of Israel and its policies goes without saying. Such key American and Israeli experts as Dov Waxman from University of California, Los Angeles,[5] Michael Koplow from Israel Policy Forum[6] and Daniel Gordis from Shalem College in Jerusalem,[7] Jonathan Rynhold from Bar-Ilan University,[8] write intensively on these current issues. In the Russian scientific

literature, the relations between American Jewish community and Israel, unfortunately, did not attract much attention with just a few exceptions.[9] In my opinion, for Russian experts in international relations studying this topic helps to promote a more profound understanding of the specifics of the US-Israeli relations. There are some Russian academic works on the US-Israel relations and Israel's foreign policy that worth being highlighted here, such as the books of Tatyana Karasova and Irina Zvyagelskaya.[10] But it deserves to be studied as a separate analysis with a focus on current issues. As a person who teaches students at Department of Jewish Studies, Lomonosov Moscow State University, I see that there is a growing interest in history of American Jewish community and especially in the character of relations between American Jews and Israel, as well as in the pro-Israel activity of American Jewish organizations.

The purpose of this research is to explain the complicated character of the current crisis between the American Jewish community as a Diaspora[11] and Israel as a state in the 2010s. This chapter seeks to fill a niche of researching relations between American Jewish community and the Jewish state in contemporary Israel studies in Russia and it also has an ambitious aim to present to a broader scientific audience the results of the author's own research.

The first part of the chapter contains a brief analysis of relations between American Jews and Israel, focusing on the main decisive points. In the second part I focus more on growing differences in the American Jewish community in such areas as religious expressions, traditions and values. The third part examines a growing alienation of American liberal progressive Jews from Israel and changes in pro-Israel lobbying in the US. The fourth part is set to present contradictions between Benyamin Netanyahu and Barack Obama over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and 'the Iran problem' as a factor in the deepening crisis in the American liberal Jewish community over Israel. And the final part deals with the Trump-Netanyahu factor in the clashes between the American Jews and the Jewish state.

A brief history of American Jews-Israel relations

For the Jewish state, ties with American Jewry have been always essential and special. In pre-state times, American Jewish Zionists played an important part in promoting US support for the partition of Palestine

and later the recognition of Israel by President Harry Truman's administration (it does not mean that Zionism was widely embraced among American Jews at the time). In just one year (1947-1948), the White House received 48,000 telegrams, 790,575 postcards and 81,200 letters regarding the partition of Palestine.[12] Although the main reasons for the US President's support of the United Nations Resolution 181/II and a subsequent recognition of the Jewish state were more strategic, American Jews, as Steven L. Spiegel argued, 'did ensure that Truman could not ignore the issue'.[13] American Jewish organizations strongly supported immigration and a subsequent state-formation for the New Yishuv and later Israel. For example, in 1947 the United Jewish Appeal (the UJA) received more than $110 million in cash for immigrant and housing programs in Israel from American Jews. (In 1948 the UJA also raised more than $150 million in additional funds for these purposes).[14] As Henry Morgenthau Jr., the United States Secretary of the Treasury (1934-1945) and the General Chairman of the United Jewish Appeal (1947-1950), stressed after his trip to Israel, 'cash will be the only deciding factor for life and for new hope for our people'.[15] This assistance from American Jews to Israel helped the Jewish state to sustain in a hostile environment.

The US pro-Israel lobbying structures played a special role in pro-Israel political expression of American Jews. In the 1950s, groups of interests started to establish such organizations, for example one of the most important was the American Zionist Committee for Public Affairs (later AIPAC – American-Israeli Political Affairs Committee) that focused its work with Congress (the main issue for AIPAC till today is lobbying to secure US foreign assistance to Israel, especially in the military sphere). Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations (before the Conference of Jewish Organizations), that is an umbrella group of key Jewish organizations in the US, chose to present the voice of the American Jews to the White House. These lobbying structures that are not an Israeli lobby and do not represent the Israeli government have been promoting the strengthening of the US-Israel relations in ways to enhance the security for both of these states. The presence of politically active financial networks and Pro-Israel affiliations in the United States is one of the factors that give US-Israeli relations the 'special' status by which this relationship is generally characterized.[16]

The nature of ties between Israel and the American Jewish community was discussed between the Israeli Prime-Minister David Ben-Gurion and the Head of the American Jewish Committee, Jacob Blaustein, in the

early 1950s. Clarification was needed after the following Ben-Gurion's controversial statement: 'Jews have an obligation to emigrate to Israel'. Thus the parties came to an agreement: 'Jews of America have no political affiliation with the State of Israel, and there can be no interference by the Government of Israel in the internal affairs of American Jewry'.[17] In 1956 Ben-Gurion wrote to Blaustein, confirming the aforementioned agreement, that for him Zionism means to live in Israel and build there a new Jewish independent life, but 'other Zionists are entitled to their own interpretations of Zionism' and they 'are free to hold varying views on what constitutes Jewishness'.[18] Regardless of this important agreement, the rule of not interfering in each other's affairs has been regularly violated over the subsequent decades.

The American Jews' perceptions of Israel have never been static and went through different stages. Jonatan Rynhold from Bar-Ilan University depicted it in the following way: the first period was a cautious support out of fear of being accused of double loyalty in 1948-1966; the second period (1967-1981) was an open and 'loud' support of Israel after the Six Day War (1967) and a rise in Jewish solidarity over Israel; the third period (1982-1992) started with the collapse of consensus over the Jewish state after the 1982 Lebanon war; the fourth period (1993-2000), during the Oslo years, revealed a growing estrangement of American Jews from Israel and, finally, during the post-Oslo years (2000-2004) there was a beginning of a more pluralistic American Jewish solidarity over Israel.[19]

The two most important decisive points were the Six Day War (1967) and the Lebanon War (1982). In 1967 the Israeli preemptive victorious military campaign resulted in significant territorial gains, the most important one being Jerusalem. The American Jews became more vocally proud of Israel and rallied around it. As Thomas Friedman wrote, Israel became 'the symbol and carrier of Jewish communal identity'.[20] The American public started supporting Israel more than Arab nations in the Arab-Israeli conflict.[21] However, after the Yom Kippur War (1973) and the Israeli right-wing party Likud's election in 1977, the American Jewish peace organizations (like Breira, Peace Now etc.) started openly questioning Israeli policies, but these voices of Jewish peace camps were not largely in the mainstream back then.

The tables turned in 1982 with the Lebanon war which prompted a change in the American Jews' perception of Israel and an erosion of consensus within the community over the Jewish state's policies. One side expressed support for Israel and its desire to defend itself against the

Palestinian Liberation Organization's terror. These were mainly conservative Jewish organizations. For example, the President of the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) Ivan Novik justified Israeli actions by saying that Jews fought against the 'terrorist disaster' in the region.[22] The Jewish Institute for National Security Affairs, on its part, issued a newsletter stating that Israel 'did a dirty job using its soldiers and shedding blood to destroy the elements that turned Lebanon into a center of international terrorism'.[23]

Others, on the contrary, openly criticized Israeli military campaign in Lebanon. For example, a famous American civil rights activist, the World Zionist Congress executive (1969-1978) and the President of the American Jewish Congress (1972-1978), Rabbi A. Hertzberg openly blamed Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin 'for squandering Israel's respect for itself and the world'.[24]. The criticism increased when the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), while being aware of an impending massacre, did not prevent Sabra and Shatila incident in which Phalangists' militia killed Palestinian refugees in Beirut. For the liberal part of the American Jewish community, the war that Israel waged in Lebanon in 1982 was not defensive, but an offensive one, had vague goals and gross violations of human rights. The Lebanon war (1982) changed the situation dramatically and launched an era of a more mobilized Jewish peace movement in the United States.[25]

The Pollard Affair (1985) and the First Palestinian Intifada (1987) continued this pattern of open disagreement with Israel's actions from the American Jewish leadership. Besides dissatisfaction with some aspects of Israel's foreign policy, the Israeli domestic political agenda also drew attention of the American Jewish organizations. In 1988, there was a round of discussions in the Israeli government of implementing new amendments in Law of Return (1950)[26] to include that a conversion to Judaism has to be 'according to Jewish law'. This proposal met an opposition from major American Jewish organizations, for example Jewish Federations of North America. For Yitzhak Shamir, an Israeli Prime Minister (1986-1992) and a leader of Likud, it was a political move to convince ultra-Orthodox parties to join his coalition after the 1988 elections, but after facing the backlash from the US Jewry, he withdrew this proposal. A growing frustration and discontent with Israel among American Jews stemmed, but not only from its policies. As Steven Cohen writes, it was also 'a growing disenchantment with Israel as the Jewish state' and 'as a Judaic symbol in the consciousness of American Jews'.[27] It led to a decline of trips of American Jews to Israel and in charity donations.[28]

At the beginning of the Oslo process in the 1990s, the American Jewish community overwhelmingly supported the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. However, political stalemate in Israel and the Palestine National Authority to move further and outbreaks of violence between the sides of the conflict resulted in a slow decline in support of the peace efforts over time: from 80 percent in 1993 to 60 percent in 1995.[29] In general, the American Jews had a distrust of the Arab states' interest in the peace process with Israel, only Jordanians being an exception in this regard. The US Jews' trust towards Yasser Arafat, the leader of Palestinian Liberation Organization, and Palestinians, completely faded with rise of Hamas and the Islamic Jihad terror attacks against Israelis in the mid-1990s.

Internal debates on the key peace process issues, such as the fate of Jerusalem, an establishing a Palestinian state and Israel's settlement activity in the West bank, became more heated between different groups in the American Jewish community. As Steven T. Rosenthal wrote 'the image of American Jewry "united around Israel standing together" became only a fond memory'.[30] The Orthodox Jewish leaders (for example, Rabbi Aaron Soloveitchik) or organizations, such as the Zionist Organization of America, opposed the peace settlement with the Palestinians. Yitzhak Rabin's assassination by an Israeli Orthodox Jew, a student from yeshiva, provoked discussions in the US Orthodox Jewish community on the role of hateful rhetoric of some rabbis and its responsibility in promoting violence towards the Israeli Prime Minister. As Rabbi Marc Angel said, 'if he [Yigal Amir] was a lone assassin, we could just say he was a nut. But now they've arrested six or seven other people and we hear people are sympathetic to him. In Orthodoxy at large, there's a kind of a loose cannon; we haven't been successful at stopping this'.[31] The liberal part of American Jewish leadership and organizations promoted support for the peace process. For example, in 1993 the Israel Policy Forum was established for this purpose.

Both the Orthodox and Non-Orthodox Jewish communities in the United States wanted to be heard by the Israeli government and have an impact on the decision process. However, the voices of American Jews have never been decisive in Israel's policy. Nonetheless, it has become more politically tinted. Non-Orthodox American Jews tended to be more pro-peace, so it resulted in their support the Labor party and other left-wing parties in Israel, while the Orthodox American Jews, on the contrary, started to be close to Likud party and its policy. As Professor Rynhold concluded: 'the character of Israel became the main ideological battlefield of Diaspora Jewry'.[32]

The American Jewish community and Israel had a new low point when in 1997 the Israeli ultra-Orthodox party Shas submitted a bill to Knesset which stated that only a conversion to Judaism from Chief Rabbinate of Israel is valid. The wounds of differences over religious expressions between the American Non-Orthodox Jews and Israel were open again. As was written in the American Jewish Year Book, for Conservative and Reform Jews in the US it 'was nothing less than a declaration of war'.[33] One of the reasons that pushed to a new round of 'Who is a Jew' legal debate in Israel was the Great Aliyah from the post-Soviet Republics (many of new olims were not Jews according to Halacha). The Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu did not make meaningful steps to ease the tensions with the US Jewish community. For him it was a political issue, in his coalition the ultra-Orthodox and Orthodox religious parties (Shas, Mafdal, Yahadut HaTorah etc.) played an important role. The majority of American Jewish organizations was not in great favor of Netanyahu, because of his clashes with President Bill Clinton over the peace process and the situation concerning religious conversions in Israel.[34] While Netanyahu was in the United States, for example, he met with Evangelical Christians, a different source of support for him instead of American Jews, but not with the Reform Jewish groups. The Neeman Committee was formed and recommended the establishment of an Institute of Jewish studies to offer a future convert a more complex view of three congregations in Judaism.[35] Netanyahu said at the meeting the American Jewish Committee Board of Governors in February 1988: 'I am sure the Neeman recommendations will finally be adopted'.[36] The Knesset ratified the Neeman proposals, but they never became a law. In the end, the Chief Rabbinate of Israel rejected the idea to cooperate with Non-Orthodox Jews in training future converts. As Rabbi Eric Yoffie, President of the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ), shared his thoughts on this conflict: 'The Judaism that's being articulated by the Israeli leadership is so foreign to us and so vituperative when it comes to my form of Judaism. If people in Israel are saying Reform and Conservative synagogues are whorehouses and throwing handfuls of shit at us, then is it any wonder that we're turning away?'.

Amid these controversies over religious conversions and political clashes over the peace process, to strengthening ties with the Diaspora and fortifying Jewish identity there, the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs was established with an aim of 'fostering the connection between world Jewry and the State of Israel'. On the site of the Ministry it is said that 'the

Israeli government sees itself as being responsible for all Jews worldwide, whether they live in Israel or the Diaspora'. In 1999, Taglit-Birthright program that 'aims to strengthen Jewish identity, Jewish communities, and connection with Israel and its people', was established, focusing on young Jews (18-32 years old) from different parts of the world. More than half of a million of young Jews visited Israel through Taglit-Birthright. Later, in 2004 the Israeli government and the Jewish Agency, the main liaison between the Jewish state and the Diaspora, established Masa Israel Journey or just Masa project to involve young Jews (18-30 years old) in different kind of programs in Israel, such as education, volunteering etc. Nefesh B'Nefesh, established in 2001, promotes and supports aliyah[37] to Israel. These steps to build or strength Jewish identity and connection to Israel have been considered successful: more American Jews started to visit the Jewish state and some even have chosen to stay there.[38]

After the collapse of the Oslo process, when the Second Palestinian Intifada outbroke and the 9/11 tragedy shocked the nation, the American Jewish organizations, both liberal and conservative, were once again united over Israel.[39] The Americans for Peace Now and the Zionist Organization of America, two ideologically opposing groups, participated in pro-Israel demonstrations in New York City.[40] This issue of Israel being at risk serves as a solidarity factor for the American Jewish leadership. Splitting over Israel's polices did not diminish an attachment of American Jews to Israel, but it provided different expressions of ideological and political identity within the community and identification with the Jewish state. As Dov Waxman writes 'what is different today is not the level of American Jewish support for Israel, but rather its mode expression – it has become more critical than it was in the past, and it is no longer expressed politically simply through knee-jerk support for whatever Israeli governments does'.[41]

Different tribes: American Jews and the Jewish state

'You can't turn Israel into America, any
more than you can turn America into Israel'

Benyamin Netanyahu, 1998[42]

At the annual meeting of the General Assembly of the Jewish Federation of North America in 2018, Benyamin Netanyahu said that the main

issue in relations with the Diaspora is not the problem with Reform and Conservative praying at the Western Wall or the conversion, but the loss of Jewish identity among Jews and their 'departure' from Israel.[43]

The presumption that young American Jews are less attached to Israe1 is not new. There were publications and polemics on 'the vanishing American Jews' since at least the 1960s and the debates continue to this day. Attitudes towards Jewish identity are changing - among American Jews it is increasingly connected not with religion, but with the memory of the Holocaust, leading ethical life or the observance of Jewish traditions (such as tikkun olam).[44] An American Jewish Committee survey of 2019 also showed that being Jewish for 59 percent of respondents was mostly a matter of ethnicity or culture (only 24 percent of respondents said that it is mostly a matter of religion)[45].

There is also a growing concern with declining in numbers of memberships in Non-Orthodox Jewish congregations. 'The Shrinking Middle' is vital to many major institutions in Jewish life as Steven M. Cohen writes, and 'the weakening of Conservative, Reform, Federation, and organizational Jewish expression translates into a more monochrome, less passionate, and less contentious American Jewry'.[46] On the other side, the Orthodox Jewish community, the more conservative and more attached to Israel part of the community, is the fastest growing Jewish congregation in the US and they, probably, will be the dominant majority in the future.[47] If this prognosis is right, it will dramatically affect the community and her ties with Israel: Non-Orthodox Jews, especially Reform Jews, and Jews of no religion will become less engaged with Israel, but the Orthodox Jews remain to have the same amount of attachment towards the Jewish state.

Some American experts, for example, the 'troubadour of the J street movement', American journalist Peter Beinart believe that there is a crisis of American liberal Zionism over Israel and we can even see the emergence of a new kind of Zionism in the United States.[48] He argued that 'if Israel's democracy falters, so will the Zionism consensus' and the main role will be played by people who are indifferent to liberal democratic ideals. Other experts, such as American journalist Michelle Goldberg, declared Liberal Zionism dead.[49] This issue requires a separate and profound study and, probably, time to see how internal changes within the American Jewish community will impact Zionism in the US.

Some of the latest surveys show that there is a changing trend in how younger generations of American Jews view the Jewish state. In

2013 the Pew Research Center conducted a significant survey within the American Jewish community and one of the standout results was that young American Jews are infrequently seeing Israel as an essential part of what being Jewish means to them than older participants in the survey.[50] In 2019, American Jewish committee's survey showed that only 44 percent of American Jewish respondents between the ages 18-29, from whom 32 percent identified themselves as secular, considers caring about Israel was an important part of being a Jew[51] (the total figure of respondents of all ages who considered it important was 62 percent). There are however counterarguments to this assumption, for example, that attachment to Israel grows up with age.[52]

The high rate of intermarriages (and other demographic issues such as low fertility rate among Non-Orthodox Jews) in the American Jewish community are debated also as a factor behind 'vanishing' Jewishness (before 1970s only 17 percent, now more than 50 percent of marriages are intermarriages according to the Pew Research Center). In 2019, the Israeli Minister of Education Rafi Peretz, a former Chief Rabbi of the Israel Defense Forces, infamously said that intermarriage between American Jews and non-Jews is like 'second Holocaust'. He later retreated from this statement after a strong reaction against it both in Israel and in the US.[53] In Forward's piece on this issue, some US rabbis, especially Orthodox ones, sounded the alarm that intermarriage leads to the erosion of Jewish identity in the country.[54] From these short interviews, one of the most interesting reactions was from Conservative rabbi Shalom Lewis: 'Our dwindling numbers prove that we don't have a universal discipline to live committed Jewish lives in a tolerant place. We are being hugged and kissed to death'. Leonard Saxe from Brandeis University argued that since the late 1970s 'the Jewish community was urged to welcome, not reject intermarried families' and it showed some success in such integration (Professor Saxe also stressed that Judaism is not in competition here with other religions, but with secularism).[55]

This logic of the necessity of community building and integration of intermarried people more into American Jewish life does not fit with the Israeli political and religious elite's approach to this issue. The Israeli government constantly calls on Diaspora Jews to make aliyah to Israel. In 2011, the Israeli Ministry of Immigrant Absorption promoted short videos on their website that showed 'disadvantages' of raising children in the US. As Jeffrey Goldberg put it, these videos 'suggest that it is impossible for Jews to remain Jewish in America'.[56] The Jewish Federations of

North America (JFNA) sent a letter to the Israeli government stating that this 'outrageous and insulting message could harm the Israel-Diaspora relationship'.[57]

The issue of differences of religious expression also plays a role in a crisis between American Jews and Israel. Reform and Conservative Judaism is widespread in the United States with only 10 percent of respondents being Orthodox.[58] Most Israeli Jews are Secular (Hiloni – 40 percent) and Traditional (Masorti – 23 percent). There are also Religious (Dati – 10 percent) and small, but fast growing Ultra-Orthodox (Haredi – 9 percent) groups.[59] The Chief Rabbinate of Israel is controlled by Ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) rabbis. For many decades, religious conversions were officially recognized only if they made by Orthodox rabbis, only in 2021 the Supreme Court ruled that people who convert in Israel to Reform or Conservative rabbis will be recognized for purposes of citizenship. In 2015, Minister of Religious Services (2015-2018) and a member of Shas party David Azulai made very controversial remarks that American Reform Jews 'try to fake and do not carry out the religious law properly, and give it other interpretations' and he added 'these are Jews who erred along the way'.[60] Prime Minister of Israel Benyamin Netanyahu rejected these comments and stressed that they did not represent the government's position. However, such comments from Israeli government officials or the Chief Rabbinate of Israel on an eternal question 'Who is a Jew' keep coming further and provoke strong reactions from the US Diaspora.

Many American Jewish organizations are actively promoting the idea of the end of the Orthodox monopoly on marriage and religious rituals in the Jewish state. In recent years, conflicts have begun to arise between representatives of Orthodox and Non-Orthodox congregations at the Western Wall (Kotel).[61] For example, in 2017, the American Reformist rabbi and President of the Union for Reform Judaism Rick Jacobs and his supporters could not go to the Western Wall to pray.[62] The Women of the Wall movement, which consists of different Jewish congregations and groups, including Israeli feminist organizations, which aims to challenge and change the Ultra-Orthodox monopoly of the Kotel, have been experiencing discrimination, arrests and even detention. In 2019 the contradictions between the Women of the Wall and some Ultra-Orthodox groups turned violent. Rabbi Jacobs told Haaretz that 'delegitimizing other Jews leads to the kind of violence we saw last Friday. Next time it could turn deadly'.[63]

The US Jewish community, a minority group in the United States (almost 2 percent of the total population), live in an open, mixed society, where freedom of worship is protected by the US Constitution. Israeli Jews, however, are born and grow up in predominantly Jewish society with fewer interactions with different ethnic or religious groups. As the Pew Research survey (2017) showed, 98 percent of Israeli respondents stated that their close friends are Jewish, but only 32 percent of American Jewish respondents said the same.[64] Living in different societies, countries and with such different histories, these communities, as Israeli journalist Haviv Rettig Gur stressed in his piece for the Times of Israel, 'they [the two groups] do not even share fundamental assumptions about the source of a person's identity and the place of the individual in a broader community'.[65] Steven M. Cohen and Arnold M. Eisen made a profound study of Jewish identity in the US that was published in 2000. One of their findings was that American Jews started to lose communal obligations, their 'first language is universalist, liberal and personalist', i.e. individualism tends to be more important than community.[66]

In 2018, then Israeli President Reuven Rivlin repeatedly pointed out that the 1950 agreement between David Ben-Gurion and Jacob Blaustein on non-intervention but mutual responsibility between sides should be updated, taking into account modern realities and challenges.[67] He also supported the idea of 'the Reverse Birthright' for young Israelis to know lives of Jewish communities outside Israel. There is an issue of lack of knowledge about each other's daily lives and struggles in both communities, but especially in Israel. As Gabriel Sheffer pointed out, the largest group of Israelis are apathetic to what is going on with Diaspora Jews.[68] There is a lack of educational programs on Jewish lives in Diaspora in Israeli universities and schools. There are some pushes to change from the Jewish Agency in this sphere, as former Head of the JA, Isaac Herzog told to David Harris, the Executive Director of the American Jewish Committee in June 2020.[69] For now, it is hard to value their efficiency and impact to addressing the crisis.

In the 2010s the main contradictions have been happening over politics where American Jews became even more divided over Israel and it affected relations between organized American Jewry and the Jewish state.

The rise of the voice of American liberal progressive Jews

One of most important factors in relations between American Jews and Israel are the growing criticisms of the politics of the Israeli Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu from liberal Jewish communities. In the era of social media, young American liberal progressive Jews, for whom the fight for social justice in the US is an important part of their lives, see controversial aspects of Israel's politics such as the settlement policy of the Jewish state in the West Bank and the demolition of Palestinian houses, discrimination against Arab citizens of Israel, the deportation of the African asylum seekers in the Jewish state and numerous other human rights infringements.[70] This side of Israel is rarely shown during Taglit-Birthright Israel programs which young Jews around the world can participate in.

Some young liberal progressive Jewish organizations, such as If Not Now that was established in 2014, started to gather protests against Israel's occupation policy on the Palestinian territories. Moreover, activists from this organization have started to challenge the mainstream Jewish organizations and institutions in the aim to end their support of occupation or other human rights violations in Israel.

As Professor Dov Waxman argues, in the American Jewish community there are internal disagreements on many issues, including support for the Jewish state: 'rancorous and divisive debate pitting left against right, critics against defenders of Israeli government policies, Jews against Jews'.[71] In a very simplified version it looks like that: the US Jews who are politically conservative are less critical of Israeli government policies, but American liberal Jews, in the contrary, are not hesitant to publicly judge the Jewish state. Dov Waxman distinguishes four camps in the American Jewish debate about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: left, center-left, center-right and right (only the first one in this list considers Israel to be at fault in this conflict, center-left think that both sides of the conflict to be blamed, the last two groups blame only Palestinians).[72] The issue of support for Israel has become a stumbling block within the community, as confirmed by the survey of the American Jewish Committee (2019): more than 80 percent of respondents believe that American Jews are more divided than last year.

Israeli Jews are also not a monolithic group in regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: they could be loosely divided into three politically affiliated groups: left, right and centrist. After the collapse of Oslo pro-

cess and the experiences of the Second Intifada, Israeli Jews became less optimistic about the peace process. The polls are demonstrative: in 1997, approximately 67 per cent of Israeli Jews believed that the peace treaty would put an end to the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, in 2007 - only 25 per cent of respondents shared this view.[73] During the 2010s, while the right wing became the largest political camp in the country, a majority of Israelis came to believe that the two-state solution and the establishment of a demilitarized Palestinian state on the West Bank were no longer possible.[74] As for the settlement activity in the West Bank, in general, Israelis, especially those who leaned towards the right of the political spectrum, think that it helps the security of Israel.[75] Attitudes towards American Jews are changing too. According to a Haaretz poll in 2020, 51 percent of Israeli Jews believe that American Jews are not sufficiently supportive of the Jewish state and 46 percent think that Israel should not take into account the opinions of US Jews.[76] As for the American Jewish community's attempt to influence Israeli policy on the peace process or national security, 63 percent of Israeli respondents said that it is not appropriate.[77]

For many decades, the key American Jewish organizations, such as the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, tried to avoid harsh and open criticism of Israel and its actions in the region. Pro-Israel, liberal Jewish organizations, such as Americans for Peace Now and Israel Policy Forum, successfully promoted a new kind of support of Israel, more critical and balanced, but they could not challenge mainstream structures. Given the growth of a serious divergence of the positions of American liberal progressive Jews with the main Jewish organizations, as a result, new organizations with new agendas have emerged, such as J street in 2008. One of the main priorities of this organization is working on American campuses to become a more sophisticated platform to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and other issues related to Israel. Since 2019, J street began to provide a more nuanced program, in contrast with Taglit-Birthright, for young American Jews 'Let our people know' that showed the lives of both Israelis and Palestinians.

In many ways, J street has challenged a veteran of pro-Israel lobbying in the United States - AIPAC. American experts on pro-Israeli lobbying point out that AIPAC is a centrist organization among other lobbying structures, primarily because its activities remain bipartisan - it works with both Democrats and Republicans. Over the last two decades, however, the right-wing conservative views have intensified at AIPAC, mainly

because Evangelical Christians started to play a bigger role in this organization (as one American expert said to the author of the chapter, the activity of J street pushes AIPAC to the Republican Party even more). In contrast, J street, a left-wing liberal organization that focuses on increasing its political influence on Congress, is close to the US Democratic Party (according to the Center for Responsive Politics data, during the midterms in 2010 and 2014, J street's affiliated political action committee supported Republican candidates, but the majority of donations were still going to the Democrats. Since 2016, J street did not support Republicans[78]). In some way, it limits its activities and the ability to conduct a dialog or even cooperate with various representatives of the American political Olympus. In 2014, J street was rejected to join the main umbrella Jewish group Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish organizations in 2014 (among 50 organizations, 22 voted against, 17 voted for and to be included there is a requirement to have 34 votes).

The ZOA and the Republican Jewish coalition (the RJC), pro-Israel and pro-Republican lobbying organizations, started to attack J street for being anti-Israel.[79] One of the key reasons for the divide in pro-Israel lobbying structures is the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) issue. AIPAC, the ZOA and the RJC publicly condemn the BDS. According to the J street site, the organization 'has always been and remains opposed to the Global BDS Movement', but it 'is opposed to legislative attempts to penalize or criminalize BDS activities'.[80] J street's support of pro-BDS American politicians, like Member of the US House of Representatives from Minnesota (5 district) Ilhan Omar, provoked a backlash from right-wing and conservative Jewish groups.

In 2010, pro-Israel lobbying rival organizations started to wage whole campaigns in an attempt to discredit one another. These changes in the pro-Israel lobbying are a direct evidence of a new discourse about Israel in this sphere.[81]

Political disagreements between Barack Obama and Benyamin Netanyahu as a factor in deepening crisis in the American liberal Jewish community over Israel

In analyzing increased criticism of Israel within the American Jewish community, one cannot exclude the 'Obama-Netanyahu factor'. The President of the US, Barack Obama (2009-2017), twice won American Jewish

votes in elections (2008 – 78 percent of Jewish votes, 2012 – 69 percent) and for the eight years of his presidency American Jews approved of his performance more than the general American population.[82] The position of the Obama administration on the main issues of relations with Israel, such the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and 'the Iran problem', coincided with the opinion of the majority of the American Jewish community, especially the liberal progressive part. Trita Parsi, a well-known American author and president of the National Iranian American Council, in his book Losing the Enemy: Obama, Iran and the Triumph of Diplomacy described Obama's conversation with M.J. Rosenberg, a former AIPAC employee, columnist for The Nation and The Huffington Post.[83] The American leader pointed out that if Jewish organizations for peace want him to hear them, they must raise their voice (Obama once jokingly called himself a liberal Jew). For President Obama, J street became that voice. This organization actively supported Obama and lobbied for the ratification of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in Congress (JCPOA).

However, Obama's policy and approaches to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and easing the Iranian threat were largely rejected by the Israeli government and the Israeli Jewish society who started to be disappointed with him and this later transformed in distrust. The White House's use of 'soft power' approaches to regional challenges did not resonate with the Netanyahu government.[84] On the contrary, Israel saw the departure from 'hard hegemony' as a manifestation of weakness. The Israeli right-wing government demanded that the United States pursue a tougher foreign policy line. Obama, who did not visit Israel in his first presidential term, was unable to assure Israeli society that his policy towards Iran was aimed at protecting the security of the Jewish state. If left-wing Israeli parties were supportive of the White House pressure on Netanyahu in the peace process and even criticized him for not cooperating more, yet in dealing with Iran Netanyahu's, Mr. Security's, hardcore policy was greeted with more approval than what the Obama team offered.[85] Nevertheless, the Israeli opposition also opposed public clashes with the United States. Both governments had a common strategic goal to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons, but they used different and inconsistent tactical schemes and the contradictions between these approaches only deepened, revealing an overt mutual discontent. Although despite the political crisis between the countries, military and economic ties were strong.[86]

Many experts pointed out that some earlier political moves by Netanyahu provoked a deepening and broadening crisis with the American Jewish community.[87] In 2015, despite an opposition from the White House, Netanyahu gave a speech before a joint meeting of Congress in which he criticized the JCPOA, calling it numerous times 'a bad deal'. It backfired when more than 50 Democrats skipped this speech.[88] The Israeli prime-minister's open clashes and criticism of Obama and his team had lasting consequences not only in the protests of American liberal progressive Jews, but more importantly in an alienation of the Democratic party. Since the 1990s, Democrats have become increasingly inclined to be more critical of Israel. At the same time, Republicans, on the contrary, have turned into a very supportive party of the Jewish state.[89]

The Trump-Netanyahu factor in the split between American Liberal Jews and Israel

Controversy between American Jews and the Israeli government escalated after the US presidential election in 2016. The majority of American Jews (71 per cent), with the exception of some Orthodox Jewish groups, voted for Hillary Clinton, a candidate from the Democratic Party, while Donald Trump, a Republican candidate, received only 24 per cent of Jewish votes. The 2016 election year was a record due to the large number of donations from pro-Israeli lobby structures, according to the Center for Responsive Politics, about $17 million was spent.[90]

Benyamin Netanyahu's close partnership with Donald Trump is a factor of even more division in within the American Jewry. According to many surveys, Donald Trump is the most unpopular president for the majority of American Jews.[91] American Jewish liberal progressive organizations intensively mobilize and participate in demonstrations against him. Amid the serious political crisis in the United States, discussions about the rise of anti-Semitism in the United States intensified after the alt-right march in Charlottesville in 2017, which resulted in violence between white supremacists and anti-fascists. Among the marching slogans were anti-Semitic statements. President Trump's mixed response to the events in Virginia, when he blamed 'both sides' for what was happening, provoked a very negative reaction from many Jewish organizations in the United States. In 2018, the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh was attacked by a white supremacist with 11 people killed. According

to the Anti-Defamation League, it was the largest terrorist attack against the American Jewish community in the country.[92] Since Trump came to power, hate crimes across the country have grown dramatically. According to the FBI, in 2018, more than half of the victims of religious intolerance were Jews (In 2019, there were unprecedented rise of attacks against the Orthodox Jewish community in Brooklyn).[93] At the J street annual conference in 2018, many participants openly blamed D. Trump for spreading hate sentiment in the country. According to the AJC survey in 2019, 62 percent of respondents disapprove of Donald Trump's handling the threat of antisemitism in the US.[94]

The threat of anti-Semitism and the security of Jews in other countries have always worried the Israeli government. After the horrible terrorist attacks in France in January 2015, Netanyahu wrote on Twitter: 'To all the Jews of France, all the Jews of Europe, Israel is not just the place in whose direction you pray, the state of Israel is your home'.[95] In the spring of 2018, the Israeli leader tried to distance himself from what was happening in the United States. Netanyahu emphasized that the problems affecting the life of American Jews do not affect the political life of Israel.[96] The Israeli Minister of Diaspora affairs (2013-2019) Naftali Bennett, after the Tree of Life attack, questioned the ADL report on the rise of anti-Semitism in the US at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York meeting stating 'I'm not convinced those are the facts'.[97] The Israeli government has been avoiding interfering in the relations of the American Jewish community and Donald Trump.

The solidarity of Benyamin Netanyahu with Donald Trump on many issues and their mutual support of each other further estranged the liberal progressive part[98] of the Democratic Party from Israel. Politicians such as Bernie Sanders, Elizabeth Warren, Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez and 'the Squad'[99] began to promote the normalization of open criticism of the Jewish state for human rights violations of Palestinians, destructive settlement policies and excessive use of force. The dynamic debate among the Democrats over the Jewish state and its policies gave impetus to discussions about the possible upcoming end of earlier unquestioning bipartisan support of Israel in the United States. In 2019, during the J street annual conference, the candidates for the presidency of the United States openly discussed the nature and future of US military assistance to Israel. Senator Bernie Sanders, in particular, said that he would use the leverage of $3.8 billion dollars of annual US military aid to generate pressure on Israel in pushing it towards peace with the

Palestinians. Additionally, he advocated the idea of conditional aid : 'We cannot give carte blanche to the Israeli government, or for that matter to any government at all. We have a right to demand respect for human rights and democracy'.[100]

The Republican party and their supporters believe that Donald Trump maintains the right balance in relation to the two parties of the conflict, and they try to use left-liberal Democrats' criticism of Israel, accusing their opponents of radicalism. Opinion polls show that the more conservative the Republicans, the stronger their support for Israel. One example is Evangelical Christians, who in the 2016 US presidential election turned out to be the only religious group in the country that made an unambiguous choice in favor of Trump, and still remain loyal to him.[101] According to the Pew Research Center polls, Evangelical Christians are also more positive about Israelis than Palestinians. In addition to this, Donald Trump and the Republican Party rely on the support of certain groups of American Orthodox Jews and the right-wing conservative pro-Israeli lobby structures (the Republican Jewish Coalition, for example).

In Israel, President Trump became more popular than his predecessor Barack Obama. Israeli Jews thought that Trump would be more pro-Israel than his predecessor. According to a broad range of surveys and polls, Israeli sympathies for Trump's politics are very high, especially after the recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and the transfer of the US embassy from Tel Aviv to the 'city of three religions'.[102] According to a Pew Research survey of 2020, Israel has the highest approving ratings of Trump's policies amongst all other countries in the world.[103] As Steven Weiss noted: 'Israelis are red-state Jews. American Jews are blue-state — politically liberal in their outlook'.[104] This is a simplified understanding of the complex processes that occur in both communities, but what is true is that American liberal Jews have more in common with Israeli left-wing parties than with the right-wing parties like Likud. Same with the American politically conservative Jews that have more in common with the right-wing parties in Israel.

The close cooperation between Benyamin Netanyahu and Donald Trump that can be explained not only by a personal affection between them, but common national interests, ideological paradigms and selfish political aims in domestic policies, has become a factor of splits and a

new round of clashes inside the American Jewish community[l]. At the same time, it only deepened the crisis between American liberal Jewry and Israeli government. As Yehuda Kurtzer from the Shalom Hartman Institute of North America writes, 'different political realities have produced different—and maybe incompatible—political ideologies'.[105]

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The current crisis between American Jewry and Israel is real and will not disappear easily or quickly in the following years or even decades. Some serious changes within the American Jewish community and Israel have been developing in the cultural, political and religious spheres. Global trends also made an impact on both of these communities and character of their ties. Without analyzing every part of this mosaic, it is hard to get the whole picture of complicated relations of the US Jewish Diaspora and Israel. In this chapter I made an attempt to address the key contradictions that led to this current crisis.

We now witness how the taboo on open disagreement with Israeli politics has disappeared in the American Jewish community. It does not mean that American Jews are becoming more alienated from Israel, but the nature of pro-Israel activism is changing among young American Jews: 'They tend to be more critical of Israeli government policies regarding the conflict with the Palestinians'.[106] However, this criticism is not only connected with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Some other steps from the Netanyahu government, like the deportation of Eritrean and Sudanese asylum seekers to third countries (Rwanda and Uganda), provoked backlashes from key American Jewish leaders. After Naftali Bennett, whose parents were American Jews who moved to Israel from San Francisco after the Six-Day War, became the new Prime-Minister of Israel in a rotation government with Yair Lapid in 2021, the question arose - how much Israel will change its policy on key issues such as the peace process and relations with Diaspora?

The more illiberal Israel became, the more American Jewish liberal progressive organizations started to publicly disagree with its policies.

[l] In 2021, after losing the 2020 presidential elections to the Democratic candidate Joe Biden, Donald Trump gave an interview to a prominent Israeli journalist Barak Ravid where he shared his disappointment in Benyamin Netanyahu's acceptance of the US elections' outcome: "I liked Bibi. I still like Bibi. But I also like loyalty. The first person to congratulate Biden was Bibi. And not only did he congratulate him, he did it on tape". See here: Ravid B. Trump blasts Netanyahu for disloyalty: "F**k him" // Axios. Available at: https://www.axios.com/trump-netanyahu-disloyalty-fuck-him-276ac6cc-3f70-4fba-b315-c82a59603e67.html

The Israeli prominent writer Amos Oz told a Russian journalist Vladimir Pozner in 2018 that from Israel, as a state of Jews, everyone expects a high moral ground, but 'Israel is unable to meet these expectations'.[107] Israel itself demands from the Diaspora an unconditional support. As Amos Oz said in the same interview, he loves Israel, but does not like it. In my opinion, it is an accurate illustration of American Jewish liberal progressive's challenging perception of Israel. As Michael Koplow from the Israel Policy Forum puts it: 'the new tensions will override all unless both sides recalibrate their expectations'.[108] One of the possible ways of addressing the crisis is revising or even lowering expectations by both of the two main pillars of the Jewish world. There is a necessity to promote an honest and serious dialogue between leaderships of the two communities. They are not equal partners: one is a state with its own national interests, the other one a minority community in another state with a different political system. Thus the notion of 'autonomous coexistence' with several significant centers, rather than Israeli-centrism, that was proposed by different experts before, such as Gabriel Sheffer,[109] could be considered as a step towards a possible solution.

There is still no consensus on how to handle this crisis between the American Jewish Diaspora and the Jewish state. The current mechanisms that could help to find common grounds between two sides are not working. But being in a permanent conflict or even moving towards a full break is too high a price and one that neither side can afford.

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[1] In this paper the author will use a term 'American liberal progressive Jews' to differentiate new voices in the American Jewish community, mostly, young people who share progressive ideas on social issues and Israel. The whole community, as everywhere else, is not a single voice, there are many groups of different views and traditions.

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NATALIA V. ZHADOVETS

Israel and the Neighbors: Facts from Former S&T Cooperation and Science Diplomacy

Israeli government regularly stresses the role of science and technology as essential instruments not only for economic growth and competitiveness but also for social development and poverty alleviation.[1] Many of Israel's problems are common for the region: water, environment, energy, etc. These are not new problems; some factors have imbued these issues with unprecedented urgency.

