T.C.
ANKARA YILDIRIM BEYAZIT UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

ISRAEL'S SYRIA POLICY AFTER THE ARAB SPRING

MASTER THESIS

AHMET CEM ÇELİK

THE DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

ANKARA, 2021

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Supervisor
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ONAY SAYFASI

Ahmet Cem ÇELİK tarafından hazırlanan "Israel's Syria Policy After the Arab Spring" adlı tez çalışması aşağıdaki jüri tarafından oy birliği ile Ankara Yıldırım Beyazıt Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Uluslararası İlişkiler Anabilim Dalı'nda Yüksek Lisans Tezi olarak kabul edilmiştir.

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Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Müdürü Doç. Dr. Seyfullah YILDIRIM

STATEMENT

I hereby declare that all information in this thesis has been obtained and presented following academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work, otherwise I accept all legal responsibility. (31-08-2021)

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ABSTRACT

Israel's Syria Policy After the Arab Spring

This study examines the historical development of Israeli-Syrian relations and Israel's Syria policy after the Arab Spring. The main purpose of the study is to reveal how and at what level the Arab Spring and the Syrian Civil War caused a breaking point in Israel's Syria policy. In this respect, first of all, after the establishment of Israel, its bilateral relations with Syria are examined. Then, the dynamics that determine Israel's approach to the Arab Spring and its policy are defined and analyzed. In the following chapter, Israel's Syria policy implemented during the Syrian Civil War was subjected to a periodic categorization based on actors and actions. In this context, statements of Israeli soldiers, diplomats, politicians, and other statesmen were also utilized.

With the main lines, this study seeks to answer the question of whether the Arab Spring or the Syrian Civil War was a significant turning point in Israel's ongoing Syria policy. For this purpose, in this study, at what stages and how Israel was involved in the Syrian Crisis, the red lines and reflexes of the Tel Aviv Administration in decision-making and implementation processes, and its relations with other actors playing a role in the Syrian Crisis were examined inclusively. Finally, three possible scenarios in Syria and Israel's possible political and military reactions to these scenarios are evaluated through actors, factors, and actions.

Keywords: Israel, Syria, Arab Spring, Syrian Crisis, Syrian Civil War, Foreign Policy

ÖZET

İsrail'in Arap Baharı Sonrası Suriye Politikası

Bu çalışma, İsrail-Suriye ilişkilerinin tarihsel gelişimini ve İsrail'in Arap Baharı sonrası Suriye politikasını incelemektedir. Çalışmanın temel amacı, Arap Baharı'nın ve Suriye İç Savaşı'nın İsrail'in Suriye politikasında nasıl ve hangi düzeyde bir kırılma meydana getirdiğini ortaya koymaktır. Bu minvalde, öncelikle İsrail'in kuruluşunu müteakip Suriye ile ikili ilişkileri incelenmiş; daha sonrasında ise İsrail'in Arap Baharı'na yaklaşımı ve politikasını belirleyen dinamikler tanımlanıp analiz edilmiştir. İlerleyen aşamada, İsrail'in Suriye İç Savaşı boyunca uyguladığı Suriye politikası aktörler ve eylemler temelinde periyodik bir kategorizasyona tâbi kılınmıştır. Bu bağlamda İsrailli askerler, diplomatlar, siyasetçiler ve diğer devlet adamlarının açıklamalarından da istifade edilmiştir.

Ana hatları itibarıyla, bu çalışma, İsrail'in süregelen Suriye politikasında Arap Baharı ve Suriye İç Savaşı'nın önemli bir dönüm noktası olup olmadığı sorusuna cevap aramaktadır. Bu maksatla çalışmada, İsrail'in Suriye krizine hangi aşamalarda ve nasıl müdahil olduğu, Tel Aviv Yönetimi'nin karar alma ve uygulama süreçlerindeki kırmızı çizgileri ve refleksleri ile Suriye krizinde rol oynayan diğer aktörlerle ilişkileri kapsamlı bir şekilde incelenmiştir. Son olarak ise aktörler, faktörler ve eylemler üzerinden Suriye'de yaşanması muhtemel üç senaryo ve bu senaryolar karşısında İsrail'in olası siyasi ve askeri reaksiyonları değerlendirilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İsrail, Suriye, Arap Baharı, Suriye Krizi, Suriye İç Savaşı, Dış Politika

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DMZ	Demilitarized Zone
FSA	Free Syrian Army
IDF	Israeli Defense Forces
IRGC	Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Sham
MAC	Mixed Armistice Commission
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
PKK	Partiya Karkeren Kurdistane
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organization
PYD	Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat
U.S.	United States
UN	United Nations
UNTSO	United Nations Truce Supervision Organization
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
YPG	Yekineyen Parastina Gel

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

The Arab Spring is an ongoing process that had started with the protests in Tunisia at the end of 2010 and the beginning of 2011, then spread to other Arab countries with the domino effect. This process has led to radical changes in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The Arab Spring protests, which started in Tunisia, brought an end to the authoritarian regimes that had been ruling some Arab countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Yemen. The end of these authoritarian regimes, unfortunately, did not come up with good results in all of these countries and dragged Libya and Yemen into civil wars which are still ongoing to this day. In Syria, on the other hand, it did not cause a regime change and dragged Syria into an intense and unfortunate civil war. Even if it does not cause a regime change in all Arab countries as in Egypt or civil war as in Syria, it can be said that the Arab Spring affected more or less the entire MENA region.

Therefore, the Arab Spring is a process of great significance for all the countries of the region due to its regional consequences. One of the countries in this region that has been affected by this process is Israel. Although Israel is a non-Arab country, it is surrounded by Arab states due to its geographical location. This situation makes Israel affectable to radical changes happening in neighboring Arab states. However, the changes in Israel's northern neighbor Syria differ from others in some aspects. First of all, Syria has not signed a peace treaty with Israel, unlike Egypt and Jordan. Therefore, it is still technically in a state of war with Israel.[1] In addition, Syria did not witness a regime change like Egypt during the Arab Spring process. These factors, combined with the devastating civil war that has been going on for 10 years, put Syria in a different position for Israel.

The 73-year-old Israeli-Syrian relations started with the declaration of war. Despite this, relations have witnessed various ups and downs and even attempts for peace over time. These peace initiatives continued, albeit with interruptions, until 2011, when the Arab Spring began. As Arab Spring revolts spread to Syria, Israel's adversary Assad regime tremendously

[1] Fredric C. Hof, "Mapping Peace between Syria and Israel", *U.S. Institute of Peace Special Report* 219, (2009). p.2, Accessed 10 August 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep12497.

weakened, and eventually, Syria has become a weak state.[2] From the beginning of the Arab Spring to the present day, Israel's stance towards the Syrian Crisis has been an area of curiosity.

As the former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger stated, there can be no war without Egypt and no peace without Syria in the Middle East.[3] Kissinger's words draw attention to the significance that Syria has in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Inspired by the significance of Syria, this study aims to examine Israel's policies towards Syria in the context of the Arab Spring. The Arab Spring was chosen as a milestone because it ignited the fuse of the Syrian Civil War. The Syrian Civil War has put Syria in a vital process, so the role of the Syrian Civil War in Israel's Syria policy is a subject that extremely deserves further research.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The main issue waiting to be explained in the thesis is whether there was a breaking point in Israel's Syria policy after the Arab Spring. In order to clarify this, first of all, Israel-Syria relations should be discussed from the very beginning and an analytical approach should be developed. In the light of historical data, the consequences of a possible regime change in Syria or the continuation of the status quo in Syria for Israel should be emphasized. Based on these results and other dynamics, it will be tried to explain the periodic reactions of Israel to the Syrian Civil War. Thus, it will be possible to discover to what extent Israel is involved in the Syrian Crisis and its red lines regarding the Syrian Crisis. When these pieces are put together, whether the Syrian Civil War can be qualified as a breaking point in Israel's Syria policy will be revealed.

Therefore, in order for the thesis to achieve its purpose, it is necessary to answer the following questions:

1. How has Israel's Syria policy been shaped periodically?
2. What dynamics played a role when Israel shaped its Arab Spring policy?

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[2] Ehud Eiran, "Israel and Weak Neighboring States: Lessons from the Israeli Experience in Lebanon *in Israel and the Arab Spring: Opportunities in Change*, eds. N. Goren & J. Yudkevich (Mitvim and the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation, 2013), pp. 59-68, p.59. Accessed 10 August 2021. https://www.fes.org.il/shop/israelarabspring.

[3] Marwa Daoudy, "A Missed Chance for Peace: Israel And Syria's Negotiations Over the Golan Heights." *Journal of International Affairs* 61 no.2, (2008) pp.215-234, p.215. Accessed 25 May 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24358120.

3. As part of the Arab Spring, was the Syrian Civil War perceived as an advantage or a disadvantage by Israel?

4. How has Israel periodically reacted to the Syrian Civil War and to what extent has it been involved in the Syrian Crisis?

5. What are Israel's goals in Syria? At what point do these goals converge or conflict with other actors playing a role in the Syrian Civil War?

6. What are the consequences for Israel of a possible regime change or continuation of the status quo in Syria?

When these questions are answered, Israel's Syria policy after the Arab Spring will be understood. Accordingly, what place the Syrian Crisis has occupied in Israel's grand Syria policy will be revealed.

1.3. Justification

As a part of the Arab Spring, the Syrian Crisis has become one of the most important agenda topics in Middle East politics in recent years, due to its regional and global effects. Sinkaya divides the influential factors in Middle East politics into three: structural factors, political actors, and cyclical factors. The mentioned political actors are regional states, great powers, international and regional organizations, and non-state actors.[4] If the Syrian Crisis is considered a part of Middle East politics, regional actors need to be taken into account as well as other factors to analyze it properly. One of those regional actors, perhaps even one of the most important, is Israel.

Israel should be taken into account when analyzing Syria's future, not only because of its importance in Middle East politics but also its bumpy relations and geographic proximity with Syria. For this reason, Israel's overall Syria policy should be analyzed thoroughly and the role played by them in the Syrian Crisis should be revealed. This study provides an opportunity to perform a holistic analysis by periodically approaching Israel's Syria policy. In this way, the importance of the Syrian Crisis for Israel's Syria policy can be understood by comparing the whole picture. Furthermore, this research aims to reveal the extent to which Israel is involved in the Syrian Crisis.

[4] Bayram Sinkaya, "Ortadoğu Siyasetine Giriş: Temel Faktörler, Aktörler ve Dinamikler," (Ankara: ORSAM, 2016) pp. 4-9, Accessed 6 August 2021. https://orsam.org.tr/d_hbanaliz/ortadogu-siyasetine-giris-temel-faktorler-aktorler-ve-dinamikler.pdf.

This study also categorizes other regional and global actors involved in the Syrian Civil War from Israel's perspective. With this categorization, Israel's aims and tools in the Syrian Crisis, its relations with non-state actors in the Syrian Crisis, and its converging and conflicting interests with the other states playing a role in the Syrian Crisis are summarized. Herewith, it is aimed to help the Syrian Crisis to be analyzed better.

It is thought that this study, which has originality since it periodically analyzes Israel's position in the Syrian Crisis and categorizes the actors in the Syrian Crisis from the viewpoint of Israel, will make a contribution to the Turkish literature. Thus, it is hoped that this study will contribute to the policy-making process of Turkey, another regional actor closely interested in the Syrian Crisis.

1.4. Methodology

This thesis is a qualitative research aimed to find answers to research questions by considering Israel's Syria policy after the Arab Spring as a case study. Israel's Syria policy after the Arab Spring has been tried to be analyzed from the statements of Israeli decision-makers by utilizing primary and secondary sources of information. The views of active and retired Israeli diplomats are also included due to their knowledge about the Arab-Israeli peace process and Israel's Syria policy. Israel is a state that has prioritized defense and security issues in its foreign policy since its foundation.[5] Since security is so important in Israel's foreign policy, it can be said that besides bureaucrats and diplomats, army and intelligence officers have also been influential in Israel's Syria policy. For this reason, the statements of active and retired army and intelligence officers were given a place in this research.