The Middle East has the base to achieve solid economic growth; however, political conflicts have kept it from achieving its potential. Efforts to address the regional conflict have witnessed little success over the past years. Some experts claim science diplomacy can be effective and lead to building a channel of communication and conflict resolution as it was in the cases of the US and China, the US and the USSR.[2]

Israel currently trades only with Jordan, Egypt, Qatar and the Palestinians. Israel for most Arab countries is still an enemy occupying Arab land and oppressing Arab people. Some Arab countries have cooperated with Israel at the regional level on various projects. These examples underline both the value and the limits of using S&T cooperation as a tool to resolve conflict and promote Israeli-Arab cooperation. The brief history of the existing S&T cooperation programs shows that despite the benefits that projects could bring, including economic prosperity and development, the warm peace does not fit the priorities of the parties.

One program of S&T cooperation was launched in 1979 - the same year the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt was signed, and the United States started a massive aid to both countries – military and

non-military, amounting in billions of dollars. A tiny part of this aid was a program funded annually at a level of five to seven million dollars to encourage cooperation between Israeli and Egyptian scientists known as Middle East Regional Cooperation (MERC).[3] It was believed that sharing knowledge would be an important contribution to the 'normalization' process, but instead it accentuated a perception of technological inequality and a threat of alienation of Arab academics from their societies.[4] In the beginning, the projects were opportunities for the Egyptians to address applied technological issues. But all MERC projects were characterized by very limited people-to-people exchanges, and the scientific activities were conducted largely independently of one another, with very little collaboration among the different research groups, there was practically no public knowledge of these collaborative activities, with little media attention and none of the usual public ceremonies marking inception or completion.[5]

Many of S&T cooperation projects are so-called 'legacy programs' initiated by the Oslo Accords in the 1990s.[6] In May 1993, Israel and the PLO signed a mutual recognition pact. In 1994, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan became only the second Arab country after Egypt to sign a peace treaty with Israel. The signing of the peace treaty with Jordan brought hope to end the greater Arab-Israeli conflict and initially led to increased cooperation between the regional states. It was obvious that the efforts to resolve this conflict had to address the well-being of Palestinians and the neighboring countries too – issues that often demanded scientific solutions. After 1994, scientists in Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia joined their counterparts in Israel and Egypt in preparing proposals for MERC funding. The MERC program greatly changed. Almost immediately, Israel and Jordan began studying two common concerns, the Dead Sea and the Red Sea despite the fact that relations between the two peoples were characterized as a cold peace. According to G.D. Miller and S. Gilson Miller, the very few projects, non-political, of mutual concerns like the drug abuse, could reach the roots of society and offer opportunities for people-to-people exchanges among researchers, youth, and community leaders. The success of cooperation project depended on whether the partners felt equal economically, technologically and culturally. Obviously, there were only few fields where Israel and Middle East Arab States could have relatively equal opportunities and a similar attitude. The fact that Israel is much more advanced technologically and economically, and is supposed to lead the cooperation performance

provoked a rather negative attitude and anger across the region. The political situation and perception of Israel in the Arab world dominated the desire to cooperate or initiate innovative business with Israel.

Today, the prospects for ending the Arab-Israeli conflict seem grim, and lack of trust between the Arabs and Israelis is extremely high. Of the few programs that survived, most have been water and environmental programs, as they remain the pressing scientific issue of the region. Thus the importance of desalination research has brought such countries as Oman, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority, Japan, Israel, the Netherlands, the Republic of Korea, Qatar, and the United States together to promote scientific cooperation in the framework of Middle East Desalination Research Center (MEDRC), launched in 1997 following the Oslo Accords. Since desalination in the countries of the Middle East region was not well researched, the Israelis could offer valuable expertise. As Jill Shaunfield, the Executive Council Vice Chairman of the Middle East Desalination Research Center, noted, the main reasons for MEDRC's overall scientific value decrease by 2008 were mostly uncontrollable external factors, including the financial challenges for the US.[7]

One more project - the Executive Action Team on Regional Water Databanks (EXACT) brings together scientists and water authorities from Israel, the Palestinian Authority, and Jordan for discussions about new ways to think about water management and to provide training on new technology. As in the case of MEDRC, EXACT has maintained a relatively low profile in order to protect the programs from political attack. As a result, these programs have been similarly under-resourced.

The Amman Center for Peace and Development (ACPD) was founded in the hope that warm peace is possible between Arabs and Israelis. The ACPD runs projects on a very small scale between Jordanians and Israelis in several fields including regional security, youth and women's activities, agricultural development, professional skills enhancement and healthcare. An example of a project that can address both water and energy needs is the peace canal between the Red Sea and the Dead Sea, otherwise known as the 'Red to Dead Project.' It is to be a joint venture among the Israelis, Jordanians and the Palestinian Authority and has multiple purposes, one of which is to save the Dead Sea.

The cooperation between Jordan and Israel on water has been relatively successful, with both sides working out differences bilaterally without escalation of problems. This type of cooperation should con-

tinue to serve as a way for both countries to work together. It can also be expanded to include countries such as Lebanon and Syria, which have similar water concerns and share the same water sources. If the peace process moves forward in the future, Jordan could invite participants from other Arab countries to take part in activities.

Another example of Israel's participation in the regional scientific research is a UNESCO project - Synchrotron-light for Experimental Science and Applications in the Middle East (SESAME). This autonomous intergovernmental organization is composed of nine member states, including Bahrain, Cyprus, Egypt, Iran, Israel, Jordan, Pakistan, the Palestinian Authority, and Turkey. This multinational research program, a cooperative venture being developed under the auspices of UNESCO, is multipurpose and intended to contribute to the resolution of shared regional challenges. The improvement of scientific and technological capabilities is expected to have a positive effect on the further development of the region. From a diplomatic point of view, Israel can expect to play an active role in strengthening mutual trust and benefits among countries in the region. The project still faces technical challenges, on top of the constant threat of political breakdown or conflict forcing the key countries to pull out or cancel their funding.

As in the case of SESAME, the main condition to keep the project alive is the support of the sponsors (here the EU, CERN). The project was on the verge of survival when Israel joined it and invested $5 billion, which allowed the project to develop and expand further.[8] It is possible to conclude that the financial sustainability plays a decisive role. Among the success factors the experts emphasized a focus on mutual concerns, an engagement of like-minded professionals, a positive mental attitude, and an equitable treatment of partners.[9] Contentious issues are the inclusion of policy-makers in the projects, and the priority of large-scale or small projects.

Assuming that success of S&T cooperation depends on technological and economic equality, shared attitudes to research issues, it is necessary to conclude that scientific cooperation between Israel and its neighbors, and thus science diplomacy are a hard deal. First, the Israeli scientific community is highly regarded around the world, in contrast to Arab science. However, some countries of the Middle East have made a significant progress in scientific research, especially Turkey and Iran.[10] The Middle East region has increased the number of scientific articles and their share in Web of Science publications from 2% to 4%; an impressive

growth was observed in five countries (Turkey, Iran, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan); about half of all publications accounted for Turkey, which has increased its share in global publications from 0.7% to 1.9%; the share of Iran in 2009 was a quarter of all publications (1.3% in the world).[11] The disparity in technological level with some regional countries gradually decreases, which can positively affect the prospects of scientific cooperation. Second, some regional issues cannot wait for political solutions or be postponed, and the region is being shaped by increasing awareness of shared environmental and natural resource challenges. Joint efforts of scientists can help overcome at least some obstacles on vital issues and long-term challenges. Third, today it is impossible to take for granted that a regime in any Arab state now in power will remain in power tomorrow. Some minority groups may not share Israeli values but be willing to cooperate with Israel on a range of issues. This changing landscape may require Israel to develop new strategies for advancing regional cooperation. Thus the Egyptian Nobel laureate A. Zewail urges to build stronger collaborative relationships in education, science and technology and move away from building vaguely-defined and poorly staffed research organizations.[12]

Although technical solutions cannot provide quick and easy fixes for political problems in the Middle East or elsewhere, only personal contacts can overcome issues of fear and mistrust,[13] thus an important goal for the future could be to build partnerships between young scientists and engineers from Israel and its neighbors and empower them to develop solutions to common challenges. The salience of personal relationships proved to be a powerful attractor for keeping participants involved during difficult periods.[14]

The joint projects in the region face many problems. First, the high costs of common research initiatives. Funding restrictions, donor discouragement about research cooperation between Israelis and Arabs make it difficult to promote science cooperation.[15] P. Scham points out that the primary difficulties faced in Arab-Israeli joint research have been funding, recruiting participants, and balancing asymmetries of power and resources.[16] R.Miller notes that even during the Oslo years, many in the Palestinian science community opposed international community efforts to promote cooperation between Israel and Palestine because of the power imbalance.[17]

Another problem is that projects are not always separated from politics, and large-scale projects have a risk to be politicized or used for one

country's own purposes. The small-scale projects are usually less politicized but often face difficulties in raising funding, and involve less professionals and representatives of the public, since there is no broad public support for establishing scientific relations between Israel and the Arab states. Israeli scientists have shown moderate professional interest in the neighboring countries' science. Perhaps the problem concerns the too little influence of scientists on policy-making and public opinion on the peace process. For Arab regimes their vision of a resolution of the Palestinian conflict prevails over the benefits of cooperating with Israel; for Israel, security concerns will always be above the potential benefits of cooperating with Arab countries, but the fact that some issues are being addressed multilaterally between Arabs and Israelis is a positive sign.

The political situation in the region remains a critical challenge too. Since the collapse of the peace process it has become more difficult to promote science interaction between the adversaries. The major brokers of peace talks and sponsors of S&T cooperation in the Middle East require new approaches to promote collaborative projects. Some say it is necessary to avoid funding region-to-region, bilateral (Israeli-Palestinian), and trilateral (EU, Israeli, and Palestinian) projects because of little practical success. Thus, according to Rory Miller, Europe has not achieved its long-time goal of becoming a full player in the diplomacy of the Israel-Palestine conflict through funding joint projects and providing a framework for Palestinians and Israelis to pursue their 'strategic interest in cooperating for research'.[18] On the one hand, the efforts of the EU and the USA (and other sponsors) to bring together researchers from both sides has had some success on the practical and diplomatic levels. Thus even after the collapse of the Oslo process in 2000 the EU and the US continued to promote Israeli-Palestinian cooperation on politically and strategically sensitive issues such as energy and water.[19] In 2003 the first agreement between Israeli and Palestinian government ministers was signed. The EU made energy cooperation between Israel and the PA one of its three priority projects under the MEDA Neighbourhood Programme. On the other hand, such frequent political crises as the Gaza conflict of late 2008 and early 2009 often result in stalemating the progress achieved earlier.

A new approach to science diplomacy in the Middle East, developed in the EU, is to encourage Israeli and Arab technology entrepreneurs to meet to commercialize their ideas by backing venture capital funds, start-up incubators, and joint projects. The private sector supported in S&T collaboration may have a potential needed for political breakthrough.

There is an opportunity for the UN to adopt a new approach to the regional conflict, since its main purpose is to handle international conflicts. Unfortunately, the UN has consistently failed this goal. Since the international community through the United Nations shows its inability to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict, it can stand firmly behind successful international scientific collaborative projects like SESAME. While other regional initiatives supported by the United States and other donor-countries are at an impasse because of political instability and insufficient funding, SESAME continues fostering scientific and technological excellence in the Middle East and neighboring countries (and prevent or reverse the brain drain), and building scientific and cultural bridges between diverse societies, and contribute to a culture of peace through international cooperation in science.

It is a mistake to think that Israel lies low in Russia's foreign policy priorities. Perhaps the most surprising of Russian initiatives in the Middle East is a noticeable upgrade of relations with Israel. US withdrawal from the region and alienation from scientific cooperation programs have created a new historical chance for Russia to start developing science diplomacy with Israel and other countries of the region.

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EKATERINA YU. USOVA

The Gender Dimension of Israel's International Development Cooperation Policy: Continuity and Change in Golda Meir's Legacy

Gender Equality in Israel's Political Tradition

The question of women's role in the building of the future Jewish state was discussed within the Zionist movement since its emergence. As early as in 1898 at the Second Zionist Congress women were given full voting rights.[1] At that time it was a revolutionary move. The emancipation and equality of women was one of the basic principles of the Kibbutz movement which played an important role in building Israeli society and state.[2] On May 14, 1948, the Israeli Declaration of independence was signed by 24 members of *Moetzet ha-Am* (People's Council), including two women - Golda Myerson and Rachel Cohen-Kagan. In 1949, after the first national election in Israel, Golda Myerson was appointed Minister of Labor and Social Security – the only woman minister in the first Government of Israel. In 1956 Golda Myerson became the Foreign Minister of Israel, and since that time she became known under the name Golda Meir. Golda Meir was the second woman foreign minister in world history preceded only by Ana Pauker (Romania, 1947-53).[3] In 1969 – 1974 she was the Prime Minister of the State of Israel. The Worldwide Guide to Women in Leadership lists her the sixth among 180 women elected or appointed heads of state and government during the period 1917 – 2017 (for the period 1917 – 1980 there were only 14 such women).[4]

The biography of Golda Meir who, as many other Israeli leaders of the first decades of statehood, had a kibbutz background, demonstrates clearly that Israel from the very beginning was among the leading nations of the world in providing opportunities for women in playing an active role in society and politics including making a political and government career. Nevertheless, Golda Meir remained the only woman in the Israeli Cabinet until 1974 when she was joined by another prominent Israeli woman politician Shulamit Aloni who received the post of a Minister Without Portfolio. After that the number of women in the Israeli Cabinets of Ministers grew substantially, especially after the year 2000, varying in the last six Governments from three to eight Ministers and Deputy Ministers.[5] The number of women MKs until 1999 varied from 8 to 12 out of total 120 Members of the Israeli Knesset (7-10%). After the 1999 election (the 15th Knesset) the number increased noticeably: from 17 women in the 15th Knesset up to 37 women in the 20th Knesset formed after the 2015 election.[6] Data presented in Table 1 shows that the level of parliamentary representation of women in Israel during this period has almost always been above the world average (with the exception of the 17th Knesset elected in 2006 and the 22nd Knesset elected in 2019 – but after the 2020 election this level has risen again falling just a little bit short of the world average).

Table 1. Proportion of seats held by women in Israeli Knesset as compared to world average, 1999–2020

Knesset	Year of Election	Number of Women MKs	% of Women MKs	Average % of Women MPs Worldwide for the Year of election
15th	1999	17	14.1%	13.5%
16th	2003	25	20.8%	15.2%
17th	2006	18	15%	17%
18th	2009	25	20.8%	19%
19th	2013	27	22.5%	21.8%
20th	2015	37	30.8%	22.8%
21st	2019	33	27.5%	24.6%
22nd	2019	28	23.3%	24.6%
23rd	2020	29	24,2%	24,6%*

*2019. Sources: knesset.gov.il/mk/eng/mkindexbyknesset_eng.asp?knesset; https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS?end=2019&start=1990&view=chart

Nevertheless, Shulamit Aloni, the first woman after Golda Meir to serve as a cabinet minister and the only woman in Yitzhak Rabin's first government (1974 – 1977) had come into conflict with the Labor party leadership exactly before the 1969 election that brought Golda Meir to the highest post in the Government. In 1973 she left the Labor Party to form Ratz, the Movement for Civil rights and Peace – thus becoming the first woman in Israel to establish a political party. The platform of her party was based on the assumption that the situation in the sphere of the rights of women as well as civil and human rights in general in Israel left very much to be desired. She devoted the rest of her life to a passionate struggle for the rights of all kinds of minorities, against all kinds of discrimination and for a just peace between Israel and the Palestinians. The issues of women's rights, gender equality and discrimination against women always ranked high on her priority list. They became the subject of one of her books, Women as Human Beings.[7]

In January 2014 Shulamit Aloni passed away. Some of the numerous *in memoriam* publications portray her as an antagonist of Golda Meir in many respects, including the gender issue. 'Unlike Meir, who did nothing to advance women's rights within government or without, Aloni was a feminist' (B.Muraskin).[8] 'Meir was the first and only woman to serve as prime minister in the State of Israel, but she never pretended to be a symbol of the struggle for gender equality. It's highly doubtful that she even understood the feminist idea. Unlike her, Aloni was a self-professed fighter for women's rights in the days when politicians in Israel didn't even know how to pronounce these two words' (M. Mualem).[9] Former Education Minister Yossi Sarid, who inherited Aloni's position as chairman of the Meretz Party (a coalition of Ratz, Mapam and Shinui formed in 1992), recalled in a conversation soon after Aloni's death was announced: 'While Shula talked of women's status in society, Golda thought this wasn't an issue because the fact was that she was a prime minister … Golda didn't just object to her, she didn't understand what she wanted of her'.[10]

Development and its Gender Aspect in Golda Meir's Foreign Policy

Sharing completely the highest appreciation and respect for Shulamit Aloni's outstanding role in promoting civil and human rights in Israel, including, of course, gender equality, it should be noted however,

that Golda Meir's attitude towards gender issues was not as dismissive as it is described above. Here we should bear in mind, first of all, that one of the main spheres of Golda Meir's political activity was foreign policy and diplomacy. Even before she was appointed to her first ministerial post she had carried out a number of diplomatic missions crucial for Israeli interests, such as two rounds of secret talks with King Abdullah of Transjordan in 1947 and 1948, two highly successful fundraising missions to the United States in 1948, and seven months of diplomatic service in Moscow as the head of Israel's diplomatic mission there in 1948-49. As the Foreign Minister of Israel she had to face the severe political-diplomatic consequences of the 1956 war (the Sinai Campaign) after which Israel found itself in a deep isolation: ' … in many respects entirely alone, less than popular and certainly misunderstood. France was an ally and a good friend, and one or two other European countries were sympathetic to us; but our relationship with the United States was strained, with the Soviet bloc it was worse than strained and in Asia – despite all our efforts to secure real acceptance – we had, for the most part, come up against a stone wall'.[11] Before the war Israel had been excluded from the 1955 Bandung conference of Asian and African states. On the other hand, the Suez campaign resulted in the opening of the Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli shipping and the possibility of direct communication with African states which started to achieve their independence since the end of 1950s.[12] Here Israel's leaders saw a good opportunity to improve the country's situation on the international arena by strengthening her ties with the newly independent states. In pursuing this policy they relied on the interest expressed by some of the developing countries in Israel's experience and achievements in the sphere of economic and social development as well as in the sphere of national consolidation and nation-building. This interest was further boosted by the popularity of socialist ideas and socialist models of development among new independent states of that time. The fact that the young Jewish state was also trying to build its economy and society along the socialist lines made its experience especially attractive.

Thus Golda Meir during her tenure as Foreign Minister made Africa a special object of her attention. In M. Brecher's judgment, Israel's conspicuous and successful 'presence' in Africa and the development of Israel's technical assistance programme in the Third World generally was Golda Meir's major achievement as Foreign Minister.[13] In 1958 Golda Meir made a five-week trip to Africa and had the first high-level discus-

sions with African leaders like Kwame Nkrumah, William Tubman, Felix Houphouet-Boigny, George Padmore ('the father of Pan-Africanism') and others. These talks helped to show Israeli interest in the African liberation movement as well as to stimulate African interest in Israel.[14] Analyzing Golda Meir's African policy, many authors point out that she was motivated not only by her official duty as Foreign Minister to serve the national interest of her country, but also by her personal ideas, beliefs and feelings. She believed that the people of these lands, like the Jews, had long been oppressed peoples. She felt an obligation to help them as much as she could. As a good politician she also knew that Israel must make as many friends as possible.[15] But at the same time she responded with a warm personal approach to the problems of suffering humanity – the hunger and disease, the hopelessness afflicting the peoples of the new states in Asia and Africa.[16] It was probably this very special attitude that guaranteed the success of Golda Meir's missions in Africa. During her visit to Liberia Golda managed to win such a high respect that she was made Honorary Paramount Chief of the Gola tribe after which she was admitted to the secret Zoe Society of Women.[17] In her own memoirs Golda Meir wrote a special chapter about *'African and other friendships'* of Israel.[18] Here we find a detailed description of the whole complexity of her approach to Israel's interests and mission in Africa:

> *… In a world neatly divided between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots', Israel's experience was beginning to look unique because we had been forced to find solutions to the kinds of problems that large, wealthy, powerful states had never encountered. We couldn't offer Africa money or arms but, on the other hand, we were free of the taint of the colonial exploiters because all that we wanted from Africa was friendship. Let me at once anticipate the cynics. Did we go into Africa because we wanted votes at the United Nations? Yes, of course that was one of our motives – and a perfectly honourable one – which I never, at any time, concealed either from myself or from the Africans. But it was far from being the most important motive, though it certainly wasn't trivial. The main reason for our African 'adventure' was that we had something we wanted to pass on to nations that were even younger and less experienced than ourselves. … I am prouder of Israel's International Cooperation Programme than I am of any other single project we have ever undertaken.*
>
> *For me, more than anything else, that programme typifies the drive towards social justice, reconstruction and rehabilitation that is at the very heart of Labour-Zionism – and Judaism. The philosophy of life*

that impelled the men and women of Merhavia in the 1920s to dedicate themselves to pioneering within a cooperative framework, that led my daughter and her comrades to continue in that same demanding pattern in the Revivim of the 1940s and that is responsible today for each new kibbutz established in Israel is identical, I believe, with the vision that took Israelis into African countries for years to share with the Africans the practical and theoretical knowledge that alone could answer Africa's needs in a changing world in which it was, at last, responsible for its own destiny. …[19]

In order to implement the program of development assistance to the countries of the Third World a special unit was set up within the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the end of 1957 – the Center for International Cooperation (MASHAV). It started its work in 1958.[20] Under the auspices of the MASHAV a number of training centers were established in Israel with the purpose of teaching courses in various aspects of economic and social development to professionals from Asia, Africa and Latin America. One of these centers was founded in 1961 on the initiative of Golda Meir with the main objective to train women from the Third World for posts of community leadership and administration. It is the Mount Carmel Training Center in Haifa (MCTC). Three prominent women contributed to the establishment of the MCTC: Golda Meir, Mina Ben-Zvi (the first Commander of the Women's Corps in the IDF, in 1956-58 represented Israel on the UN Commission on the Status of Women) and Inga Thorsson (chairwoman of the Swedish Social Democratic Women's Federation, diplomat, disarmament expert and an advocate for disarmament; Swedish Ambassador to Israel in 1964-66, Nobel Peace Prize nominee of 1988). Mina Ben-Zvi became the founding director of the MCTC, a position she held for over 25 years. Since 1985 the MCTC has been bearing the name of Golda Meir. Golda Meir initiated the establishment of the MCTC because in her eyes, the fate of the women in the Third World was the hardest and cruelest of all. For the most part they received only a few scattered years of schooling, were married off very young and were then responsible for the home and bringing up their children. They were the main sufferers from the poverty and deterioration affecting the African and Asian world.[21] In her memoirs Golda Meir describes the MCTC as a project that remained as exciting and interesting to her still after fifteen years from its start in 1960 'because I so greatly admire these women from developing countries who leave their towns and villages, and their families, and travel so far to a strange country in order to learn the skills

that will eventually make the life of their people easier and richer. There is something heroic, I think – and this is not a word I use easily or often – in the effort made by such women to ensure a better and fuller existence for themselves, for their children and for their children's children through the long, difficult process of self-education … I don't think I have ever encountered a more hard-working, enthusiastic or attractive group of women than those I used to talk to for hours in Haifa. On the surface, our life experience had been entirely different, but in reality we were struggling for much the same things.'[22]

Israel's Development Cooperation Policy after Golda Meir: Continuity and Change

Many changes have occurred in Israel and the world since that time. Many of the ideas that inspired Golda Meir and other founders of Israel's development cooperation programs are no longer topical. The socialist model of development hasn't proved its effectiveness and lost its attractiveness. Its failure can be most strikingly illustrated by the example of Ghana, Israel's first and major African partner, as compared to South Korea. A research carried out by World Bank experts has shown that, while in 1957, upon achieving independence, Ghana had about the same per capita GDP as South Korea, thirty years later South Korea's annual per capita purchasing power was about 10 times that of Ghana's. Ghana's economic retrogression stemmed from allowing hyperinflation, over-regulation, production disincentives, institutional demoralization, and deterioration of human services. In spite of the implementation of an Economic Recovery Programme in the 1980s, Ghana remained dependent upon the international price of cocoa and foreign aid. At the same time, South Korea in the mid-1960s introduced an export-oriented economy by developing export pride, national leadership, market sustaining incentives, labour incentives, research, and technical education. While both Ghana and South Korea have used state-owned enterprises, only South Korea has done so successfully, with a Performance Evaluation System.[23] In Israel, too, those structures and institutions that played a crucial role in the building of Israel's national economy, society and statehood during the Yishuv period and the first decades of independence (they were also most actively engaged in the earliest Israeli development cooperation programs) – such as the Histadrut, the kibbutz movement, the paramilitary defense-cum-agricultural settlement youth

movement Nahal, etc. – have also lost their importance. Israel has finally built up an industrialized, consumer-oriented economy and its image, as well as policies became similar to those of other developed countries. For those in the developing world who were still concerned with revolutionary social change, Israel lost its attraction.[24] During the Yom Kippur War of 1973 most African states broke their diplomatic relations with Israel. By mid-1990 relations had been restored, moreover, Israel managed to expand its diplomatic ties in Africa: new relations were established in the 1990s with former pro-Soviet African states such as Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Mozambique.

In spite of all the disturbances, Israel's development cooperation programs survived and acquired new dimensions. For instance, it is surely beyond any dispute, that the Israeli experience and achievements in the sphere of agricultural development have a tremendous relevance and importance to the problems and needs of the less developed countries. But the emphasis now is no longer placed on the collectivist (kibbutz) model. Instead, as Ambassador H. Dimon, Head of MASHAV, expressed in the Foreword to the 2010 MASHAV Annual Report, 'We have to see the youth as entrepreneurs in the agricultural sector. … to place rural young people and smallholder farmers at the forefront of global strategies for food security, poverty reduction and income growth'.[25] In 2012 Israel initiated a resolution approved by the UN General Assembly under the title Entrepreneurship for Development affirming that entrepreneurship is a critical development tool and a primary pathway to sustainable economic growth for all.[26]

In the 1990s Israel's foreign relations network expanded impressively to include the countries of the former Soviet bloc, the former Soviet republics and the two Asian giants – China and India. With the start of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process in 1993 and the signing of the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty in 1994, Israel's isolation in the Middle East and North Africa also diminished. Although after 2000 the situation deteriorated again, the overall confrontation of the past seems to have passed into history. Most of the new partners of Israel became concurrently partners of the MASHAV. The list of official working languages of MASHAV courses and seminars, besides the traditional English, French and Spanish, now includes also Russian and Arabic. Today's Israel is no longer a country that 'can't offer money or arms' (in fact it has become a major arms exporter). Still, in the sphere of development cooperation Israel prefers to invest intellectual rather than financial resources.

Presenting the 2019 MASHAV activity review, its Head Amb. G. Haskel described Israel as a country that has successfully addressed its own development challenges and is now eager to share its success with the world:

> *Since gaining our independence in 1948, Israel has transformed from a developing country to a high-tech advanced economy, ready and willing, through MASHAV, to share all its knowledge with friends around the world. Israel evolved from a development challenged State to a proud donor country.*[27]

Thus the basic principle of Israel's development cooperation policy, that is, sharing and teaching Israel's experience in the sphere of economic and social development, after 60 years has remained unchanged but upgraded. Nowadays, this policy is modelled chiefly on the guidelines set out in the United Nations documents forming the world development agenda.

Introducing Gender Equality Issue into the Agenda of World Politics in General and Development Policy in Particular: Israel's Pioneering Role

But as far as the issue of gender equality is concerned, Israel's case shows a different trend. In this sphere, Israel did not have to adjust her policy to the changing world standards, on the contrary, Golda Meir's initiative of establishing MCTC and making women a special group of trainees learning leadership skills was definitely much ahead of its time. The establishment of the MCTC coincided with the start of the First United Nations Development Decade. The two UN General Assembly resolutions outlining the basic principles of the Decade did not even mention the principle of gender equality.[28] Only ten years later, in a resolution announcing the Second Development Decade, Paragraph 18 (h) stated that 'The full integration of women in the total development effort should be encouraged.'[29] Since that time the value placed on gender equality as an international political issue and an important prerequisite for successful development has been growing steadily.

As the international feminist movement began to gain momentum during the 1970s, the General Assembly declared 1975 as the International Women's Year and organized the first World Conference on Women, held in Mexico City. At the urging of the Conference, it subse-

quently declared the years 1976-1985 as the UN Decade for Women, and established a Voluntary Fund for the Decade.

In 1979, the General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which is often described as an International Bill of Rights for Women. In 1985, the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, was convened in Nairobi. By that time the movement for gender equality had finally gained true global recognition, and 15,000 representatives of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) participated in a parallel NGO Forum. This event is often described as 'the birth of global feminism'.[30]

In 1995 Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) were introduced in the Human Development Report issued by the United Nations Development Program. The aim of these measurements was to add a gender-sensitive dimension to the Human Development Index (HDI). In 2010 the Gender Inequality Index was introduced.

In the same year 2010 the UN General Assembly established UN Women, the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. One of the main ideas guiding the work of this entity is that gender equality is not only a basic human right but its achievement has enormous socio-economic ramifications because empowering women fuels thriving economies, spurring productivity and growth.[31]

Today's concept of development formulated for the first decades of the 21st century is centered around two UN documents:

1. 'Millennium Development Goals and Beyond 2015' based on the 'United Nations Millennium Declaration' adopted by the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in 2000. The program included eight goals. Goal 3 suggested 'to promote gender equality and empower women'. The progress in achieving this goal was supposed to be measured by the following indicators: (1) - Ratios of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education; (2) - Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector and (3) - Proportion of seats held by women in national parliament.[32]
2. Sustainable Development Goals based on the outcome document of the UN summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda and enshrined in the General Assembly

Resolution A/RES/70/1 passed on September 25, 2015 as the '2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development'.[33] The new agenda includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals with 169 associated targets of which Goal 5 is to 'achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'. The nine targets associated with Goal 5 include (1) – End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls; (2) – Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls including trafficking, sexual and other forms of exploitation; (3) – Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation; (4) – Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family; (5) – Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life; (6) – Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights; (7) – Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources; (8) – Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communication technology, to promote the empowerment of women; (9) – Adopt and strengthen policies and legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.

As we can see from the documents cited above, the concept of gender equality and women's rights accepted worldwide is gradually expanding, embracing more and more issues, viewing gender equality more and more as an integral part of and a condition *sine qua non* for the whole process of development. And we see that at least one target set in the 2015 document mapping out the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is almost identical to the mission of the Mount Carmel Training Center established by Golda Meir in 1961: ensure women's equal opportunities for leadership in political, economic and public life. Thus Israel and, to be precise, Golda Meir played a really pioneering role in promoting gender equality as a vehicle of development on the international arena. As the result, MCTC and MASHAV as a whole entered the 21st century well prepared for an active participation in the imple-

mentation of the development goals set in the two UN programs cited above. All the recent MASHAV documents stress its commitment to the basic principles of these programs describing them as the main 'catalyst' for its activities.[34] In the Foreword to MASHAV Annual Report 2003 its Head, Deputy Director General of Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs A.Arazi pointed out that many topics that had moved into the forefront of the development efforts worldwide at the turn of the 21st century had been the focus of MASHAV's activities throughout its 45 years history. The Report further states that empowerment of women, as well as poverty alleviation, provision of food security and upgrade of basic health and education services had been MASHAV's priorities since its establishment and the formalization of these priorities in the Millennium Development Goals 'has only caused us to redouble our longstanding efforts'.[35] Introducing MASHAV 2012 Annual Report, its Head, Amb. D. Carmon emphasized that 'Israel has taken an active part in the efforts of implementing the Millennium Development Goals and is joining the international community in rethinking the Post 2015 agenda and formulating the new Sustainable Development Goals'.[36] 2019 MASHAV Annual Report puts the Agency's priorities 'in line with the United Nations 2030 Agenda's sustainable development goals, OECD recommendations and good practices of DAC members … focusing its activities on areas in which Israel has a comparative advantage and accumulated expertise'.[37]

Introducing 'Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment' as one of MASHAV's priority sectors the 2019 report declares that:

> *Women have a critical role to play in all of the Agenda 2030 as is especially represented in Goal 5. MASHAV considers the empowerment of women as a critical and central component of its development policy, relating to gender equality not only as a fundamental human right, but also as a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. MASHAV's programs in the field focus on strengthening entrepreneurial skills and innovation through capacity building and the transfer of individual and community leadership skills and strategies relating to women's economic empowerment, including the empowerment of rural women by ways of agricultural entrepreneurship, to contribute to income generation and employment.*[38]

Gender aspects of Development in MASHAV and MCTC Training Programs

MASHAV activity in the sphere of promoting gender equality and empowerment of women is in progress now within two main frameworks. First, within the framework of MCTC which is MASHAV's flagship training extension for the advancement of the status of women in all spheres of society in the developing world, established long before the issue was put on the UN agenda and as such, holding a unique place in the international arena.[39] Second, within the framework of various courses in gender issues taught in all the training centers affiliated with MASHAV. As far as MCTC training activities are concerned, they do not necessarily deal with gender issues proper, focusing primarily on three areas of study. These three core areas are currently formulated as (1) – Entrepreneurship and Innovation, (2) - Sustainable Community Development and (3) – Early Childhood Education and Development, with gender serving as a cross-cutting issue. Thus MCTC conducts training activities in socio-economic areas, with an emphasis on gender equality and women's leadership.[40] In the most recent list of courses and seminars offered by MCTC published in 2020, four out of the fourteen courses in the 'Entrepreneurship and Innovation' area deal specially with gender aspects of entrepreneurship and business as a tool for women's empowerment. In the area of 'Sustainable Community Development' seven out of 13 courses deal directly with economic and political empowerment of women, combating violence against women and children, innovations in women's health, development and management of health care systems for rural women, etc. As for the area of 'Early Childhood Education and Development', most of these courses are focused on problems especially important for women as mothers and educators.[41]

The working languages of MCTC courses and seminars are English, Spanish, French, Russian and Arabic. For the first ten years of its existence, MCTC accepted only women. Since 1970, mixed acceptation of men and women together has been practiced for the constructive influence this has on the men participants.[42]

The basic data on the training activities of MCTC both in Israel and abroad, are presented in Table 2 below. The data show, first of all, that in the first decades of the 21st century the number of trainees taking courses at MCTC increased sufficiently as compared to the first decade of the Center's existence. According to Sh. Amir, by the early 1970s, after

12 years since the establishment of MCTC, the number of course participants had reached approximately two thousand,[43] thus during the first 12 years of its existence MCTC received less than 170 trainees a year. In the years 2003-2018 the average number of trainees attending courses at MCTC amounts to more than 620 a year, besides, more than 900 trainees attended annually on-the-spot courses organized by MCTC abroad. It is worth mentioning here that the first 12 years since the establishment of MCTC were the years of the most active cooperation between Israel and Africa, the so-called 'Israeli-African honeymoon'.[44] However, we see that in the recent decades the number of trainees attending annually MCTS courses in Israel only is more than 3.5 times larger than it was in the first decade of its existence, which suggests that that the real 'honeymoon' between MCTC and its partner countries falls more likely into the current period.

In particular years within the period 2003-2018, numbers of trainees attending MCTC courses in Israel varied from the minimum one of 433 in 2017 to the maximum one of 907 in 2010; numbers of 'on-the-spot' course participants varied from 420 in 2015 to 1735 in 2006. During the period 2003-2010 the number of course participants at MCTC tended to increase from 504 in 2003 to 907 in 2010 (with some fluctuation), the period 2011-2014 shows a declining trend, in 2015-2018 the number of trainees was growing again with the exception of the gap in 2017. The average number of MCTC on-the-spot course participants fell from about 1.5 thousand a year in 2003-2006 to slightly more than 750 a year in 2009-2018, but this trend coincided with the general declining trend of MASHAV on-the-spot training activities: while in 2003-2006 the average number of MASHAV on-the-spot course participants was approaching 6 thousand a year, in 2009-2019 it fell to about 2.6 thousand a year. As the result, the average percentage of MCTC on-the-spot course participants among the total number of MASHAV on-the-spot course participants in the periods 2003-2006 and 2009-2016 remained almost unchanged amounting to 25-26%, moreover, since 2011 the percentage started to increase reaching its peak of 33.8% in 2016. It is particularly remarkable that in this year MCTC on-the-spot courses were attended by 884 trainees while in 2006 when they were attended by the maximum number of 1735 trainees this number comprised only 28.9% of the total number of MASHAV on-the-spot course participants.

Table 2. MCTC Training Activities 2003-2019: Basic Data

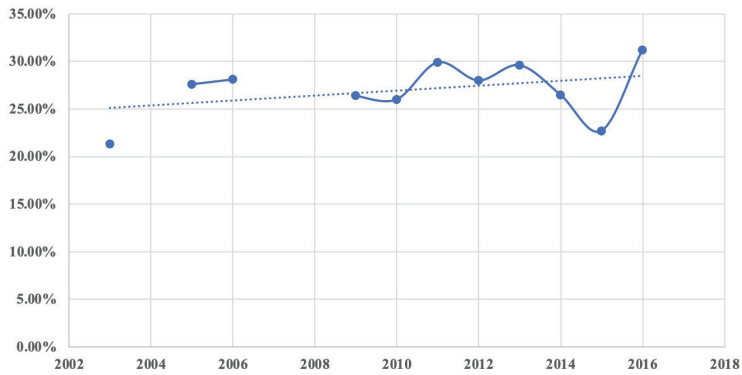
Year	MCTC course participants in Israel	Total number of MASHAV course participants in Israel	% of MCTC course participants in Israel	MCTC on-the-spot course participants	Total number of MASHAV on-the-spot course participants	% of MCTC on-the-spo participants in Israel	Total number of MCTC course participants	Total number of MASHAV course participants	% of MCTC course participants
2003	504	2349	21.5	1455	6860	21.2	1959	9209	21.3
2004	502	2164	23.2	n/d	6226	n/d	n/d	8390	n/d
2005	623	2271	27.4	1208	4365	27.7	1831	6636	27.6
2006	569	2201	25.8	1735	6005	28.9	2304	8206	28.1
2007	547	2468	22.2	n/d	4765	n/d	n/d	7233	n/d
2008	713	2762	25.8	n/d	5594	n/d	n/d	8356	n/d
2009	811	2375	34.1	966	4357	22.2	1777	6732	26.4
2010	907	2459	38.9	765	3979	19.2	1672	6438	26.0
2011	751	2638	28.5	908	2913	31.2	1659	5551	29.9
2012	731	2437	30.0	881	3309	26.6	1612	5746	28.0
2013	744	2235	33.3	576	2220	25.9	1320	4455	29.6
2014	479	1774	27.0	602	2308	26.1	1081	4082	26.5
2015	507	1800	28.2	420	2275	18.5	927	4075	22.7
2016	551	1979	27.8	884	2617	33.8	1435	4596	31.2
2017	433	1778	24.3	n/d	1559	n/d	n/d	3337	n/d
2018	605	n/d	n/d	774	n/d	n/d	1379	n/d	n/d
2018-19	n/d	2729	n/d	n/d	4113	n/d	n/d	6842	n/d
Total	9977**	36419	27.4*	–	63465	–	–	99884	–

*2003-2017 **2003-2018

Sources: MASHAV Annual Reports 2003 - 20 19: http: //mfa .gov.il/MFA/mashav/Publications/Annual Reports/Pages/default.aspx ; The Golda Meir Mount Carmel International Training Center (MCTC), Haifa, Israel Annual Reports 20 12 - 2018:// https://mctc_mfa.gov.il/?g=publications#annual report

Anyway, as we can see in Fig.1, the percentage of all the MCTC course participants among the total number of MASHAV course participants shows a clear upward trend. Given that MASHAV training courses are provided at three core training centers belonging to MASHAV (of which only two provide on-the-spot courses abroad) and eight affiliated centers and institutions (of which only three organize courses abroad),[45] the percentage of MCTC course participants among the total number of MASHAV course participants, together with the above-mentioned upward trend, lead to the conclusion that MCTC plays a leading role in the whole of MASHAV training system.

Fig.1 Percentage of MCTC course participants among the total number of MASHAV course participants, 2003-2016



The percentage of women among the MCTC course participants in Israel, as shown in Table 3, varied from 63% in 2003 to 83% in 2013. In the years 2014-2018 it declined to an annual average of about 70%. The breakdown of the percentage into distinct courses for one given year (2018) presented in Table 4 suggests that this decline occurs mainly through introducing and expanding the study area specified as 'Entre-

preneurship and Innovation'. Among the trainees attending these courses women rarely comprise more than 60% and sometimes men even form a majority of students. Another program attended by a relatively low percentage of women is a joint Israeli-Palestinian project of Regional Workshops for Health Care Professionals. Courses addressing subjects directly related to the problems of women including early childhood education, women's leadership and empowerment, support of women's entrepreneurship, etc., are characterized by an outright majority of women participants.

Table 3. MCTC Course Participants: Percentage of Women

Year	Courses in Israel	On-the-spot courses
2003	63%	n/d
2004	70%	n/d
2005	74%	58%
2006	80%	55%
2007	70%	n/d
2008	66%	n/d
2009	70%	n/d
2010	78%	n/d
2011	80%	n/d
2012	80%	64%
2013	83%	65%
2014	72%	68%
2015*	72%	n/d
2016	69.5%	65.9%
2017*	60%	n/d
2018	65.4%	n/d

*MCTC Annual Reports for the years 2015 and 2017 do not provide complete data on the numbers of trainees and the percentage of women

Sources: MASHAV Annual Reports 2003 – 2018: http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/mashav/Publications/Annual_Reports/Pages/default.aspx; The Golda Meir Mount Carmel International Training Center (MCTC), Haifa, Israel Annual Reports 2012 – 2018: https://mctc.mfa.gov.il/?q=publications#annual_report

Table 4. Percentage of women among MCTC course participants, 2018 (breakdown into subjects)

Name of the course	Total number of participants	Number of women	% of women
Development of Children: Social Emotional Support and Well-Being	27	20	74
Early Childhood Education: Children with Special Needs	28	25	89
Agribusiness: a Tool for the Empowerment of Rural Women	25	23	92
Innovation in Tourism	24	18	75
Political Empowerment of Women	24	22	92
Social Entrepreneurship as a Tool for Community Development	*24*	*14*	***58***
Leadership for Civil Society Activism	22	14	64
Supporting Women Entrepreneurs through the Use of Information and Communication Technologies and Networking	25	21	84
Innovative Entrepreneurship – from an Idea to Starting a Business	*28*	*14*	***50***
Innovations in Women's Health	26	22	85
Open Innovation and Intellectual Property Rights Protection	*23*	*14*	***61***
Startup Accelerators in the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem	*27*	*10*	***37***
The Entrepreneurial Ecosystem in Israel: Transforming an Idea to a Business	*28*	*6*	***21***
Innovation Road Map: Developing an Entrepreneurial Ecosystem for Startups	*23*	*12*	***52***
Regional Workshop for Health Care Professionals (Israeli-Palestinian Cooperation Project) I	*22*	*11*	***50***
Regional Workshop for Health Care Professionals II	*22*	*13*	***59***
Women's Leadership and Social Entrepreneurship for a Delegation from Morocco	7	6	86

Source: MCTS Annual Report 2018, pp. 12-29

Since 2006 the special accent on gender aspects of development which was original MCTC initiative and 'trademark' has been extended to MASHAV's training activities as a whole, i.e. 'Gender issues' have been listed in MASHAV annual reports as a separate subject of training. The data on the dynamics of course participation in this area of study, both in Israel and 'on-the-spot' are presented in Tables 5 and 6 below.

The data show that the number of course participants increased sharply in 2007, the next year after the subject was introduced. The period 2007-2019 falls into two sub-periods: in 2007-2012 the total number of trainees attending courses on gender issues was larger than 200 a year (averaging about 245 a year); in 2013-2019 the yearly number of trainees fell to less than 200 averaging 133 a year. Nevertheless, the percentage of trainees attending courses on gender issues did not drop so sharply due to the general decrease of the number of trainees attending MASHAV courses: in 2007-2012 they comprised 3.8% of all the MASHAV course participants against 2.8% in 2013-2019, the overall percentage being 3.3%. On-the-spot courses did not take place regularly (i.e. every year) and the number of trainees attending these courses was varying rather arbitrarily, showing no clear trend in its dynamics. In the years 2007 and 2011 they reached their peaks at 127 and 124 correspondingly, but generally these courses were attended by several dozen trainees a year. Summing up, if we take into consideration, first, that Israel is a small country with rather limited resources, and second, that the traditionally dominant subjects of MASHAV training courses are agriculture and education, we can suggest that MASHAV has managed to acquire a good reputation in the sphere of education in gender issues and that this relatively new subject figures quite prominently in MASHAV's curriculum. The data presented in Table 7 shows that according to the number of trainees attending courses on gender issues in the period 2013-2019 (when this number declined as compared with the previous period), this subject ranked 6th among the total of nine subjects in 2013, 2015 and 2018-2019; 7th in 2014 and 8th in 2016-2017.

Table 5. MASHAV Courses in Gender Issues 2006 – 2019

Year	Courses in Israel		On-the-spot courses		Total No. of courses	Total No. of participants	Short-term consultancies abroad
	No. of courses	No. of participants	No. of courses	No. of participants			
2006	2	38	1	34	3	72	-
2007	4	113	2	127	6	240	-
2008	9	168	1	65	10	233	-
2009	7	227	-	-	7	227	1
2010	9	194	2	47	11	241	2
2011	6	148	3	134	9	282	2
2012	10	245	-	-	10	245	2
2013	10	175	1	23	11	198	-
2014	5	126	-	-	5	126	1
2015	4	147	1	16	5	163	-
2016	5	111	-	-	5	111	3
2017	2	40	1	24	3	64	2
18-19	7	197	3	73	10	270	7
Total	–	1929	–	543	–	2472	–

Source: MASHAV Annual Reports 2006 – 2019, http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/mashav/Publications/Annual_Reports/Pages/default.aspx

Table 6. Percentage of participants studying gender issues out of total number of MASHAV course participants

	Total number of MASHAV courses participants	Participants studying gender issues	% of participants studying gender issues
2006	8206	72	0,88
2007	7233	240	3,3
2008	8356	233	2,8
2009	6732	227	3,4
2010	6438	241	3,7
2011	5551	282	5,1

2012	5746	245	4,3
2013	4455	198	4,4
2014	4082	126	3,1
2015	4075	163	4
2016	4596	111	2,4
2017	3337	64	1,9
2018-19	6842	270	3,9
Total	75649	2472	3,3

Table 7. Total number of MASHAV course participants, 2013-2019: breakdown into main subjects

Subject	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	18-19
Agriculture	2134	1796	2298	1528	1245	2791
Education	817	624	527	887	628	1345
Small & Medium Enterprises*	416	637	313	697	365	-
Entrepreneurship & Innovation	-	-	-	-	-	945
Community Development	219	378	215	386	351	420
Gender Issues	198	126	163	111	64	270
Medicine & Public Health	197	290	306	426	159	735
Environmental Issues	248	25	73	120	116	155
Rural & Urban Development	162	142	98	195	394	157
Science & Technology	97	25	76	46	25	24

*This subject was retitled in 2019 as 'Entrepreneurship and Innovation'.

Source: MASHAV Annual Reports 2013 – 2019, http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/mashav/Publications/Annual_Reports/Pages/default.aspx

Gender issues has become not only the subject of MASHAV educational and training programs for professionals from Asia, Africa and Latin America (as well as some post-Soviet states) but also a sphere of partner-

ship among donor countries. Within this framework MASHAV conducts and participates in professional dialogues, meetings and conventions with the donor community including first of all OECD member countries of Europe and North America as well as Australia and Japan.[46] As we can see from the data presented in Table 8, 'Gender Issues' has become the most attractive subject on MASHAV curriculum for donor countries' professionals, which is a clear indication of great esteem for Israeli expertise in this sphere among the professional community, while this expertise is rooted in Golda Meir's revolutionary initiative and the decades-long success story of MCTC. One of the sources of this expertise is the knowledge about the problems of development and gender issues as well as the ways and experience of solving these problems gathered by MCTC specialists all over the world through working and teaching courses 'on the spot', communicating with students and alumni of the courses, etc. The staff members of MCTC do not only teach, they also learn, widening and deepening their knowledge about development and gender problems – that is why it can now introduce itself as 'a center rich in knowledge and know-how about development around the globe'.[47]

Table 8. Donor countries participation in MASHAV-conducted events within the framework of donor countries partnership, 2007-2017

Year	Total number of DC professionals attending events in Israel	Number of DC professionals attending gender issues events in Israel	% of DC professionals attending gender issues events	Number of MASHAV-provided short-term consultancies on gender issues for DC professionals
2007	28	18	64%	-
2008	44	17	39%	-
2009	65	35	54%	1
2010	24	18	75%	2
2011	29	-	-	2
2012	10	-	-	1
2013	26	13	50%	-
2014	10	5	50%	-
2015	24	11	46%	-
2016	30	-	-	2
2017	9	-	-	2

Source: MASHAV Annual Reports, 2007-2017

Besides expanding gender issues studies throughout the MASHAV system, MCTC leadership within the system manifested itself in making a special stress on innovation in courses on business and entrepreneurship as tools for development. In 2016 one of the core areas of study at MCTC, formerly presented as 'Management and Organization of Micro-enterprises', 'Entrepreneurship and Development', etc., was rebranded as 'Entrepreneurship and Innovation'.[48] In 2019 this title for the first time was used in MASHAV Annual Report relating to the cluster of courses formerly labeled as 'Small and Medium Enterprises'.[49]

MCTC as an International Platform for Dialogue and Decision-Making in the Sphere of Gender Aspect of Development and formulating general development strategies

Besides its training activities, MCTC since its establishment has been actively participating in the international cooperation of experts and leaders in the spheres of development and gender equality. The main platform for such cooperation has been the series of biennial conferences known as International Women Leaders Conferences. The founding of the Center in 1961 was marked by the first international women's conference.[50] At that time the participants of that conference could not yet be regarded as really powerful leaders – as long as women's leadership had not yet been widely recognized. In the recent decades these conferences have become a gathering place for high-ranking women from all over the world (ministers, members of parliaments, judges, NGO chairpersons, educators, journalists, etc.).[51] The discussion they hold on various themes of international importance now can produce an effect on the decision-making process on the international level as far as the formulation of development strategies is concerned. This makes Israel one of the centers of the international policy and strategy formulation processes and contributes to strengthening its positions on the world arena. Evidence for this suggestion can be seen in the support provided for the Women Leaders Conferences and other MCTC and MASHAV activities from leading international organizations including various UN bodies such as the UN Commission on the Status of Women, UNDP, UNESCO, etc. The case of the UNESCO support is especially remarkable since this organization has always been ill-famed for its anti-Israeli position and a disproportionately large number of resolutions condemning Israel

on various occasions.[52] Nevertheless, UNESCO has been supporting MASHAV activities since 2004 – starting with a MCTC seminar on *Education for All in Early Childhood*.[53] The 27th International Women Leaders Conference held in 2011 marking MCTC's Jubilee Year was attended and addressed by UNESCO Director-General Irina Bokova.[54] This is a clear evidence in support of the suggestion that Israel's activities in the sphere of development cooperation do help her to counterweight the political-diplomatic attacks that she has to face so often in the international arena. And it is noteworthy that it was MCTC that played a decisive role in securing the UNESCO support for Israel's development cooperation programs.

The 30th Conference held in 2018, the 60th year of MASHAV activities and the year of Israel's 70th anniversary was marked by the participation of such prominent figures as O.Algayerova (Executive Secretary, UNECE), J.Howard-Taylor (Vice President of Liberia), F.A.Baron (Minister of Foreign Affairs of Dominica) and many other influential women leaders in the world.[55]

Each of the conferences has been focused on one particular problem dealing with the status of women, gender equality and women's empowerment. The outcome of each conference has been formulated as proposals and recommendations submitted to leading international bodies, first of all the United Nations, its agencies and other units in order to contribute to the decision-making process and the formulation of new development strategies.

From this point of view the 28th Conference (2013) and the 29th Conference (2015) were of particular importance.

The subject of the 28th Conference was formulated as 'The Post-2015 and Sustainable Development Goals Agenda: Ensuring the Centrality of Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in the Next Framework. The forty two participants represented twenty two countries and ten international organizations; among them were acting and former government ministers and deputy ministers, parliamentarians and high-level experts. The Conference issued the 'Haifa Declaration' containing a number of proposals and recommendations to be considered while preparing the next world developing program in the run-up to the expiration of the Millennium Development Goals in 2015. Some of these recommendations were reflected in the sustainable Development Goals issued in 2015, among them, for instance, increasing the participation of

women in all decision-making processes; preventing and combating all forms of violence against women and girls including human trafficking; promoting women's sexual and reproductive health and rights including the prevention of child marriage; etc.[56]

The 29th Conference took place soon after the Sustainable Development Goals were issued in 2015. It was focused on the subject of 'Promoting Gender Equality through Economic Empowerment: Implementing the Post-2015 Development Agenda'. The Conference was attended by A.Mohammed (UN Special Advisor of The Secretary-General on Post-2015 Development Planning) as a guest of honor which is a clear evidence that the United Nations follows the work of the Women Leaders Conferences with great attention and highly values and appreciates the ideas generated at this platform. The ideas brought out at the 29th Conference were summed up in the second Haifa Declaration touching primarily on the ways of transforming economies to ensure gender equality and women's empowerment. The Conference participants had the opportunity to meet with two prominent Israeli women who had managed to achieve a spectacular success in the economic sphere, namely, M.Fassberg (CEO, Intel Israel) and K.Flug (Governor of the Central Bank of Israel).[57] These meetings were organized in line with one of the main principles of Israel's development cooperation policy, that is, the principle of sharing Israel's own experience in solving the problems of development (in this particular case it was Israel's experience in the sphere of economic empowerment of women).

MCTC Special Projects: In Search of the Solution of Global and Regional Problems

Among the 30 Women Leaders Conferences organized by MCTC during the period of 1961 – 2018 there are two more that deserve a special attention.

The 2005 24th Conference which focused on the topic of Migration and Gender Issues within the Millennium Development Goals gave start to a series of prestigious international seminars and workshops on the problems of combating human trafficking. These seminars attracted top-level experts in this field. Within the period 2005 – 2018 ten such seminars were held. The 2012 seminar – the High-Level Seminar on *Profiles of Trafficking: Patterns, Populations and Policies* lasted ten days and

included an innovative one-day event on a related topic *The Relationship between Government and NGOs in Regard to Anti-Trafficking Activity* which widened the range of experts available and enabled specialist panels and mutual learning between participants and Israeli experts. The seminar was attended, among other high-ranking persons, by Dr. Maria Grazia Giammarinaro, OSCE Special Representative and Coordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings. At her suggestion the next four seminars in 2013 – 2018 were held especially for judges from various countries, including Supreme Court justices and judges. One of the aims of the seminars was to establish a network of justices and judges in order to nurture cross-border collaboration and exchange of information, legislation and best practices in the fight against human trafficking. The seminars were organized in partnership with the OSCE, UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and other prominent international bodies.[58]

These activities certainly raise Israel's prestige on the international arena, placing her among the key actors in the global effort to solve one of the most insistent problems of contemporary world, enhance her cooperation with the top-ranking international organizations and provides her own experts with a unique opportunity to expand their knowledge and expertise through discussions with their colleagues from all over the world.

The preceding 23th Conference (2003) spotlighting the subject *Women's Voice in Conflict Resolution and Peace Building* initiated a series of joint Palestinian-Israeli Women's seminars under the general headline *Women Building a New Reality* upon the proposal of Canadian Senator M. Jaffer which she put forward in her keynote address at the conference. The first of the seminars was held in 2004 within the framework of the renewal of MASHAV's cooperation with the Palestinian Authority that had been frozen for four years since 2000 (the year when the Israeli-Palestinian peace process collapsed). Its subject was the role of civil society in maintaining dialogue in the context of conflict.[59] The seminars were aimed at bringing together Israeli and Palestinian women in order to create bonds of mutual understanding and to promote peace and non-violence. The key words of this dimension of MCTC activities are 'education for peace', 'mediation' and 'leadership' that women can show in search of achieving mutual understanding through dialogue, working as coaches and trainers within their communities.[60] The participants learned how to build leadership capacities, take an active and involved part in their communities, create good relationships and mutual under-

standing through acquiring communication skills and maintain the process of understanding and coexistence. They exchanged experience and learned lessons from their own environments: the home, the work place, volunteers' activities, etc.[61]

The seminars were held during the period 2004 – 2015, their total number was 35. About 1.5 thousand women participated in these seminars. Most of them were Palestinians. Among the participants all the ethnic and religious communities were adequately represented: Jews, Moslems, Christians, Druze, Israeli Jews and Israeli Arabs.[62]

In 2014-2015 the project started to face difficulties caused by the deterioration of Israeli-Palestinian relations. Seminars were postponed or cancelled, and finally the project was terminated.

Besides *Women Building a New Reality* seminars MCTC carried out some other projects in the sphere of peace building and promoting regional cooperation. These activities included special seminars on fostering entrepreneurship among Palestinian women and business cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian women entrepreneurs. In 2009 a seminar for Israeli and Palestinian businesswomen '*Women Making Business*' was organized by MASHAV and MCTC in cooperation with the Israel-Palestine Chamber of Commerce.[63] In 2009-2013 special seminars for Palestinian women were held on Management of Micro-enterprises, in 2011 a professional workshop was organized for Palestinian Women Educators, etc.[64] Another regional course on Women's Empowerment and Entrepreneurship was held in 2016 in partnership with the Jordan Red Crescent Society.[65]

Since 2008 MASHAV and MCTC have been working together with The Green Land Society for Health Development (a Hebron-based Palestinian NGO) on training programs which were first related to joint Israeli-Palestinian initiatives in child rehabilitation. In 2014 a series of Regional Workshops for Health Care Professionals was launched for the purpose of training Palestinian physiotherapists, and in 2015 a Regional Workshop on Management of Health Systems was held for health system professionals from the Palestinian Authority and Jordan.[66]

MCTC activities within the framework of regional dialogue imply also events involving various countries of the Middle East and North Africa beyond the group of Israel's immediate neighbors. The most recent of such events were the 2018 special seminar *Women's Leadership and Social Entrepreneurship* for a delegation from Morocco and a series of webinars

conducted in 2019 for the staff of Springs of Hope Foundation working in the Shariya refugee camp in Northern Iraq. The sessions focused on self-care strategies and facilitation tools that the staff can use in their daily work with the women and children at the refugee camps.[67]

Conclusion

In the late 50s – early 60s of the 20th century Golda Meir played a pioneering role in the formation of development cooperation policy both in Israel and worldwide. Largely due to her conviction and determined enthusiasm Israel became one of the first of the countries in the world that made development cooperation an integral part of its foreign policy – and the first one among the new independent states established after World War II. As far as her ideas of women's role and the crucial importance of gender equality in the process of development are concerned, they stayed very far ahead of her time.

The Mount Carmel Training Center established at her initiative to teach women from the Third World countries how to acquire leadership capacities and play an active role in the development processes in their countries during the six decades of its existence has been not only preserving Golda Meir's legacy but also expanding its scope, renovating and transforming it to meet up-to-date needs and challenges showing an impressive level of flexibility and adaptivity.

At the start MCTC training programs, as well as MASHAV development cooperation policy as a whole were designed for students from countries having an agrarian type of economy and a very low level of education, with predominantly illiterate population. Besides, at that times Israel (as well as many of her partner countries in the Third World) tended to believe in the effectiveness of socialist (collectivist) model of economic and social development – with the kibbutz experience regarded as a hallmark and the most valuable component of Israel's development experience as a whole. Now we see the new MCTC training programs accentuating entrepreneurship and innovation as well as human development through early childhood education.

Since the principles of gender equality and women's empowerment were recognized by the world development community and leading international bodies, first of all the United Nations, MCTC, through its traditional biennial Women Leaders Conferences has become one of the

decision-making centers contributing to the formulation of new development strategies and raising to a position of high esteem and prestige in this sphere.

The regional dimension of MCTC activities should be mentioned specially as long as here we see a radical revision of Golda Meir's views and approaches regarding the Middle East conflict. It is well known that she saw the only way to achieve peace in the region through direct bilateral negotiations between Israel and Arab states and that she did not recognize the existence of the Palestinian people as a distinct national entity denying completely the necessity to work on the Israeli-Palestinian track of the Middle East conflict resolution.[68] The fact that now MCTC is actively promoting Israeli-Palestinian dialogue in line with contemporary conflict resolution technologies of peace-building gives us a clear evidence that Golda Meir's legacy is not a 'fossil' but a living organism able to leave behind outdated trends that failed to stand the test of time and to create new ones.

Summing up, we can state that the seeds planted by Golda Meir through the establishment of MCTC have grown into a big, branchy and fruitful tree yielding benefits both to Israel raising her prestige on the international arena and to the world development process as well as to promoting peace in the Middle East.

[1] Vital D. *The Origins of Zionism* (Oxford, 1975), p. 357.

[2] Dubson B.I. Kibutzy: Puteshestvie v svetloe budushchee i obratno [The Kibbutzim: a journey into the radiant future and back] (Moscow, 2008), pp. 15-16 (in Russian).

[3] http://www.guide2womenleaders.com/Foreign_Ministers_Chronological.htm

[4] http://www.guide2womenleaders.com/Female_Leaders.htm

[5] http://knesset.gov.il/govt/eng/GovtByParameter_eng.asp?par=1

[6] http://knesset.gov.il/mk/eng/mkindexbyknesset_eng.asp?

[7] http://jewishcurrents.org/memoriam-al-feldstein-shulamith-aloni-28081

[8] Ibidem.

[9] http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/01/shulamit-aloni-meretz-party-gender-equality-human-rights.html#

[10] Ibidem.

[11] Meir G. *My Life* (L., 1975), p. 263.

[12] Gitelson S.A. Israel's African Setback in Perspective, in: Curtis M & Gitelson S.A. (eds), *Israel in the Third World* (New Brunswick, 1976), p. 182.

[13] Brecher M. *The Foreign Policy System of Israel. Setting, Images, Process* (L., 1972), pp. 244, 394.

[14] http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Politics/africa.html; Avriel E. Israel's Beginnings in Africa, in Curtis M & Gitelson S.A. (eds). *Op. cit.*, p. 73.

[15] Dobrin A. *A Life for Israel. The Story of Golda Meir* (N.Y., 1974), p. 67.

[16] Aynor H.S & Avimor Sh. (eds). *Thirty Years of Israel's International Technical Assistance and Cooperation. Jerusalem*, 1990, p. E9.

[17] Mann P. *Op. cit*., p. 171.

[18] Meir G. *Op. cit*., chapter 11, pp. 263–290.

[19] Meir G. *Op. cit*., pp. 264 – 266.

[20] Since 2008 the Center's full official name has been changed to Israel's National Agency for International Development Cooperation although the abbreviation 'MASHAV' remains unchanged: http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/mashav/Publications/Annual_Reports/Documents/AnnualReport2008.pdf

[21] Aynor H.S. & Avimor Sh. (eds). *Op. cit*., p. E10.

[22] Meir G. *Op. cit.*, pp. 276 –277.

[23] Werlin H. *Ghana and South Korea: Lessons from World Bank Case Studies. Public Administration and Development. Special Issue: Bottlenecks to Development*. Vol. 11, No. 3 (May/June 1991), pp. 245–255.

[24] Avriel E. *Op. cit*., pp. 72 – 73 ; Gitelson S.A. *Op. cit*., p. 185.

[25] MASHAV Annual Report 2010, p. 3. http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/mashav/Publications/Annual_Reports/Documents/AnnualReport2010.pdf

[26] *MASHAV Annual Report 2012*, p. 8; Resolution A/RES/67/202 'Entrepreneurship for Development' adopted bt the General Assembly on 21 December 2012. https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/67/202

[27] *MASHAV Annual Report 2019*, p. 3.

[28] Res. 1710 (XVI). United Nations Development Decade. A programme for international economic co-operation (I). 19 December 1961. http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/1710(XVI)&Lang=E&Area=RESOLUTION; Res. 1715 (XVI). United Nations Development Des cade. A programme for international economic co-operation (II). 19 December 1961. http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/1715(XVI)&Lang=E&Area=RESOLUTION

[29] Res. 2626 (XXV). International Development Strategy for the Second United Nations Development Decade. 24 October 1970.

http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/2626(XXV)&Lang=E&Area=RESOLUTION

[30] http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/women/

[31] In this entity four previously existing parts of the UN system focusing on gender equality and women's empowerment, were merged: (1) – Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW); (2) – International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW); (3) – Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women; (4) – UN Development Fund for Women. See: https://www.unwomen.org/en/about-us/about-un-women

[32] United Nations Millennium Declaration. A/Res/55/2 18 September 2000 https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/55/2; United Nations General Assembly. Road Map Towards the Implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration. Report of the Secretary-General. A/56/326. 6 September 2001. Annex pp. 55-58. https://undocs.org/en/A/56/326; United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/Res/56/95 30 January 2002 https://undocs.org/en/A/RES/56/95

[33] *Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E

[34] *MASHAV Annual Report 2019*, p. 3.

[35] *MASHAV Annual Report 2003*, pp. 2-4.

[36] *MASHAV Annual Report 2012*, p. 5.

[37] *MASHAV Annual Report 2019*, p. 6. DAC is OECD Development Assistance Committee of which Israel is not a member.

[38] *MASHAV Annual Report 2019*, p. 7.

[39] *MCTC Annual Report 2013*, p. 3.

[40] *Impact Magazine*, vol. 1 (Haifa, MASHAV – MCTC, 2020), p. 4.

[41] *Impact Magazine*, vol. 1, 2020, pp. 4-6, 17-18, 30-31.

[42] http://www.d-schiffer.de/sorop/mctc/20031102-07conflict/MCTC.htm

[43] Amir Sh. Traditional Leadership and Modern Administration in Developing Countries, in: Curtis M & Gitelson S.A. (eds). *Op. cit.*, p. 41.

[44] Sachar H.M. *A History of Israel. From the Rise of Zionism to Our Time*. N.Y., 2003, pp. 575 – 579.

[45] *MASHAV Annual Report 2018*, pp. 36-45, 48.

[46] Israel became an OECD member in 2010. Two years earlier she was admitted to the OECD Development Center. See: *MASHAV Annual Report 2008*, p. 7; *MASHAV Annual Report 2019*, p. 35.

[47] *MCTC Annual Report 2016*, p. 5.

[48] *MCTC Annual Report 2015,* p. 3; *MCTC Annual Report 2016*, pp. 10, 54. *Impact Magazine*, vol. 1, 2020, pp/4-6.

[49] *MASHAV Annual Report 2019*, pp. 20-25.

[50] http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/IsraelExperience/Pages/Israeli_training_center_empowers_women-July_2011.aspx

[51] *MASHAV Annual Report 2004*, p. 44. http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/mashav/Publications/Annual_Reports/Documents/AnnualReport2004.pdf

[52] http://www.unwatch.org/site/apps/nlnet/content2.aspx?c=bdKKISNqEmG&b=1316871&ct=13604457

[53] *MASHAV Annual Report 2004*, p. 44.

[54] MASHAV Annual Report 2011, pp. 11, 45. http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/mashav/Publications/Annual_Reports/Documents/AnnualReport2011.pdf

[55] MCTC Annual Report 2018, p. 6.

[56] Haifa Declaration., in *MCTC Annual Report 2013*, pp. 50-52; *Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/70/1&Lang=E

[57] MASHAV Annual Report 2015, p. 44.

[58] MASHAV Annual Report 2008, p. 45.; MASHAV Annual Report 2009, pp. 10-11.; MASHAV Annual Report 2012, pp. 15, 47. ; MCTC Annual Report 2012, pp. 3, 13; MCTC Annual Report 2013, p. 23 MCTC Annual Report 2018, p. 7.

[59] MASHAV Annual Report 2004, pp. 11, 44-45.

[60] MASHAV Annual Report 2007, p. 46. MASHAV Annual Report 2008, pp. 12, 45; MASHAV Annual Report 2011, p. 45.

[61] *MCTC Annual Report 2013*, pp. 11-12.

[62] *MASHAV Annual Report 2008*, p. 12; *MASHAV Annual Report 2015*, p. 15.

[63] *MASHAV Annual Report 2009*, p. 9.

[64] *MASHAV Annual Report 2009*, p. 46; *MASHAV Annual Report 2011*, p. 45; *MCTC Annual Report 2013*, p. 24.

[65] *MCTC Annual Report 2016*, p. 5.

[66] *MCTC Annual Report 2015,* pp. 10-11; *MCTC Annual Report 2018*, pp. 27, 29; *MASHAV Annual Report 2015*, p. 44.

[67] *MCTC Annual Report 2018*, p. 28; *MASHAV Annual Report 2019*, p. 38. The Springs of Hope Foundation is an Iraqi NGO registered in Baghdad and Erbil (Iraqi Kurdistan). Its staff includes Iraqi Arabs and Kurds, Moslems and Yezidi. The mission of the Hope Centre they established in the Shariya refugee camp is to provide socio-psychological rehabilitation for refugees who were especially affected by the atrocities of the Islamic State (IS) terrorist group: women and girls who were kidnapped and enslaved, young men and teenagers who were forcibly conscripted into the army of the IS 'Caliphate', etc. – see: https://www.springsofhope.foundation/

[68] Brecher M. *The Foreign Policy System of Israel*, p. 310; Meir G. *A Land of Our Own. An Oral Autobiography*. N.Y., Putnam, 1973, p. 242; *Sunday Times* June 15, 1969; *The Washington Post* June 16, 1969

CHAPTER 4. ISRAEL AND THE ARAB WORLD

ALEXANDER V. KRYLOV

The Evolution of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict Settlement Process

The Middle East has been and remains the most conflict-prone region of the world. The Arab Israeli conflict is the most long-standing major conflict. At the heart of it lies the status of the historical Palestine territory located west of the Jordan River, which was under the British Mandate from 1922 to 1948.

On November 29, 1947 the UN General Assembly adopted an apparently reasonable solution, embodied in Resolution 181/II, concerning the partition of Palestine and the establishment of two states on its territory - Arab and Jewish. This resolution was supported by most of the states then represented at the United Nations - 33, with 13 states against and 10 abstaining. However, the very fact that the State of Israel was established in a territory that since the Caliph Omar who conquered Palestine in 638 had been considered Dar-ul-Islam, i. e. a Muslim territory governed by Islamic religious law, caused an extremely hostile reaction in the Arab world. The conflict between Jews and Palestinian Arabs that erupted during the British Mandate in Palestine turned into an international conflict overnight. Immediately after the proclamation of its independence on the night of 14 to 15 May 1948, the State of Israel was confronted by armed forces of seven Arab states.

As a result of the Arab-Israeli armed confrontation, some 750,000 Palestinians were forced to flee their permanent places of residence, thus creating a longstanding problem of Palestinian refugees. The Arab Palestinian state was not established. About 40% of the territory designated by UN resolutions for Palestinians has been occupied by Israeli troops, the remaining 60% has been divided (annexed) between Egypt (the Gaza Strip) and Jordan (West Bank). Jerusalem, which was to become a city with special international status according to the UNGA resolution

181/II), was divided between Israel (73% of the urban area) and Jordan (the eastern part with 27%).

Subsequently, the conflict acquired new qualities and its scope widened. The 1956 Suez Crisis, when Britain along with France and Israel invaded Egypt, was arguably one of the most significant episodes in post-WWII history. Still, until the mid-1970s, the problem of settling the Arab Israeli conflict was handled primarily by the UN. However, the grim reality is that its many resolutions on the key problems of the Arab Israeli conflict, such as country borders, refugees and displaced persons, the status of Jerusalem, Jewish settlements in the occupied Palestinian lands, were never fulfilled.

UN efforts to resolve the Arab Israeli conflict and the Palestinian problem

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the UN spent a lot of efforts in attempts to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian problem. On May 29, 1948, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 50, which called on the warring parties to end the hostilities. The same resolution also established a special 'United Nations Truce Supervision Organization' (UNTSO).The first UN military observer team arrived in the conflict zone in June 1948 and has been based permanently on Israel's borders with neighboring Arab states ever since. Between February and July 1949, separate Armistice Agreements were signed between Israel and Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, thanks to the efforts of the UN Security Council.[1] Subsequently, the UN sent its military forces on several occasions to maintain peace along the ceasefire line. Some of these military contingents still carry out their mission - the UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in the Golan Heights and the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) on the Israeli-Lebanese border.

At the third session of the UNGA, Resolution 194/III was adopted, addressing the issue of future borders between Israel and Palestine, the Palestinian refugee problem, and the status of Jerusalem. The resolution established the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP), comprising France, Turkey, and the United States, in order to 'ensure maximum local autonomy for the various groups, compatible with the special international status of the area of Jerusalem'.[2] The separate negotiations conducted by the UNCCP between Israel and neigh-

boring Arab states ended to no avail. The UNCCP is still active, but now deals mainly with the issue of property lost by refugees of all faiths during the first Arab-Israeli conflict.

In February 1950. Israel moved its capital from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and extended its sovereignty over the Palestinian territories that had come under its control under the Armistice Agreements. In response, the Hashemite monarchy declared the eastern part of the city its capital and the Jordanian parliament decided to merge Jordan and Palestine - the West Bank - into one state. The situation was exacerbated by the further internationalization of the conflict. In October 1956, Britain, France, and Israel undertook joint military action against AER in reaction to the nationalization of the Suez Canal by the Egyptians. Under UN pressure, the Triple Coalition was forced to stop bombing Egyptian cities and evacuate Israeli troops from the occupied Sinai Peninsula. The Suez Crisis confirmed that the UN can function normally, and most importantly, productively only in conditions of coordinated interaction between the world's leading powers.

After the Six Day War of 5-10 June 1967, Israel occupied 68,000 square kilometers of Arab territory, including all the Palestinian territories and all of Jerusalem. The UN Security Council responded to the new escalation of the conflict by unanimously approving Resolution No. 242 (1967). The resolution demanded 'a withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied during the recent conflict'.[3] The resolution emphasized 'the inadmissibility of the acquisition of territory by war'. The peace process in the region was to be based on the 'land for peace' formula. However, the years since the adoption of the resolution have shown that the UN has no effective leverage to apply its resolutions in practice.

In October 1973, Egypt and Syria attempted to regain the territories lost in the 1967 war by military means and even achieved some success at first, but ultimately failed to achieve their objectives. The Resolution No 338 adopted by the UN Security Council, requesting the sides to cease military operations and start implementing the Resolution No 242,[4] also had no effect.

The UN initiated the establishment of a rather large number of affiliated organizations dealing with various aspects of Arab-Israeli confrontation. In December 1949, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNWRA) was set up.[5] Today, UNWRA is the main international organization implementing hundreds

of programmes and projects within refugee camps in the fields of education, health, economic development and the distribution of social benefits. There are 7.1m Palestinian refugees in the world (70% of the entire Palestinian population worldwide).[6] The cost to the Agency for each registered refugee is $70 a year. UNRWA runs and finances some 900 establishments in Palestinian refugee camps, among them 710 primary and secondary schools with almost half a million pupils, 143 health centers.[7] With an annual budget of $1.1 billion, UNRWA is the largest UN agency, employing more than 30,000 people.[8]

In 1975, in addition to UNRWA, the UN established the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP). The Committee operates within the framework of a UN programme aimed at enabling the Palestinian people to exercise their rights based on the resolution 3236. That resolution inter alia affirmed 'the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people in Palestine, including the right to self-determination without external interference, the right to national independence and sovereignty, and the inalienable right of the Palestinians to return to their homes and properties from which they have been displaced and expelled ....'[9] In addition, the UN recognized the need to inform the international public regarding the implementation of Palestinian rights. To that end, the Assembly decided to establish a special Unit on Palestinian rights within the UN Secretariat to assist the Committee in its work, conduct research and produce publications on the issue. They were to be publicized as widely as possible. The Unit, subsequently renamed the Division for Palestinian Rights (UNDPR), is now structurally part of the Department of Political Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat. Its mandate has been renewed annually, its responsibilities have been expanded several times to include work on programmes for the organization of international meetings worldwide, the establishment of the computerized information system on the question of Palestine (UNISPAL) and the organization of an annual staff training programme for the Palestinian National Authority.

In December 1991, the UNGA decided to establish the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). The new structure was given the following remit: 'to provide humanitarian assistance in accordance with the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality'.[10] In 1998, in addition to coordinating humanitarian assistance, the Office added the development of humanitarian policy and the protection of rights in the humanitarian sphere to its mandate. The Office is headed

by an Emergency Relief Coordinator with the status of Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations. The Office has offices in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The organization's budget of about $8 million a year is mainly spent on monitoring activities in the Palestinian occupied territories.[11]

In May 1994, the Office of the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Settlement (UNSCO), established by the UN GA following the Cairo Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements between the Israeli and Palestinian sides, became operational.[12] UN co-sponsorship authority was transferred to UNSCO in 1999. Since then, the Special Coordinator (currently the post held by Tor Wennesland of Norway) acts on behalf of the UN Secretary-General in the negotiations of the Quartet of international mediators for the Middle East peace process.

The UN Special Committee for Investigation of Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of Palestinian People and Other Arabs of Occupied Territories performs approximately the same functions. The Special Committee is directed by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). It is currently chaired by Michelle Bachelet of Chile. Every year since 2007, this Committee has sent a report to the UN Secretary-General on the human rights situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and the Syrian Golan Heights. The most recent report was published in 2021.[13]

Previously, in 1993, the OHCHR also established the post of Special Rapporteur of the UN Commission on Human Rights, a non-UN staff member who leads a working group that produces an annual report on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967.[14] The current Special Rapporteur is Michael Link (Canada).

UN experts also work in the Office of the Special Representative of the Quartet on the Middle East Settlement. Since the time of former British Prime Minister Tony Blair's leadership of the Office, its staff have been primarily engaged in mobilizing international aid for the development of the Palestinian economy. The current head of the Office, John Clark (United States), recently headed the coordinating council in the office of the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process.

Since 1993, the United Nations Economic and Social Council Office (ECOSOC) has been regularly collecting material and preparing annual analytical reports for the UNGA under the title 'Economic and Social

Impact on Palestinians Living under Israeli Occupation in the Palestinian Territories, including Jerusalem, and on the Arab Population in the Syrian Golan'. Experts from the Human Rights Committee and the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UN-HABITAT) address similar issues.

Tens of thousands of people are now employed in these UN structures. They have been responsible for spending tens of billions of dollars over seven decades on various UN programmes. Much of this money, however, is spent on the salaries of UN officials numbering in the thousands. The existence of a huge number of organizations, in fact duplicating each other, led to the dispersion of funds and their ineffective use. Comfortable living for an impressive contingent of well-paid 'UN' functionaries has been created and maintained. However, advancing humanitarian and economic projects in the Palestinian territories makes no sense if there is no movement on resolving the fundamental final status issues. The Palestinians also realize that the fixation of the UN and its units on solving secondary issues is not conducive to normalizing the situation in the West Bank and Gaza, much less to laying the foundations for a future Palestinian state.

The US participation in the Middle East peace process - 1975-1990

After the October 1973 war, attempts to move the conflict resolution process beyond the UN and to establish a political mechanism to achieve an equitable solution to the Middle East crisis intensified.

In December 1973, the Geneva Peace Conference on the Middle East, co-chaired by the USSR and the US, was convened. The powers succeeded in bringing some of the warring parties to the negotiating table for the first time since the outbreak of the conflict (Syria and the Palestinians were not represented at the conference). During the Geneva Conference, agreements were reached on the disengagement of forces in Sinai and the Golan, under which Israel returned land seized in the 1973 war as well as parts of the territories occupied in 1967. However, the confrontation between the USSR and the US did not allow the conference participants to coordinate their actions. The situation was aggravated by the fact that the Palestine Liberation Organization, established in 1964 and uniting all leading Palestinian parties and armed groups, was considered a terrorist organization in Israel and some Western countries. In contrast, most states at the UN General Assembly on November

25, 1974, supported Resolution 3236/XXIX, which recognized the PLO as 'the sole legitimate representative of the Arab people of Palestine.[15] The USSR's unilateral severance of diplomatic relations with Israel after the 1967 war largely prevented Moscow from participating in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

In the mid-1970s, the United States took the initiative to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict on a so-called separate basis. After Abdel Nasser's death, Egypt became the most suitable partner for testing the American model of negotiations, that is not between all parties to the conflict, but between individual parties and Israel. In March 1975, the then US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger conducted a series of negotiations to settle disputes between Egypt and Israel according to the formula 'part of the territory for partial peace'. Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy ended with the signing of the interim Sinai Treaty (4 September 1975), which formalized the parties' desire to resolve conflict by peaceful rather than military means.[16]

Subsequently, the combination of the land-for-peace formula and the separate efforts of US diplomacy produced certain positive results. Following the Camp David bilateral agreement (September 1978) and the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty (March 1979), the border between Israel and Egypt was fully restored to the one that existed before June 4, 1967.

In 1994 Jordan used Egyptian negotiation tactics to settle its border disputes with Israel. However, the question of the Palestinian territory's status (under the control of the Israeli military administration) while separate negotiations were under way, remained unresolved.

Over the years, Israel has created another major problem that has been significantly complicating the peace process to this day. Several Jewish settlements have been built in the Palestinian territories, the largest of which are Ariel, Modi'in, Gush Etzion, Ma'ale Adumim and as well as in East Jerusalem, where no Jews lived before the 1967 war. Some 520,000 Israelis now live in 150 Jewish settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Unlike Egyptian, Lebanese and Jordanian territories occupied in the 1967 war, Israel considers Palestinian and Syrian territory in the Golan 'disputed land'. Referring to the Balfour Declaration (1917), which allowed Jewish settlement west of the Jordan River, Israel has been actively encouraging its citizens to develop these occupied areas.