The primary sources of information usually consist of news and articles from various media organizations. The media organizations used are usually Israeli newspapers such as The Times of Israel, The Jerusalem Post, Haaretz, and international media organizations such as Al Jazeera, Al-Monitor, The New York Times, The Washington Post, Reuters, BBC, The Guardian, etc. In addition to these, statements on the official websites of Israeli state institutions such as the Israeli Ministry of Justice, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Israeli Defensive Forces were also used. The utilized secondary sources are usually

[5] Ufuk Ulutaş, Selin Bölme, Gülşah Neslihan Demir, Furkan Torlak, and Saliha Ziya. "İsrail Siyasetini Anlama Kılavuzu," İstanbul: SETA, (2012) p. 62, Accessed 5 August 2021. http://file.setav.org/Files/Pdf/20130125150650_israil-siyasetini-anlama-kilavuzu_son.pdf.

books, academic articles, columns, and reports on the Arab-Israeli wars, the Arab-Israeli peace process, Israeli foreign policy, the Arab Spring, and the Syrian Civil War.

1.5. Literature Review

The Arab Spring has been a phenomenon that has attracted a great number of researchers' attention over the past decade. More specifically, there are studies on the relationship between the Arab Spring and Israel. The book "Israel and the Arab Spring: Opportunities in Change" edited by Nimrod Goren and Jenia Yudkevich draws attention to the political and geopolitical dynamics between the Arab Spring and Israel. The reflections of the Arab Spring on Israel are discussed in many ways and the opportunities and risks that the Arab Spring presents to Israel are summarized in this book. On top of that, the Syrian Crisis is evaluated as an opportunity for Israel in the long run as it weakens the bloc led by Iran.[6]

The book titled "The Arab Spring, Democracy and Security: Domestic and international ramifications", edited by Efraim Inbar, comprehensively discusses the political, economic, and strategic reflections of the Arab Spring from Israel's perspective. However, this book, unlike the previous one, draws attention to the risks that will arise for Israel due to the instability caused by the regime change in Syria.[7]

Benedetta Berti tries to analyze Israel's reactions to the Arab Spring from an extensive perspective in her article "Israel and the Arab Spring: Understanding Attitudes and Responses to the New Middle East." According to Berti, the democratization process that came with the Arab Spring brings opportunities for Israel in the long run, but the uncertainty following the fall of the authoritarian regimes frightens Israel. According to Berti, this dilemma of Israel is seen more clearly in the Syrian Crisis. The overthrow of the Assad regime was viewed as a new opportunity in Israeli-Syrian relations, on the other hand, there were concerns that a rise of the Islamist regime in Syria will be more hostile to Israel than

[6] Elia Podeh and Nimrod Goren, "Postscript: Israel in the Wake of the Arab Spring", in *Israel and the Arab Spring: Opportunities in Change*, ed. Nimrod Goren and Jenia Yudkevich, (Mitvim and the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation, 2013): 98-102, p.100. Accessed 14 April 2021. https://www.fes.org.il/shop/israelarabspring.
[7] Efraim Inbar, "The Strategic Implications for Israel", in *The Arab Spring, Democracy and Security Domestic and International Ramifications*, ed. Efraim Inbar, (London, England: Routledge, 2013): 145-165, p. 145, Accessed 5 June 2021. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203539132.

Assad.[8]

The three studies mentioned so far view the Arab Spring from a broad perspective and briefly address the Syrian Crisis as a part of it. While analyzing Israel's Arab Spring policy and trying to understand Israel's Syria policy, these three studies have been benefited a lot. In addition to these studies, some studies specifically approach Israel's policy in the Syria crisis.

Itamar Rabinovich's analysis report "Israel's View of the Syrian Crisis" is one of them. Rabinovich assesses the developments in Syria from the perspective of Israel in this report. According to Rabinovich, the most lucrative option for Israel is the overthrow of the regime in Syria by secular opposition and the establishment of central authority. However, due to Israel's negative reputation in the Arab World, support for any opposition faction would have the opposite effect. Rabinovich considers the triumph of the regime in the civil war as the least likely scenario. The worst-case scenario for Israel, according to Rabinovich, is the collapse of the Assad regime and its successor's failure to establish central authority.[9]

Özlem Tür, in her article titled "Israel and the Syrian Crisis - Between Keeping the Status Quo and Demanding Change", discusses Israel's Arab Spring policy from a general perspective and also addresses Israel's policy in particular regarding the Syrian Crisis. In the article, which briefly mentions Israel-Syria relations since the Hafez Assad period, it is emphasized that Israel is stuck between two options in Syria, as in Berti's article. The reason for this dilemma is the uncertainty and new opportunities that will arise from regime change in Syria. The most important of these opportunities for Israel is the weakening of Iran and Hezbollah. Tür argues that the opinion on the Israeli side that wants a regime change in Syria is gaining strength. In addition, the limits of Israel's intervention in the Syrian Crisis are discussed in the article. Tür concludes, by agreeing with Rabinovich, that open support for any group in Syria would backfire on Israel.[10]

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[8] Benedetta Berti, "Israel and the Arab Spring: Understanding Attitudes and Responses to the "New Middle East", in *The West and the Muslim Brotherhood After the Arab Spring,* ed. Lorenzo Vidino (Al Mesbar Studies and Research Center and Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2013): 130-146. p.135 Accessed 14 April 2021. https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/162622/201303.west_and_the_muslim_brotherhood_after_the_arab_spring.pdf.

[9] Itamar Rabinovich, "Israel's View of the Syrian Crisis", Washington DC: Brookings Institution, (2012) pp. 1-12, Accessed 8 April 2021. https://www.brookings.edu/research/israels-view-of-the-syrian-crisis/.

[10] Özlem Tür, "Israel and the Syrian Crisis: Between Keeping the Status Quo and Demanding Change. *Ekonomi İşletme Siyaset ve Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi* 1, no.1, (2015): 85–103, pp. 100-101. Accessed 10 August 2021. https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/107100.

Larry Hanauer, in his perspective "Israel's Interests and Options in Syria", lists Israel's goals and actions in the Syrian Crisis. According to Hanauer, Israel's capacity to influence the outcome of the Syrian Crisis is limited and it is not in Israel's interests to intervene in the crisis. In this report, Hanauer seeks an answer to the question of how Israel can protect its interests in Syria despite its limited capacity to intervene. Hanauer argues that any definite outcome in the Syrian Crisis will have various negative consequences for Israel. According to him, the most profitable outcome for Israel is the prolonging of the Syrian Crisis. As the crisis prolongs, Israel will be able to maintain its proactive self-defense strategy and protect its interests without being a party to the crisis.[11]

In "Israel's Policy on the Syrian Civil War: Risks and Opportunities," Nir Boms discusses the evolution of Israel's Syria policy since the beginning of the crisis and assesses Israel's risks and opportunities in the Syrian Civil War. In the article, it is tried to explain that although Israel initially took a passive observer stance towards the Syrian Crisis, it took more active measures in the later stages on the Syrian border. The reason for this, according to Boms, is the establishment of a new status quo on the Syrian side that deepens the Iranian presence in Syria. Boms also argues, by disagreeing with Hanauer, that Israel has a high capacity to support the opposition in Syria. According to him, the ambiguous attitude has worked against Israel, and that Israel should take more assertive steps regarding the Syrian Crisis.[12]

The common feature in each of these studies is that the Israeli-Syrian relations have not been comprehensively addressed from beginning to end. On the other hand, not all actors in the Syrian Civil War are categorized from Israel's point of view. This study aims to close the gaps in these fields and contribute to the literature by making use of these and unmentioned sources.

1.6. Chapter Outline

The first chapter is the introduction. It contains background, statement of the problem, justification, and methodology of the research and literature review.

The second chapter covers the historical background of Israel-Syria relations until

[11] Larry Hanauer. "Israel's Interests and Options in Syria", Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, (2016) p.16. Accessed 10 August 2021. https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE185.html..
[12] Nir Boms. "Israel's Policy on the Syrian Civil War: Risks and Opportunities", *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 11, no. 3, (2018) pp.10-11, Accessed 25 May 2021. https://doi.org/10.1080/23739770.2017.1430006.

the Arab Spring. It contains the wars, peace negotiations, and other significant developments from 1948 to 2011.

The third chapter examines how Israel reacted to the Arab Spring and discusses the political, geopolitical, security, terrorism dynamics that were influential in constructing its policy. Discussing these dynamics and the role of Iran is essential before directly addressing Israel's Syria policy after the Syrian Civil War.

The fourth chapter analyzes how Israel periodically reacts to significant developments in the Syrian Civil War and its overall Syria policy after 2011.

The fifth chapter pertains to the general discussion. This is the chapter where the obtained data are concluded and the actors in the Syrian Civil War are categorized from Israel's point of view.

2. ISRAEL AND SYRIA IN THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT: FROM 1949 TO THE ARAB SPRING

2.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the historical development of Israeli Syrian Relations until the Arab Spring. In order to comprehend contemporary Israeli Syrian relations, it is necessary to build a timeline from the past to the present. In this way, how the relations between the two countries started, how they have been going in the course of time, and where they have reached would be clearly understood. In order to better understand this development, this chapter deals with the relations between the two countries in six different stages. At the same time, changes in relations between two countries require time frames. The reasons for these attitude changes are the internal factors and various external factors in both Israel and Syria. For some reason, peaks and troughs of the relations between the two countries and their reasons need to be well examined. Perhaps in this way, inferences can be made that can shed light on the recent past and even the future.

The first phase of the relations between the two countries until the Arab Spring witnessed military conflicts and the second phase witnessed attempts to make peace. The first main argument in this chapter is the causes of the conflicts that occurred in the first phase of relations. The second main argument is how peace initiatives in the second phase of the relations have failed. Sometimes one side never wanted peace, and sometimes even if both sides were eager for peace, no agreement was reached. Because there was no consensus between the two countries on the extent and conditions of the peace.

2.2. Armistice Period (1949-1951)

Studying Israeli Syrian relations from a historical point of view is not an easy task since the two countries have been involved in various conflicts since the independence of Israel. The state of war, which began with the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, continues even today.

The 1948 Arab-Israeli War, called The First Palestine War by the Arabs and The War of Independence by the Israelites, has two stages. The first was the civil war between Arabs and Jews at the British Mandate for Palestine which began on 30 November 1947. The

second phase of the war was the conventional war that began on 15 May 1948 when the neighboring Arab states intervened.[13] After Israel declared independence on 14 May 1948, the armies of Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria were directly involved in the conflict between Arabs and Jews. It was also the newly established State of Israel's first war with its Arab neighbors. Despite initial defeats, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF), which was established during the war, managed to prevail over the Arab armies. Egypt signed a ceasefire with Israel on February 14, Lebanon on March 23, Jordan on April 3, and finally Syria on 20 July 1949.[14]

With this military victory, 77 percent of the Palestinian territories fell under Israeli control and around 700,000 Palestinians became refugees. Israel owned 21 percent more land than the land appointed to it by the 1947 United Nations Partition Plan. In the northern part of mandate Palestine, only the land captured by Syria along the Jordan River was not occupied by Israel.[15] This shows that the Syrian army made gains beyond the colonial boundaries set between the British and French administrations in 1923. For this reason, Israel wanted the 1923 borders to be referred to when negotiating the ceasefire with Syria. However, when negotiating with Egypt and Jordan, Israel wanted the military outcome to be referred.[16] Because Israel had the upper hand on the ground against Egypt and Jordan, it controlled more areas than the 1923 borders when the engagement ended.

[13] Benny Morris, "The First Stage of the Civil War, November 1947–March 1948." p.77 In *1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War*, (Yale University Press, 2008):75-112. Accessed 9 April 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1np9bm.8.
[14] Netanel Lorch, "The Arab-Israeli Wars", *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs,* Accessed 9 April 2021. https://mfa.gov.il/mfa/aboutisrael/history/pages/the%20arab-israeli%20wars.aspx.
[15] Donald Neff, "Israel-Syria: Conflict at the Jordan River, 1949-1967." *Journal of Palestine Studies* 23, no. 4 (1994): 26-40, p. 27, Accessed 20 December 2020. doi:10.2307/2538209.
[16] Jerome Slater, "Lost Opportunities for Peace in the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Israel and Syria, 1948-2001." *International Security* 27, no. 1 (2002): 79-106, pp.84-86, Accessed 20 December 2020. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3092153.