In 1991, the Madrid peace conference was held. Under persistent US pressure, Israeli and Palestinian representatives met for the first time.

Although the conference did not yield direct practical results, it was important because Israel accepted the 'territory for peace' principle when discussing the future status of the Palestinian territories.

After the collapse of the USSR, the Middle East peace process was largely led by the United States. By the early 1990s most of the Muslim world also preferred not to intervene in the conflict. In 1988, Jordan renounced its claim to the West Bank and supported the establishment of a Palestinian state on the territory. Earlier, the League of Arab States had formally recognized the PLO as the exclusive representative of the Palestinian people.

The Oslo processes

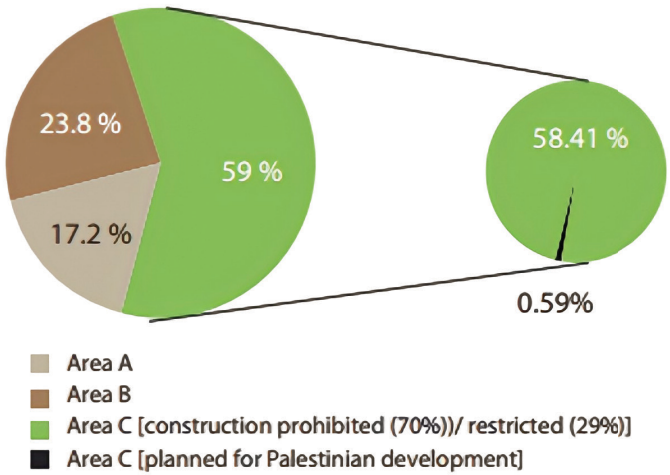
On 13 September 1993, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat, chairman of the PLO, signed a joint Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Measures ('Oslo 1') in Washington,[17] which was brokered by the US and Russia.

On September 28, 1995, the Palestinian-Israeli Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza (Oslo II) was signed in Washington[18], ending the first phase of talks between Israel and the PLO. Both agreements were called the 'Oslo Accords' because they were drafted in secret negotiations held in Norway with the assistance of Norwegian Foreign Minister Johan Jørgen Holst. The main achievement of the Olso Accords was that for the first time both sides to the conflict formally agreed to mutually recognize each other as well as the right of all parties to the conflict, including the State of Israel and the Palestinian state, to live in peace. The parties also accepted the UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 as the basis for the negotiation process. To this end Israel promised to withdraw its troops from the Palestinian territories in a phased manner.

In accordance with the Hebron Protocol (1997) and the Wye River Memorandum (1997), which were concluded between Palestinians and Israelis under US mediation within the Oslo process, Israel withdrew its forces from Area A (zone of full Palestinian National Authority control) and partially from Area B (zone of joint Israeli and PNA control). Area C (the zone of full Israeli control), where virtually all the Jewish settlements are located, has now been almost completely 'depalestinized'. The Norwegian agreements called for the parties to the conflict to reach a final settlement by the year 2000. However, intensive negotiations conducted

by the Palestinian and Israeli delegations at Camp David, mediated by the United States, were unsuccessful. Since the Oslo 2 Agreement and the Palestinian-Israeli agreements reached before year 2000, the territory under full PNA control in the West Bank and Gaza Strip has increased from 2% to 17.2%, and partial control has decreased from 26% to 23.8%.

Areas of control 'A', 'B' and 'C' in the West Bank, delineated by the redeployments carried out under the Oslo II Agreement (1995), the Protocol on Hebron (1997) and the Wye River Memorandum (1997).



Source: Area C. The Key to the Two-State Solution. Jerusalem: Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, December 2012, p. 3.

A closed round of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations was scheduled for January 2001 in Taba under the auspices of the United States, the European Union, Egypt and Jordan. For Israeli Prime Minister Barak, this was the last chance to stay in power. He was well aware that if the negotiations failed, the Likud opposition would waste no time in taking advantage of the political setback with the Palestinians and launching a campaign to remove Barak and his party from power. It was for this reason that the Israeli negotiating team was prepared to make serious territorial concessions to the Palestinians in Taba. One of the main participants in the Israeli delegation, lawyer G. Sher, on the eve of the negotiations, handed the Palestinian side the map depicting the final settle-

ment, according to which 5 per cent of the West Bank remained within Israeli borders. In exchange the Palestinians were offered the desert area of Kholot Halutzah, which under the 1947 UN partition plan for Palestine was to be part of an Arab Palestinian state.

In order to disrupt the negotiations, Israeli opposition leader Ariel Sharon made a provocative ascent to Haram al-Sharif on September 28, 2000, accompanied by thousands of police officers, which triggered the mass Palestinian protests that became the starting point of the 'al-Aqsa Intifada'. It is noteworthy that this act, which instantly nullified all previous US plans for a Palestinian-Israeli settlement based on peaceful negotiations, provoked a rather harsh reaction from the new administration of US. President George W. Bush. US special envoy Senator G. J. Mitchell was urgently sent to the Middle East to head an international commission (comprising the United States, the European Union and Turkey) charged with fact-finding, ceasefire negotiations and rebuilding trust between the PNA and Israel. Mitchell presented his report in Sharm el-Sheikh on April 30, 2001. The senator declared that the White House might reconsider its position of continued international support for Israel if it did not stop increasing the number of settlements and their size in the Palestinian territories.[19]

The recommendations made by Mitchell which called on 'the government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority to prepare an agreed schedule for the full redeployment of the Israeli army to the positions held before September 28, 2000, within one week of the security meetings and the resumption of cooperation in that area'[20] were not taken up by the parties to the conflict. Immediately after the US senator's report, Israeli tanks invaded Gaza, in turn Palestinian suicide bombers carried out a series of attacks on Israeli civilians.

The roadmap of the 'quartet' of HLB intermediaries

In June 2001, the US made another attempt to bring the Palestinians and Israelis back to the negotiating table. This time, the mission was entrusted to the CIA director George Tenet. The plan was based on the recommendations of the Mitchell Commission and included a series of measures to achieve a ceasefire between the warring parties based on active security cooperation.[21] The UN Security Council responded positively to US diplomacy's efforts to address another flare-up of ten-

sions between Israel and the Palestinians and called on 'the Israeli and Palestinian sides and their leaders to cooperate in implementing Tenet's work plan and the recommendations contained in the Mitchell Report in order to resume negotiations toward a political settlement'.[22] However, despite acceptance by the Israeli and Palestinian sides (with many reservations), neither the Mitchell Commission's recommendations nor the provisions of the Tenet plan have been implemented.

In the wake of fruitless efforts of the US diplomacy and in the absence of serious deterrents, the Israeli political leadership, led by Sharon, who became prime minister in March 2001, effectively refused to engage in a political dialogue with the Palestinians, or to respect the agreements previously reached. At this difficult juncture, the US again utilized the Madrid Conference principle of collective co-sponsorship of the Middle East peace process. In late 2001 US President G. Bush proposed expanding and strengthening the institution of international mediators to prevent dangerous developments in the zone of Palestinian-Israeli confrontation. The new political structure of co-sponsors of the Middle East Peace Process, comprising Russia, the US, the EU and the UN (the so-called Quartet) was formed during the most difficult and dramatic period in the MEPP history, when the very idea of achieving a comprehensive peace acceptable to all parties to the conflict seemed unattainable. In the face of the futility of US efforts and the absence of serious deterrents, in the spring of 2002, Israeli troops launched what became known as the military operation 'Defensive Shield'. It was in fact a reoccupation of the West Bank and Gaza. A curfew was imposed in all Palestinian settlements except Jericho. A moat was dug around Jericho, blocking all approaches to the city. The West Bank was divided by the Israelis into 50 isolated districts. The movement from one area to another was totally controlled by the Israeli military. In fact, 700,000 people, or a third of the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip were placed under house arrest.[23]

In the summer of 2002, the 'Quartet' prepared a Road Map that envisaged a three-stage move towards a comprehensive Arab-Israeli settlement over a three-year period. The 'Quartet' also expressed its willingness to support the establishment of a Palestinian state with provisional borders in 2003 as an intermediate stage to permanent status. The Road Map was unequivocally supported first by the Palestinians and, in April 2003, by Israel.

On Russia's initiative, the document developed by the 'Quartet' was approved by the UN Security Council. As reflected in its Resolution 1515, it specifically called on 'the parties to fulfil their obligations under the Roadmap in cooperation with the Quartet and to achieve the vision of two States living side by side in peace and security'.[24]

However, the Roadmap failed to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Siting the strengthening of Hamas and other radical Islamist groups in Gaza, Ariel Sharon's government abandoned the political dialogue with the Palestinians and embarked on a course of unilateral disengagement. In August 2005, Israel withdrew its troops from Gaza and evacuated its settlements there. Sharon and his ministers tried to equate these actions with the implementation of the Road Map.[25] The international community unequivocally interpreted Israel's actions as a tactical move that gave it full military and economic control of Gaza and at the same time allowed it to evade its Road Map obligations.[26]

By 2007 it was clear that the conflict resolution process was at a dead end. Under these rather complicated circumstances, additional actions were required by the Quartet capable of breaking through the thick veil of tension and reanimating the peace process. To this end, the Bush Administration proposed to re-invigorate the Quartet's work by appointing former British Prime Minister Blair, who had extensive experience in settling the long-lasting conflict in Northern Ireland, as its special envoy to the Middle East.

In addition, Washington initiated an international summit on the Middle East in Annapolis in November 2007, at which Israel, under international pressure, pledged not to build new settlements in the West Bank. However, since 2007, intensive construction and expansion of existing Israeli settlements began. In doing so, the Israeli government significantly increased public spending on the maintenance of settlements, as well as subsidies and benefits for settlers, thereby encouraging Israeli citizens to move across the Green Line, which existed before the outbreak of hostilities in June 1967.

In April 2007 Tony Blair's office prepared a detailed programme called 'Towards Palestinian Statehood' that provided for creation of industrial zones in a number of Palestinian cities, construction of water infrastructure facilities, increase of foreign investments in the Palestinian economy as well as reform of the Palestinian law enforcement and security services. Several EU countries (the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, Ger-

many, Italy), the World Bank, Australia, Japan and others took part in financing the program.

However, the government of Israel immediately blocked all economic development projects in the Palestinian territories, including a project to develop 14 Palestinian villages in the West Bank. Tony Blair soon recognized the unrealizable nature of his proposed program because it was completely contrary to the basic principles of Israeli policy, which are primarily aimed at 'depalestinizing' and extending Israeli sovereignty to these areas of the West Bank through the intensive expansion of Jewish settlements and the construction of defense barrier along the 'green line'.[27]

It is clear that the formula 'security for Israelis in exchange for the socio-economic development of parts of the West Bank is the key to a breakthrough in the negotiations between Israel and the PA' totally failed. Israel was satisfied with the situation in which it was essentially being approached by the Quartet with trivial requests for the introduction of concessions in the Palestinian territories or a temporary freeze on construction of its settlements. But the Palestinians have begun to realize that Blair's program does not contribute to the Quartet's efforts to normalize the situation in the West Bank and Gaza, much less to exercise their legitimate right to establish a Palestinian state. Because of the blatantly pro-Israeli position of the United States and its departure from the previously developed legal basis for a Middle East settlement, the Quartet was doomed to deal less with settlement issues and more with overcoming its internal divisions. In fact, in its current configuration, the Quartet has exhausted its potential and cannot become an effective instrument for reconciling the Palestinian and Israeli sides. In 2008, Israel carried out a large-scale military operation called 'Cast Lead' in Gaza under the pretext of destroying Hamas's terrorists. This controversial operation, that was criticized even by Israel's partners, pushed the peace process back to the period that preceded the Oslo Accords.

The failure of President Obama's policies

Many analysts expected a long-awaited breakthrough in the Middle East settlement process to come with the election of Barak Obama as US President. However, when B. Obama came to the White House, he initiated a decisive attack on the Iranian nuclear programme. In August

2009, the US State Department proposed to its major NATO partners to consider implementing the 'deal' implying tougher western sanctions capable of undermining the Iranian economy in exchange for a freeze on construction in the Jewish settlements.[28] This highly unusual proposal for a Middle East settlement, linking the problems of the Palestinian-Israeli standoff with Iran, provoked a negative reaction and misunderstanding in the international community, including Israel and the PNA. It was clear from the outset that such an 'initiative' would not be endorsed by UNSC member states. Russia, China, Britain and France are known to strongly oppose the policy of developing the Israeli settlement sector in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

Cautious attempts by then-Secretary of State H. Clinton (in office 2009-2013) to persuade Israeli Prime Minister B. Netanyahu to halt settlement activity in the West Bank were not successful. Nor was the attempt by the US State Department, Egypt and Jordan to relaunch the Israeli-Palestinian talks in Washington held September 2010 on the condition that Israel observe a 10-month moratorium on construction in the settlements. Netanyahu's second term in office (2009-201) saw the most intensive phase of Israel's development of the Palestinian territories. During this period, 28 000 new housing units were built, which accommodated about 103 000 settlers.[29] Notably, 40 per cent of the new housing units were built in settlements away from the Green Line, with the rest mainly in East Jerusalem and areas adjacent to the city in the West Bank.[30] The 'shuttle diplomacy' of George Mitchell did not have any significant results either.

After winning the second presidential election in 2011, the Obama administration decisively revised the attitude towards the negotiation process between Israel and the Palestinians as well as the role of the US in this process. Although the team of advisers on the Middle East was substantially reshuffled, on examination, it almost entirely comprised representatives of the Jewish lobby in the US government. Moreover, most of its members took part in the preparation and conduct of the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations which were held in 2000-2001 in Washington, Camp David and Taba under President Clinton's aegis. As noted above, during the brief period when the center-right government of the Labor Party headed by Ehud Barak was in power (06.07.1999 - 07.03.2001), the Israeli side was ready to make serious territorial concessions to the Palestinians.

There was no doubt in anyone's mind that the plan to be prepared for the then Secretary of State John Kerry by Bill Clinton's team of advisers would simply be an updated version of the so-called swap exchanges.[31] Thus in the negotiations the Americans in effect abandoned the previously established international legal framework - the Madrid principle of 'land for peace' was replaced by a formula of 'land swaps' or 'swap exchanges'.

The Palestinians and Israelis hold diametrically opposed views on the swap issue. The strategic goal of Palestinian diplomacy is to minimize, or prevent altogether, radical changes to the pre-June 4, 1967, borders. Israeli diplomacy insists that due to the unresolved status of Judea and Samaria, i.e., the West Bank, Jews have the same right as Palestinians to settle there. In this regard, all settlers and settlements established in accordance with Israeli law, excluding 'illegal settlements' established without due legal process should be under Israeli sovereignty and jurisdiction once a final status agreement is signed.

At the Camp David negotiations, for the first time, the Israeli delegation put forward a land swap plan. According to that plan, 111 settlements with a total of 374,327 settlers would remain under Israeli sovereignty and 34 settlements and 18,977 settlers would leave the West Bank. Under the Israeli plan, 733 square kilometers of the West Bank[32] would fall under Israeli control and 114 square kilometers under NPA control. Another 507 square kilometers Israel hoped to secure under a long-term lease from the Palestinians.[33] The Palestinian delegation at the talks refused to discuss the swap issue.

At the Taba talks, for the first time, both sides presented maps marking the borders of the two states. Israel recognized the June 4, 1967, borders as the basis for negotiations. Israel's proposal included the following: 6% of the West Bank and 69 settlements with 435,626 settlers remained under Israeli sovereignty. Seventy-one settlements and 65,000 settlers are to be evacuated. Israel offered to lease another 2% of the West Bank from the Palestinians. In exchange, it offered to give the PNA 6% of Israeli territory in the completely uninhabitable Negev desert region, as well as to build a corridor connecting the West Bank with the Gaza Strip under Israeli sovereignty.[34] The Palestinians, naturally, rejected the proposal.

John Kerry's plan has never been announced or published. But judging by the results of the talks that US Vice President Joe Biden and Secretary of State John Kerry held with the GCC leaders in April 2013, it is

likely to have been a version of the Arab peace initiative of 2002, which assumed a recognition of Israel by the Arab countries on condition of Israeli troops withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories and agreement to the establishment of a Palestinian state under a land swap formula between Israel and the Palestinians.[35]

The announcement of the American politicians caused an intensely negative reaction in Israel, which clearly rejected the very idea of territorial exchange after the Annapolis summit. John Kerry had to fly to Israel four more times in one month to put pressure on Netanyahu.[36] In the end, under pressure from the United States and leading EU countries, Israel agreed to sit down at the negotiating table, on condition that the preconditions complied with prior agreements between the Palestinian and Israeli sides. As a guarantee that it would participate in the negotiations, Israel agreed to release 104 Palestinians from its prisons, 14 of whom were Arabs of Israeli citizenship. This condition was already documented in the Sharm el-Sheikh Memorandum of September 4, 1999 but was not fully implemented by the Israeli side. The Palestinians, for their part, during the negotiation promised to cease their attempts to enter 15 organizations affiliated to the UN as full members.

Each side was represented by two negotiators. The Israeli side was represented by the then Justice Minister Z. Livni and Adviser to the Prime Minister on the Palestinian question B. Molho. The US side was represented by M. Indyk and F. Lowenstein and the PNA side by a Fatah leader Saeb Erekat, as well as Economy Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh. Direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians began on 29 July 2013 in Washington and were to last 9 months. The deadline was limited to a specific date of 29 April 2014. However, as there was no progress during this deadline, there were discussions about the possibility of extending them until 2015. The Obama administration hoped to achieve a diplomatic breakthrough in early 2014. In January 2014, Kerry was expected to present his plan, which would propose a solution to all the major problems of the Middle East settlement, based on the 1967 borders and the exchange of territories. The plan was to include the timetable for its implementation. It was also to address regional peace issues, the Arab Peace Initiative and an economic programme for the Palestinian territories. However, John Kerry never ventured to make his programme public.

Before the talks began, Israel released the first batch of 26 Palestinian prisoners as a goodwill gesture. In spite of this, the negotiations

'stalled' immediately after the first tripartite meeting. Such outcome was probably inevitable. Hamas (which at the time had the support of 55% of the Palestinians, vs Fatah's 38%),[37] had officially declared before the three-party meeting in Washington that 'Abbas does not have any right to negotiate on behalf of the Palestinian people'.[38] For its part, the new government of Benjamin Netanyahu, following the results of the special elections in January 2013, immediately approved 84 additional settlement construction projects, thus stressing that it intended neither to freeze nor curtail its settlement activities in the Palestinian territories. Furthermore, Palestinian negotiators were convinced from the outset that the American side, when discussing contentious issues, was more inclined to listen to Israeli rather than Palestinian side.

The first four negotiation rounds consisted mainly of mutual recriminations after the Palestinian delegation made a statement that the final resolution should contain a provision that 'the Palestinian state should have territory completely free of Israeli military and civilians'.[39]

On 6 November, in another round of negotiations, the Israeli delegation made a clear statement: 'There will be no Palestinian state within the 1967 borders and the border between the Palestinians and Israel will be demarcated by the fence'.[40] S. Erekat and M. Shtayyeh responded by accusing Israel of derailing negotiations and 'escalating construction in the settlements'.[41] Moreover, the negotiations on a two-state solution formula to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict were rendered meaningless as Israeli politicians and lawmakers actually started the procedure of annexing the Jordan Valley into Israel's borders.

The announcement by the Israeli negotiating team was preceded by a speech by Benjamin Netanyahu at a cabinet meeting in which the prime minister unexpectedly recalled the 96th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration and linked it to the need of inclusion of the Jordan Valley (32.9 percent of the West Bank) into Israeli territory, 'The principle that will ensure peace, as well as protect the state of Israel, in the event that the peace agreement is broken, is the principle of security. Security arrangements are fundamental for us, and we insist on them. There will be many elements to these agreements, but at the center of them we insist that the Israeli security border runs along the Jordan River'. Following the prime minister's statement, Likud MPs, led by Miri Regev, began to spin the Knesset's procedure for passing a law on the annexation of the Jordan Valley.[42]

At another round of talks on 31 January 2014, Indyk raised the issue of swaps, the proposition first offered by the Americans in Taba in 2001. He said that as part of a future peace agreement the US were prepared to recognize the expansion of Israel by adding 6% of the West Bank, where 80% of the settlers now lived. The proposal would also allow for the presence of Israeli troops and security forces on the borders of the West Bank with Jordan. Israel insisted on extending its sovereignty to 10% of Palestinian territory, while Palestinian negotiators agreed to exchange only 3% and hand over control of the border with Jordan to the US and other NATO forces.[43] The Israeli delegation also demanded that the Palestinians recognize Israel as a 'Jewish state'. But the Palestinians objected, stating that PLO recognition of Israel as a state already took place in 1993. They also pointed out that when they signed the Oslo Accords, they were not required to define Israel as a 'Jewish state'.

On 28 March, Israel refused to release another group of Palestinian prisoners and held tenders for 708 housing units in East Jerusalem, which the Palestinians qualified as a violation of the prerequisites for continuing negotiations. Abbas rejected a moratorium on relevant procedures for the accreditation of PNA-controlled territories by 15 international organizations. The negotiations were on the verge of collapse again.

For a fortnight, Kerry tried to persuade the leaders of Israel and the PNA to 'save the peace process'. The United States even expressed its willingness to release Israeli agent Jonathan Pollard, who was arrested in 1987 for passing secret documents to Israel and sentenced to life in a US prison. Moreover, the US promised to transfer $4 billion for the development of the Palestinian economy.[44] However, in the end, all of Kerry's efforts were in vain. On 23 April 2014, the Palestinian factions Fatah and Hamas agreed to form a national unity government and hold new elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council. PNA officials stated that 'Palestinian unity will only contribute to the peace process'.[45] Israel's response was immediate and unequivocal - 'no negotiations with a terrorist organization'.[46] On top of that, harsh economic sanctions were imposed on Palestinians living in the West Bank, including a ban on all construction in the Palestinian sector in Area C. Indyk blamed Israel and Netanyahu personally for the negotiations failure, who, in Indyk's words 'did nothing to move the peace process forward by even a foot'.[47] However, the US State Department insisted in an official statement that 'both sides have done everything that can ultimately be called a total failure'.[48] Kerry was forced to admit that his mission had ended inconclusively:

'Unfortunately, the right moment has been missed again, we are right back to where we were from the beginning'.[49]

One cannot but agree with the conclusion of the famous American political observer Ross Dozet, who summed up the Middle East policy of Barak Obama and his advisers in The New York Times editorial: 'It is safe to say that the term 'failure' most accurately describes the essence of US foreign policy in the region'.[50]

At the same time, despite Obama's and Netanyahu's mutual dislike, it was Israel that has benefited most from American Middle East policy. Israel's borders, which were drawn as a result of its occupation of Palestinian territories and the Syrian Golan Heights in the 1967 war, are relatively calm, and have not seen such a state of non-conflict since the creation of Israel in 1948. It is noteworthy that the terrorist formations in Syria, which have terrified the world, avoid anti-Israeli rhetoric even in their propaganda materials. At that, the world media is virtually silent about the fact that the efforts of the 'Islamic State'[51] dealt a serious blow to the Palestinian Resistance Movement forces and the Palestinian refugee camps in Syria because they were supported by the official Syrian government. Even the leaders of the radical Islamic Hamas movement prudently moved the movement's headquarters from Damascus to Doha for fear that Islamist militants would persecute them for collaborating with representatives of the ruling al-Assad clan.

The main forces hostile to Israel have now been effectively neutralized and, according to leading Israeli experts, considering the current situation 'terrorists will try to avoid a new war with Israel'.[52] Gaza's border with Egypt, which was once used to move fighters and weapons, is now even more secure than when it was controlled by the Israelis, thanks to efforts made by the current Egyptian authorities. Nor does Hizbullah now pose a serious threat to Israel, since its main forces have been redeployed to Syria to support the Alawites.

The decades-old myth of an Iranian nuclear threat, created largely by Israeli politicians themselves, is rapidly losing its power. Even many representatives of Israel's military leadership no longer believe that Iran can use nuclear weapons against Israel. It should be recalled that a few years ago the former heads of the Israeli foreign intelligence service Mossad and the IDF General Staff - M. Dagan and B. Ganz, - openly stated that Iran would not seek to build its own nuclear bomb in the near future.[53]

Turkey, which unexpectedly supported Palestinian demands in 2009,

is now fully satisfied with compensation for the damage caused by Israeli special forces to the Mavi Marmara. Ankara is now ready to restore Turkish-Israeli relations to the extent that they existed before the failed Peace Flotilla raid on the Gaza Strip.

The US-Israeli relationship, somewhat tarnished by Netanyahu's pre-election populism, has now returned to its previous level of strategic partnership. A month before the next US presidential election, a new Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the two countries. It provided for US military support to Israel to the tune of $38 billion between 2018 and 2028. Moreover, the US has expressed its willingness to increase annual military aid to Israel to $3.7 billion. From 1998 to 2007, this amount was $2.4 billion a year, and from 2008 to date it has risen to $2.9 billion.[54]

Active US involvement in the Middle East peace process has gradually reformatted the Arab-Israeli conflict. Egypt and Jordan have signed peace treaties with Israel; and the most hostile Arab countries (Syria, Iraq, Libya, Lebanon) have in actuality been neutralized and are currently unable to influence the situation in the region. The attitude of the influential Arabian monarchies towards Israel has changed largely in its favor. The events of the so-called Arab Spring, which coincided with Obama's presidency, served as an 'acid test' that clearly showed that the Arab-Israeli conflict ceased to be international and, as in the years of the British Mandate rule in Palestine, returned to a bilateral confrontation between Palestinians and Jews.

Donald Trump and His Deal of the Century

The Israeli political leadership made no secret of its delight at President Trump's arrival in the White House. The new US president formulated his position on the Middle East peace process as soon as he took office, the event which coincided with B. Netanyahu's visit to Washington on 15 February 2017. In typical Trump fashion, it was expressed in the extravagant phrase: 'You have a problem, you solve it, and I'll be happy with any solution'.[55] At the same time, the 45th U.S. president publicly rejected the 'two state solution' formula. Netanyahu was extremely pleased that the US would no longer insist that Israel return to the pre-June 1967 borders or demand to freeze settlement activity in the Palestinian territories. Immediately after Netanyahu's return from Washington, Israeli President

Rivlin spoke in favor of annexing all the territories and granting citizenship to the Arabs who populate them, that is, of Israel absorbing the occupied Palestinian territories, as happened to those territories occupied by Israeli forces during the first Arab Israeli conflict in 1948-1949.[56]

On 5 December 2017, D. Trump officially announced that the US recognizes Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and ordered the US embassy to be moved from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem'.[57] The opening date of the new embassy building (15 May 2018) was timed to coincide with the 70th anniversary of the proclamation of the State of Israel. Prior to the embassy relocation, Washington sanctioned a series of anti-Palestinian actions. First, funding for UNWRA and other international aid agencies was suspended and then completely cut off and the official PLO office in the US was closed. All these actions were accompanied by confrontational rhetoric against Iran and Russia. In May, Trump announced that the US had unilaterally withdrawn from the P5+1 group and refused to participate in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the nuclear programme.

It is noteworthy that Trump's vague Middle East proposals provoked an extremely negative reaction from all US NATO allies, the Arab world countries, Turkey, China, India and Russia. Mahmoud Abbas, head of the Palestinian National Authority, called the president's decision 'an unacceptable crime'.[58] Ismail Haniyeh, chairman of the Palestinian Hamas politburo in Gaza, has called for a new Palestinian intifada.[59] Mass Palestinian riots have erupted throughout the relatively calm, until recently, West Bank. Israeli Arabs in the Galilee threw stones at passing buses.

Immediately after Trump's announcement regarding the US embassy move to Jerusalem, the US State Department announced that President Trump had a draft plan for Middle East peace process. At the same time, reports emerged that the content of the plan, which Trump himself repeatedly calls 'the ultimate deal', was kept strictly secret, and the US State Department repeatedly postponed the presentation of the plan. The plan was to be made public once the political crisis in Israel would have been resolved.

Four people were involved in developing Trump's 'plan': Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and top adviser; Jason Greenblatt, the Israeli-born US Special Representative for International Negotiations; David Friedman, the US Ambassador to Israel; and Dina Powell, the US Deputy National Security Adviser, an Egyptian-born American businesswoman.

The latter was likely added to the team in order to avoid accusations of anti-Palestinian bias, since the rest were pro-Israeli Jews.

According to Israeli portal Debka, the US president has discussed the plan with three Arab leaders - Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the Emir of the UAE, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, as well as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. They tried to involve the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in the discussion, but he flatly refused.[60]

The reaction of the Palestinian side to the American 'deal of the century' was unequivocal: Abbas, who received Trump's plan through diplomatic channels from Saudi Arabia, did not even open the envelope with the document, thus confirming that the PNA did not intend to participate in the process of promoting the new American initiative.[61] S. Erekat stressed that 'Trump and Netanyahu are plotting to close the Palestinian case by excluding the issue of Jerusalem from any settlement agreement, annexing most of the major settlements and moving our capital to the outskirts of Jerusalem'.[62] Ali Jarbawi, a professor at Birzeit University (Ramallah), noted that 'the Americans want to solve the Palestinian issue as Trump sees fit, at a regional conference with their allies, but without Palestinian participation'.

In the run-up to the upcoming 2020 US presidential election, the political opposition began accusing Trump of failing to deliver on his key campaign promises. Democratic presidential candidate Joe Biden called his opponent's Middle East settlement plan a 'political stunt'. Democrats replicated a joke across the country calling Trump's 'deal' 'the deal of the next century, not of this century'. Realising that removing himself from the issue of resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict could have a negative impact on the future political career of the current US president, he nevertheless decided to release the text of the 'deal of the century' on January 29, 2020.

The 180-page document is titled rather optimistically 'Peace to Prosperity. A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People'.[63]

In essence, however, Trump's initiative was nothing more than the quintessence of the 'Kerry Plan' or territory swap plan that former President Obama's administration tried unsuccessfully to promote. It also reflects the policy proposals of the Israeli 'Israel Our Home' party on the transfer of the so-called 'Arab Triangle'[64] to PNA control and the already well-known initiatives of Trump himself.

Studying the new US administration initiative allows one to draw an unequivocal conclusion: there is no allowance for a fully-fledged Palestinian state within the 1967 borders, and the demarcating fence, which since 2004 has been built around Jewish settlements in the West Bank and around Jerusalem, will solidify into the border between the Palestinians and Israel.

A key element of Trump's 'plan' is the 44-page map of a future 'Palestinian state'. In the territory offered to the Palestinians, 15 isolated Israeli enclaves will remain - Hermesh, Mevo Dotan, Elon More, Itamar, Brahā, Itzhar, Ateret, Ma'ale Amos, Asfar, Karmei Tzur, Telem, Adora, Negohot, Beit Hagai, Otniel (about 6% of the Palestinian territories). The Jordan Valley and the northern part of the Dead Sea coast (32.9% of the West Bank) will remain under Israeli control. All of Jerusalem, including its eastern part where there had been no Jews before the 1967 war, would be recognised as territory belonging to the State of Israel. Palestinians would be allowed to declare Abu Dis, a village isolated from Jerusalem by a reinforced concrete wall, as their capital. At present, the residents of Abu Dis are not allowed to visit Jerusalem without special permits.

Map of the 'Palestine State' presented in the 'Trump Plan'

Thus, according to Trump's 'plan', approximately 38.9% of the West Bank and 69 settlements with 470,000 Jewish settlers would come under Israeli sovereignty, while 71 settlements and 118,000 settlers would be evacuated. In exchange, the Palestinians are offered, as before at the Camp David talks in 2000, part of the Negev desert - the Holot Halutz area, which is completely unfit for human habitation. Joint industrial zones and 'high-tech' enterprises were to be established there. 'The Trump Plan also envisages the transfer of the Arab communities of the Arab Triangle from Kafr Kara, Baqa el Gharbia, Umm el Fahm, Qalansua, Taybeh, Kafr Qasim, Tyre, Kafr Bara and Daljuliya (about 450,000 people) to the West Bank in exchange for Jewish settlements. The rest of the West Bank will remain, according to the 'deal of the century', fragmented into 15 isolated enclaves, to be connected by Israeli-controlled corridors. De facto, this means a US rejection of provisions accepted by all UN Security Council members and enshrined in resolutions 242 and 338, which state that 'implementation of the principles of the Charter requires the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East, which must include the application of both of the following principles: 1) withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied during the recent conflict; 2) cessation of all claims or states of war and respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of each state in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized borders without threats or use of force'.[65]

The document confirms US recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel.[66] In effect, this means that the US and Israel refuse to discuss the status of Jerusalem - key final status issue with the Palestinian side. US recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel is a flagrant violation of international law, as it disavows UNSC Resolution 478 of 1980, which determines that 'all legislative and administrative measures and actions taken by Israel, the occupying Power, which have altered or purport to alter the character and status of the Holy City of Jerusalem, and in particular the recent 'basic law' on Jerusalem, are null and void and must be rescinded forthwith'.[67] Trump's 'plan' envisages the establishment of the future capital of the state of Palestine on the edge of East Jerusalem in an area where the barrier fence runs, separating the current municipal borders of the city from the Palestinian refugee camp Shuafat and the small Palestinian villages of Kfar Aqab and Abu Dis. This area is now part of what is known as Area B, which is under the joint control of Israel and the PNA. Thus, according to the U.S proposal the

so-called united and indivisible capital of the State of Israel has an area of 48.3 square kilometers with a population of 560,000 Jews and 358,000 Arabs, and 15.5 square kilometers with a population of only 50,900 people is allocated for the capital of the Palestinian state.[68]

While paragraph 4 of the draft version of the 'deal of the century' envisaged the establishment of a Palestinian state, the final version contained the following vague statement: 'A realistic solution would give the Palestinians full authority, but not the power to threaten Israel. It would necessarily entail limiting certain sovereign powers in the Palestinian areas hereinafter referred to as the 'Palestinian state', such as allowing Israel to maintain security and control of Israeli airspace west of the Jordan River.[69]

Areas proposed for Palestinian use at Israeli ports of Ashdod and Haifa, as well as corridors connecting the West Bank with Gaza and Jordan, would be controlled by Israel and remain under its sovereignty. It is noteworthy that the construction of an airport on the Palestinian territories or the use of special terminals at Israel's international airport is ruled out in principle by the US initiative. This means that the airspace of the proposed 'Palestinian state' will be under Israeli control.

A separate section of the Trump Plan focuses on Palestinian refugees and calls for a just solution to the refugee problem within the State of Palestine. It stresses that the issue of Palestinian refugees must be addressed in the context of Jewish refugees affected by the Arab Israeli wars.[70] Thus, the problem of millions of Palestinian refugees, most of whom are currently living in Arab countries, is once again sidelined, and viewed as an inner issue of Arab countries themselves.

A large part of the new American initiative is devoted to an economic development plan for the Palestinian territories: 12 industrial zones that will provide jobs for about a million Palestinians through establishing businesses in construction, energy, water, agriculture, tourism as well as modern medical and education facilities. The programme is expected to cost $50 billion over the next decade.[71] However, the text of the 'Deal of the Century' did not specify how the plan would be funded.

The conduct of negotiations between the Israeli and Palestinian sides has shown that the Palestinians would never agree to sign a permanent status agreement on the conditions outlined above. In fact, all previous settlement programmes based on the socio-economic development in the Israeli-occupied territories have failed proving that no 'economic

miracle' can take place without a political solution to the Palestinian problem. It is for this reason that Trump's 'plan' was incapable of bringing about a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The plan is likely to suffer the ignominious fate of the 'Kerry plan'. It is clear that the US one-sided model based on substantial assignments profitable exclusively to Israel works lopsidedly and fails the Palestinians as it only responds to Israeli political priorities. Such an approach precludes the very possibility of establishing a Palestinian state, thus blocking any initiative to advance the Middle East peace process. The right-wing-dominant representatives of the Knesset are preparing to submit legislation for the Israeli annexation of the West Bank. If this does happen, it will once again raise tensions and further escalate the confrontation between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

Russia's position on resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict

The Russian Federation is an active member of the Middle East peace process. Russia's position on the peace process has always remained unchanged. Russia rejects any solution to the Palestinian problem which denies the Madrid formula of the 'two state solution' such as: the fragmentation of Palestinian territories, the establishment of a confederation of Israel, Jordan and the PNA, the preservation of the status quo, the unilateral disengagement from the West Bank and blockade of Palestinian territories by the analogy the disengagement from Gaza in 2005, etc.). Russia firmly insists that a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East can only be achieved on the basis of the two-State solution, the relevant UN resolutions, including Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 1515 (2003), the principals of the Madrid Conference, and the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative.

Russia firmly insists on respect for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people in accordance with international resolutions, including the right of return for Palestinian refugees, the right to self-determination and the establishment of an independent State of Palestine within the pre-1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. Russia also supports Palestine's determination to obtain full membership status in the UN and other international organizations. Russia has consistently demanded that Israel stop all actions that contradict international law and discriminatory legislative policies, as well as practices that violate the human

rights of the Palestinian people in the occupied Palestinian territories, including asymmetric military operations targeting civilians.

The Russian Federation strongly condemned the continuation of the policy of building and expanding Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. This policy is in flagrant violation of United Nations Security Council resolution 2334 (2016), which demands the immediate and complete cessation of all Israeli settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and serves as the main obstacle to achieving a two-State solution. Russia has called on Israel to stop building the fence, which, just like Israeli settlements in the West Bank, destroys the integrity of the Palestinian territories.[72]

Russia condemns any measures aimed at undermining the status of Jerusalem as established under international law, including UN Security Council resolutions 476 and 478. Rejects the decision by the US and Guatemala to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and to move their embassies there. Russia also has expressed deep concern at the decision by Hungary and Brazil to open trade missions with diplomatic status in Jerusalem. The Russian Federation calls on all states not to transfer their diplomatic missions to Jerusalem in accordance with the UN Security Council resolution 478 (1980) and to comply with the UN General Assembly resolution 10/19 (2017), which stresses that 'the question of Jerusalem is a final status issue that must be resolved through negotiations in accordance with the relevant UN resolutions'.[73]

Russia supports the right of the State of Palestine to sovereignty over East Jerusalem. It urges Israel to respect the legal and historical status quo of Jerusalem and its Christian, Jewish and Islamic holy sites, including the Al-Aqsa Mosque and Qubat Al-Sakhra in the Holy Haram Al-Sharif area. Russia supports the Jordanian administration's trustee role as the Waqf of Jerusalem and the al-Aqsa Mosque as the only recognized authority for this holy site. It welcomes the joint 'Appeal for Jerusalem' signed by His Majesty King Mohammed VI of Morocco and His Holiness Pope Francis on 30 March 2019 in Rabat, on preserving and strengthening Jerusalem's special status as a multi-faith city, as well as its spirituality and unique identity.

Russia condemns Israeli aggression and the imposition of a blockade on the Gaza Strip, which has led to a sharp deterioration in the economic and humanitarian situation; demands that Israel immediately lift all restrictions imposed on the Gaza Strip, including obstacles to economic

development, the provision of basic services and the reconstruction process, and end violations of the rights of the local population; calls on the international community to step up efforts aimed at meeting the urgent humanitarian needs of the Gaza Strip population,

As one of the co-sponsors of the Quartet on the Middle East settlement, the Russian Federation is working to create the conditions for restarting negotiations between Palestine and Israel that will resolve all final status issues and help to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the region. In 2016 the Russian President Vladimir Putin put forward the proposal to hold negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli leaders in Moscow, which still stands.

Russia has consistently supported efforts to restore Palestinian unity on the PLO's political platform as well as to hold elections in all the Palestinian territories. Russia insists that the situation of the Palestinian refugees is a final status issue which must be resolved through negotiations between Palestine and Israel in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions, including resolution 194 (1948). Moscow deeply regrets the decision by the United States to discontinue funding for the UNRWA and calls on all States and organizations that do not currently participate in its funding to consider making voluntary contributions to sustain the Agency's activities as soon as possible.

Conclusion

Our analysis proves that the UN, which initially assumed responsibility for the settlement of the Arab Israeli conflict and its core - the Palestinian problem - was unable to achieve this goal due to the reasons examined in the study. The US interference in the Middle East peace process has led to a gradual reformatting of the conflict. Egypt and Jordan signed peace treaties with Israel, and the most hostile Arab states (Syria, Iraq, Libya and Lebanon) were practically neutralized and currently cannot influence the situation in the Israeli-Palestinian confrontation zone. The Arab-Israeli conflict ceased to have an international character and again entered the phase of confrontation between Israel and the Palestinians.

It was shown above that all American initiatives on the Palestinian-Israeli track, including the 'Trump's plan,' are in the interests of Israel only and infringe on the interests of the Palestinians. Upon careful consid-

eration, all the US plans and initiatives to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are consistent with Israel's political priorities, and these priorities exclude any possibility of creating a sustainable Palestinian state.

Joe Biden's administration has not yet developed a coherent policy on the issue of the Palestinian-Israeli confrontation. But this position of the main mediator in relations between the warring sides fully justifies Israel's expectations. Time is on its side. Israel is using time to annex the West Bank completely, similar to the annexation of the occupied Palestinian territories in the 1948-1949 war, as well as Jerusalem and the Golan Heights.