Figure 2.1. *The Syrian-Israeli Frontier (Sourced from Jewishvirtuallibrary.org)*

The negotiation process, which began with the ceasefire signed between Israel and Syria on 20 July 1949, continued for two years. This ceasefire process did not allow for

normal relations, such as the ceasefire agreements signed by Israel with other Arab countries. It was merely a ceasefire agreement with military arrangements. Under article seven of the ceasefire treaty, a Mixed Armistice Commission (MAC) was established to oversee the fulfillment of the requirements of its treaty, with a total of five members, two from each party to the treaty and the head of the commission appointed by the UN. The appointed commission chairman was head of the UN's United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) department.[17] UNTSO was a department established in 1949 to observe a ceasefire between Israel and Arab states, with military observers from various nations.[18]

With the ceasefire agreement, three demilitarized zones (DMZs) were established in disputed areas totaling 66.5 square miles. There were no settlements in the northern DMZ, but there were Jewish and Arab settlements in the central and southern DMZs. However, all of them were used for farming and grazing. Each DMZ consisted of two main parts, the fully demilitarized inner core, and the outer shell, which contained only defensive troops. This DMZ solution had Syria withdraw its troops from areas it occupied during the war. In return, the status of these disputed regions would be determined with a peace treaty.[19]

Colonel Husni Zaim, who came to power with a coup in March 1949, was in power in Syria when this ceasefire was signed. Zaim intended to establish good relations with the United States by signing peace with Israel. In this way, he planned to get economic aid from the United States.

Zaim's goals were to make Syria more stable thanks to the peace treaty and to increase his charisma in the country with the territory gained. Under Zaim's peace offering, Israel would grant Syria permanent access to the Jordan River and Lake Tiberias waters. In return, Syria would host 300,000 out of 700,000 Palestinian refugees. Israeli Prime Minister Ben Gurion rejected the offer, thinking that territorial demands would continue and that making territorial concessions would make Israel look weak. Moshe Sharett, Israel's foreign minister, preferred a path of empathy with the Arabs. However, Prime Minister Ben Gurion had absolutely no confidence in the Arabs and thought they wanted to eradicate Israel at the

[17] Muhammad Muslih, "The Golan: Israel, Syria, and Strategic Calculations." *Middle East Journal* 47, no. 4 (1993): 611-32. Accessed 15 December 2020. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4328632.
[18] United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, Background, Accessed 27 December 2020. https://untso.unmissions.org/background.
[19] Neff, p. 27

earliest opportunity.[20] Zaim offered to make another peace treaty, this time based on the 1923 borders, but for the same reasons, Ben Gurion refused.

In 1949, there were two more military coups in Syria. In August, Colonel Sami Hinnawi, in December, Colonel Adib Shishakli staged a coup. Shishakli was the man who held power until 1954.[21] Shishakli banned the anti-Israeli and anti-western Muslim Brotherhood movement in Syria. Like his predecessor Zaim, he tried to improve relations with Israel and the United States. Shishakli even renewed Zaim's peace proposal, offering to divide the DMZs between Israel and Syria in exchange for accepting 500,000 Palestinian refugees. This meant that, like the previous proposal, Syria would reach the Jordan River and Lake Tiberias. Shishakli's renewed peace offer was also rejected by Ben Gurion because it included territorial concessions like the previous one.[22]

Another reason why Syria's leaders were so insistent on demanding territory was to somewhat ease the public outcry over a peace treaty with Israel. Moreover, the territorial gains from Israel would subdue the view in the Arab world that Israel has spreading tendencies. The reason for anger towards Israel in the Syrian public was not just a religious or nationalist response. The consequences of the 1948 War, frequent clashes at the border, the migration of large quantities of Jewish settlers to Israel on these dates were among the reasons.[23]

Another reason Israel did not discuss territorial concessions was that it did not want to share the waters of the Jordan River and Lake Tiberias with Syria. Although Moshe Sharett was more moderate compared to Ben Gurion, in a report to the Israeli assembly Knesset, he explained why Husni Zaim's offer was rejected: "What is at stake is the water's edge, the shore of Lake Tiberias, the East Bank of the Jordan River... We want to keep these waters within the state's territory and not to make Syria a partner."[24]

As a result, three coups were staged in Syria during this period. In all of them, those who seized the power somehow sought to sign a peace treaty with Israel. The purpose of

[20] Moshe Ma'oz, "From Conflict to Peace? Israel's Relations with Syria and the Palestinians." *Middle East Journal* 53, no. 3 (1999): 393-416. Accessed 15 December 2020. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4329353.
[21] Kevin W. Martin, "The Beginnings of Authoritarian Culture in the Arab World: The Persistence and Resilience of Undemocratic Government in Syria" *IAS The Institute Letter Spring 2018,* Accessed 27 December 2020. https://www.ias.edu/ideas/martin-authoritarian-beginnings.
[22] Slater, p. 87
[23] Ma'oz, 1999, p. 396
[24] Slater, p. 87

their request was to improve economic relations with the United States, the leader of the Western Bloc. In doing so, they wanted to suppress anti-Israel reactions within the country by taking land from Israel. Israel, on the other hand, was certainly not keen on returning territories. The main reason for this was that Israel did not want to set a bad example for peace talks with other Arab countries. Israel thought the territory demands by the Arab countries would continue if it makes territorial concessions. Furthermore, Israel's goal was to maximize its territorial gains from the very beginning. That's why it wanted 1923 borders to be referred to when negotiating a ceasefire with Syria. On the other hand, it was inevitable that Syria would gain enough territories to reach the water resources such as Lake Tiberias and the Jordan River. This would undoubtedly lead to further disagreements over the water issue between Israel and Syria.