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[72] The UN Security Council Resolution No. 2334. UNISPAL document S/RES/2334, September 23, 2016.

[73] The UN Security Councill Resolution No 478. UNISPAL document S/RES/478, August 20, 1980.

ARTYOM V. GOFMAN

The 'Jordanian Option' as an Alternative for the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict's Settlement

The situation around the Palestinian-Israeli conflict continues to give cause for concern. This confrontation usually resembles a pendulum-like movement – from a state of relative stability to sharp deterioration and back again. The peculiarity of the current period is that the settlement of the Palestinian problem was declared to be one of the main foreign policy priorities of the American administration under the presidency of Donald Trump. Over the past few years, the United States has carried out a series of unilateral actions of a distinctly pro-Israeli nature. This, in turn, has led to a backlash from the Palestinian side, which has effectively broken off contact with the Americans and the Israelis.

Failed attempts at creating a confederation

Formally, a unified state can take three forms: Jordanian-Palestinian, Jordanian-Israeli and Jordanian-Palestinian-Israeli. What they had in common was that they did not imply the creation of a fully-fledged and independent Palestinian state.

The idea of a Jordanian-Palestinian unification was first voiced by a Jordanian monarch on March 15, 1972. King Hussein announced that Jordan would become a United Arab Kingdom on both sides of the Jordan River, with Jerusalem as its capital for the West Bank region and Amman as its capital for Jordan.[1]

But the very next day, Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir rejected the proposal, noting, that the Jordanian King wanted to decide the fate of the territories not under his direct control.[2]

The next time, the subject of a Jordanian-Palestinian state was raised in negotiations between Jordan and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). On February 11, 1985 King Hussein met with the PLO leader Yasser Arafat in Amman. An agreement was reached, which (in paragraph 2) stated that the right of self-determination for the Palestinian people was possible within the proposed confederative Arab state of Jordan and Palestine.[3]

But the Jordanian-Palestinian negotiations soon reached a crisis point. The PLO insisted on creation of a Palestinian state before joining the confederation, while Amman hoped for a reverse sequence. On April 19, 1987, the PLO executive committee announced its withdrawal from the Amman agreement in the light of emerging differences over the understanding and implementation of various clauses in the document.[4]

The Jordanian-Palestinian negotiations ran simultaneously with the Jordanian-Israeli ones. In the beginning, there was no talk of a united state. The Reagan Plan,[5] based on the Camp David Accords,[6] called for an active Jordanian participation in Palestinian self-government. The Israeli position was that the PLO members could not participate in talks until they recognized Israel's right to exist. This found manifestation in a statement by the Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres after a meeting with the Jordanian delegation on June 10, 1985.[7]

After trading places with Yitzhak Shamir, Peres, as Israel's foreign minister, held a secret meeting with King Hussein, presumably on April 11, 1987, which led to the signing of the so-called 'London Agreement'.[8] The text of the treaty itself is unknown, but it is believed that it referred to a joint Jordanian-Israeli control of the Palestinian territories.[9]

The Agreement was rejected by Prime Minister Shamir and later by Jordan.[10] Peres tried again in March 1990 to propose the establishment of a trilateral Israeli-Jordanian-Palestinian confederation, but even his own party could not accept this proposal.[11]

In 1994, Israel and Jordan signed a peace treaty and established formal diplomatic relations. As Russian scholar R. Landa wrote, Palestine finally: 'ceased to be legally part of Jordan, which thereby recognized the national and political autonomy of the Palestinians outside the [Jordanian] kingdom and the Palestinian autonomy that they had formed'.[12]

From the 'Oslo process' to the 'Deal of the century'

In the 1990s, the peace process was revived and could realistically have led to the resolution of some key problems. However, due to mistakes made in the planning stage and during the implementation of the Oslo Accords, it resulted in a new Intifada and a complete degradation of situation in the region. In this context, the 'Oslo process' may be called the most successful of the unfulfilled, aborted attempts to solve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict along the 'two state solution'. Subsequent attempts, including the establishment of the Middle East Quartet, have so far failed to achieve any significant success.

The Trump's administration actively exploited the failures of past years, reiterating that the President Trump's so-called 'Deal of the Century' was aimed at a comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian problem. Washington has even suggested that the resolution of the conflict does not necessarily have to involve the implementation of the 'two state solution'.[13]

However, the plan caused a lot of international criticism: from accusations of a pro-Israeli bias, to the fact the United States intended to be a dominant negotiator.[14] A conference in Bahrain in June 2019, where economic aspects of the peace plan were discussed, ended up going nowhere.[15] The Palestinians' refusal to accept economic aid, tied to demands, set by Washington and its allies reduces the possibility of realizing the American proposal. The persistent postponement of the unveiling of the 'Deal of the Century' due to the political crisis in Israel and internal political processes in the US itself, has only added insult to injury.

Within this context, news suddenly emerged that the basis for a peace settlement would be the creation of a confederation of Palestine with Jordan. Palestinian leader Mahmud Abbas mentioned this at a meeting with leftist Israeli activists on September 2, 2018, adding that the proposal came from the US side.[16] 'I said: Yes, I want a three-way confederation with Jordan and Israel. I asked them if the Israelis would agree to such a proposal'.[17]

It did not take long before the Israelis and Jordanians gave their reaction. 'My answer is: a confederation with whom?'[18] said the Jordan's King Abdallah II, explaining that Jordan is firmly committed to a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. Moreover, the current state of the Israeli-Jordanian relations is close to stagnation, negatively affect-

ing further cooperation prospects. For example, on October 21, 2018, King Abdallah II of Jordan refused to extend one of the clauses to the 1994 Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty concerning the leasing of some border territories to Israel, inevitably leading to a negative reaction from the Israeli side.[19]

Israel, too, rejected the idea of a confederation, stressing that direct negotiations, the demilitarization of the Palestinian state and Israel's control over the West Bank were the only way to reach an agreement.[20] A month later, the US Middle East Special Envoy Jason Greenblatt said that the peace plan in progress was not to be based on a confederation model.[21]

'Is Fecit Cui Prodest'

As a result, the idea of a Jordanian-Palestinian-Israeli confederation died out as quickly as it had emerged. No one, save for the Palestinian leader, even agreed to discuss the proposal, revealing a whole knot of contradictions regarding this issue of confederacy. It is, however, necessary to explain the reason for its unexpected emergence.

Clearly the key parties here have been Israel, Jordan and Palestinians. The United States, despite its desire to be a mediator in the peace process, due to a number of unilateral actions of the Trump administration, became one of the parties to the conflict with a clear pro-Israel position. Saudi Arabia, Egypt and a number of other Middle Eastern states were indirect participants in the process. The United Nations, the European Union, the Russian Federation and other countries, just like in the 1990s, essentially fell by the wayside in the peace process again, taking the place of second-line participants.

It should be mentioned, that any political gain is relative, temporary and dependent on a particular political course of action. At first glance, Ramallah could be the biggest winner from a possible unification. First of all, it would allow the three countries to 'share' the burden of the deplorable state of the Palestinian economy. As noted by A. Fedorchenko, A. Krylov and V. Morozov of Moscow State Institute of International Relations, between 2009 and 2015: 'the Palestinian Administration ran chronic budget deficits of $1.3-1.5 billion (about 20% of GDP)'.[22] Moreover, being part of a unified state would tie the Israeli government's hands in expanding Jewish settlement building in Palestine across the

'Green Line', thus strengthening Arab positions within their areas of residence.

Oddly enough, the United States could also have benefitted from the confederation solution. Washington reiterated that the main goal of the 'Deal of the Century' is a full settlement and the security of Israel (and the interests of the United States itself). From the American point of view, any plan that guarantees these provisions is acceptable, whether it is a two-state solution or a confederation or something else entirely.

For Israel and Jordan, however, confederation is seen as a disadvantageous issue. First, there is the pressure of the failed experience of previous years, when Peres and King Hussein had tried to negotiate a confederation; second, there is the reluctance to deal with Palestinian problems, or rather solve these problems, for the Palestinians. Third, by Israelis, the Palestinians are thought as irresponsible negotiators – perceived total corruption and a fragmented, clannish nature of the Palestinian society noticeably weaken the Palestinian authorities. In this light, the willingness of Palestinians to join the three-party unified state seems logical.

It is worth saying, that the positions of Israeli, Palestinian and Jordanian governments, to some degree, reflect the opinion of their own populations. Polls show that an overwhelming majority of Jordanians oppose the creation of a confederate state of Jordan and Palestine.[23] Also, about 2/3 of Palestinians oppose its creation, and almost 3/4 of Palestinians polled oppose the creation of a Jordanian-Palestinian-Israeli confederation.[24] As for the two-state solution in 2018, 46.8% of the respondents among the Israelis support it,[25] and 47% of the Palestinians do so.[26]

The views of the academic community are also multifaceted. There is both an understanding of the difficulty of implementing of the two-state option and an awareness of the difficulty of finding and adapting alternatives. One of the organizers of the 'Oslo process', Israeli statesman Y. Beilin sees a trilateral confederation as an inevitable option that the parties will sooner or later arrive at. He adds, that there is no solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict outside of a united front, which the current situation shows.[27] His views are close to those of G. Frisch and I. Sokolov of the Begin-Sadat Centre for Strategic Studies at Bar-Ilan University in Ramat Gan, who believe that Israeli concessions do not meet the minimum Palestinian requirements for peace, and that it would be Jordan that 'could provide an alternative to the model of a two-state

solution that depends on the Palestinian Authority'.[28] O. Eran, senior researcher at the Israel Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv, argues that the belief in Amman's ability to respond to Palestinian aspirations is 'an illusion,' but it does not mean total rejection, because Jordan can play a positive role in resolving some problems of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.[29] Mohsen Saleh from Lebanon says that the Trump's plan is doomed to failure.[30] 'Any future solution to the Israeli issue will not be far from what Kissinger proposed and worked on for many years',[31] - believes the Al-Arabiya's expert Shebab Al-Makahleh. Carnegie's scholars consider that 'concessions, coordination, and cooperation on policy required between Israelis and Palestinians to achieve any 'one-state solution' do not seem politically acceptable to either party'.[32]

Lack of progress in the peace process, deep antagonisms in Palestinian-Israeli relations, the mixed results of Israeli concessions at the Oslo process and unilateral disengagement from Gaza - all create a specific and murky environment in which official and backstage diplomacy, interests of key and lesser parties to the peace process, mutual grievances and feelings of righteousness are all intertwined.

Such unstable state of affairs can as easily improve as it can suddenly deteriorate. Any sorts of proposals and formulas can be put forward. This requires an impartial and respectable mediator, which at the moment is sorely lacking.

The US is not doing a good job as a mediator, it has already alienated one of the main parties of the conflict – the Palestinians. On January 28, 2020. President Trump presented the political part of his Peace Plan, which caused condemnation in the Arab world.[33] It was blatantly pro-Israeli in nature, setting impossible conditions for the Palestinians, thus making its implementation extremely unlikely. Not only is the Palestinian problem being solved once again without the active participation of the Palestinians themselves, the very essence of the American proposal is aimed at recognizing Israeli sovereignty over the Jordan Valley, East Jerusalem and Jewish settlements. The proposal also 'removed' the Palestinian refugee problem from the agenda. In fact, the American proposal can be viewed as an attempt to legally enshrine the results of a 'fait accompli' policy that is totally unacceptable to the Palestinian side, at least according to their current position. Against this background, proposals to hand over territories in the western Negev desert to Palestinian control and to provide substantial financial assistance looked rather weak and unconvincing.[34]

Nevertheless, the American plan might play a positive role in the future. As D. Maryasis of the Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow pointed out: 'the document could spur new processes between Palestinians and Israelis that might move on this painful and greatly prolonged conflict from the deadlock'.[35] We may recall that although the 'Madrid formula' negotiations in 1991-1992 failed on their own, they did lay the groundwork for the 'Oslo process' that lasted throughout the 1990s. However, currently, implementation of the US plan is almost impossible, which makes it logical to look for other solutions to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Opportunities for Russia

Since the start of the Russian anti-terrorist operation in Syria in September 2015, Russia's position in the Middle East region has strengthened considerably. For several years now, the Russian 'Centre for the Reconciliation of the Hostile Parties and Control of Refugee Movements' in Syria has been working to stabilize the situation and provide humanitarian assistance in areas freed from terrorists and armed insurgents. Thus, Russia has not only become a part to the conflict, but has also taken on the position of mediator, ready to negotiate with all the conflict parties interested in a settlement.

Moscow, while lacking the US economic and military might, nevertheless occupies a special position in the region, maintaining contacts with all the leading regional actors.

The Russian Federation's official position on resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is based on the UN resolutions and the two-state solution. On top of that, on April 6, 2017, the Russian Foreign Ministry issued a Statement, according to which East Jerusalem is seen by Russia as the capital of the future Palestinian state, while West Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Israel.[36] Moscow insists that unilateral steps, in the absence of the Palestinian-Israeli dialogue, do not contribute to a just resolution of the conflict, leading to further deterioration of the conflict.

Russia's position on Jerusalem was voiced in the course of the overall efforts to restart the peace process, offering, among other things, its own negotiating platform. However, these proposals remain unrealized – although the former Prime-Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his Palestinian vis-a-vis were frequent visitors to the Russian capital, they never

did it together. Russian scholars claim that striving to play a mediating role in the negotiations is fraught with a risk of achieving contrary results: 'The risk for Moscow is not to demonstrate yet again that the peace process cannot be launched in its present format. This would just be another aid to Washington's 'Deal of the Century', and would open the way to revising the terms of the negotiation process'.[37]

Moscow was skeptical about Washington's plan to restart the peace process, believing it did not adequately take Palestinian interests into account. It is likely that the Russian side would not support the 'Jordanian option' either, if it does not create the Palestinian state in the process.

For this reason, for Moscow it makes more sense to continue reaching out to the key parties to the conflict and build trusting relationships. The closer and broader Russia's ties with Israelis and Arabs, the more likely the regional elites will view Moscow as a viable negotiating platform rather than an option of a last resort.

Conclusions

The instability of the current situation has a negative impact on the peace process, making it rather dependent on fluctuations in global politics. Thus, making long-term forecasts regarding the peace process does not seem to be practical. In the short term, several scenarios are possible.

1. Preservation of the status quo. This trend seems the most likely. Deep-rooted antagonism, an aversion between Palestinians and Israelis will continue to be the main stumbling block in the peace process. Washington's inability to make the conflict parties achieve consensus significantly reduces its capacity as a mediator.

Unresolved peace process issues create perpetual and deepening crisis often resulting in various Palestinian uprisings that in turn provoke Israeli military responses. Such expressions of Palestinian anger can take different forms from the 'Great Marches of Return' in Gaza and isolated terrorist attacks to large scale events like the first and second Intifadas. Aggression towards the Israelis usually leads to even greater desire to develop Israeli settlements as a means of combating terror. On the other hand, Palestinian violence can also lead Israel to soften its stance during diplomatic negotiations, as it happened in the early 1990s following the first Intifada and during the disengagement from Gaza in 2005, after the Second Intifada.

This scenario would mean continued construction of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, as a response to ongoing violence and terrorist actions by Palestinian radicals. This is tantamount to a rejection of the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

2. A confederation. This option is less likely than the first, but it remains a certain 'fallback' option since its implementation implies either full or partial rejection of the 'two-state solution'. Until this type of solution is reached, ideas of various alliances and state configurations will continue to haunt the peace process, emerging from time to time.

This scenario may be implemented either in the form of a confederation or in other formats of a joint political and territorial arrangement.

3. Creation of the Palestinian state. This option is the most unlikely, as it entails withdrawal of Israeli authority from the West Bank and a return to the armistice line of the pre-1967 Six-Day War. Its implementation requires preconditions in the form of profound changes in Israeli society, a rethinking of the Israeli's place in the Middle East and its security.

This option is based on full adherence to international resolutions, possibly with minor amendments with the UN approval.

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Possible Network Solutions to the Israeli-Palestine Crisis

Introduction

It is the intention of this chapter to examine the underlying issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and consider alternative approaches to resolution of the disagreement between the two parties. Since the creation of the Israeli State in 1948, there has been a continued conflict in the region and mostly only conventional methods of diplomacy have been used in an attempt to cease the violence. As the author examines the underlying issues through our research, the primary goal is to contrast them against alternative formats of network diplomacy. The focus will be upon the applications of medical, science, social, public, and private diplomacy. The author will provide an analysis of the efficacy of each form of diplomacy and whether there is an opportunity for advancement and growth along these paths. At the summation of our paper, the author presents the forms of network diplomacy which are most likely to succeed, and eventually heal, the rift that exists within Israel. During the research the author will be using mostly comparative methods, driven from both academic and scientific research. The analysis will contain data and articles originating from both sides of the conflict. At the end the author will provide an answer to the question: "*What forms of network diplomacy will most effectively lead to a resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict?*"

Methodology

The Analysis of the possible solutions to the issue has proceeded as follows.

First of all, the author conducted a brainstorming session in order to elicit different outlooks and possibilities with a view to adopt a comprehensive strategy.

Secondly, the different instruments that have been considered, have been the object of theoretical and practical research. In particular, during this phase, the main aim has been, apart from that of gaining information on the current status and the already available possibilities, the evaluation of all possible *pros* and *cons* to any specific instrument of network diplomacy on the table.

The third phase, has been a cross-examination and discussion regarding the previous phase results' analysis outcomes, both through a second session of brainstorming aimed at the finding of further *pros* and *cons*, and through the conduction of an anonymous peer-reviewing process based on a random-assignment-basis.

Fourth, the results of the analysis have been put together inside a matrix table and assigned values according to 5 criteria (Positive Outcomes, Credibility, Relevance, Geographical Impact and Expansion, Feasibility/Capability), followed by an explanation of the assignment of the values.

Finally, the three solutions that have achieved the highest score have been analysed to a further extent in the conclusion of the paper. In case of achievement of the same score, the solutions will get an *ex aequo* placement.

Current State of Affairs

The Israeli-Palestinian crisis is marked as one of the world´s most controversial and the longest crisis often described as the world's 'most intractable conflict' too. The crux of the matter is based on the movement of the self-determined groups: the Jewish Zionist project and the Palestinian nationalist project and their dispute regarding the territorial issue of the same area - the area of the so-called West Bank. However, the Israeli Palestine conflict is much broader and complicated than that. It is also the matter of other key issues such as:

- mutual recognition
- water rights,
- Palestinian concerns over Israeli settlements in the West Bank
- status and control of Jerusalem
- security concerns over terrorism, safe borders, incitements, violence,
- Palestinian freedom of movement - right of return of Palestinian refugees living in the Palestinian diaspora.

Yet, to initially answer the question of how to use network diplomacy in order to provide some solution towards this crisis it is necessary to outline and evaluate what is Israel and Palestine crisis about, and why they are the fighting. The answer to this matter would lead to Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs that both want the same land and the notion of compromise is rather difficult to find.

The current state of affairs encompasses the dispute over the West Bank that is nominally controlled by the Palestinian Arabs but is under Israeli occupation. The occupation by the Israelis is effected by troops who represent and also enforce two main objectives of Israeli Authority. First, the Israeli security restrictions on Palestinian movement and second the settlement of Israeli communities in the West Bank that operates to protect the land and obviate the influence of Palestinians in the land. However, it is important to emphasize that neither side holds a single position. Both actors, Israel and the Palestine movement, comprise moderate and extremist bodies.

The current situation with regard to this dispute is a stand-off, unstable intractable conflict, as there is common mistrust between both governments. Further, none of the parties is in a position to come to a compromise and make a real deal. Mutual distrust and significant disagreements are deep over basic issues, as is reciprocal scepticism about the other side's commitment to upholding obligations in an eventual agreement. In defiance of long-term actions towards peace and the reconciliation of Israel with Egypt and Jordan, the Israeli-Palestinian relations have failed to come to any kind of final peace agreement.

Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to demonstrate the multilateral use for network diplomacy and its different approaches in order to solve the Israeli- Palestinian issue. The complex analysis and application of such methods is provided further in this chapter.

The Role of Network Diplomacy

In order to analyze the role of network diplomacy, we first need to define the concept itself: network diplomacy is a foreign policy infrastructure that would allow a greater number of institutions to engage in achieving state goals, as well as a wider influence on the audience in foreign countries, thus creating loyal influence groups. In this sense, network diplomacy would include non-state representation (business, science, health, sport…) to advance a state's interests.

In this chapter we will analyze how different types of diplomacy can contribute to the settlement of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

a. Medical Diplomacy

Medical coordination between Israel and the Palestinian Authority has been ongoing since 1995 and continues to increase each year, despite ebbs and flows regarding security[1]. When compared to all of the differing forms of diplomacy enacted between the two parties, medical diplomacy may very well be the most crucial. In this capacity, there are programs in which Israeli doctors are able to train their Palestinian counterparts facilitating friendship and allowing better healthcare for Palestinians. However, the picture changes when we look at the healthcare system *inside* Palestine. Even with the formation of the Palestinian Authority, which technically has control over Palestinian health programs, the system is still mostly subservient to Israel which controls healthcare budgets, border crossings, building permits and pharmaceutical imports/exports. Medical facilities are poor in comparison to western and Israeli facilities, and Palestinians lack specialists – Palestine has 8 times fewer medical specialists compared to Israel[2]. Additionally, the Separation Wall which divides the West Bank from greater Israel further exacerbates the difficulties facing Palestinians who are seeking medical attention. Due to the many blockades, Palestinians must apply for permits regarding the specialist care they require, particularly oncological treatments. In 2013, the WHO stated that this process often includes lengthy waiting periods, and 17% of the time permits are denied, a third of which were denied without any explanation[3]. Furthermore, the Palestinian Red Cross Society, the main ambulance service in Palestine, reported that 93% of its ambulance transfers at the Israeli border (West

Bank) experienced delays of 10 minutes or more for unwell patients[4]. The statistics regarding the Gaza Strip are much bleaker.

Thus, although it is clear that while efforts to increase cooperation between the two parties are helpful to the Palestinian population, there is still a lot to be desired in terms of ease-of-access and the level of assistance granted by the Israeli government. Furthermore, there needs to be a greater effort from international institutions as well as the partners of Israel to press for better conditions for healthcare. In May, 2019 there was the 72nd World Health Assembly in which guidelines for both the Palestinian Authority and Israel were outlined. Unfortunately, in their memorandum many of the suggestions laid out by the World Health Organization have not resulted in substantial progress from the Israeli side. Additionally, protests in the Gaza Strip and attacks on medical services have complicated such resolutions. For example, in 2018, 363 Palestinian attacks against healthcare in the Gaza Strip were recorded by the World Health Organization[5].

In conclusion, medical diplomacy is so effective because it is one of the few areas of cooperation between two conflicting parties that carries little political risk and cost. While budgets may come under scrutiny, striving for the common good of aiding the sick and injured is respected by both sides and the international community as a whole. The ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine greatly impairs efforts for any diplomacy, medical or otherwise. Flare-ups like during 'The Great March of Return' massively set back efforts for cooperation between the two countries when they happen. Taking into consideration an increasingly hostile political environment with Netanyahu's nationalist drum-beating in an attempt to keep his presidency and avoid fraud indictments, the road for a diplomatic future will not be easy to achieve. However, continuing to finance projects such as Project Rozana which educates aspiring Israeli and Palestinian child psychologists to help with children suffering from PTSD, brings closer a future where Israeli and Palestinian can work side-by-side under the auspices of shared experience. With continued funding from various NGOs, the EU, guidance from the WHO, and humanitarian funding from the UN there is an opportunity for improvement. However, the key linchpins will be for Israel to ease restrictions regarding healthcare-related border crossings, and more freedoms for the Palestinian Authority in this aspect. The Palestinian Authority needs to do what it can to assuage Israel of its security concerns, and an effort to stymie organized uprisings which turn violent (on both sides) will aid

in this effort. However, until rhetoric regarding continued settling of disputed areas and violence on the borders cease, even medical diplomacy will not be able to significantly improve relations.

b. Science Diplomacy

Science could contribute to conflict resolution in several ways:

First, the scientific community, especially those experts in international relations of both parties, through study, research and analysis, can provide a valid solution for conflict resolution. The academia should carry out joint work for an effective settlement that will be suitable for both communities.

Secondly, science has an important role not only for providing a specific solution for the conflict per se, but also for improving and stabilizing relations through various collaborative projects in other spheres. Scientific cooperation is a key instrument for humanizing the adversaries and foster intercultural understanding. According to the scientific code, it is the duty of experts to provide human knowledge, leaving aside political ideas. That is why when creating science, a framework is created in which no matter how complicated relations in other areas are, cooperation will be maintained for the scientific good. Thus, it is essential to promote various projects together. An example of this is the Middle East Cooperation Program: '*a competitive research grants program, financed by the US Agency for International Development that supports cooperation between Arab and Israeli scientists on topics that are likely to produce long-term development results*'[6].

In addition, given the serious development problems of Palestine, the scientific community could accomplish projects to improve the living conditions of the population, and provide scientific advances in areas such as agriculture, the food industry, production models, transport and humanitarian assistance among others. Israel should see an interest in collaborating to improve the overall situation of the region of which it is a part[7].

We must bear in mind that given the serious economic situation in Palestine, its society does not contain a strong scientific community, nor has it the means necessary to finance projects. Therefore, science sponsorship also plays an important role in this type of diplomacy. External actors such as the UN or the EU should finance projects in which partic-

ipants from both sides take part. Likewise, as a gesture to stabilize relations, Israel could also collaborate in financing such projects[8].

Finally, it is necessary to analyse the role of education, an important piece of science diplomacy. Student exchanges, the same way as scientific projects, help humanize the adversary and understand the environment of the other side. In addition, providing quality education and promoting higher education is important because it gives society the capacity and empowerment to resolve the conflict with respect, analysis, and expertise. Again, because of the development problems of Palestine, their educational institutions are underdeveloped. Therefore, financing and sponsoring education of Palestinians at different levels should be useful for advancing capabilities of Palestinians. Israel is in possession of educative instruments. Therefore, offering a number of vacancies to the Palestinian community within its institutions would be an effective diplomatic gesture since it would provide the Palestinians with the aforementioned expertise, give cultural understanding of Israel and would be a gesture of Israel's desire to improve relations between both sides.

c. Regional Cooperation

There are various spheres of social influence that might help in resolving the issue of Israeli-Palestinian antagonism, such as: health, environment, agriculture, engineering, science, education, culture … All of these aspects play a significant role in the lives of citizens and therefore have a great influence on the actual atmosphere and its improvement.

Furthermore, an analysis of project that encompasses cooperation between Israel and Palestine plus other actors is provided below to demonstrate on specific examples the other social aspects under network diplomacy that could lead to the resolution of the problem.

1. Middle East Regional Cooperation Program (MERC)

The Middle East Regional Cooperation Program (MERC) was created with the main aim of promoting cooperation between Israeli, Egyptian, American scientists and those of Arab nations.

Each project run under MERC must include at least one Israeli and one Arab partner, which creates a great opportunity for regional cooperation and is boosting the productive atmosphere between the two rival

actors. Up to now, the MERC program financed various projects with the participation of West Bank and Gaza. The background of each partner may differ - from academic to private sector or non-governmental to governmental institutions. This encompasses and boosts direct cooperation among the Middle Eastern individuals and institutions too.

'*The goals of MERC are to contribute to development and improvement of the quality of life in the Middle East Region through the application of research and technology; and to contribute to the peace process through the establishment of cooperative relationships that will last beyond the life of the project.*'[9]

For instance, the projects include:

1. exploration of techniques in order to increase food production using a limited amount of water,
2. development of new techniques for thrifty use of water as well as reuse of domestic wastewater for agriculture,
3. establishment of scientific cooperation - Regional Water Data Bank (Regional Water Data Banks) Project to strengthen water security and improve water-resources management capabilities …

Furthermore, it is essential to emphasize the fact that the goal of MERC projects is to use research and technology as a means to solve regional problems rather than the issues extending to global concern. Through these regional cooperation projects, a significant impact on economic growth is made that increases incomes of the disadvantaged, improves the environment, harmonizes national strategies, boosts food production and water conservation, while alleviating the burden on the healthcare system through better treatment or health management strategies.

All of the aforementioned aspects are a real contribution to the improvement of living standards of citizens and are creating a cooperative atmosphere for the Israeli and Palestinian actors. A specific example is provided below.

A concrete project operating in the Middle East region run by MERC involved research workers form Egypt, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia and the US. The general aim of the project was to establish standardized virus detection methods for the Middle East. This project is a demonstration of how network diplomacy can help and promote coop-

eration between two countries that are in conflict specifically through public diplomacy, science diplomacy, education, agriculture, technologies and development.

Ultimately, the main endeavour of MERC Program is to build sustained and stable Arab-Israeli cooperation. Primarily the program gave preference to projects involving these two actors that are based on true intellectual partnerships.

2. MASHAV - Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation

MASHAV is another example of regional cooperation between Israel and Palestine. The Hebrew acronym stands for Israel´s Agency for International Development Cooperation and was created as a division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs[10]. Special attention is given to cooperation among Palestinians and MASHAV (institutional and non-institutional bodies) as a consequence of how important this cooperation is in supporting and advancing the peace process. Further, it improves the atmosphere between the citizens and also between the professionals on both sides. The programs of MASHAV are put in place in the Middle East as a priority of the agency.

MASHAV's activities in this area reflect both the Israel Foreign Ministry goals vis-à-vis the Palestinian Authority as well as the development goals of the Palestinian Authority itself, with emphasis being given to the following topics:

- economic development;
- creating jobs to reduce unemployment, especially for women and young people (small and medium-size enterprises);
- strengthening ties between the Palestinian Authority and Israeli business sectors;
- food security and agriculture;
- empowerment of women;
- developing a dialogue between the civil society in the Palestinian Authority and the civil society in Israel;
- medicine and public health;
- reconciliation in the educational system.[11]

Cooperation in the following areas is creating an atmosphere of trust and tolerance in Israeli-Palestinian relations, plus strengthening the

peace missions. Some concrete examples of actions or rather projects within this agency are, for instance:

a) **Program for Effective Agricultural Business Management**. A program launched in Israel and Gaza with the involvement of leaders of agricultural cooperatives. The main objectives encompass the strengthening of business administration skills and introduction of new technologies in Israeli agriculture, relevant to the agricultural reality in Gaza.[12]

b) **Empowerment of Women and Young People in the Palestinian Authority**. This program operates in three different spheres giving main emphasis on civil society, working on cross-cultural acceptance and generally improving the living standards of society. The programs are: A Program for Small Businesses for Young Palestinians - A Tool for Job Creation, A Seminar for Palestinian and Israeli Women - Women Building a New Reality, and A Workshop on Women Leadership, Strengthening Civil Society and Small Businesses. These programs mainly aim at developing dialogue between Palestinian and Israeli community. The result of these programs is an actual engagement and involvement of both communities.[13]

c) **Israeli-Palestinian Cooperation in the Rehabilitation of Handicapped Children**. The main objective is to enhance the skills and know-how of doctors, nurses in Bethlehem Arab Rehabilitation Society (BASR) by Israeli Alyn Hospital by creating a medical program for Palestinian children that receive the treatment at Alyn Hospital and afterwards are transferred for longer rehabilitation at BASR.[14]

d. Religion Diplomacy

It has been argued that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not simply political in nature. To put it differently, other components interplay, including the religious one. As a matter of fact, religion seems to play a strong and extremely relevant role[15]: one simple example is the fact that one of the main contentions of the two parties to the conflict is Jerusalem, the holy city for the three main monotheistic religions: Christianity, Islam and Judaism. Another example is that the Intifadas (uprisings) launched against Israel included religious elements as well, associated with the political ones[16]. Religion thus seems to play a fundamental role in the social life of people, and through this in shaping their identity.

Moving from these preliminary considerations, it is then possible to maintain that religion is indeed a relevant element that might actually be used as an instrument on the diplomatic desk. One possible exploitation is the planned meeting of relevant religious exponents,[17] on occasion of religious festivities and ceremonies capable of influencing the religious components of the population. One of the main effects would be the de-escalation of the religious element of the conflict at least in those factions that see in the religious side of the conflict its main reason of existence. The reference, in particular, is to those extremist (on both sides) and terrorist factions that find in religion a justification for the use of violence, if not the sole reason behind it. For these elements, to see a peaceful meeting and discussion of influential religious exponents, would amount to a double level of delegitimization: the first one being the delegitimization of their ideology by the very same most influential preachers (who could not be accused of misinterpretation of the scriptures); and the second one consisting in the delegitimization in front of the common public that might, or might not, have felt timidly sympathetic to their cause on grounds of religious ideology, but might have found it inappropriate to take an active role in the fight. On the other hand, it can be contended that the believers of one faith might consider the leaders of the other absolutely illegitimate and to see the leaders of both sides meeting together might actually achieve a completely opposite effect, thus delegitimizing the religious leaders in their eyes. A further issue is the fact that, according to the overwhelming majority of Israel's national religious community, the territory of Israel should correspond to that of the Land of Israel (the land between the Jordan river and the Mediterranean Sea), thus making it difficult to reconcile the territorial aspirations of both Israel and Palestine.[18] A solution might be that of focusing on the mostly moralistic and a-political religious tenets as a first step towards rapprochement. Nonetheless, the cooperation might inhibit the erosion of legitimacy of the respective leaders in the measure in which it proves to have concrete effects both in acts and among the remaining part of the population.[19]

A second target of the strategy would be this latest subdivision of the population: the very simple exchange of signs of peace, messages of tolerance and solidarity between the highest echelons of the confessions might indeed influence every other stratum of the population. On a lower level, and on an ordinary and everyday basis, moreover, the exchange of religious knowledge starting from educational centers and

institutions (thus connecting with the scientific and cultural diplomacy) would, on the longer term, influence a whole generation of pupils and scholars, inclining them towards the teachings of the overcoming of violence and the establishment of peace and peaceful co-existence.

This is particularly the case of Jerusalem: the circumstances of a peaceful and shared exploitation of the holy sites by both religious factions (Jews and Muslims, but Christians should be accounted as well) would be seen as a further improvement in the direction of co-existence and mutual respect and tolerance. This move would, moreover, represent a further step towards the guarantees of security for pilgrims and believers: an attack conducted against the shared sites, making victims on both sides, would further de-legitimize the perpetrators of the attack, and thus the willingness of the rest of the population to be associated with them under the religious point of view. On the other hand, the provision of Israeli security forces in defense of the shared sites would be, taking the necessary and opportune steps and measures (as the creation of *ad hoc* mixed-religious teams), a form of confidence-building capable of overcoming a general fear and mistrust. It should be noted, however, that certain sites, as Haram Al-Sharif, would represent almost irreconcilable cases, in the measure in which they are generally closed to anybody, except high echelon clerics, of the respective religions, thereby making the possibility of a shared place of cult particularly improbable, thus maintaining the current level of tension that might be fostered by a proposal of sharing.

By way of conclusion, the topic of religion need to be evaluated as both a positive and a negative instrument in diplomacy. As has been seen, in fact, religion is a fundamental ground for both confrontation and cooperation between the two different factions in the conflict, besides the political motivations. The organization of the above-mentioned meetings at the top levels should anyway be coupled with a lower-level action in the education and scientific spheres. Moreover, the private sector, in the form of NGOs, might play a particularly relevant role in the measure in which charity groups and associations might try to reconcile the divergencies and operate in a common environment in order to defuse religious violence and leading, for a second time, to State-level negotiations that might solve the political and territorial issues in an environment of reduced or limited violence, giving the *bona fides* and will of ordinary population a further incentive. Nonetheless, as previously mentioned, religious differences might lead to an impossibil-

ity of promoting such interreligious forms of cooperation, inasfar as the population of one religious faith might consider absolutely illegitimate the leaders of the other and thus, by reflex, the clerics of all levels who might actually be willing to undergo such forms of diplomacy. To a *prima facie* analysis this might represent the biggest threat to the success of the initiative. However, a certain degree of success in the longer term (one generation) might anyway be achieved, notwithstanding the preliminary absence of concrete results.

Business Diplomacy

Trading relationships that are established due to economic incentives facilitates professional and social contacts linking both conflicting parties in everyday life.

The Palestinian economy is overwhelmingly dependent on Israel. At the same time, the ongoing conflict with Israel has a huge economic cost for the Palestinian economy—in both the West Bank and Gaza. Commercial links can dampen political conflicts and imply willingness to engage in peaceful cooperation. This is why business should not be neglected in conflict resolution.

Israeli politics has created a strong dependency, the loss of control of natural resources, the growing dependence on exogenous income sources and a huge trade deficit that have led to a poor and illicit Palestine economy dependent on Israel and international aid.

The limited autonomous management of Palestine, far from modifying this situation, has strengthened it by creating a public sector endowed with a vast bureaucracy, without autonomy and subject to particular interests.

Violence on the Palestinian side is not the source of the economic difficulties. It is only an expression, a clear manifestation of popular dissatisfaction with the continuing deterioration of the political, economic and social situation caused by Israeli-related activities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

This is the reason why improving the economy of Palestine will help reduce tensions. To improve the economic environment, Israel should stop its periodic economic pressure on Palestine, granting this region with more autonomy and treat Palestine more like a business partner.

The Palestinian economy suffers from two growing imbalances: the scarcity of resources and the disequilibrium of the labour market, as well as the very important and unhealthy dependence on external sources of income.

Initiatives like Tech2Peace are trying to bridge divides between the two communities. The student and volunteer-led programme brings Israeli and Palestinian youths together to learn tech skills - 3D and graphic design, website creation, app development - and to engage in conflict resolution dialogue. A true gateway to make Jewish friends in Israel. According to I. Kaufman,[20] 'for most Palestinians, being a part of PIP is the first time they've encountered an Israeli other than at a checkpoint. For most Israelis it's the first time they're able to speak with a Palestinian and work with them on a professional level.'

Some other examples of economic cooperation:

- The Palestinian Partnership Fund would provide grants for joint ventures between Palestinian entrepreneurs and companies in Israel, other countries in the Middle East and the US. I. Kaufman declared that 'there was an opportunity to do something interesting from a business perspective, but also to create a smaller scale 'start-up nation' next door'.
- The Palestinian Internship Program. It arranges internships for Palestinians at Israeli tech firms. Then they then go back and start companies.
- Rawabi special economic zone in the West Bank for high-tech startups. A billion-dollar venture.
- EcoPeace is now raising private-sector capital to produce solar energy in Jordan. The electricity will be sold cheaply to Israel and provide the power to run the sewage plants in Gaza.

Can Business Diplomacy lead to a resolution of the conflict?

'*The first step for change is to remove all Israeli restriction in trade*[21]*, thus letting Palestinian and Israeli businesses collaborate on an equal footing. But Israel believes such restrictions are necessary to maintain its security in the troubled region. These business leaders are working from the premise that if the economy can get substantially better, different political forces will emerge*'.[22]

Possible Results:

With careless customs taxes, Palestine could trade with other countries and with less restrictions it could import new technology from the rest of the world and not being solely limited to second-hand Israeli machinery. In addition, autonomous management and exploitation of territorial resources and raw materials to support industrial development.

f. Digital Diplomacy

The internet revolution changed almost every aspect of human interactions and diplomacy was not an exception. Despite some scholars arguing that Digital Diplomacy was born decades before Internet (telegraph can be considered a first step for what concerns digitalization of diplomacy), in the last 20 years we experienced a sharp increase in the creation of web-based networks used by diplomats in order to overcome some limitations of traditional diplomacy.

Internet has of course not been used in the same modalities by the different countries, and if we take, for example, the experience related to '*digital embassies*', we can find that Sweden and the US foreign services have very different approaches toward digital diplomacy.

- In 2008, the Swedish government launched the world's first virtual Embassy. Located within the virtual world of Second Life, the Embassy served as a cultural institute enabling the government to promote Swedish culture on a truly global scale. Embassy visitors could attend gallery openings, interact with Swedish artists and attend Swedish art festivals. Sweden's virtual Embassy is considered a milestone in the evolution of digital diplomacy as it demonstrates the way digital platforms influence the conduct of diplomacy.[23]
- The US State Department launched its own virtual Embassy to Iran in 2011. With slightly different goals than those of the Swedish government, the State Department employed digital tools so as to overcome the limitations of traditional diplomacy, namely the absence of bilateral ties with Iran. The virtual Embassy, known as Virtual Embassy Iran, consisted of a web-based platform through which American diplomats could converse with Iranian citizens, explain US foreign policy in the Middle East and manage America's image among Iranians.