2.3. Clashes for DMZs (1951-1956)

The first two years of the ceasefire between Israel and Syria have been peaceful and quiet. Israeli and Arab farmers cultivated their lands very close to each other. Meanwhile, Israel continued to expand its farmlands in violation of Arab farmlands and carry out water projects on demilitarized zones. Irrigation canals that were built as part of these water projects violated Arab farmers' properties. This inevitably ignited five years of conflict over control of the DMZs. On 21 January 1951, The World Zionist Organization's Jewish National Fund donated $250 Million for several investments, including the Huleh Drainage Project which aimed at transferring water from The Huleh Swamp to the Negev Desert. However, it later became clear that the water channels required for the project violated the Syrian territory in the central demilitarized zone. After Syria complained about this situation, Syria-Israel MAC ruled that this project was a violation of the 1949 Armistice Agreement. Thereupon, Israel claimed for the first time on 24 March 1951, that it had full sovereignty over the DMZs. Israel claimed that it had the right to process because it was the successor to Mandatory Palestine and that the 1949 Armistice was only a military agreement.[25] United Nations officials countered Israel's claim, underlining that the sovereignty of demilitarized zones has been left unsolved on purpose for resolution by a peace treaty to be signed later.[26]

Israel tried to achieve actual gains in the field in order to solve the problem

[25] Neff, p. 30
[26] Fred J. Khouri, "Friction and Conflict on the Israeli-Syrian Front." *Middle East Journal* 17, no. 1/2 (1963): 14-34. Accessed 2 January 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4323551.

unilaterally rather than a peace treaty. This situation is summed up by Ariel Shalev as follows:

> "In the first years of the armistice regime it was Israel that tried unilaterally to effect changes in the status quo in the DMZ... [initiating] activity on the ground to change the status quo in its favor and secure full control of the area. Many of the ensuing incidents were triggered by Israel's attempts to extend the areas under cultivation on Arab-owned land, with the Syrians opening fire in response."[27]

As a first step, Arab farmers living in demilitarized areas were forced to leave the places where they live, and Jewish paramilitary farms were established in those places. The Syrian Army, which saw Jewish farmers working in a land abandoned by Arab farmers, opened fire on Jewish farmers. This attack led to Israeli retaliatory raids on Syria, and in fact, ignited years of military conflict over the DMZs.[28]

On 25 March 1951, when Israelis were working for The Huleh Drainage Project in the central DMZ, clashes with Syrian forces emerged for the first time. Although there were no casualties from either side, Israel exiled 785 Palestinians from the central DMZ a week later. The crisis escalated a month later when two Israeli soldiers were killed by Syrians in southern DMZ. Then the Israeli cabinet secretly decided to drive all Arabs from the DMZs.[29] On the same day, Israel launched airstrikes in the southern DMZ. Due to these airstrikes, two Arab civilians were killed and six wounded. And also 1200 Arab residents were driven out of southern and central sectors of the DMZs. These actions were strongly condemned by the United States. On May 2, Syrian troops infiltrated the central DMZ to prevent the evacuation of the remaining Arab settlements. However, they were repelled after five days of fighting that cost the lives of forty Israeli soldiers.[30]

Finally, on 8 May 1951, the UN Security Council called for a ceasefire, and on May 18th it adopted Resolution 93 with 10 votes to none and the abstaining vote of the Soviet Union. According to this resolution, Israel would completely stop The Huleh Drainage

[27] Aryeh Shalev, Israel and Syria: Peace and Security in the Golan (Tel Aviv: Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Tel Aviv University, 1994), pp. 45-49. Quoted in Jerome Slater, ibid.
[28] Slater, p. 88
[29] Benny Morris, Israel's Border Wars: 1949-1956. Arab Infiltration, Israeli Retaliation, and the Countdown to the Suez War (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 363, quoted in Donald Neff, ibid.
[30] Neff, p. 31

project and allow Arab civilians which were driven from the DMZs to return their homes.[31] However only 350 Arab civilians were able to return home, and Israel did not allow more to return. On the other hand, on 6 June 1951, The Huleh Drainage Project was halted by Israel.[32]

On 20 June 1951, Israel announced that they will not attend any Mixed Armistice Commission meetings if DMZs are on the agenda. They did not think there was a reason to discuss sovereign Israeli territory. On the contrary, Syria has also announced to UNTSO that they will not attend Mixed Armistice Commission meetings if DMZs are not on the agenda. Israel has not answered the calls from the United Nations for further meetings and even blocked the entry of United Nations officials into the DMZs. This Israeli decision permanently ended Mixed Armistice Commission meetings.[33]

These clashes in the spring of 1951 led to the de facto partition of the demilitarized zones. Syria managed to control inhabited northern DMZ, and the village of Al-Hama in the southern DMZ. The west bank of the Jordan River in the central demilitarized zone came under the control of Israel and the east bank came under the control of Syria. Thus, Syria maintained its access to Lake Tiberias on the northeast coast despite "the 10-meters strip" which makes the Lake Tiberias within the borders of Mandate Palestine. Although there were minor border changes to the detriment of Syria for the following 16 years, these de facto borders which had been formed in 1951, generally determined the 4 June 1967 line.[34]

On 20 August 1951 UNTSO chief-of-staff General William Edward Riley submitted a report to United Nations Security Council explaining Israeli actions which undermine UN efforts for resolution. He listed:

- Israeli occupation of Palestinian-controlled al-Khuri farm in central DMZ
- Israeli restriction of Palestinian travel in central DMZ

[31] UN, S/2157, May 18, 1951. Accessed 3 January 2021. https://unispal.un.org/DPA/DPR/unispal.nsf/0/7B0D9E1D08CC405E852560C2006EC543.
[32] Sydney Gruson, "Drainage Project Halted by Israel," *The New York Times*, 7 June 1951. Accessed 3 January 2021. https://www.nytimes.com/1951/06/07/archives/drainage-project-halted-by-israel-job-suspended-for-few-days-to.html.
[33] Neff, p. 31
[34] Fredric C. Hof, "The Line of June 4, 1967," *Middle East Insight*, Vol.14, No. 5 (September-October 1999) Accessed 2 January 2021. https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/line-of-june-4-1967.

- Israel's blocking of the return of Palestinians driven from the Central DMZ in March

- Israel's attempt to establish a police force in Kirad-al Baqqara and Kirad-al Gannama in the Central DMZ

- Israel's refusal to allow the Palestinian villagers to buy food from Syria

- Israeli blocking of the return of farmers to the al-Khuri farm where the harvest is in bad condition due to lack of irrigation

- Israel's restriction of UN observers' entry into DMZs

The area remained calm for two years compared to previous times and there were no serious clashes.[35]

Although the MAC meetings between Israel and Syria ended, they held a series of secret military meetings between 1952 and 1953 to divide demilitarized zones. Furthermore, they agreed on major significant issues:

- The creation of a new border on the east bank of the river so that the Jordan River remains within Israel's borders,

- Dividing the northern and southern sectors of demilitarized zones in two,

- Reducing "the 10-meter strip" in the northeastern shore of Lake Tiberias to one meter so that the lake remains within Israel's borders

Despite the agreement on these major issues, secret negotiations failed. Syria wanted a new ceasefire line to prevent further Israeli expansion but did not want to officially recognize Israel. However, if Israel was to give up on "1923 borders", it could only be for the sake of a full peace treaty.[36]

"The Jordan River Development Authority" was the backbone of U.S. President Eisenhower's plan to bring peace to the Middle East. According to the project designed by Eisenhower, Arabs and Israelis would benefit fairly from the waters of the region. Jordan,

[35] Neff, p. 32
[36] Hof, 1999.

which has been positive towards the U.S. plan, has agreed to cancel its regional plan, the Bunger Plan. However, a month before the American project was launched in October 1953, Israel launched its project. In the central DMZ, it was a project to divert a 14 kilometers canal between Huleh Marshes and Lake Tiberias. According to Israel, this was just a small project to power a hydroelectric station on the shores of Lake Tiberias. However, the affords of UN observers in the region have shown that this is a very large project to power a simple hydroelectric power plant. According to observers, that was a project largely capable of draining the water of the Jordan River if it was completed. Syria claimed that this work could dry up about 4,800 hectares of land. Afterward, Israel also admitted that the project had nothing to do with the hydroelectric power plant but was primarily done to help irrigation of the Sharon Plain and eventually the Negev Desert. Naturally, U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles asked Israel to stop the project on 18 September 1953. Otherwise, he warned that Israel may not receive $26 million of U.S. aid.[37] However, Israel continued the project, ignoring those warnings.

UNTSO Chief of Staff Major General Vagn Bennike asked Israel to halt the work on 23 October. In a report to the United Nations Secretary-General, he said the Israeli project had already made two Palestinian farms unusable. But more importantly, controlling the flow of the Jordan River would also give Israel a huge military advantage. If the riverbed was emptied, a natural obstacle would appear, and Israel would be able to control the passage across the river as it controls the flow of the Jordan River.[38]

Israel responded to Vagn Bennike's demands by accelerating the project. Clashes broke out between Israeli and Syrian forces, and the region was on the brink of a serious conflict. On 20 October 1953, the U.S. Secretary of State Dulles announced that they were cutting off economic aid because Israel had ignored UNTSO's warnings. A week later, the United Nations Security Council issued Resolution 100 asking Israel to officially halt the project.[39] A day later, Israel announced it was halting the project. U.S. President Eisenhower also announced that economic assistance would continue for 6 months.

Thanks to the initiatives of Eric Johnston, the negotiator who came to the region to

[37] Neff, p. 32
[38] United Nations S/3122, "Report of the Chief of Staff of UNTSO to Secretary-General," 23 October 1953. Accessed February 10, 2021. https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/634041.
[39] UN Security Council, S/RES/100 (1953) S/3128 27 October 1953, Accessed 11 February 2021. https://unispal.un.org/unispal.nsf/d744b47860e5c97e85256c40005d01d6/e8c095f0c2069235852560c2006f824e?OpenDocument.

represent the United States, Israel compromised in August 1955 and agreed to use 40 percent of the water. Arab states have also agreed to allow Israel to use its use of water in the Negev Desert. However, at the Arab League Summit in October 1955, it was decided to postpone Johnston's plan. Because the Arab states did not want to be part of a treaty that would "imply" Israel's recognition, even if it was only for technical and logistical reasons.[40]

On 22 January 1954, the Soviet Union issued its first veto concerning the Middle East in the United Nations Security Council. The United States, Britain, and France have submitted a draft that equally criticizes Syria for blocking regional projects and Israel for violating the DMZs. The Soviet Union vetoed it arguing that the draft was not solution-oriented. With this veto, the focus of the Cold War shifted to the Middle East, and the Soviet Union began to take a more active role in Middle East politics.[41]

From 1953 onwards, Israel's effort to expand its sovereignty in order to implement the 1923 borders became a game of inches. According to Moshe Dayan, more than 80% of the clashes in the DMZs were the result of Israeli provocation. The Israelis were using agricultural activities in violation of the border, the Syrian army was firing on Israeli farmers, and Israel was retaliating against them, making Syria suffer heavy losses due to Israel's superior military. In this way, Israel was de facto expanding its territories.[42]

In 1955, Ariel Sharon, a young Israeli officer at that time, commanded a military operation with two parachute battalions at Syrian positions on the shores of Lake Tiberias. More than 50 Syrian soldiers and civilians were killed in this operation. Israel made an official statement, saying that the operation was retaliation for the attack on Israeli patrol boats on the previous day. However, there were no casualties in this incident. The Syrians did not open fire on farmers on farmland or provoked Israel in another way. Only Israeli patrol boats were shot, which probably had been sent to the border to provoke Syria.[43]

On 19 January 1956, the United Nations Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 111, condemning Israel's raid on Syria on 11 December 1955, in which 55 Syrian

[40] Howard Sachar, A History of Israel: From the Rise of Zionism to Our Time, (NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979), p. 450, Accessed 10 April 2021. https://ia801606.us.archive.org/12/items/HistoryOfIsraelFromTheRiseOfZionismToOurTimeAHowardMSachar1977/History%20of%20Israel_%20From%20the%20Rise%20of%20Zionism%20to%20Our%20Time%2C%20A%20Howard%20M%20%20Sachar%201977.pdf.
[41] Neff, p. 33
[42] Hof, 1999.
[43] Slater, p. 89

soldiers were killed. They also said that Syria violated the 1949 General Armistice Treaty by interfering with Israel's activities in Lake Tiberias, but that this would not justify Israel's action.[44]