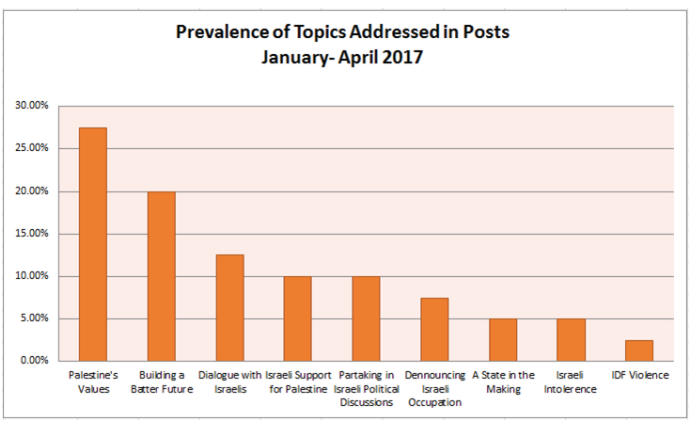
We can easily notice that the two experiences, despite sharing some common features, differ as concerns the goal of the initiatives.

On one hand, the Swedish digital embassy is aimed at sharing the country's culture and strengthening its soft power on a global scale, while on the other hand the American digital embassy was an initiative that cannot be decontextualized from the status of US-Iran relations, and can be considered an innovative way to bypass the limits of traditional diplomacy and directly explain US foreign policy to the Iranian citizens.

Those two different approaches towards Digital Diplomacy (one linked with the need to communicate with an adversary, the other one more generic and stimulated by the will to increase the country's soft-power and other standing worldwide) have been applied to the Israeli-Palestinian situation on different occasions.

The most relevant experience of what concerns the creation of a digital embassy directly aimed at influencing the people of the opposite bloc is represented by the '*Palestine in Hebrew*'[24] digital embassy mostly active on Facebook and other social media. This initiative came from the West Bank authorities (the PLO) and represents a try to bypass the mediatic '*Iron Curtain*' between Palestine and Israel and inform Israeli citizens about the Palestinian point of view. It is interesting to notice that despite the multiple issues concerning the West Bank, and despite the general opposition to the Israeli policies in the area (new settlements), this first '*Digital embassy*' of the PLO focused on topics that are not strictly anti-Zionist. Complaints about the Israeli occupation accounted (in 2017) for less than the 15% of the posts of the page and most of the information that this platform wanted to share with the Israeli citizens was about cultural sensibilization.

Prevalence of Topics Addressed in Posts, January-April 2017



Source: Manor I., Holmes M. Palestinian digital diplomacy, in International Affairs, 29 January 2018. Available at: https://medium.com/international-affairs-blog/palestine-in-hebrew-a-new-approach-to-palestinian-digital-diplomacy-81870d523c25

The '*Palestine in Hebrew*' initiative represents a very interesting example of digital diplomacy that, by now can be considered as quite a unique experience and it is not a coincidence that the West Bank was the only place where this form of network diplomacy could have happened. The status of siege that prevails in the narratives of Gaza (Hamas) stimulates a totally different approach, one that makes them focus on convincing the world community instead of the '*besiegers*'.

'*Gaza-review*'[25] and other digital instruments of similar nature are aimed at influencing European and Arab countries more than Israel proper.

On the other side of the issue, we can state that the particular geopolitical position of Israel (both a besieger and besieged) gave space for some attempts to influence the Arab community of some MENA countries (Arabic Language Digital Diplomacy team at the Israel MFA actively worked for this goal), but it is difficult to consider, for example, Gaza citizens as the objective of this new diplomatic instrument, since the '*violent options*' are still a relevant part of the Israeli answer for what concerns the Gaza issue and this fact totally annihilates the network diplomacy potential of some internet-based solutions.

To conclude, we can state that digital diplomacy is unlikely to affect the decision-makers of Israel, PLO and Hamas in the short term, but in the absence of military operations can contribute to increasing the mutual understanding in the disputes. Network diplomacy is more willing to work for Israel and the PLO than for Israel and Hamas, since Hamas is subject/protagonist of major violent actions and this fact complicates the success of any E-Diplomacy project. The last but not the least to take into consideration is that Hamas simply does not accept the existence of Israel, a position that can never contribute to a peaceful solution of existing disputes.

Results and Analysis

In order to assess the impact of each kind of diplomacy, a qualitative analysis will be carried out, based on 1) *Positive Outcomes*; 2) *Credibility*;

3) *Relevance*; 4) *Geographical Impact and Expansion*; and 5) *Feasibility/ Capability*. Each factor will be measured on a scale from 1-5, 1 meaning the lowest impact and 5 the biggest impact.

1. **Positive outcomes:** referring to past solutions and projects and future or proposed solutions.
2. **Credibility:** analysis from both sides of the conflict (Israel and Palestine), averaged for a total score.
3. **Relevance:** measurement of the contribution towards the establishment of normal diplomatic links.
4. **Geographical Impact and Expansion:** Assessment of the possible application of the solution in the three areas of conflict (scale from 1 - 3).
5. **Feasibility/Capability:** Determination of the actual feasibility of the application of the proposed solution and the availability of resources in order to achieve full implementation.

Table: Impact of Different Types of Diplomacy

	Positive Outcomes	Credibility	Relevance	Geographical Impact and Expansion	Feasibility/ Capability	**Results**
Medical	4	2	2	3	5	16/23
Science	3	2	3	3	5	16/23
Religion	2	3	4	2	3	14/23
Business	3	3	4	3	4	17/23
Digital	3	4	3	2	5	17/23
Social	4	4	2	2	3	15/23

Medical Diplomacy:

1. *Positive Outcomes*: a score of four points has been awarded to medical diplomacy's positive outcomes. Historically, efforts to

between the the Palestinian Authority and Israel have been, albeit not without limitations, successful. Programs aimed at creating cohesion between the two sides of the conflict provide better medical care and better-trained doctors for Palestinians. However, due to the violence in Gaza, lack of common necessities such as electricity, and attacks on medical convoys there, a point was deducted.

2. *Credibility*: the aspect of medical diplomacy carries moderately low credibility with the Palestinian and Israeli populations, and thus two points have been awarded. Due to the fact that Israel still controls the Palestinian Authority's budget and hamstrings medical care with difficult border crossings (particularly in Gaza), medical diplomacy loses points for credibility.
3. *Relevance*: although incredibly important for the well-being of Palestinians, medical diplomacy does not carry great relevance for the solving of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and therefore has been awarded only two points under this criterium. The conflict is largely a political issue, and increased medical cooperation will not result in great strides towards overall peace, especially considering the continual injuries and deaths incurred on the Gaza border.
4. *Geographical Impact and Extensions*: In this aspect, medical diplomacy was awarded the full three points for all areas (Gaza, West Bank, Israel) called upon to utilize Medical diplomacy. Even though there are attacks on medical staff in Gaza, there is a massive need for the medical aid that Israel can provide.
5. *Feasibility/Capability:* Medical diplomacy is awarded the full five points in terms of feasibility and capability. Programs already exist in regard to this medical cooperation, and Israel has the economic capabilities to build effective programs for the Palestinians. However, how much are the Israelis willing to contribute at the end of the day since they control the budget for the Palestinian Authority?

Science Diplomacy:

1. *Positive outcomes:* Taking into consideration the number and dimension of the projects that have been carried out so far, out-

comes can be considered successful. However, not many projects have been carried out as yet. Thus a value of 3 has been assigned.

2. *Credibility:* Science is not a key element at the very root of the conflict, in the sense that other factors like religion, business or health are influencing the issue in a much more direct way. Therefore, the value of 2 was given, since there is low credibility with both sides that science could greatly influence the settlement.
3. *Relevance:* Even if science is not a key element at the root of the conflict, it plays an important role in the relaxation of tension, considering the general willingness of the science community to cooperate and the importance of science for the underdeveloped areas of Palestine. We should also consider education for mutual understanding and co-living, as well as its role in developing a community that will be able to give effective proposals for problem solving. Nonetheless, national identities and their political claims will hardly be changed through science. Therefore, a value of 3 is given.
4. *Geographical Impact and Extensions:* Science would have a huge geographical impact, since its advancements can be applied in any area of the conflict. A value of 3, the maximum, is assigned.
5. *Feasibility/Capability:* Science-related approaches are usually welcomed and doable. Thus 5 is given.

Religion Diplomacy:

1. *Positive Outcomes*: the positive outcomes of the already adopted initiatives are quite limited in terms of results. Thus, the value of 2 out of 5 has been assigned. Nonetheless, it should be borne in mind that it is a particularly risky and slippery topic.
2. *Credibility*: as a matter of fact, credibility is a key element of the whole strategy and instrument, as pointed out in the dedicated section of the paper. Thus the value of 3 out of 5 has been assigned, in the face of the inherent risks in case of discredit of the religious institutions involved in the application of the instrument.
3. *Relevance*: as mentioned above, the religious side of the conflict represents a parallel to the political one and has thus a particu-

larly relevant role in the resolution of the dispute. For this reason, a value of 4 out of 5 has been applied.

4. *Geographical Impact and Extensions*: the religious issue is equally distributed along the whole territory in which the conflict has taken and is taking place. Nonetheless, in certain areas religious hatred is so deeply rooted that the expansion of the applied instrument would be particularly limited if not completely null. Thus a value of 2 out of 3 has been assigned, in order to delimit the geographical application to the main areas in which dialogue is actually possible.
5. *Feasibility/Capability*: the implementation of the religious instrument as a way of establishment of network diplomacy relations is relatively feasible and cost effective (being based on dialogue and the contributions of the private sector in the forms of charity etc.). Nonetheless, the above mentioned issues related to legitimacy of the religious leaders involved might actually represent a serious issue in terms of factual implementation and achievement of positive (and expected) results. For this reason, a value of 3 out of 5 has been assigned.

Business Diplomacy:

1. *Positive Outcomes*: These functional interdependencies caused by economic complementarities and economic incentives a (with the support of joint institutions) will create some level of cooperation and can counteract segregation and decrease conflict potential. This implies a substantial potential for increasing trade between the parties of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict for economic gain but also for political reconciliation.
2. *Credibility*: In general, professional contacts with Palestinians are perceived as negative by Israelis. But Israeli traders who have existing business relationships with Palestinians perceive such links as significantly less dangerous and risky.
3. *Relevance*: The economic disequilibrium between both regions is significantly impacting conflict resolution. Supporting the Palestinian economy will help modernize the country, decrease disparity and provide new structures for development.

4. *Geographical Impact and Extensions*: Business diplomacy will mostly apply to the West Bank. Considering the lack of state authority in Gaza, business environment is still unsafe for a transnational company to grow. The first objective to reach Gaza will be to successfully develop water facilities and sewages. After that poverty should dampen and stability should grow.
5. *Feasibility/Capability*: Israel has the resources needed to develop such partnership. The main issue still is the security. If Palestine grows economically it will be harder for Israel to maintain its position. Still, according to estimated figures, even a 20 years presumable rapid economic development in Palestine could not possibly bring the country even a bit closer to Israel's level of economic development.

Digital diplomacy:

1. *Positive Outcome:* The relevant outcomes for what concerns digital diplomacy are localized only to certain parts of Palestine and are unlikely to influence Gaza's politics.Since the results are just effective in the West Bank-Israeli and Israeli-MENA relations, we decided for a result of 3 out of 5.
2. *Credibility:* Digital diplomacy has been considered as an interesting instrument for both sides of the conflict, thus we assume that the potential of internet-diplomacy is perceived as relevant. Of course we consider credible in the resolution of the conflict only the efforts to directly communicate with the adversary and not the projects of EDiplomacy related to external propaganda.
3. *Relevance:* we assign a score of 3/5 for what concerns 'Relevance' because, as explained before, the results will be most likely achieved in the long term and only if no major 'black swans' occur in the West Bank, while the security dilemma of Gaza (and the consequent cyclical use of violence) limits the relevance of Digital Diplomacy for the Hamas-Israeli side of the conflict.
4. *Geographical Impact and Extensions:* Internet connection is working in both Gaza and the West bank. Nevertheless, Digital Diplomacy is properly working only in the PLO area of responsibility.
5. *Feasibility/Capability:* Projects related to the development of network diplomacy have been already fielded and they are feasi-

ble from the technical perspective. We underline that structural political characteristics of the different areas of conflicts (Gaza and West Bank) undermine the diplomatic capability to achieve success using digital instruments and solutions, hence the score is 3/5 for Feasibility/Capabilities.

Social diplomacy:

1. *Positive Outcome:* section received the value of 4 as it highly and positively influences the quality and life standard of citizens. Improving the relations in the spheres of water and increase of food production are crucial for everyday and bring positive outcomes only. Furthermore, the interaction of population through health diplomacy and educations is beneficial too.
2. *Credibility:* is vital when applying various regional cooperation projects and the outcomes are the proof of its success, which results in high credibility. Therefore, the value 4 out of 5 was given to this element. When analysing the work of aforementioned programs, the credibility of the exact projects is very high as it encompasses the crucial areas such as agriculture, creation of new jobs - boosting the economy, empowerment of women and so on.
3. *Relevance:* regional cooperation is the essential element as far as the creation of fusion of not only business diplomacy, but agriculture, social diplomacy, health diplomacy is concerned. However, it was rewarded with the value 2 out of 5 mainly for the reason that the relations between Israelis and Palestinians are still very cold and there are various disputes and unresolved issues, which are the main reasons why the relevance of regional cooperation is low. However, if relations improve and mutual trust is achieved, the relevance of regional cooperation will play a significant role.
4. *Geographical Impact and Extensions*: as within the regional cooperation, there is a direct link with geography as it is directly related to the cooperation of three analysed areas - Israel, Palestine and Gaza. Therefore, the value 2 out of 3 is given to this element.

5. *Feasibility/Capability:* there is a great potential for feasibility of certain projects and capability of carrying them out. However, this element was assigned the value of 3 out of 5 mainly because up till now the relations within the three monitored areas are rather unstable, unpredictable and rather frosty now.

Conclusion

Considering the results obtained from the table (see Table Impact of Different Types of Diplomacy), the types of diplomacy that obtained the higher values are *Medical Diplomacy* (16), *Science Diplomacy* (16), *Business Diplomacy* (17) and *Digital Diplomacy* (17). This suggests that these kinds of network diplomacy instruments impact more effectively in the relaxation and conflict-solving of the Israeli-Palestine conflict. This by no means implies that the other types of diplomacy should be put away, since firstly, even if on a lower level, they also contribute to the settlement of tense relations and secondly, because as shown in the results obtained, they got lower values but only for a small difference; *Social Diplomacy* (15) and *Religion Diplomacy* (14), respectively. In particular, because of the inherent religious nature of the conflict, Religious diplomacy was expected to achieve a higher score. Nonetheless, because of the delicacy of the subject matter, the possible blowback effects and of the relatively low level of success of the initiatives taken so far, it would be recommended to start the implementation of the instrument from a lower level, in the hope that on the mid-long term the results will finally allow for a further implementation at higher levels.

After analysing how each kind of diplomacy could contribute to resolving the conflict, it is clear that none of them can provide a direct and short-term conclusion. Still, they play an essential role in creating a more peaceful environment for more effective negotiations of traditional diplomacy.

In conclusion, all of these instruments represent a highly valuable system that requires a contingent application in all spheres, in order to prepare a more fertile and open ground for the conduct of direct and public negotiations in a more positive and auspicious climate.

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ELENA S. MELKUMYAN

Arab Monarchies of the Gulf and Israel: the Evolution of Approaches

The Arab monarchic Gulf States, which include Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, are major players in the Middle East region. These states' interest in a political solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict, their willingness to act as a bridge between Israel and the large Arab world as well as their financial possibilities (that could potentially be used to build a future Palestinian State) raise the question of how the position of this group of States vis-à-vis the Arab-Israeli conflict has evolved and changed over time.

The Arab-Israeli Conflict Stance

The Arab monarchic Gulf States were not directly involved in the military confrontation between Arab countries and Israel. Their stance towards the conflict was determined by belonging to the larger Arab world and their membership in the League of Arab States (LAS), established in 1945) that united all independent Arab states. At that time, Saudi Arabia was the only Gulf state that joined the LAS. This organization declared war on Israel on the day of its independence. Saudi Arabia's position was consistent with the general anti-Israeli policy of the LAS.

Since gaining political independence in 1961, Kuwait has paid increased attention to the Arab-Israeli conflict because it needed other Arab states' support and sought to strengthen its role in the inter-Arab arena. This was especially necessary in light of Iraq's claim to Kuwait as part of its territory. During the Six-Day War in June of 1967, Kuwait sent its Yarmouk motorized infantry brigade to the Egyptian front in order to give support to the Arab side of the conflict. At the LAS summit in Khar-

toum in September 1967, it was decided to resume oil production and lift the embargo, which had been imposed on the recommendation of the LAS' finance, economy and oil ministers.

The summit resolution declared that 'oil is a vital Arab resource that can be used for Arab purposes and play a role in ensuring that Arab countries that have been victims of aggression and have lost part of their revenues as a result, are quickly able to eliminate the consequences of such aggression'.[1] Saudi Arabia and Kuwait pledged yearly contributions of 50 and 55 million respectively GBP pounds,[2] starting in October 1967 until all the consequences of the Israeli aggression would have been eliminated.

Although the rest of the Arab Gulf states had not yet gained political independence, they all supported the Arab States in their confrontation with Israel. For example, in 1967, the people of Qatar expressed their solidarity with the Arab peoples who were subjected to Israeli aggression. Demonstrations in support of the Arab states were held in Qatar, funds were raised for the Arab people of Palestine.[3]

In the foreign policy agenda of the Arab Gulf monarchies after the 1967 war the Palestinian question gained prominence as the number of Palestinians working in these countries increased markedly at that time. Thus, speaking at the XXIII session of the UN General Assembly on October 22, 1968, Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah stated that Kuwait supports 'the struggle of Palestinian resistance groups fighting in the occupied Arab territories for their liberation'.[4] The Kuwaiti official position was that 'the key to solving the Middle East conflict is to solve the problem of the Arab people of Palestine' and that 'Kuwait will not accept a solution that is not supported by the Palestinian people themselves'.[5]

Since gaining independence in the early 1970s, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Oman, which joined the LAS at that period, have all formulated a position on the Arab-Israeli conflict. This was a prerequisite for entering the united community of Arab states and securing its political support. In his first speech the Emir of Qatar Halifa Bin Jasem Al Thani, marking the country's declaration of independence, emphasized: 'We will do all we can to achieve Arab unity and fight for the victory of Arab aspirations, especially liberating the desecrated land of Palestine and the occupied Arab lands. It is the duty of every Arab. Our State will fully support the realization of Arab people of Palestine's right

to their ancestral homeland. We will also provide comprehensive support to Arab States in their struggle to return the occupied [Palestinian] territories'.[6]

The political rhetoric of the Arab Gulf states' leaders included two fundamental components - 'support for the Palestinian people in their struggle for their legitimate rights' and 'exposure of Israeli crimes against the Arab nation'.

The Gulf States, being in possession of significant energy resources, used them to contribute to the Arab-wide struggle against Israel. During the October 1973 war, they imposed an oil embargo on the US and other allies of Israel, which led to the outbreak of an energy crisis that resulted in a rapid rise in oil prices and, as a result, vastly increased financial hard-currency resources of Arab monarchies. These opportunities were used by them as a tool to strengthen their position in the international arena.

However, the conclusion of the 1978 Camp David Accords and the signing in 1979 of a peace treaty between Israel and Egypt led to Egypt's isolation in the Arab world with the Gulf monarchies breaking diplomatic relations with it. The only exception was the Sultanate of Oman, which regarded these agreements as 'a step towards peace in the Middle East'. Oman occupied politically and economically a marginalized position in the Arab community and its special stance on these questions was not strongly condemned by the leading regional powers.

Various approaches to the Arab-Israeli conflict were emerging between Arab states at that time. The 'progressive' Arab states that formed the Resistance and Defiance Front were determined to continue armed struggle against Israel. The 'conservative' Arab countries, which included the Gulf monarchies, were committed to the peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Thus, in 1981, Saudi Arabia proposed a political solution called the 'Fahd Peace Plan'. It demanded that Israel withdraw from all occupied Arab territories, establish an independent Palestinian state in East Jerusalem, dismantle Israeli settlements in the occupied Arab lands and resolve the refugee problem by compensating those Palestinians who did not want to return to Palestine. At the same time, the plan proclaimed the right of all countries in the region to live in peace,[7] thus indirectly accepting the existence of Israel as one of the regional states.

The Gulf states, directly threatened by the Iran-Iraq war that began in September 1980, were extremely interested in a peaceful resolution of the conflict between Israel and the Arab countries.

In 1981, the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC), was established that united all of the Arab monarchies of the region. At the first GCC summit, held in Abu Dhabi on 26 May 1981, the member-states declared that 'establishing stability in the Gulf region lies through achieving peace in the Middle East'. The final communiqué of the Summit stated that the Palestinian question must be resolved in a just manner, one that ensures the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to return to their homeland and to establish their independent State. GCC demanded the withdrawal of Israeli troops from all occupied territories, especially East Jerusalem, condemning 'Zionist criminal acts against the Lebanese people, Palestinian refugee camps' and 'provocations' against Syria.[8] This position was guided by the need to strengthen Arab solidarity, and its rhetoric was in line with the broader Arab world's approach to Israel and the Palestinian issue.

The Cooperation Council expressed its positions on the most pressing issues in the Arab world and the Palestinian question and Israeli foreign policy were generally on the agenda of all the summits held by the organization. However, those issues were considered from different perspectives, depending on the changing political context. For example, at the fourth Summit held in Riyadh in November 1981, the need to achieve unity in the Palestine Liberation Organization was stressed, which at that time was seriously divided among its members.

The Arab-Israeli conflict did not directly affect GCC member States. Their security depended first and foremost on the situation in the Gulf region itself.

Negotiation with Israel in the Context of the Madrid Conference

The Madrid Conference, which began in October 1991, was aimed at achieving peace and ending the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The prerequisites for the convening of the Madrid Conference were created by fundamental shifts at both the global and regional levels. The bipolar system of international relations was coming to an end with the Soviet Union, on the eve of its disintegration, abandoning its reliance on

ideological principles in foreign policy. The USSR's desire to improve relations with the West was a factor that contributed to its co-sponsorship of the Madrid Conference, with the United States being the main initiator.

At the time, political situation in the Middle East was greatly affected by the Iraqi aggression that began in August 1990, when Iraq carried out an occupation of Kuwait. The reaction of the Arab community was not homogenous. Kuwait's GGC partners gave it full support and issued a statement condemning the invasion of Kuwait.[9] However, when foreign ministers of LAS members met on 3 August 1990, they did not express solidarity against Iraqi aggression. Jordan, Yemen, Sudan, Mauritania and the PLO abstained from voting and Libyan delegation left the session in protest. The lack of unity in the Arab community was also demonstrated by the LAS summit held on 10 August of the same year. Its resolution not only condemned the Iraqi aggression, but also the intention to send Arab military units to Saudi Arabia to join the multinational forces under of the US leadership. Iraq, Libya and the PLO, voted against the resolution. Algeria and Yemen abstained, Sudan and Mauritania raised their objections, while Tunisia did not attend the meeting.[10]

The PLO position was met with disappointment in Kuwait. As heir to the Kuwaiti throne Saad Al-Abdallah Al-Sabah, noted, 'Kuwait has supported the Palestinian Liberation Organization since its establishment in 1964, so its position during the Iraqi aggression against Kuwait caused misunderstanding not only among the Kuwaiti government and people, but also among all Arabs'. He also stated that in return for the financial and moral support provided by Kuwait to the PLO and the Palestinians living in the country, Kuwait received PLO's 'support for the aggression and assistance to the aggressor'.[11]

Soon after Kuwait was liberated, numerous cases of Arab migrants cooperating with the occupation authorities were uncovered. Most of them were Palestinians, who enjoyed various privileges in the Gulf countries and often held important positions in society, working as journalists, lawyers, doctors, engineers, university professors as well as middle rank and senior officials. The number of Palestinians in all Gulf countries had fallen sharply since the liberation of Kuwait. At the same time, the Kuwaiti Government continued to provide assistance to the PLO. The final communiqué of the Kuwaiti People's Congress, held in Jeddah in December 1990, noted that 'the support of some Palestinian leaders for the Iraqi occupation will not affect the solidarity of the Kuwaiti people with the Palestinian people in their just struggle for the liberation of

their homeland and their trampled rights'.[12]

The Iraqi crisis has not only changed the balance of power in the Arab geopolitical space, it also affected the perception of Israel by the Arab public, which previously viewed it as a major threat to Arab national interests. During the war for the liberation of Kuwait waged by the multinational coalition forces, Iraq began to launch rocket attacks on Israeli territory, hoping to draw Israel into the military conflict, turning it into yet another Arab-Israeli confrontation. Israel refrained from retaliatory strikes. The Arab Gulf States and Israel thus equally became subjects to Iraqi aggression. They now had a common enemy, which affected the nature of their relations which became not so hostile during and immediately after the Madrid Conference.

The Arab Gulf States welcomed the convening of the Madrid Peace Conference, as it 'was the culmination of a peace effort to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict, the path of peace that has always been supported by GCC States'.[13] Saudi Arabia and the Secretary-General of the GCC participated as observers. The other member States participated in multilateral Arab-Israeli negotiations from 1991 to 1996. For example, in October 1994, Bahrain hosted one of the multilateral negotiations devoted to the environment, Kuwait also participated in multilateral negotiations, but was not particularly active and did not establish any contacts with Israel.

A working group on water issues negotiated in Oman in April 1994 resulting in the establishment in this country of the Middle East Desalination Research Center.

In September 1994, members of the Cooperation Council lifted the secondary and tertiary boycott of Israel. In December 1994, Oman was the first Arab country to receive an official visit by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. In April 1996, Prime Minister Shimon Peres also visited the country.

In 1995, Oman opened an Israeli trade mission on its territory. In response, Israel also opened an Omani trade mission. Qatar was another GCC country that began to establish contacts with the Jewish State within the Madrid process. In 1996, Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres visited Qatar and met with its ruler, Emir Hamad Al Thani. They agreed to open an Israeli trade mission in Doha.

In November 1997, Qatar held the Fourth Annual Economic Conference with the Arab countries' and Israeli participation. Although all GCC States participated in the previous conferences, the Doha confer-

ence provoked controversy among its members. Bahrain, Kuwait and Oman sent their delegations to the conference, while Saudi Arabia and the UAE refused to participate 'due to the lack of progress in the Middle East peace process'.[14] However, the conference host, Qatar, stated its sovereign right to conduct its own foreign policy.[15]

The Cooling of Relations in the Early 2000s

Israeli trade missions in the Arab Gulf States were closed in September 2000, when the second Palestinian Intifada was launched in Israel. As Yousef Alawi, acting Foreign Minister of Oman, said during a conversation with his Israeli counterpart at a conference in Doha in September 2000, 'the Israeli Trade Mission in Oman will be closed until a Palestinian state agreement is reached'.[16]

The year 2000 marked the end of the Madrid process. The Oslo Accords concluded between the PLO and Israel in 1993 were no longer implemented. Negotiations between Israel and Syria also ceased. The development of relations between Israel and the Arab Gulf monarchies stopped, although sporadic contacts continued. Thus, in November 2000, Qatar announced the closure of the Israeli trade mission on its territory. At the same time, this did not prevent a secret meeting between Israeli Foreign Minister Shlomo Ben-Ami and high-level Qatari representatives in Geneva in December 2000.

In 2005, Qatar asked Israel to support its candidature as a non-permanent Asian member of the United Nations Security Council. The Qatari government's decision to continue contact with Israel was based on the belief that a solution to the Middle East conflict can only be achieved through negotiations. The Qatari foreign minister arrived at the LAS summit in Beirut in the summer of 2006 from Tel Aviv, where he held talks on regional developments. Qatar sought to play a mediating role in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

In October 2006, Qatar invited Israel to participate in the Sixth International Conference on Democracy, in Doha, which was held under the auspices of the United Nations. The Israeli delegation was to be headed by its Foreign Minister, Tzipi Livni. However, due to the participation of Hamas representatives, the Israeli delegation did not come. The invitation of the Israeli delegation had drawn strong criticism from some of Qatar's neighbors, primarily Saudi Arabia.

In April 2008. Qatar invited Livni to make a keynote speech at the Eighth Conference on Democracy, Development and Free Trade in Doha. In response, Syria and Iran refused to participate in the conference. After her visit, Hamas leader Khaled Mashal visited Qatar.

In 2009, some Israeli officials visited the Middle East Desalination Research Center in Oman and held talks with Omani representatives.[17]

Following the Israeli military operation in the Gaza Strip in December 2008, Qatar's political ties with Israel were drastically severed. However, trade exchanges between the two countries continued, albeit on a small scale. Israel supplied Qatar with machinery and technology and imported some plastic goods from Qatar.[18]

Thus Qatar pursued a dual policy towards Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict. It established stronger relations with Israel than other Gulf States, while at the same time supporting all anti-Israeli actions and allegations of other Arab countries. Qatar's contacts with the Israeli side occurred at the same time as it provided significant assistance to the Palestinian National Authority, not only to the Government of Mahmoud Abbas, but also to Hamas. Qatar's policy was motivated by its desire to increase its political role in the region and to become one of its influential players.

The Arab Gulf Monarchies And Israel at a Time of Heightened Regional Tensions

The events of the Arab Spring transformed the Middle East region: a new balance of power has emerged, regional security has become more complex and new conflict zones have emerged. Under these circumstances, the Arab-Israeli conflict, to a great degree, lost its former significance as a system-forming factor of a unified Middle East geopolitical regional system. The political positions of Israel and Arab Gulf monarchies have become in many respects identical. Both sides negatively perceived Iran's policies in the region of the Middle East, which they viewed as a threat to regional security. The Iranian nuclear program was of particular concern. Their reaction to the Joint Comprehensive Action Plan (JCAP) in July 2015 was negative. In Cyprus, a secret meeting was held between Israeli and UAE representatives to discuss this situation around the Iranian nuclear problem.

In 2016, Saudi Arabia, followed by Bahrain, severed diplomatic relations with Iran. The other GCC member states, with the exception of Oman, lowered the level of their diplomatic representation in Tehran (Qatar in 2017, against the background of the crisis in its relations with Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, UAE and Egypt, restored them in full).

A new round of tension with Iran has helped to intensify contacts between the Gulf States and Israel. Meetings between representatives of the two sides were generally informal. In November 2018, Minister of Transport and Intelligence Israel Katz visited Oman, where he participated in a transport conference and proposed to build a rail link from the Israeli coast of the Mediterranean Sea to the Persian Gulf. In October 2018, Israeli Minister of Culture and Sports Miri Regev visited Abu Dhabi as part of a delegation accompanying the Israeli judo team.

Qatar, for its part, has held open contacts with Israel in the Gaza Strip since late 2018 with the view to ease tensions in the region and facilitate indirect negotiations between Israel and Hamas. Saudi representatives also met with the Israelis, but their meetings were not advertised. Saudi Arabia was unable to establish closer relationship with Israel for a number of reasons. First, the Saudi anti-systemic informal opposition would have been able to use such rapprochement in its propaganda. Second, Saudi Arabia, having become one of the most influential Arab states as a result of the change in the balance of power post Arab Spring, had to maintain traditional position of defending the interests of Arab countries, demanding from Israel to meet their just demands.

Kuwait also took a special stance - refusing to change its position towards Israel and continuing to provide assistance to the Palestinians. In 2018, Kuwait provided $50 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) to offset a decrease in the United States contribution. It also criticized the US recognition of Jerusalem as the sole and indivisible capital of Israel, as well as the US decision to move its embassy to Jerusalem. The Kuwait representative also did not attend a conference in Bahrain organized by the US in June 2019 to publicize its proposals for peaceful solution between Israel and the Palestinians.[19] Kuwait's cautious policy on Arab-Israeli reconciliation stems from the need for the Kuwaiti authorities to take into account the positions of the parliament which possesses sufficient authority in Kuwait. It represents various opposition political forces, both Islamists and conservative, who oppose a change in relations with Israel and continue to view support for the Palestinians as a duty of all Arab countries.

The other GCC States have not been restricted in their relations with Israel, which has facilitated their interaction in various fields. Informal exchange of intelligence information has been established between Israel and the UAE. In addition, Israel, like the Gulf States, participated in the International Task Force operating in Jordan devoted to intelligence-sharing and military cooperation.[20]

An important factor that determined the new approaches of Israel and the Arab Gulf monarchies to the possibility of developing mutual contacts was their strategic alliance with the United States. The strengthening of the strategic alliance between the United States and the GCC states, after Donald Trump became US President, put a new emphasis in the American policy towards the Middle East conflict settlement. The plan, developed by the American administration, suggested that it would be implemented with the help of US Arab allies with special role given to the Gulf states.

In October 2018, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu paid an official visit to Oman where he met with Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Said who governed the country at that time, to discuss ways to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. Currently, Oman appears to take on a mediating role between Israel and the Arab world, as evidenced by the visit of PNA Chairman Mahmoud Abbas to Oman the previous day. Mediation has in fact been a prominent feature of Oman's foreign policy. Moreover, Oman has always been a supporter of a peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It was one of the few Arab countries that did not condemn Egypt for signing the Camp David accords and the peace treaty with Israel, nor did it sever diplomatic relations with Egypt.

Following the death of Sultan Qaboos bin Said, the creator of Oman's foreign policy towards Arab-Israeli conflict on 10 January 2020, his successor, Haitham bin Tariq Al Said, promised to follow the foreign policy line of his predecessor.

In July 2018, the Council for Cooperation countries and Jordan met in Jeddah, where Saudi representatives stated that an understanding had been reached between Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and President Trump regarding the mechanism for creating a 'Middle East strategic alliance[21]' with the aims of resolving the Arab-Israeli confrontation and weakening Iran.

In February 2019, the Gulf States took part in a conference in Warsaw that was attended by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu. The conference

was organized by the United States to create an anti-Iranian bloc of Middle Eastern states.

On June 18, 2019 Saudi Arabia held two summits in Mecca – one for the GCC countries and another for the Arab member-states of the LAS. The final communiqué of the Summit of the Cooperation Council countries expressed support for the American strategy on Iran, while the LAS summit condemned the actions of Iran and its allies for attacks on Saudi Arabian oil facilities and UAE tankers. At the same time, Arab leaders reaffirmed the central importance of the Palestinian issue and the Arab Peace Initiative.[22]

The Gulf monarchies are politically stable states which were not significantly disturbed by the events of the Arab Spring. Mass protests took place in Bahrain, Kuwait and Oman, but they were not directed against existing regimes, whose legitimacy was not challenged by the opposition forces. For Israel, therefore, establishing political and economic ties with that group of states seems like the profitable direction of policy in the Arab world. Moreover, Gulf states were among the active supporters of a peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. Potentially, their interest also lies in the development of economic relations with Israel in order to achieve the goals of long-term fundamental economic restructuring and diversification.

However, the Gulf monarchies will not be able to abandon the fundamental demands of the Arab community, above all, the establishment of an independent Palestinian State. The final communiqué of the Riyadh Declaration of the GCC Summit held in December 2019 confirmed the firm position of the member states on the Palestinian problem, naming it 'the major problem of the Arab and Muslim world'. This document reiterated 'support for the rights of the Palestinian people in the territories occupied in June 1967 and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital', as well as 'the resolution of the refugee problem in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative, UN documents and international law'. The Riyadh summit of GCC called on the international community to 'intensify efforts to resolve the confrontation, while respecting the legitimate rights of the brotherly Palestinian people'.[23]

The Riyadh Declaration condemned the actions of the Israeli authorities against Palestinians, including the destruction of Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem, attempts by Israel to change the character of the city

and its demographic structure. It also contained demands for the dismantling of Israeli settlements in the West Bank.[24] The Arab Gulf monarchies had thus reaffirmed their unwavering positions on major issues of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

After the announcement of the US President Donald Trump's plan of the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in the beginning of 2020, the position of the Arab Gulf monarchies confirmed their limited ability to influence the larger Arab world's position on the question of Palestine. During the announcement of the US plan in Washington, the ambassadors of the three Gulf countries - Bahrain, UAE and Oman - were present, indicating their participation and tacit support for the plan with the Americans. The first statements by leaders of these Gulf monarchies thanked Trump for his efforts and called on the Palestinian National Authority and Israel to resume direct negotiations.[25] However, after an emergency meeting of the League of Arab States in Cairo at the end of January 2020, which rejected the plan as 'not meeting Palestinian aspirations' and not being in line with the Arab Peace Initiative (which envisaged the creation of a Palestinian state on the basis of the 1967 borders and East Jerusalem as its capital), their position changed.[26] No Gulf states have expressed support for the American plan after LAS meeting. The support for the LAS decision was also given by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which also held its emergency meeting at the time.

Despite the official position voiced by the leaders of the Arab monarchies of the Gulf after the Arab League summit, on August 13, 2020, a joint statement by the United States, Israel and the UAE was announced on the normalization of relations between the UAE and Israel. On September 15, 2020, an agreement was signed in Washington to normalize Israel's relations with the two Arab states of the Gulf - Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates. It was called the 'Peace Agreement of Abraham'. The declaration published on this occasion stated: 'We believe that the best way to address challenges is through cooperation and dialogue and that developing friendly relations among states advances the interests of lasting peace in the Middle East and around the world. We encourage efforts to promote interfaith and intercultural dialogue to advance a culture of peace among the three Abrahamic religions and all humanity.[27]

Contacts between Israel and the UAE began to develop at a rapid pace, in contrast to Israeli-Bahraini relations, since the Bahraini authorities, due to the more complicated internal political situation in the country, deliberately restrained their advance.

Conclusion

The Arab monarchic states of the Persian Gulf region are striving to bring the Arab-Israeli conflict to an end, primarily because of the interest in preserving regional stability. These states have shown the willingness to find, together with Israel, ways to solve the Palestinian problem which would be acceptable to the Arab world. This, of course, is the most difficult and complex of all problems caused by the Arab-Israeli confrontation. Moreover, the Arab States are aware of the key importance of this issue to the overall settlement of the Middle East conflict.

The attitude of this group of states towards the Middle East conflict has changed as a result of regional and global geopolitical shifts in regional situation. During the period of military Arab-Israeli interstate confrontation, their positions did not differ from that taken by the League of Arab States (LAS), of which they are all members.

In the 1980s, the Arab Gulf States became active supporters of a peaceful solution to the conflict. The King Fahd Peace Initiative was the beginning of this new period in the development of conflict resolution. Their active participation in the Madrid Peace Conference and multilateral negotiations with Israel was a logical continuation of the chosen course for peaceful solution. The launch of the Arab Peace Initiative, adopted by the LAS as a common Arab position on the Arab-Israeli conflict, was yet another confirmation of their readiness to include Israel in a unified regional system in the Middle East.

The aggravation of the situation in the Arab geopolitical space, caused by the intensification of terrorist activities and numerous regional conflicts, forced the Gulf states to look for new ways to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict - a major destabilizing factor in the region. The confrontation between the Gulf States and Iran accelerated that process, in which contacts with Israel should have helped to find a solution acceptable to both parties to the conflict.

The 'Deal of the Century' - the American plan for the settlement of relations between Israel and the Palestinian National Authority, announced on January 29, 2020, was condemned by the Palestinian leadership and Arab leaders, which did not become an obstacle for Bahrain and the UAE to conclude peace agreements with Israel. Contacts between Israel and the UAE are developing successfully, while Bahrain is in no hurry to expand its ties with Israel. The position of the other members of the Cooperation Council is not unanimous: Oman supported the peace

agreements with Israel, which were concluded by its partners, but is in no hurry to follow their example. Qatar insists on the need to achieve progress in the settlement of Israeli-Palestinian relations as a condition for normalizing relations with Israel. Kuwait also stresses its commitment to protecting the rights of the Palestinian people. Saudi Arabia is not yet ready to make peace with Israel, fearing a negative reaction from the Arab and Muslim communities and internal opposition. The normalization of relations with Israel in all Arab monarchies of the Gulf will depend on the regional situation and the policy of Biden Administration in Washington.

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GRIGORY G. KOSACH

Saudi Arabia: Normalization of Relations with Israel?

The normalization of Saudi-Israeli relations is crucial for the Middle East system of international relations. Its positive outcome would change the face of the region, removing this geopolitical space (due to Riyadh's role as a major regional power) from the never ending Arab-Israeli confrontation.

The development of Saudi-Israeli contacts in recent years represent a clear trend, confirmed by the words of Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in an interview with *The Atlantic* in Washington in early April 2018: 'I believe that Palestinians and Israelis have the right to own land,' but on condition that 'the rights of the Palestinian people' are respected. The prince denied any 'religious reasons' making the existence of Israel in the Middle East impossible, stressing that 'Israel is a big economy compared to their size and it's a growing economy, and of course there are a lot of interests we share with Israel and if there is peace, there would be a lot of interest between Israel and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and countries like Egypt and Jordan'.[1]

The Crown Prince's words meant that for Riyadh, normalization of relations with Israel is possible only in the broader context of resolving the Middle East conflict (primarily its Palestinian component). Focusing on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Riyadh's view of Israel (and previously of the Jewish-Palestinian community/the Yishuv) has been evolving, subject to regional and world events.

Palestine in Saudi Foreign Policy: 1920s-1930s

The reason why the founder of the Saudi State, Ibn Saud, first paid attention to the intra-Palestinian situation was the Jerusalem Muslim shrines. Their status was disputed by the Jewish-Palestinian community. But in the 1930s the other aspects of the Palestinian problem - the growth of the Jewish population and its aspirations for statehood - were also brought into the spotlight. The Yishuv was gaining power, becoming, the Saudis believed, another form of European expansion.

Supporting the Arab-Palestinian movement against the Yishuv (and establishing ties with Mufti Amin al-Husseini), Ibn Saud sought to expand his state's sphere of influence as well as to achieve the final legitimization of his power in the Hijaz. Becoming in 1926 'the Servant of the Two Noble Sanctuaries,' he stressed the 'indissoluble connection' between Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem. At that time the al-Aqsa Mosque was transformed into the 'third sanctuary' of the Islamic world, depriving the former Hashemite rulers of the Hijaz not only of their rights to the throne in a state that had become a Saudi province, but also of their ability (as British sanctioned Trans-Jordanian rulers in contact with Zionists) to defend Arab-Palestinian rights. The struggle for Palestine, including its armed phase, the Palestinian War of 1948-1949 (where Saudi involvement was symbolic), turned Ibn Saud into a regional player.

Being an advocate of Arab-Palestinian autonomy when the future of Palestine was concerned, Ibn Saud, nevertheless, was opposed to Arab interference (including military interference) in internal Palestinian events. The presence of a small Saudi military force in Palestine in 1948-1949 was determined by the fact that the monarch was 'bound by the collective decisions of the conferences' of the League of Arab States (LAS) members in the first half of the 1940s.[2] The same reason also determined Saudi Arabia's participation in the economic boycott of Israel, including the boycott of companies from third countries that cooperate with the Jewish state.[3]

The appearance of Israel on the political map of the Middle East did not change the general direction of the kingdom's foreign policy. Ibn Saud and his successors (Saud, Faisal, and Khaled) did not even allow the hypothetical possibility of de facto recognition of Israel, remaining formally at war with the Jewish state. Riyadh constantly stressed that 'the Jewish state is the cause of dangerous turmoil for the whole region'.[4]

Saudi perspective on the Palestinian issue after the creation of Israel

The outcome of the Palestinian war changed the situation in the Middle East. The ascent of the military in a number of Arab countries in the region altered the intra-Arabic relations. Pan-Arabism was becoming a tool that seemed capable of changing the outcome of the first Arab-Israeli military campaign. The Soviet-American rivalry was dividing the Arab world into 'radicals' and monarchical 'conservatives'.

In May 1964, the Palestinian National Congress held in East Jerusalem proclaimed the establishment of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). The Saudi 'restraint' was notable[5] - the PLO was patronized by the Nasser regime. This did not mean, however, that Riyadh did not seek contacts with the Fatah outside the PLO. For example, the Saudi leadership went to great lengths (including providing financial support) to prepare Fatah armed insurrection in Israel on 1 January 1965. In early 1967, King Feisal bin Abdul Aziz and Yasser Arafat met for the first time. In May 1973, Fatah opened an office in the Saudi capital. In November of that year, the meeting of the LAS foreign ministers adopted a Saudi proposal recognizing the PLO (by which time Fatah had become its supporting structure, with its Executive Committee headed by Arafat) as 'the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people'.[6] In January 1989 Arafat opened the 'State of Palestine' embassy in Riyadh.[7]

In the late 1960s and early 1970s the Saudi position towards Palestine was changing. Riyadh realized that the most important 'power centers' in the region (Egypt and Syria), after their defeat in the June 1967 war as well as the losses sustained in October 1973, were not longer able to be the Palestinians' patron states. They became countries that needed Saudi help themselves.[8] After October 1973, Saudi-American engagement was also changing. The Saudi 'ruling class' sought to facilitate contacts between the US administration and the PLO, on the one hand, and, on the other, began to pressure Washington to change its approach to the Middle East conflict.

In October 1974, Saudi diplomacy achieved an important success that involved inviting the PLO, as the 'representative of the Palestinian people', to the 29th session of the UN General Assembly that discussed the Palestinian question through Resolution 3210. The attendance of a delegation led by Arafat resulted in the granting of permanent observer status to the PLO at the UN. Riyadh's achievement was underpinned by

the conditions prevailing on the world energy market: in 1973, the kingdom (with ARAMCO nationalized) imposed an embargo on oil deliveries to the United States and European countries.

Riyadh was beginning to see itself as a leading regional power. Saudi diplomacy started working on building up its capacity as a power center immediately after the June 1967 war. The LAS summit held in Khartoum in September of that year 'restored' unity to the Arab region, facilitating, in the words of a Saudi scholar, 'the crystallization of a new form of inter-Arab relations. That form was 'Arab solidarity,' defined by 'the unity of the Arab political course towards Israel,' which included the eliminating of 'the consequences of the 1967 Israeli aggression' and 'ensuring the rights of the Palestinian people'.[9]

Anwar Sadat's trip to Jerusalem (November 1977) encouraged Saudi Arabia to look for a settlement formula that could become, 'a positive Arab alternative to the US-Israeli partial settlement strategy'. On the other hand, this formula would encourage 'the Arabs to depart from the negative position of rejecting a partial settlement' by putting forward a 'positive approach - a minimally acceptable pan-Arab conditions for moving toward a peace treaty'.

In August 1981, at the eleventh LAS summit in Fes, Morocco, Fahd bin Abdulaziz presented the Saudi plan for a peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It envisaged 'the withdrawal of Israel from all Arab territories occupied in 1967', including East Jerusalem, 'the dismantling of the settlements built by Israel after 1967', 'ensuring freedom of worship and religious observance of all religions in holy places'. The future king's plan affirmed 'the right of the Palestinian people to return and to property restitution for those who do not wish to return' and the establishment of 'an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital'.[10]

Riyadh also proposed how to implement the main points of its plan: 'placing the West Bank and Gaza under UN control for a transitional period'. Implementation of the plan would mean 'the right of the states in the region to exist in peace'. Fahd bin Abdul Aziz referred to the United Nations or a group of UN member states as the guarantor of peace in the Middle East. However, the official Saudi interpretation of the plan was that the proposed initiative was aimed at 'putting an end to Israel's defiant behavior' and emphasizing that 'the fate of the Palestinians is the basis of the Middle East equation'. The adoption of this plan by the Fez

summit defined the future Palestinian state as the natural field of action for the PLO. With this in mind, Riyadh welcomed the Declaration of Independence of the State of Palestine adopted in mid-November 1988 by the 19th (emergency) session of the Palestinian National Council, which envisaged the establishment of national statehood in parts of 'historic Palestine' - the West Bank and Gaza Strip.[11]

Saudi Politics and the Palestinian Question: Time for Change

Saudi Arabia participated in the 1991 Madrid peace conference, initiated after the liberation of Kuwait, as an observer state. The Saudis supported all Arab-Israeli contacts at the multilateral conference. This meant, to use the words of a Saudi foreign policy official, that Riyadh 'saw the need to provide full assistance to the peace movement in the Middle East, confident that peace had become the Arabs' strategic choice'. Fahd bin Abdulaziz's plan, he noted, had 'entered the phase of its practical implementation'.[12]

Saudi Arabia no longer felt suspicious regarding direct contacts between the Arab states and Israel (it applied to Israel's relationship with Bahrain, Oman and Qatar, the countries of the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) patronized by Riyadh. These relationship ceased by 2009). The Saudis simply pointed out that such contacts should be accompanied by a search for ways to 'resolve the pressing issues: the establishment of a Palestinian state, the elimination of settlements, the status of Jerusalem and the return of refugees'. As Riyadh stressed at the time, 'to the extent that progress is made in bilateral negotiations, multilateral contacts will develop'.[13]

The Palestinian-Israeli agreements (the Declaration of Principles, mainly Gaza and Jericho) initiated substantial Saudi financial aid to the newly established Palestinian National Authority (PNA). Throughout the period leading up to the beginning of the al-Aqsa mosque intifada, the Saudis invested in the development of Palestinian infrastructure (including an international airport and a seaport in Gaza). No customs duties were levied on Palestinian goods entering the kingdom.[14] Riyadh's goal of these undertakings was to promote 'a just and comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict.[15]

The Palestinian issue was becoming a leading Saudi policy, especially 'the restoration of the rights of the Palestinian people and the return of

Muslim holy sites currently under Israeli military control. Resolving the issue 'justly' would mean that 'Israel would have an opportunity for peace based on the basic principle of the process: land in exchange for peace and UN Security Council Resolutions Nos. 242 and 338'. In the spring of 2002 this Saudi position was finally confirmed.

The LAS summit held in Beirut in late March - early April, 2002 approved the plan of (then Crown Prince) Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz. The plan was named the Arab Peace Initiative.[16] It has since provided the basic framework for the Saudi approach to resolving the Arab-Israeli and Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Riyadh demanded that Israelis withdraw from the occupied territories and return to the pre-June 1967 armistice lines that would define the state borders between Israel and Palestine. The Arab countries responded by declaring their readiness to establish full-fledged relations with Israel. The prospect of a unified regional system emerged (but on Riyadh's terms) that would address the prohibition of weapons of mass destruction, arms control, environmental concerns and regional security issues.

The Saudi plan envisaged the creation of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital which, according to Riyadh, would not have been unacceptable for Israel in the situation that came about in the early 2000s. After all, Israel had accepted the idea of Palestinian statehood by signing the Oslo accords. In addition, the Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz plan contained references to a 'just solution' for the Palestinian refugee problem, suggesting various options for its implementation.

Speaking at the Beirut summit, Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz addressed his initiative to 'the Israeli people' (the text of the initiative noted that it was addressed to 'the government of Israel and all Israelis'), stressing: 'Let me say to the Israeli people that the ongoing violence has led to the fact that Israelis are far from living in security and peace.' He further remarked, 'The Israeli people must believe in the possibility of peace and understand that peace and the continuation of the occupation are impossible.' Addressing the Palestinians, the future monarch noted that the alternative to the previous 'struggle for liberation' was a 'just and comprehensive peace'.[17]

At the beginning of 2004 Saudi Arabia initiated the 'Road to Development, Modernization and Reforms' initiative that was adopted by the XVI Summit of the LAS in Tunis in May 2004, a document envisaging the future shape of the Arab world. Proclaiming the 'integrity of the Middle

East, including Israel', the document declared that the Arab-Israeli conflict constituted 'the most important obstacle to the unification of the entire region for the sake of its comprehensive development and the creation of a secure and prosperous future for all its sons'.[18]

Saudi Arabia's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO) was finalized in November 2005. Using the provisions of Article 35 of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), which allows a WTO member to refrain from applying GATT provisions to another member, unless both have previously 'entered into tariff negotiations'.[19] Thus, the Kingdom has been able to exclude the possibility of direct trade contacts with Israel. Nevertheless, Riyadh has refused to boycott those WTO members that maintain relations with the Jewish state.[20]

Attitudes Towards Israel as a Subject of Public Debate

The time since King Salman bin Abdul Aziz came to power (January 2015) has changed the public and political atmosphere. One manifestation of these changes was the publications in Saudi press that muted the possibility of relations normalization with Israel. A series of articles (printed between July and August 2016) by Siham Al-Qahtani, a journalist in the *Al-Jazeera* branch in Riyad attempted (within the official position) to analyze the 'societal fears shrouding Arab-Israeli relations' in the light of the socio-economic restructuring started by Mohammed bin Salman and set out in the 'Vision for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: 2030' project.

Siham Al-Qahtani (far from being a convinced supporter of the recognition of Israel) stated that while the Arab world had become accustomed to the fact that 'not every Jew is a Zionist and an Israeli', it was still obvious that 'every Israeli is a Zionist'.[21] She claimed that the Arab world was convinced of the existence of a 'Jewish conspiracy', where 'behind every catastrophe in Arab history, whether ... the assassination of Caliph Osman or the takeover of Palestine, there are hidden Jewish secret acts'. Instead of addressing the real cause of the 'seizure of Palestine' - 'European anti-Semitism', employing 'false interpretations' of the Koran, in the Arab world they speak of 'precepts of Judaism'. Without denying the existence of a 'Jewish anti-Arab conspiracy', the Al Jazeera author remarked: 'This conspiracy has achieved its goal because of the ignorance of the Arabs themselves. The Arabs' enemy is the Arabs themselves.

The journalist pointed to a reality[22] - Zionism appealed to 'religion, the facts of history and geography'. Its appeal was supported by the Koran - Judaism is 'a divinely revealed doctrine'. Zionism's claim to Palestine had its basis - 'there existed a great Jewish kingdom of 'the prophet Suleiman', there existed 'the temple of Suleiman''. The Zionist choice of Palestine as the 'place of Israel's rebirth' was not accidental - it 'absolved them of the charge of seizing Palestine and justified their return to an abandoned land. Using a historical myth, Zionism 'created a bitter situation for the Arabs'.

But 'did Israel defeat the Arabs?'.[23] Al-Qahtani believed that 'Israel defines the reality of the Arab region today. The position of the Arabs does not affect this reality, and therefore recognition [of Israel] is a matter of time.' She went on to say: 'Israel won because it relied on practical and scientific methods, while the Arabs relied on their feelings. Israel relied on reason and weapons, on influencing and winning [the support] of world public opinion. The Arabs relied on the idea of their historical oppression.

Then 'what are the reasons that prevent the Arabs from recognizing Israel?' the Al Jazeera author asked. First, 'the Arabs' conviction of their ethnic superiority'. Recognizing Israel would imply its inclusion in the Middle East community, but Israel is 'ethnically different', it is 'not linked to the Arabs by language, origin or religion'. Secondly, recognizing Israel 'would preserve its dominance in Jerusalem'. The enormous 'religious value' of Jerusalem, however, means that peace with Israel would be 'a betrayal of Arab religious heritage'. Third, recognition would destroy 'Arab moral foundations' - 'there is a huge difference between Arab and Israeli morality'. Fourth, recognition would deprive the Arabs of their 'great value - religious and cultural unity' - 'the inclusion of a Jewish state in the existing region would undermine that unity.' Israel, on the other hand, if recognized by the Arabs, would gain 'legitimacy for its existence', and would be 'free of accusations of crimes against the Palestinians'. It would be able to annul 'the historical Arab claim to Palestine'. This recognition would 'ensure Israeli dominance over the Arab economies. And he who controls the economy, Al-Qahtani asserted, 'also controls politics'.

Still, perhaps understanding all these risks does not preclude the possibility of peace? Al-Qahtani argued that 'the term 'peace' applied to the Arab-Israeli confrontation is vague'.[24] Recalling that the issue of peace in the Middle East has a long history, the Al Jazeera author stressed that the undertakings involved have not been successful because each of

the conflicting parties 'seeks peace as it understands it and on its own terms'. However, 'the desire for peace exists among both Arabs and Israelis'. However, the reasons behind this 'desire' are different, they may coincide, but they may also diverge, which 'turns the peace talks into a field of bilateral cold war'.

Al-Qahtani argued that there is a possibility of 'normalization for the sake of salvation'.[25] Because 'today, the major powers in the region are Iran and Israel', the Arab states find themselves 'between Iran's hammer and Israel's anvil' - they may have to choose 'whether to join Russia-backed Iran, or Israel, backed by America. Both regional powers have their own claims to the Arab world. 'Israel has not forgotten about 'Greater Israel from the Nile to the Euphrates, 'while Iran speaks of 'comprehensive regional dominance. Of the two 'evils', the Arabs have to choose the 'more useful one'. It is Israel, with which 'peace for land' deal could be negotiated and which could become 'a shield that could protect the Arabs from Iranian expansion'. Concluding her series of articles, Al-Qahtani wrote: 'Normalization will be the salvation for all'.

The publication of al-Qahtani's articles coincided with a trip made in late July 2016 to the West Bank and also to Jerusalem by retired General Anwar Eshki, director of the Jeddah-based Middle East Center for Strategic and Legal Studies. The general was accompanied by a delegation of Saudi analysts and businessmen. In Israel, the trip was seen as a 'visit' to the Jewish state.[26] For five days, the Saudi analyst was visiting a territory controlled by the Israeli army, meeting with members of the Knesset,[27] foreign ministry and occupation administration officials.

When speaking about his trip, Eshki said he had made a 'private' visit at the invitation of the PNA and had been 'in Palestine and Jerusalem' and not in Israel - a trip he wanted 'to get acquainted with the situation of Palestinian prisoners and the families of perished heroes'.[28] Whereas, he stressed in an interview with Arab publications, the Israelis 'consider Jerusalem to be Israeli, we consider it Palestinian and the problem [of Jerusalem] to be Arab and Islamic'.[29] In an interview with Israel's i24news, he spoke of the possibility of an Arab-Israeli settlement only on the basis of an 'Arab peace initiative'.[30] For its part, the Saudi foreign ministry said that 'private individuals, such as Anwar Eshki,' 'have nothing to do with any state institution and do not express the views of the Saudi government.[31] This message was picked up by the Saudi press.

In early August 2016, Saudi *Al-Yawm* published an article by its political analyst Abdel Latif Al-Mulhim, 'Why did Anwar Eshki accept the invitation to visit Israel?'.[32] According to him, 'Israelis began to reflect on the 'Arab Peace Initiative', and concluded that limiting contacts 'with the Palestinians and representatives of neighboring countries' was insufficient and that talks with the Saudis were urgent, determined by 'the political weight and position of the Kingdom in the wider world, especially the Islamic world'. Hence the attention of 'Israeli official and semi-official structures to establish direct ties with any Saudi citizen, even if they do not possess any state powers.' Al-Mulhim did not deny an undercurrent development of Saudi-Israeli contacts. He wrote, 'Eshki is not the first Saudi citizen to receive an invitation [to visit Israel]. His only concern was that, Eshki's 'political incompetence' allowed Israel to present the visit as a 'reflection of the Kingdom's official position' which was damaging to Riyadh'.

Thus, an unprecedented situation has arisen in Saudi Arabia - a topic that previously seemed all but taboo was now openly discussed. The issue was open to debate, suggesting that the Kingdom was evolving and that its 'educated class' was keen to participate in political decision-making.

The issue was not only a debate on the pages of the media - the changing socio-political atmosphere transformed the mindset in the cultural sphere as well. Saudi fiction writers turned to the Jewish theme, bringing it to the center of the reading public's attention. As was the case with the press, this was unprecedented – the Jewish life and protagonists featured in the five novels and novellas published in the past four years. The novels' protagonists were not from Saudi Arabia (where there is no Jewish minority), but mostly from Yemen. The public discussion that arose was driven by the idea that such stories were important because they had 'humanistic' value rather than just 'political' point or advocated for 'normalization [of relations with Israel]'.[33]

The author of the first of such novels, 'The Saved Jewess' (published in 2015), is Salima Al-Maushi, a historian, women's rights activist and member of the Saudi Political Science Association. In her novel, she addressed the lives of Yemeni Jews in the time before and during their exodus after the Palestinian War. Al-Maushi argued that the Yemeni Jewish community should be seen as an integral part of the historical and cultural heritage of the Arabian Peninsula. Its loss, she argues, was caused by the 'inhumane circumstances stemming from political games' in the late

1940s, in which not only Israel, but also the Arabian rulers of the time, were involved.

The novel 'Possessed by Leila the Jew' was written by novelist and literary critic Hamad Hamid Al-Rashidi (published in 2016). His protagonist, a Saudi student studying in Cairo, falls in love with a local Jewish woman called Leila Shalom. While initially he views Jews negatively, believing them to be 'the perpetrators of Arab woes', his encounter with Leila forces him to abandon his earlier perceptions and become more critical of Arab Judeophobic myths. It is revealing that the novel's title, 'Madjnun Leila' - the possessed, is also the nickname of the hero of a tragic love story popular in the Arab world and the Muslim East dating from the pre-Islamic period.

In turn, the novella 'The Jewish Bottom' (published in 2018), written by a popular novelist Ali Al-Amir, is the story of a Saudi university student from Sana'a who falls in love with a girl from the last Jewish family still living in the former Jewish quarter of the Yemeni capital. Love leads the protagonist to explore ancient Jewish history, as well as the history of Yemen's Jews, including the tragic circumstances of their exodus.

'Jewish Alienation', published in 2020 by Raja Bandar, a writer from the Saudi Arabian province adjacent to Yemen, tells the story of the daughter of a Muslim immigrant from that province and a Yemeni Jew, who joins her father's family after her mother's death. Apart from focusing on the central Jewish issue, the author of the novel writes about the struggle for female emancipation in a society dominated by traditional patriarchal values.

'Lady Talin', written by Fawzi Sadeq and published in 2020, is the work set in the Saudi town of Hufuf (Eastern Province) during the Ottoman period, when there used to be a Jewish quarter in the city. In describing life in this quarter, the author does not fail to mention that traces of the former Jewish presence in the city are still in evidence today - a nearly extinct cemetery and a palm grove planted by its former inhabitants that still bears fruit.

Interviews with the authors of these works published in the 'Asharq Al-Awsat' newspaper proved that, despite avoiding 'politics' in their work, turning to Jewish themes in fiction was made possible by changes in Saudi society that enabled them to break taboos. Asked why the protagonist of her story is Jewish, Raja Bandar said: 'I grew up at a time when Arab rage was at its height. ...Our neighbors were a Palestinian family,

and when I played with the children of the family, we threw stones at imaginary Israeli soldiers. We cried when a stone would kill a Palestinian child, and we rejoiced when the same stone would kill an imaginary Zionist child. She went on: 'I once met a Jewish guy of Yemeni origin on one of the social networks. He was an enemy, but he spoke perfect Arabic and had a profound understanding of the Arab world. I realized that there were other aspects to the problem. I realized that I knew nothing about it except abstract hatred and enmity. I plunged into the world of the Oriental Jews and realized that they actually lived among us'.[34]

For his part, Fawzi Sadeq, discussing his focus on the Jews of the Eastern Province in his writing, said: 'I was born there and lived in Bahrain as a child. Then I heard that many Jews who had once lived in Hufuf had moved to Bahrain. But it was impossible for a Saudi author to write about it, it was taboo. To write the story, I had to learn about Jewish history and travelled to the Eastern Province, where traces of their life are preserved. I drew my thoughts from history wanting to give them the necessary humanist touch.'

The Saudi Position Today: The Reign of Salman bin Abdul Aziz

The events of the Arab Spring have transformed the region surrounding Saudi Arabia. Assessing the outcome of those events, the Center for Policy and Islamic Studies in Riyadh called them 'the collapse of the nation-state', which was unable 'to compete with the ideology of religious extremism' and 'to resist Iranian expansion'. Iran was proclaimed a 'strategic regional rival'.[35] It was time for 'a rigorous rearrangement of priorities' to 'protect security and stability'.[36]

Addressing the regular session of the Consultative Assembly on 20 November 2019, King Salman bin Abdul Aziz noted: 'The Palestinian issue remains our first priority. It will remain so until the brotherly Palestinian people regain their legitimate rights - first and foremost the establishment of their own independent state, with East Jerusalem as its capital'. The monarch said that the total amount of aid from the Kingdom to the Palestinian Authority over the last two years had exceeded $500 million.[37] The Saudi position was again framed by the desire to protect Islamic holy sites. Speaking at the opening of the 14th summit of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Mecca, the monarch said that his country 'categorically rejects any attack on the historical image

and legal status of East Jerusalem'.[38] The invariability of the overall approach did not mean that there were no significant changes. One of these was Riyadh's break with Hamas.

From its beginnings, Hamas had been receiving considerable financial support from Saudi non-governmental charitable foundations. Official help from the Kingdom was sporadic and limited to the time of the Kuwait crisis of 1991, when Arafat took a pro-Iraqi stance that allowed Hamas to open a semi-official office in Jeddah (in 1998, Sheikh Ahmed Yassin visited Riyadh, which was widely reported in the Saudi press).[39] The events of September 11, 2001 dramatically changed the situation - non-state foundations (considered by Washington as sources of funding for al-Qaeda) were nationalized and dealings with Hamas reduced to a minimum. When Hamas leaders, including Khaled Mashal, visited Saudi Arabia, it was only for pilgrimages to Mecca.

Relations between Riyadh and Hamas deteriorated further after the breakage of the Mecca Reconciliation Agreement with Fatah under the patronage of King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz in February 2007 and the consequent seizure of power by Hamas in the Gaza Strip. Hamas's turn to Iran (and after 2017 to Qatar) allowed the then Saudi foreign minister Adil al-Jubeir to call the movement an 'extremist and terrorist organization'.[40] In September 2019, its supporters within the kingdom were arrested and persecuted.

Saudi approaches to solving the Palestinian issue were in line with the US position. Saudi Arabia welcomed Donald Trump's victory, seeing him as the opposite of the 'too soft' Barack Obama. As a Saudi journalist wrote, commenting on the latest US presidential campaign, 'the region, more than anything, desperately needs the departure of the current president because no previous president has done so much damage'.[41] Meeting Trump in May 2017 during his visit to Riyadh, King Salman spoke of 'the importance of the American approach to the Palestinian-Israeli settlement, stressing his willingness to 'work together for peace between the two sides' because the US is, as Foreign Minister Al-Jubeir claimed, 'the best sponsor of the solution'.[42] Riyadh welcomed Israeli strikes on Hizballah and Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps positions in Syria, seeing them as a 'precondition' for the emergence of 'new alliances'. According to a Saudi analyst, in the event of an 'open Arab-Iranian confrontation' Israel would 'unequivocally join the Arab camp'.[43]

Trump's announcement in early December 2017 that he would recognize 'one' Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and move the US embassy

to that city was not accepted by the Saudi-led establishment. In a telephone conversation with the US president, the monarch stressed that 'any American decision on the status of Jerusalem taken before a final settlement on the Palestinian issue is reached would damage the peace talks and increase regional tensions'.[44] Although this did not lead to a cooling of the US-Saudi bilateral relations, it did complicate the possibility of Saudi-Israeli rapprochement. As a Saudi commentator stressed, this was determined by 'Iran's readiness to reap the fruits of anger over disagreement between the Saudis and US'. Referring to the PLO, he added: 'What is the Palestinian question really about? Officially – it is the central problem; in practice it is an escape from all real problems under the slogan of 'The Road to Jerusalem'.[45]

Trump's decision to recognize Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, as well as Michael Pompeo's statement on the legality of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, have further complicated Saudi-American relations. In a statement on the issue, the Saudi foreign ministry emphasized its 'total rejection' of the US Golan Heights decision as it would 'complicate the peace process in the Middle East'.[46] The statement on the settlements was similarly worded.[47] For his part, a Saudi analyst, noting that while Trump's decision on the Golan Heights was 'illegal', nevertheless, felt that 'Israeli concerns' that Syria was 'full with Iranians' should be taken into account.[48] The same analyst, following his country's official position on the settlements, posed the question from a broader perspective, focusing on the US administration proposed 'Deal of the Century'. In his opinion, the proposed peace plan 'might be the greatest chance for the Palestinians to finally acquire a state of their own. What`s worth focusing on, he thought, was not the 'details' of the US president`s behavior, but 'whether the Palestinians would get a state under this plan or allow the Israelis to rule over what is left of Palestine'.[49]

A statement issued by the Saudi Foreign Ministry on 29 January 2020 regarding President Trump's unveiling of the 'Peace for Prosperity' plan for a Palestinian-Israeli settlement emphasized: 'The Kingdom appreciates the efforts of the Trump administration to prepare a comprehensive peace plan between the Palestinian and Israeli sides, and supports direct Palestinian-Israeli peace negotiations under the auspices of the United States'. The statement noted that 'the negotiations will make it possible to resolve all bilateral differences over the plan in order to direct the peace process towards an agreement which would allow the brotherly Palestinian people to exercise their legitimate rights.' The statement

noted that the Kingdom had 'always stood by the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people'. In particular, Saudi 'Arab Peace Initiative' reaffirmed that a military solution would not lead to peace and security for both sides, and that a just and comprehensive peace was a strategic choice'.[50] In a phone conversation on the same day between King Salman bin Abdul Aziz and Mahmoud Abbas, the Saudi monarch affirmed 'the Kingdom's unwavering position on the Palestinian question' and that his country 'stands with the Palestinian people in supporting the solution that will enable them to realize their aspirations and ambitions'.[51]

The Saudi point of view, however, has not become the determining one for the LAS. At the meeting of the League's Ministerial Council on February 1, 2020 , the 'US-Israeli deal of the century' was rejected as 'not satisfying the basic rights and aspirations of the Palestinian people' as well as being 'contrary to the basic foundations of the peace process'. The LAS Ministerial Council proclaimed its decision 'to refuse any cooperation with the US administration to implement the provisions of the deal'.[52] Nevertheless, Riyadh continued bilateral consultations with the US side, including the issue of the 'Deal of the Century'. In the second half of February 2020, Pompeo visited the Saudi capital (including a visit to the Prince Sultan Military Base, where US units are stationed) for talks with the King and Crown Prince on 'regional developments' and the role of Saudi Arabia as 'a pillar of US policy to counter the threat from Iran (mutual for both sides) '.[53]

In the context of current Middle East reality, the Saudi understanding of the Palestinian question was changing. Official rejection of the American president's actions, which were seen in Riyadh as reinforcing 'Israeli intransigence' did not mean that the Saudi establishment no longer considered contacts with Israel impossible. These contacts, as the Saudi analyst wrote, are important because 'even the worst enemies engage and engage in dialogue,' which is all the more important when 'the aggressive Iranian project is being implemented.' Confronting Iran, Riyadh cannot fail to understand that 'Israel is the only state currently using military force to contain Iran in Syria', while Saudi Arabia 'is fighting Iran in Yemen'. He further remarked, that allegations against Riyadh's 'alliance with the Zionists' sounded like 'a broken record'. 'How can we confront Iran in the Gulf region, Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon, Syria and Palestine nowadays', without taking the Israeli factor into account, he asked. In today's situation, the analyst added, 'Israel is no longer forbidden fruit'.[54]

If Saudi-Israeli contacts were intensified after the July 2015 Iran nuclear deal, one of the most important factors behind this was the rise of Mohammed bin Salman to de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia in June 2017 which led to a 'hardening' of Saudi foreign policy. The current Saudi crown prince and his entourage, representing Ibn Saud's 'generation of grandsons', are not only young but also pragmatic. As the Saudi author noted, they are far from the 'prejudices of their fathers' and are 'unlike them, open to the world'.[55]

Riyadh has been pushed towards rapprochement with Israel by a sense of the existential threat from Iran (including its nuclear potential), as well as a concern regarding the expanding Iranian presence in the Middle East. As the Crown Prince said in late November 2017, 'taking advantage of the turmoil in the Arab world', 'Tehran's mullahs were able to establish their dominance over four Arab capitals - Damascus, Sanaa, Baghdad and Beirut'. This required, he said, 'the creation of a united front in the region against Iranian expansionism' and 'to prevent the emergence in the Middle East of a new Iranian Hitler', whose 'appeasement', 'as in Europe in the 1930s, will not lead to success'.[56] In December of that year (now Minister of Foreign Affairs) Al-Jubeir told *France24* that his country had a 'road map' for establishing full diplomatic relations with Israel, provided that a 'peace agreement is reached with the Palestinians'.[57]

If Riyadh did not officially comment on the process of normalization of relations between the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Bahrain one the one side and Israel on the other (the process started in August 2020), this did not mean a lack of reaction from the Saudi press. It was about the attitude of the PNA to the initiative of Abu Dhabi and Manama.

Qualifying the Emirati-Israeli agreement, one of the leading observers of *Asharq Al-Awsat*, Mshari al-Zaidi, wrote about 'a huge political, psychological and security-related regional breakthrough'. In his opinion, the agreement not only 'did not ignore the fair Palestinian right to create a state, but also preserved the inviolable right of all Muslims to possess the Islamic shrines [of Jerusalem]'. Moreover, it 'created additional opportunities, far from the chatter of the Muslim Brotherhood, Iran and left-wing nationalists, to implement a two-state solution'. Referring to history, al-Zaidi drew an equal sign between the UAE's decision and the 'historic act of the great President Anwar Sadat' that 'initiated the peace process'.[58]

In turn, Abdel Rahman al-Rashid, a Saudi analyst, former editor-in-chief of the world Arabic-language edition of the *Asharq Al-Awsat* news-

paper and general director of the *Al-Arabiya* satellite television channel, considered it necessary to separate the two aspects of the 'issue of relations with Israel'. The first, in his opinion, is that 'no Arab side can impose its opinion on the Palestinians on how to solve their problem'. The time of 'guardianship over the Palestinians is over', 'the Palestinians make the decision on Palestine, not the Qataris, Syrians, Iranians or Saudis'. The second is connected with the fact that 'every Arab state has the right to independently build its international relations, including relations with Israel'. Then he drew a harsh conclusion: 'The Israelis have visited all the Arab capitals - they were received as diplomats, athletes, security officials and journalists. The Palestinians were on the losing side. This is the choice of the PNA, which only observes events and expresses negative judgments about them!'.[59]

The Iranian threat has forced the Saudis to establish contacts with Israel in the field of intelligence information exchange, not only in the context of closed bilateral meetings, but also during joint participation in international political, economic and cultural forums and exhibitions.[60] In November 2017, for the first time in the history of bilateral relations, Israeli Army Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot gave an interview to the Saudi private Internet portal Elaph. The General stressed, among other things, that his country is ready to provide Riyadh with intelligence information to counter Iran if necessary.[61]

The Iranian threat allowed the authors of the Saudi press to describe Binyamin Netanyahu's October 2018 visit to Oman as resulting from a 'clear and open position of the Sultanate' that promoted 'political differentiation' in the Middle East, 'with the conflicts in Syria and Yemen as a starting point'.[62] Iranian threat was also the reason why Saudi Arabia had no reservations about other GCC countries hosting sporting, cultural, and social events with Israel participation. The March 2018 opening up of Air India flights to Tel Aviv to use Saudi airspace was also part of the Saudi desire to broaden contacts with Israel.[63]

Riyadh is far from openly admitting its cooperation with Israel. There are many obstacles in its way: the legacy of the past, represented by the official ideological doctrine and the Ulema corps behind it. There are also current obstacles, such as the claims and actions of an underground internal opposition that appeals to religious postulates and maintains connections with extremists in neighboring countries. The unresolved Palestinian question allows the opposition to accuse the authorities of aligning themselves with the West and following the path of Zionism,

which they proclaim to be a 'strategic enemy' of Islam and the pan-Arab unity. The list of these obstacles also includes foreign policy context – Iran, as is often stressed by Riyadh, uses Palestinian factor to unite Saudi Arabia's regional adversaries.

At the same time, Saudi Arabia does not exclude the possibility of serious changes in the sphere of relations with Israel. In early April 2018, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia noted in an interview with *The Atlantic* in Washington that his country's leadership had no 'religious objections' to the 'existence of Israel': We have religious concerns about the fate of the holy mosque in Jerusalem and about the rights of the Palestinian people. … We don't have any objection against any other people. … I believe the Palestinians and the Israelis have the right to have their own land. … We have to have a peace agreement to assure the stability for everyone and to have normal relations. … Israel is a big economy compared to their size and it's a growing economy, and of course there are a lot of interests we share with Israel and if there is peace, there would be a lot of interest'.[64]

The Saudi establishment also actively promotes a process of inter-religious tolerance and direct contacts with Jewish communities in Europe and America. Riyadh uses these contacts to maintain indirect contacts with Israel, to create a positive image of the Kingdom in the world and to put pressure on Western governments to solve Saudi political problems. The main vehicle for this is the Muslim World League (MWL - founded in Saudi Arabia in 1962 to deal with Fiqh issues). Its general secretary is Mohammed Al-Isa, a supporter of the Crown Prince's social and economic reforms.

The focus on developing relations with Jewish civil society organizations was confirmed in 2018, when Mohammed Al-Isa declared that 'the Holocaust was a crime against humanity'.[65] MWL leadership announced a visit of the American Association of Holocaust Organizations delegation to Riyadh in early 2020.[66] In September 2019, in collaboration with Jewish and Christian communities in France, LIM held a conference in Paris entitled 'Jews, Christians, and Muslims: Working Together for the Good of Man'. The Memorandum of Understanding among its participants (that included the French Chief Rabbi) on cooperation among the Abrahamic religions stressed the importance of 'mutual understanding among Jews, Christians and Muslims in France and throughout the world for the sake of peace and human solidarity'. The same document noted that a joint delegation of the LIM and the French Chief Rabbinate would

visit Auschwitz 'on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi death camps'[67] in the spring of 2020.

Conclusion. Is Saudi-Israeli Normalization Possible?

The Saudi-Israeli inter-state relations normalization is a process that will continue only if and to an extent that the major obstacle that stands in its way - the Palestinian-Israeli conflict - is resolved.

Riyadh is maintaining contact with the Jewish state today due to pragmatic reasons such as preservation of Saudi influence in the Middle East currently challenged by Iran. This means that rapprochement with Israel is built not on a genuine desire for full reciprocal cooperation, but conditioned by current political situation in the region, and thus (despite the wishes of Prince Mohammed bin Salman) is intrinsically fragile. None of the instances of normalization of relations between Israel and the Arab countries (including those in the Gulf and Maghreb regions) has been an example of gradual evolution and development. On the contrary, all of them have been the result of external factors, held hostage to the unresolved Palestinian-Israeli conflict, domestic politics, as well as the political views and actions of various Arab leaders.

There is, however, a more significant factor influencing the possibility of Saudi-Israeli normalization and, consequently, changing the face of the Middle East. There is a real possibility that Israel might become the leading power in a transformed region, which would by no means correspond to Saudi interests. In this regard, the Kingdom's emphasis on the priority of resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict implies not only and not so much the re-establishment of Palestinian rights (within the truncated limits of the former Mandate of Palestine) on humanitarian grounds, as the preservation of its own regional supremacy. In turn, achieving a mutual understanding (and a workable settlement) between Jerusalem and Riyadh will only become a reality if Israeli regional policy is adjusted so as not to threaten Saudi interests.

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[9] Al-Mansour M.A., *op. cit*. p. 215-216.

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DMITRY A. MARYASIS, SVETLANA YU. BABENKOVA

Digital Economics as a Means to Foster Israeli-Palestinian Economic Cooperation

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the longest in modern history. For a long time, international leaders, diplomats, scientists discussed the problems that arose in the course of the confrontation between the two peoples and tried to find ways out of the current situation. In the past few decades, the world has changed dramatically and security problems, including economic and informational ones, facing the countries of the Middle East, have come to the fore.

Of course, many questions and problems remain intractable. At the same time, we should note that in both countries there is a great intellectual human potential, which will help to effectively use the possibilities of the 21st century innovations-based economy, and, possibly, will bring new and unexpected options for a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Over the decades of studying the Palestinian-Israeli confrontation, many proposals and ideas have been put forward to resolve it, but these plans were not implemented, among other reasons due to the fact that their goals and objectives did not fully or partially satisfy any of the parties to the conflict and did not take into account the rapidly changing realities of the Middle East region.

The authors did not set themselves the task of creating a 'universal and fast-acting' mechanism for resolving a long-term conflict. This paper is an attempt to offer an alternative opportunity for organizing mutually beneficial coexistence of the two peoples in the economic sphere in a situation where the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has not been resolved. We examined and analyzed possible points of contact between the

two societies in terms of interaction in the digital economy and as an effective tool for overcoming economic problems associated with the ongoing conflict, and as a new tool for overcoming existing problems (obviously not all) in the economy of each of its parties.

The events of 2020, with all their drama, led to two, in our opinion, significant changes both in the world in general and in the region in particular, which make this article even more relevant.

Firstly, the pandemic of the new coronavirus has led to an unprecedented increase in digitalization, not only in the field of government and business, but also in private life. Huge masses of the population have been forced to 'enter the digital world' in order to provide themselves with a minimum level of safety and comfort. The processes of digital transformation have significantly intensified at the global level, covering all aspects of human life - from food delivery to receiving medical care and organizing leisure (including cultural); corporate culture has also changed dramatically. And even after the situation with the coronavirus will be changed for the better, we can hardly expect a sharp decline in the use of digital technologies. The pandemic appears to have accelerated the digital transformation process and is irreversible.

Secondly, in the fall-winter of 2020, agreements were signed on the normalization of Israel's relations with the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco. In the context of our paper, these Arab countries (especially the United Arab Emirates) are emerging as a new financially wealthy player interested both in reducing the level of the Palestinian-Israeli confrontation in general and ready to actively contribute to the economic development of Palestine as an ideologically important component of the Arab world. The active development of the digital economy in the UAE and Bahrain is one of the essential factors that allow us to consider the conceptual proposals made in this paper relevant.

Without intensifying the process of Israeli and Palestinian economies' digitalization, it is difficult to consider the prospects of their developments in the long term. Moreover, for Palestine, this process is of much greater importance, since it allows it to overcome a number of current significant (if not vital) problems of its economic development.

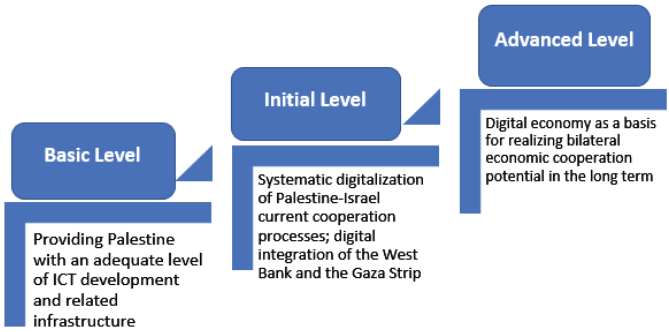

Figure 1. Development of Palestinian-Israeli cooperation in the field of digitalization

Source: Developed by Dmitry Maryasis

As shown in fig. 1, the authors propose to consider three levels of bilateral cooperation in the field of the digital economy development. We will dwell on each of them in detail, and also consider and propose a conceptualization of the anti-crisis role of digital economy instruments.

A Basic Level of ICT Development in Palestine[1]

We shall start with a more detailed consideration of what can be called the basic level of cooperation in the field of digitalization between Palestine and Israel, namely the development of cooperation between the two societies to provide Palestine with an adequate level of ICT and related infrastructure. It is obvious that, firstly, without this, any economy cannot develop in the modern world, and, secondly, in view of the specifics of Palestinian-Israeli relations, without the active participation of the latter, it will be impossible for the Palestinians to overcome the lag in the ICT development process on their territory.

The digital economy can provide Palestine with the necessary support for economic growth, including new jobs creation in the face of population growth and a large percentage of able-bodied unemployed youth. And, despite the seeming paradoxicality of this statement in view of the fact that digitalization leads to the replacement of human labor by machine labor, it is absolutely logical, since the digital infrastructure will simplify the opening of new businesses, and increasing the level of

interaction with Israel through appropriate platforms (see below) will allow a number of Palestinians work with Israeli companies. Of course, the problems of introducing digital infrastructures in Palestine primarily stem out of restrictions on the movement of people and goods. We take into consideration this fact when developing our approach to the bilateral digital framework of cooperation.

Palestine ranks 123rd in ICT, well below the average of other Arab states. The Palestinian Territories are home to approximately 4.8-5 million people, including a large number of unemployed youth. At the same time, as of 2019, there were 3,000 graduates of higher educational institutions in the country in the following areas: engineering, mathematics, technology, ICT. In our opinion, this is a good human resource potential for companies that want to enter the market of innovative technologies.

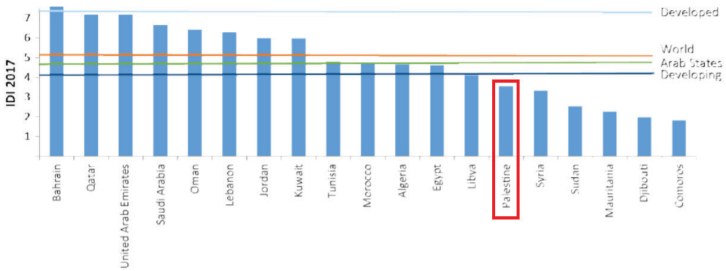

Figure 2. ICT development index in the Arab region, 2017

Source: International Telecommunications Union (ITU), 2017. URL: http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/844141590600764047/pdf/Economic-Monitoring-Report-to-the-Ad-Hoc-Liaison-Committee.pdf. (accessed on 20.07.2020)

As we can see, the country has an urgent need to reduce its digital development gap in relation to other countries in the region. In this regard, part of the Palestinian Program 'Agenda for the 21st Century' was named 'Citizens First (2017–2022)', identifying the digital transformation of socio-economic and financial sectors as priority areas for achieving economic sustainability in the face of constant foreign policy challenges.

The ICT sector in Palestine accounts for 7% of GDP; however, the demand for digitalization of its activities may arise from such areas as agriculture, healthcare, education, public services.

For the emergence of a dynamically developing and secure digital

economy in Palestine, the country's official authorities need to develop digital infrastructure, including universal, affordable and broadband Internet,[2] which is the basis for the sustainability of the digital economy. But due to numerous domestic and bilateral problems, it is unlikely that the level of Internet penetration in Palestine by 2030, will reach the 20% mark,[3] sufficient to achieve universal access to good quality broadband internet.

At the end of 2018, broadband penetration in Palestine stood at 5.39%, the lowest in the MENA region. There were 8 broadband users per 100 population. Telecommunications services are provided by the Palestinian Telecommunications Company (PalTel) via DSL,[4] with different service charges in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

Although Palestine has the right to build and operate its independent telecommunications infrastructure and establish its legal information policy under existing agreements, Israel decides on the spectrum of allocated frequencies. Palestinian operators face restrictions from the Israeli side to build towers and lay networks, and also cannot compete with Israeli cellular operators that can offer 4G communications and have 20% of the broadband Internet market in the West Bank.

Currently, 99% of the Palestinian population has access to mobile communications and 2G networks (in 2019, the increase was - 73%), while 52% of the population has access to 3G networks (by the end of 2019, the increase was 12 %). Over the past 5 years, the use of Internet traffic has increased by 40%, while 67% of the population has access to the World Wide Web.

Given a certain lack of fixed broadband infrastructure, Palestine is trying to implement mobile broadband connectivity via Wi-Fi hotspots. The mobile broadband market is more competitive in the country than the fixed broadband market. Mobile broadband is represented by two operators, Jawwal (a subsidiary of PalTel) and Ooredoo Palestine (formerly Wataniya Mobile Palestine). In early 2018, the two companies deployed 3G networks following Israel's allocation of appropriate frequencies to access the national mobile broadband network. In the Gaza Strip, access to 3G is closed to Palestinian providers, but due to Israel's proximity, Palestinians can receive a signal and use 3G and 4G/LTE networks from Israeli operators. The situation is similar in the West Bank.[5]

A summary of cellular penetration in the MENA region, including Palestine, is shown in Figure 3 of this paper.

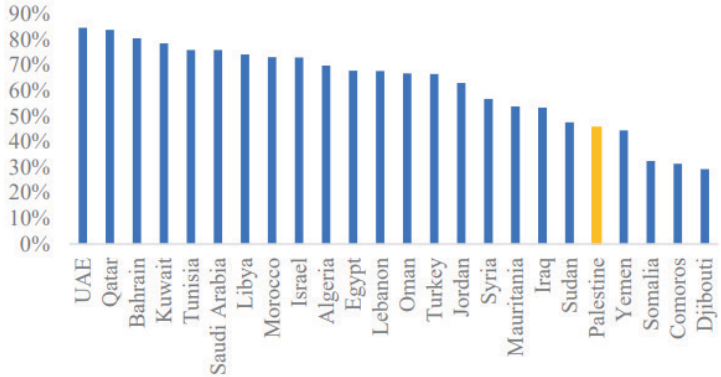

Figure 3. Cellular penetration rate in the countries of the MENA region as of the IVth quarter 2019

Source: GSMA Intelligence, 2020 (URL: http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/844141590600764047/pdf/Economic-Monitoring-Report-to-the-Ad-Hoc-Liaison-Committee.pdf (accessed on 20.07.2020)

Today, the shortage of the frequency range for the provision of high-quality broadband communication affects primarily the consumers of services, since a narrow signal bandwidth leads to an increase in the cost of deploying relay station equipment due to an increase in capacity to solve the problem of additional loads (growing traffic). We shall also note the limited number of subscribers that a mobile operator can serve, and the high cost of traffic for these subscribers. The increasing demand for 4G networks and in the future for 5G will put a strain on the communications sector in Palestine, which is not fully able to cope with this problem without the help of neighboring Israel.

However, the widespread development of digital infrastructure is hampered not only by the unresolved problems of Palestinian-Israeli relations, but also by the absence in Palestine of an up-to-date legal and regulatory framework governing the activities of digital infrastructure facilities. The telecommunications sector is regulated by Law No. 3 of 1996 'On Telecommunications' and does not take into account the current strategies that exist in the digital economy and ICT.

Since 2005, the Ministry of Telecommunications and Information Technology (hereinafter - MTIT) has been updating the regulatory framework in accordance with international practice and standards adopted in

this area, and also plans to create an independent Palestinian Authority for the supervision of communications. Political instability prevented the Service from starting its activities in 2010, but over the past 10 years it has not started operating. At the same time, by the end of 2020, MTIT planned to finally consider and approve the new telecommunications law.

What tools can help expand access to affordable, quality broadband in Palestine and accelerate the growth of the ICT sector? Of course, it is necessary to 'revive' the work of the Joint Technical Committee.[6] It will enable both parties to arrange operational and working meetings in the bilateral Palestinian-Israeli format in order to develop a common concept for the development of the telecommunications sector in Palestine, which will be comparable in terms of reliability and quality of services provided to other countries in the region. The following actions are seen:

- Establishment of an agreed and reasonable time frame for the provision of frequencies to Palestinian operators for the use of 4G, and ultimately 5G, based on the demands of the Palestinian mobile market.
- Reducing the presence of Israeli telecommunications companies in the West Bank (using micro-cells with a smaller coverage radius instead of using macro-cells).
- Changes to the provisions regarding restrictions on the use of ICTs. Palestinian companies will be able to work effectively if they introduce innovative technologies, and all interested parties will adopt approaches to the supply of imported equipment, based on an assessment of the risk to use it not only for commercial purposes, but also to undermine the security of neighboring countries.
- Ensuring, within the framework of bilateral meetings and negotiations, Israel's provision of access to infrastructure and land in zone 'C' for the installation of equipment and the provision of communication services to the Palestinian population.
- Considering the possibility of establishing a national fiber optic backbone, leveraging the facilities of the Jerusalem Area Electricity Company (JDECO). The Palestinian territories are among the most densely populated areas (800 people per sq. Km.) within the smallest territory. Given the rapid growth and popularity and, as a consequence, the decrease in the cost of opti-

cal fibers, the population density and the small territories that Palestine has, allow the construction of an integrated terrestrial fiber-optic infrastructure.

JDECO has already equipped over 400 km. distribution network in Jerusalem, Ramallah, Jericho and Bethlehem. The fiber-optic network is widely used for the power substations' operation. It has better characteristics in terms of the quality and speed of communication and information transfer, which can be provided to consumers in the form of products and services at more flexible prices than the mobile Internet.

Along with the above, it is necessary to pay attention to the development of low-cost, broadband wireless technologies, in particular to equipment and technologies (new standards) of the wireless local area Wi-Fi network manufacturers, the number of which is growing in the world. Startups are developing very well in Palestine, including those of young professionals. In this regard, the Wi-Fi market is very suitable for testing new standards for transferring digital streams, overcoming the restrictions imposed by the Israeli side.

In the short term, it is also necessary to continue work on the establishment of an independent Palestinian Communications Oversight Service and to update and test the ICT regulatory framework, as well as to adopt a new Strategic Plan for the Digital Economy for the Palestinian Territories, as the demand for the digital economy grows but the last Strategic Plan, which gives the concept and definition of e-government, was adopted in 2005, is morally outdated and does not fit the new realities.

Digitalization as a Means to Ensure the Ongoing Processes of Palestinian-Israeli Communication and Integration of Both Parts of Palestine

Today, despite all the geopolitical problems, the two territories interact quite actively with each other - Palestinian workers go to work in Israel and back, certain goods also come from the Palestinian territory, goods enter Palestine through Israeli inspection bodies, financial funds, foreign businessmen, tourists, officials enter Palestine. To control all these flows, the relevant authorities of Israel and Palestine are forced to communicate, whether they like it or not.

It seems that digitalization of all these processes will significantly increase the efficiency and transparency of these communications. Here are some examples. Thus the possibility of electronic recording for Palestinian citizens crossing checkpoints with the preservation in the virtual cloud of all the necessary information about them (personal and contact information, time and places of previous border crossings, other important data for the Israeli security system) would allow not only to speed up the process itself, but make it, in principle, more comfortable for the Palestinians. The transparency of this process would also increase.

Moving the entire contracting system of Palestinian workers into cyberspace would not only increase the transparency and efficiency of this process, but also enable workers to conduct all their financial transactions online, at least in Israel. Moreover, in the medium term, the potential for the emergence of a Palestinian-Israeli cryptocurrency arises. It can replace the Israeli shekel in payments between Israeli employers and Palestinian workers. And since cryptocurrency itself is a financial asset, Palestinians will be able to trade it using appropriate instruments.

The development of blockchain technologies will allow transforming the logistics of incoming and outgoing goods from the PNA. Digitalization is a powerful tool for increasing market transparency. On the one hand, the Palestinians will be able to control the delivery and react to violations of the process, in particular by the Israeli authorities. On the other hand, Israeli regulatory authorities will be able to spend less resources on tracking cargo traffic and focus on situations that may be related to smuggling and terrorism (for example, an attempt to transport goods without using a system of identification of origin approved by both parties, etc.).

One of the most serious problems in Palestine is its geographic fragmentation. No matter how you connect the West Bank to the Gaza Strip with a tunnel or a bridge, the gap will still be felt.

The digital economy is one of the most effective tools for solving the territorial problem. Digital resources - even the simplest ones - will allow, firstly, the internationally recognized leadership of Palestine to increase the degree of its control over its entire territory through social payments, appropriate information, organization of social processes (from cultural events to elections). Secondly, for the inhabitants of both territories it will become easier to organize various kinds of interaction with each other.

The authors have no doubt that even to implement digitalization at such a fairly simple level by modern standards, it is required to solve at least two very serious problems:

1. to make the appropriate political decisions (and they must be made by the authorities of both countries);
2. to provide funding for the creation of appropriate instruments.

In our opinion, both of the above tasks are definitely solvable in the short term. The main decisions can be agreed at the working level - there is no need to hold bilateral summit meetings, and the leadership of each of the parties can then provide the necessary political support independently. Funding for the implementation, especially at the initial stage, most likely, at least in terms of Palestinian-Israeli cooperation, will be forced to be taken over by Israel. However, it seems that if the investment does not pay off directly, then the indirect benefit from the emergence of the described system of digital cooperation can be significant.

Let us emphasize that the acceleration of digital transformation processes caused by the pandemic of the new coronavirus, in any case, in one way or another, will contribute to the formation of a new reality in the Middle East as well. But the presence in the Israel-Palestine link of a country that is a world leader in the field of new technologies, makes it possible to consider an opportunity of a new digital environment formation at an accelerated rate compared to the global average pace.

Digital Economy as an Opportunity for a New Level of Cooperation between Palestine and Israel

In the early 1990s, when the peace process in the Middle East was gaining momentum, a number of members of the Israeli political and economic elite had a feeling that Israeli-Palestinian economic cooperation could become the foundation for long-term positive interaction between the two peoples.[7] However, by the beginning of the 21st century, it became clear that, unfortunately, in many ways such hopes were illusory.[8] At the same time, nevertheless, economic cooperation between Israel and Palestine continued. It also exists at the end of the second decade of this century. While the best-known form of bilateral cooperation is (mostly) low-skilled Palestinian workers in Israeli agricultural and construction companies, it does not end there.

Within the framework of this article we will not consider in detail specific cases of Palestinian-Israeli business cooperation. We only note that for the most part it is not of a systemic nature and can hardly be considered aimed at the long term. It is important, at the same time, to point out that there are several projects in Israel aimed at providing systematic assistance to the economic development of Palestine.

The most famous is the Palestinian direction of the Center for International Cooperation, known as MASHAV.[9] Within Palestine direction, MASHAV focuses its efforts, among other things, on the agriculture development in Palestine and stimulates the strengthening of the role of women and youth in the economic sphere of Palestinian society.

From the point of view of this article, the most interesting is the Palestinian Internship Program (PIP)[10] – project aimed at assisting Palestinian specialists in getting practice in Israeli companies in the technological segment of the national economy. By 2020, the program, created in 2014 in the United States (by the American-Israeli entrepreneur Yadin Kaufman), allowed 67 Palestinians to get internships in 43 Israeli technology companies. Of these, 35% remained to work in Israeli companies, and another 33% returned to the PNA for leadership positions.[11] But this is a 'drop in the bucket' - every year Palestinian universities, as noted earlier, graduate about 2,500-3,000 technical specialists who, in modern conditions, find it extremely difficult to get adequate work or create their own technology business in Palestine.

We should also mention the Tech2Peace project, launched in 2017, which is aimed at contributing to the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through technological education.[12] The project organizes a series of trainings, master classes, and discussion groups. All events are attended by mixed groups of Israeli and Palestinian youth. The training formats are dedicated directly to technology education - 3D modeling, application development, and other relevant topics. They are designed to equip young people (especially Palestinians) with the necessary skills to further develop within the modern high-tech economy. And in discussion groups, young people discuss issues related to the problem of resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Obviously, the geopolitical situation does not allow the full potential of Palestinian-Israeli business cooperation to be realized. However, the development of an innovations-based economy and the digital transformation taking place in both countries make it possible to look at the

prospects for cooperation from a different angle. Further in the paper, we consider some possible options for overcoming existing barriers using digital technologies in more detail. In other words, in this part of the work, we consider the advanced level of bilateral cooperation in the field of digital transformation (see Fig. 1).

Virtual clusters

With the development of ICT, the issue of the virtual clusters' development has become increasingly discussed.[13] These virtual spaces are similar in their functions to geographic clusters, but all interaction takes place online, and cluster members are not necessarily in close proximity to each other. This is an interesting and promising concept in many respects – it allows companies from small countries with a low level of internal competition, which are far from each other, to unite in such structures in the virtual space to successfully compete in the global market. However, there are still no truly successful virtual clusters. There are several close to it projects - professional social networks and portals, but they only partially fulfill the role of clusters. Some experts initially believed that it would be impossible to create virtual clusters in the full sense, since physical space and live communication cannot be completely replaced by virtual equivalents.[14] Others expressed the opinion that for some industries the emergence of such full-fledged virtual clusters is possible, but for some it is not.[15] It seems that the second approach is more justified, but in this case, some time must still pass before the formation of full-fledged virtual clusters.

Over time, two directions of virtual clusters' development have emerged. The first of them is the development of the idea described above, taking into account the fundamental processes of digital transformation, new technological capabilities and new approaches to organizing processes in the business environment.[16] The second direction in the development of virtual clusters is their development based on the emergence of a new system for organizing business processes, which is called 'business as a platform'. In this case, the cluster is formed on the basis of the activities of one company, which is a backbone platform.[17] It seems that both approaches to the development of virtual clusters are equivalent, since the implementation of one or the other model largely depends on the industry. At the same time, it should be noted that the second of the described models seems to be more popular in the world as of the end of 2019.

Israeli researchers some time ago thought about the possibility of establishing innovative cooperation with Palestine. The result was their proposal to create a virtual Israeli-Palestinian incubator.[18] Virtuality appeared because, as a result of research, its authors came to the conclusion that society on both sides is not ready for direct physical contact. According to the data available to us, this concept has not yet been implemented in practice. It seems that one of the reasons may be just the virtuality of the project. There are two possible explanations. First, as noted earlier, virtual clusters (and, accordingly, incubators) are still rather poorly developed, which does not allow us to speak about their efficiency in general. And secondly, the level of social development in the Middle East is such that it is extremely difficult to make the transition to cooperation in virtual space without a phase of cooperation in physical space (in fact, this thesis is also true for most Western countries).

However, due to the COVID-19 virus pandemic, in our opinion, there has been a fundamental shift in the field of digital transformation. Individuals and companies alike have taken a very different view of the power of cyberspace. In this regard, the possibility of virtualizing cooperation between the business circles of Israel and Palestine on the basis of virtual clustering does not seem so unrealizable. Such a cluster is now quite capable of creating its own financial ecosystem, which will make it supranational, not only in the technological sense.

It seems to us that such a virtual cluster can be a kind of analogue of Qualifying industrial zones (QIZ) that operate between Israel and Jordan (since 1998) and Israel and Egypt (since 2005). They are essentially industrial clusters that allow participants to gain preferential access to US markets, which is especially important for Israeli partners in these zones.[19]

Virtualization enables Palestinians to avoid lengthy and unpleasant physical contact with various Israeli services, which is required when physically moving. At the same time, they gain access to the developed economy (Israel), which expands their opportunities for doing business and business cooperation with Israel in general (for example, working privately in Israeli companies remotely or providing outsourcing services as a legal entity to a legal entity).

Interaction platforms

The modern digital environment provides a number of opportunities for representatives of the Israeli and Palestinian business communities to overcome national borders and organize multifactorial cooperation

in such areas as: joint innovation, fund raising, training / mentoring. In the logic of the current level of the digital economy development, such cooperation can be provided by an online platform, which we will call hereinafter the 'interaction platform' (IP).

Such platforms must have the appropriate functionality. So, first of all, IP is an opportunity for free communication. It seems that an essential element of its functionality is the organization of joint technology teams: that is, innovators of both countries can share their ideas according to certain protocols in order to form a joint business or involve representatives of the other side in solving existing problems.

Both the platform itself and its users should be able to raise funds through it. We see the creation of a cryptocurrency for such an IP as a rather promising direction. This will allow involve in its activities interested businessmen and investors not only from the PNA and Israel, but also from the whole world, primarily from the countries of the Middle East and the United States, including representatives of the diaspora of both peoples. In addition to the direct technological advantages, the main advantage of this method of investment is its absolute political and economic neutrality. Any means of payment that exist today have a 'color', as they are tied to a specific country or group of countries, which, due to the long-standing regional conflict, can cause unwanted emotions among both investors and recipients. A cryptocurrency specially created for the functioning of IP cannot a priori evoke such emotions.

As shown earlier, the Israelis are already providing some mentoring support to representatives of the Palestinian technology community, but its scale does not seem to match the potential of the emerging Palestinian innovation ecosystem. Educational / mentoring activities should be an important area of IP functioning. Special online courses (entrepreneurship, international innovation, etc.), training seminars, business coaching sessions - all this can significantly stimulate not only the development of an innovative environment in the PNA, but also bring the two sides (Palestinians and Israelis) closer, which will allow them to cooperate with each other more effectively.

The key issue is the issue of financing the creation of such an IP and ensuring its functioning at least at the first stage of its existence (in the future, in the case of successful development of the IP, its functioning will be covered both by the participants of the formed community and through the work of a number of other instruments of the modern econ-

omy, in particular advertising). Investors in IP can be: such venture funds as Sadara Ventures,[20] institutional investors from the Middle East (in particular from the UAE), and private investors from all over the world.[21] The active digitalization of the financial system, including banking, taking place both in Israel and in Palestine, will provide appropriate support for these processes.

Tripartite cooperation

We are fully aware of the fact that the implementation of both of the above described ideas of Palestinian-Israeli cooperation using the possibilities of the digital economy will be extremely difficult. But, firstly, ambitious ideas are just the engine of progress. And, secondly, in our opinion, there are mechanisms to facilitate their implementation to some extent.

One of such mechanisms is the involvement of a third party in the IP formation project. We see three most likely 'candidates' for this role: the United States, China, Russia. Before considering the pros and cons of each of them, let's define the functions of the third party of the project.

At the stage of the IP formation, the likelihood of the need for neutral moderation of this process is not excluded (it is not excluded even in physical space), since the parties may tend to go beyond the framework of business cooperation. The presence of a neutral partner in this context can have a stabilizing effect on the functioning of the IP.

Despite certain possibilities for organizing production (and some of the projects implemented through IP, of course, ultimately involve the organization of production) in Palestine, taking into account the availability of cheap labor, infrastructural restrictions will not allow to fully realize the existing potential for cooperation. In this regard, it becomes necessary to organize production in another place. Of course, each team has the opportunity to independently decide where to do this, but the presence of a certain background proposal, in our opinion, makes this process more efficient.

So, from the point of view of this functionality, the United States looks like the least preferable option, since today they are definitely not at all perceived as a neutral party in relation to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the cost of organizing production on its territory with all the available infrastructure is high. However, the presence of the most powerful innovations-based economy in the world gives the United States a signif-

icant advantage, since it can become both the main source of funding for the IP and the main market for the results of the within IP formed teams' innovative activities.

The United States itself may be interested in such a project, since participation in it, firstly, allows it to fulfill its role as one of the leading external actors in the Middle East region, using the mechanisms of 'soft power', and, secondly, it corresponds with the main aspirations, voiced in the economic part of Trump's plan to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.[22]

China is certainly interesting both as a sales market and as a production site. From a political point of view, it also looks rather neutral. At the same time, it is possible that China will try to structure IP in such a way as to derive maximum benefit for itself, without taking special account of the interests of those for whom this platform is being created.

China may be interested in participating in this project as part of its more global strategy of foreign economic expansion 'one belt - one road' (and 'pearl necklace'). In particular, it can be seen that Chinese companies are actively working in the Israeli-Jordanian QIZ. However, in this case, the PRC may not have a direct obvious motivation.

The Russian option looks interesting, since today the country is perceived by both sides as a neutral player, and Russia is also interesting as a production site. But its financial capabilities in comparison with the other two are the most modest.

Russia itself may be interested in this project in view of its active participation in the Middle East processes in general and its desire to play an important role in resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, in particular. In this case, an additional incentive may be the constant need to strengthen its position in the region in view of the rivalry with the United States for the role of a leading external player.

A significant drawback of all three 'candidates' is that the United States is currently in an acute phase of rivalry with both China and Russia. That is, the participation of each of these countries as a third partner can cause a serious negative reaction from another country on this list, which can lead to the failure of the project.

At the same time, there is a possibility for representatives of the business and political communities of these countries to create a joint company (non-profit organization, fund), which would act as such a collective third partner. We understand that this option may look quite utopian, but innovation is a way to make 'a fairy tale come true'.

The Digital Economy as a Tool for Overcoming the Crisis

In our opinion, digitalization is an interesting and effective tool for overcoming crisis phenomena in the economy, which is especially important for Palestine.

The Palestinian economy is almost directly dependent on the actions of Israel, but here it is necessary to pay attention to the following. Palestine has a fairly high level of young people with higher education, including girls, and this number is constantly growing (the literacy rate as of 2014 was 98.4% among men and 95% among women).[23] Despite the country's small financial investments in R&D and digital start-ups, the intellectual potential of Palestine is its highly liquid 'human capital', since at present, young people with good potential and knowledge base can come to the labor market to replace the stagnant low-skilled labor force from Palestine in the field of innovation. Along with this, it should be noted that not only Israel, but also rich Arab countries are interested in an inexpensive but highly intelligent workforce, which, in our opinion, can give a certain impetus for young Palestinian specialists to enter interested world markets and ensure the launch of digitalization processes in the country.

The practice of combating the pandemic of the new coronavirus has shown that the two countries have common ground in front of a common threat, since work was carried out to diagnose the identified sick person and the virus strain, mutual information was exchanged on all issues related to the disease and sick people, tents were opened at the checkpoint with a medical equipment. This fact allows us to hope that other socially significant tasks (and the development of the economy is a socially significant task) can be solved in a positive way.

The digital economy offers a wide range of opportunities, including solving the problems of the COVID-19 crisis in the long term. Of course, it should be noted that in any case it is necessary to take a package of anti-crisis solutions, in particular of a logistic nature, from two sides - Palestine and Israel - to allow the free movement of goods, services, people between states, as well as to solve the internal problems of Palestine itself, for example, to carry out reforms and come to a common concept on the main issues between Fatah and Hamas.

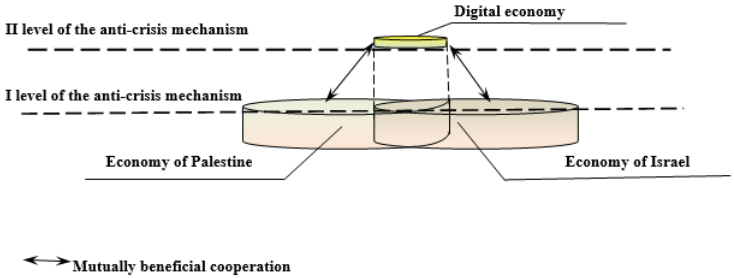

Figure 4. The digital economy in Palestinian-Israeli relations as an anti-crisis mechanism of the 2nd level

Source: Developed by Svetlana Babenkova

The digital economy is a step forward. Of course, in Israel it is at a higher level of development than in Palestine; however, in our opinion, it is the digital economy and the ICTs associated with it that are, in our terminology, an anti-crisis 'level II toolkit' (see Fig. 4), which depends on the internal potential of the country, including human potential, the quality of R&D, technical equipment, while it may not depend on the interrelated elements characteristic of the classical anti-crisis tools (we call it 'level I toolkit' - see Fig. 4).

So, in general, the anti-crisis management mechanism is a complex method with the help of which the process of preventing crises or gradual recovery from crisis situations is carried out. These methods may include, for example, debt restructuring, asset sale, additional financial infusion. Many books, textbooks and articles by both Russian and foreign authors are devoted to anti-crisis management, so in this work we will not dwell on the main concepts of this subject.[24]

However, it is advisable to note that the inclusion of the classical mechanism of anti-crisis management implies, first of all, a number of necessary actions, including analysis and assessment of the entity's financial condition, preparation of a plan of anti-crisis measures, the introduction of these comprehensive measures, taking into account the weighted risk. Of course, whether it is a bank, an enterprise, or a certain system as a whole (financial, socio-economic), the implementation of anti-crisis measures requires significant cash flows, most often from external sources, to the rehabilitation facility. If we consider anti-crisis

mechanisms that can be applied to Arab countries, then it should be noted here, including large remittances from donor countries to recipient countries, active participation in the countries' economic and political life of various international organizations (World Bank, IMF) etc.[25]

With regard to Palestine, the following should be noted: Having considered and analyzed the statistical data on the content of the main budget items, the country's financial situation, its socio-economic sustainability, the country's development scenarios (both without the consequences of COVID-19, and in the presence of deeply negative consequences of this pandemic), we can say that the country is on the verge of a very large crisis, perhaps even a repetition of the Lebanese scenario in terms of declaring a default.

Constant disagreements between Hamas and Fatah, the necessary financial borrowing by the authorities in the domestic financial market, imbalance in the fiscal system, the absence of a really working industrial sector, falling export revenues and decreasing investment - all this fully contributes to the country's approaching the abyss called 'default'. The traditional financial assistance in the form of tranches from the IMF cannot be the only 'panacea' for all the problems that Palestine is experiencing.

At the same time, it is necessary to remember about the significant level of dependence, which the country 'subscribes to' when receiving assistance from the IMF and other 'partner' organizations: the imposition of necessary political and social reforms by them, the complete subordination of the borrowing country leadership to the requirements set by the creditor organization. In any case, the use of classical anti-crisis mechanisms in solving the problems of Palestine, in our opinion, is ineffective. In this regard, the authors have proposed the second level of the anti-crisis mechanism (Fig. 4), which is understood as an anti-crisis mechanism within the digital economy.

This level does not entail risks associated with the classic anti-crisis mechanism, for example, financial dependence on external international organizations. The potential of this mechanism, first of all, is associated with the internal resources of the country itself, the competent young generation, the discovery of new innovative directions.

In fact, the implementation of projects within the framework of the basic and initial levels of cooperation between the two countries in the field of the digital economy forms the basis of the second-level anti-cri-

sis mechanism. The logic of this mechanism is that the socio-economic activity of the population could be exercised directly - without the intervention of the state. This is especially important for Palestine. Areas of activity using second-tier mechanisms are not limited only to what is commonly called an innovative economy, in view of the fact that digitalization potentially covers all spheres of the national economy.

Moreover, it makes it much easier to find third-party funding. The corruption of the Palestinian authorities is well known. By the third decade of the 21st century foreign investors who are ready to invest in the development of the Palestinian territory have accumulated fatigue from ineffective spending of these funds, which, coupled with the difficult geopolitical situation, makes them consider this possibility with caution. Proposed digital mechanisms remove (at least partially) this problem.

The use of digital economy tools in terms of the anti-crisis management mechanism is independent of global economic shocks and more flexible when challenges arise on the political map of the Middle East.

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Thus, as shown in the article, digitalization makes it possible to overcome existing barriers to economic development, especially for Palestine. But most importantly, it enables the business community of both countries to significantly reduce the significance of the current unfavorable geopolitical situation and intensify the economic component of bilateral relations. Moreover, the mechanisms we propose can operate in the context of an ongoing conflict, which is essential, since in this case there is a possibility of a gradual improvement in the economic situation in Palestine. And this is an important goal in itself, since from an economic point of view, Israel is much more developed. And its economic prospects do not raise significant questions.

We understand that many of the ideas expressed in the paper at the present time may seem either hardly implementable in the short and medium term, or very far from real life. But the acceleration of scientific and technological progress, a series of inventions that have fundamentally changed our lives over the past 30 years, the very logic of the principle of creative destruction formulated by one of the forerunners of the innovative economy, Joseph Schumpeter, allow us to conclude that even a discussion of our proposals is extremely useful when considering future development of the Middle East as a whole.

The normalization of relations between Israel and a number of Arab countries makes this paper even more relevant. First, this fact itself is indicative - there is an active process of de-ideologization of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which opens up an opportunity for the implementation of more pragmatic approaches in organizing the coexistence of the two peoples. Secondly, such a radical change in Israel's position in the region opens up new opportunities to stimulate the development of the Palestinian economy, in particular through the implementation of those bilateral and multilateral cooperation frameworks that we have outlined.

[1] For this part of the paper we use the information and data from: The World Bank. Economic Monitoring Report to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee. June 2, 2020. URL: http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/844141590600764047/pdf/Economic-Monitoring-Report-to-the-Ad-Hoc-Liaison-Committee.pdf (accessed on 17.07.2020)

[2] To connect a large number of digital products and services packages.

[3] The World Bank Marrakesh 2021. In 2018, the World Bank decided to launch an initiative in MENA countries to achieve full broadband Internet coverage in the region by 2030. URL: http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/844141590600764047/pdf/Economic-Monitoring-Report-to-the-Ad-Hoc-Liaison-Committee.pdf. (accessed on 07.23.2020).

For information: As of the end of 2019, the Internet penetration rate in Russia was 76%. URL: https://www.web-canape.ru/business/vsya-statistika-interneta-na-2019-god-v-mire-i-v-rossii/. (accessed on 07.23.2020).

[4] Stands for Digital Subscriber Line, which is a communication medium used to transmit digital signals over standard telephone lines

[5] About 600,000 Palestinians are connected to Israeli providers using a prepaid SIM card.

[6] The Joint Technical Committee was created in 1994 after the Oslo Agreement, as a technical, not a political platform, to consider issues of bilateral relations in the telecommunications field, but no regular or systematic meetings have never been held.

[7] See e.g. Peres Sh. *The New Middle East* (New York: Henry Holt & Co, 1993).

[8] See e.g. Maryasis D.A. Ekonomika i mirnoye uregulirovaniye na Blizhnem Vostoke, in *Arabo-izrail'skiy konflikt: staryye problemy i novyye plany* [Economy and Peaceful Settlement in the Middle East, in Arab-Israeli Conflict: Old Problems and New Plans] (Moscow: IIIIBV, 2003), pp. 27–32 (in Russian).

[9] MASHAV (Merkaz le shituf peula beinleummi - Hebrew) - Center for the Promotion of Economic Development. It is engaged in conducting a number of trainings and other educational programs on the use of effective methods for the development of various sectors of the economy. Agriculture often plays a major role here. To a certain extent, this program is a hidden advertisement of Israeli technologies (For more information about the MASHAV program, see e.g. Iakimova E.A. Tekhnologii v obmen na mir: 60-letiye agentstva po razvitiyu mezhdunarodnogo sotrudnichestva (MASHAV) [Technologies for Peace: 60th Anniversary of the Agency for the Development of International Cooperation (MASHAV)], in *Gosudarstvo Izrail': put' dlinoyu v 70 let (kollektivnaya monografiya)* [The State of Israel: a 70-year journey (collective monograph] (Moscow, MGIMO (U) Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2019), pp. 97-108 (in Russian).

[10] See the project's official web page: https://www.palinternship.com

[11] Cit. according to: Yablonko Y. Intern program boosts Palestinian tech sector. 04.03.2020. (URL: https://en.globes.co.il/en/article-intern-program-boosts-palestinian-tech-sector-1001320552). (accessed on: 23.07.2020).

[12] Information on the project derived from: Sheidlower N. Tech2Peace Brings Together Palestinians, Israelis Through Tech and Dialogue Workshops, 20.08.2020. URL: https://nocamels.com/2020/08/tech-2peace-palestinians-israelis-tech-dialogue/ (accessed on: 01.09.2020).

[13] See e.g: Passiante G., Secundo G. From geographical innovation clusters towards virtual innovation clusters: the Innovation Virtual System, in *42th European Regional Science Association (ERSA) Congress Report*. 08.2002; Babkin A., Kudryavtseva T., Utkina S. Formation of industrial clusters using method of virtual enterprises, in *Procedia Economics and Finance*, No. 5 (2013), *Elsevier,* pp. 68–72; O'Callaghan R. *Towards Dynamic Clustering: Capabilities and IT Enablers, in Digital Business Ecosystems*. Edited by Nachira F., Nicolai A., Dini p., Le Louarn M., Leon L.R. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2007, pp. 68-105.
URL: http://www.digital-ecosystems.org/book/Section2.pdf .

[14] *Cluster Development: A Pathway to Economic Recovery*. 11.03.2010. URL: http://e4oncompetitiveness.com/?p=80, (accessed on: 12.11.2014)

[15] Steele Ch. *Industry Clusters Evolving Role in Location Decisions*, 01.2011. URL: http://www.areadevelopment.com/siteSelection/jan2011/industry-clusters-evolve-location-decision93090.shtml?Page=1, (accessed on: 24.07.2020)

[16] On the research linked to this direction see e.g.: Fernández Hurtado S.R., Castillo Triana D., Martínez Martínez L.A. Clúster virtual: Nueva alternativa a la competitividad eficaz en las empresas, in *TENDENCIAS. Revista de la Facultad de Ciencias Económicas y Administrativas. Universidad de Nariño*.Vol. XIX No. 1 - 1er Semestre 2018, Enero- Junio, pp. 164-186.

[17] More in detail see e.g: Liping Z., Zuping Z. New Development of Traditional Industrial Clusters in China: Virtual Industrial Eco-clusters, in *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, volume 329. 4th International Conference on Contemporary Education, Social Sciences and Humanities (ICCESSH 2019). Atlantis Press, 2019, pp.1431-1439.

[18] Schwartz D., Bar-El R., Malul M. A Joint Virtual Advanced Technology Incubator – A New Pattern of Israeli-Palestinian Economic Cooperation, in *The Berkeley Electronic Press*. Volume 14, Issue 2, Article 3, 2008.

[19] More about QIZs see https://www.trade.gov/qualifying-industrial-zones (accessed on 26.09.2021).

[20] Sadara Ventures was founded in 2011 by Israeli-American entrepreneur and technology investor Yadin Kaufman in partnership with Palestinian technology entrepreneur Syed Nashef to help develop a modern technology economy in the PNA. The fund is, in fact, the first venture capital fund specially created for this purpose. As of mid-2020, it had 6 companies in its portfolio (For more information about the fund, see: https://www.sadaravc.com/).

[21] It should be noted that the instrument for financing the development of the Palestinian economy proposed by the Trump administration as part of the so-called 'deal of the century' may be just one of the significant sources of investment in this project. At the same time, due to the fact that the possibility of implementing this initiative is extremely low, in reality it is not possible to count on this resource.

[22] https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/peacetoprosperity/economic/ (accessed 26.09.2021)

[23] https://www.undp.org/content/dam/papp/docs/Publications/UNDP-papp-research-PHDR2015Education.pdf (accessed on 18.09.2020).

[24] E.g.: Baldin K.V., Perederyayev I.I., Rukosuyev A.V. *Antikrizisnoye upravleniye: makro- i mikro-uroven': Uchebnoye posobiye.6-ye izdaniye, ispravlennoye i dopolnennoye* [Anti-crisis management: macro and micro level: Textbook. 6th edition, revised and supplemented] (Moscow, Dashkov i K°, 2013); Faynshmidt E.A., Yur'yeva T.V. *Zarubezhnaya praktika antikrizisnogo upravleniya: Uchebnoye posobiye* [Foreign practice of anti-crisis management: Textbook] (Moscow, Yevraziyskiy otkrytyy institut, 2010); Kollektiv avtorov. *Antikrizisnoye upravleniye: Uchebnik* / Pod. red. I.K. Larionova. – 2-ye izd [Larionov I.K. (editor) Crisis management: Textbook] (Moscow, Dashkov i K°, ٢٠١٩) (in Russian).

[25] For more details see: Babenkova S. Yu. Blizhniy Vostok: nekotoryye problemy antikrizisnogo upravleniya v usloviyakh globalizatsii', in *Uchenyye zapiski Rossiyskoy akademii predprinimatel'stva* [The Middle East: Some Problems of Anti-Crisis Management in the Context of Globalization], in Scientific Notes of the Russian Academy of Entrepreneurship. Scientific and practical edition. Vol. 16, No. 2. (Moscow: Russian Academy of Entrepreneurship; Press Agency 'Science and Education', 2017), pp. 9-20. (URL: http://www.rusacad.ru/docs/nauka/Uch.Zap.t16.2.pdf) (in Russian).

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КОЛЛЕКТИВ АВТОРОВ

A VIEW FROM THE OUTSIDE: **RUSSIAN EXPERTS ABOUT MODERN ISRAEL**

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