According to Israeli historian Benny Morris, the main factor in Israel's attack was to provoke Egypt, which signed a mutual defense pact with Syria on 20 October 1955, to attack Israel. And probably, Morris claims, Israel wanted to exchange the Syrian prisoners it captured during this raid for Israeli prisoners that Syria has held since 1954.[45] A further reason behind the attack could be Israel's effort to increase its control on Lake Tiberias. Syria had claims for fishing in Lake Tiberias. Since the lake remained entirely within the borders of Mandate Palestine, Israel was arguing that the lake is completely under the sway of Israel. On the other hand, Syria claimed that, despite the 10-meter strip, it had the right to fish from Lake Tiberias due to mandate-era agreements which were signed between Britain and France.[46]

As a result, Israel chose to make gains on the ground during this period, rather than resolving the problems with a peace treaty. It claimed sovereignty over the DMZs, the fate of which has not yet been determined by a peace treaty. Israel forced the Arab farmers in the DMZs to emigrate and settled their own citizens. Israel used water projects as instruments while implementing its strategy of making gains on the ground. However, this pitted Israel against the Eisenhower administration, which had different ideas on water sharing in the region. Israel has bowed to pressure from the United States and the United Nations on the water project but has continued its expansionist strategy in the DMZs. Syria has also tried to maintain the status quo by responding to Israel's expansionist strategy with violence. Syria's aggressive response to these provocations paved the way for Israel to take military measures. Israel, which is superior militarily, thus managed to gain largely de facto control over the DMZs. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union began to take a more openly pro-Syrian stance. This also led to the United States taking a more pro-Israel stance and shifting the focus of the Cold War to the Middle East. On the other hand, although Syria signed a mutual defense pact with Egypt on 20 October 1955, Israel's continued aggression towards Syria is

[44] UN Security Council, S/RES/111 (1956) S/3538 19 January 1956. Accessed 20 January 2021. https://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/58C97A3D38B43299852560C20071C481.
[45] Benny Morris, "Israel's Border Wars: 1949-1956. Arab Infiltration, Israeli Retaliation, and the Countdown to the Suez War" (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 363, quoted in Donald Neff, ibid.
[46] Neff, p. 34

explained by its desire in dragging Egypt into a war.

2.4. War for Water (1956-1967)

Until 1956, Israeli relations in Syria witnessed the struggle to dominate the DMZs, both through agricultural activities and water projects. After 1956, this struggle is seen to be focused on control of water resources. However, another important issue to be addressed before that is Israel's crisis with its other Arab neighbor, Egypt. Even if Syria had not been directly involved in this crisis, it would soon end up forming a union with Egypt. Therefore, it is worth mentioning this crisis. Egypt was also one of the cobelligerents in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.

Although Egypt signed a ceasefire with Israel in 1949, it closed the Suez Canal and the Straits of Tiran, which connects the Gulf of Aqaba and the Red Sea, to Israeli shipping. Therefore, the port of Eilat, on the coast of Israel's Gulf of Aqaba, became dysfunctional. In 1955, Egypt began supporting the "Fedayeen" guerrillas, who carried out attacks against Israel. Egypt then nationalized the Suez Canal in July 1956, greatly damaging the interests of Britain and France. On 25 October 1956, made a triple alliance with Syria and Jordan which makes Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Naser the commander of the armies of those nations. In the light of these developments, Britain and France decided that they would use Israel, which was annoyed and intimidated by Egypt's recent policies, to bring Nasser to his knees. On the other hand, Egypt's blockade and increased Fedayeen attacks have encouraged Israel to attack Egypt, after the support of Britain and France. These three nations agreed on a plan: Israel was to land paratroopers near the Suez Canal and occupy the Sinai Desert. Britain and France were to call for both sides to withdraw from the canal area, expecting Egypt to refuse. Thus, Britain and France would be able to intervene in the conflict and deploy troops in Suez Canal in order to "prevent" the conflict.[47]

2.4.1. Second Arab-Israeli War (1956)

On October 30, 1956, Israelis attacked Egyptian forces in the Sinai Peninsula. At the same time, they entered the villages of Kirad al-Baqqara and Kirad al-Ghannama and drove the remaining 103 Palestinians to the Syrian side. Israel, which also blocked UN observers

[47] Jewish Virtual Library, "*The Sinai-Suez Campaign: Background & Overview (October - November 1956)"* Accessed 23 February 2021. https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/background-and-overview-sinai-suez-campaign.

seeking to enter the region for inspection, continued this blocking after 1956. However, Syria has never prevented UN officials from entering the DMZs.[48]

On 30 October 1956, the United States, which is not happy about recent developments, arranged a Security Council resolution calling for Israeli withdrawal. However, Britain and France vetoed it. On October 31, Britain and France joined the offensive against Egypt although the United States strongly opposes it. Anglo-French troops made significant gains on the field, by capturing Port Said and marching towards Suez City. However, before reaching Suez City, Soviet Union's military threats and United States' economic threats adequately persuaded them for a cease-fire.[49] On the other side, Israel had a quite successful military campaign against Egypt until the day of November 5 that all hostilities ended. Israel managed to occupy the whole Sinai Peninsula and Gaza Strip. Nevertheless, it could not stand against US-Soviet pressure like its allies and withdrew from Sinai and Gaza. But Israel also declared that if Egypt blockades the Suez Canal and Straits of Tiran once again then it will be considered as casus belli.[50] In fact, Israel has agreed to withdraw in exchange for a U.S. guarantee that the Suez Canal and Straits of Tiran will be open for Israeli shipping.[51] The United States later sponsored a United Resolution General Assembly resolution which creates United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF), to ensure peace in the Egyptian territories vacated by Israel.[52]

Despite making gains on the battlefield, Israel did not manage to obtain any concessions from Egypt except the U.S. guarantee about the waterways. Though, termination of fedayeen raids from the Egyptian border is absolutely a positive development for Israel. However, hostilities between the Arab States and Israel continued and problems remained unsolved. This waved the path of the 1967 War, also known as the Third Arab-Israeli War.[53] However, during the 10 years until the Third Arab-Israeli War, the Arab-Israeli conflict developed more on controlling water resources with the other Arab States. Syria, Jordan, and

[48] Neff, p. 35
[49] Jewish Virtual Library, "*The Sinai-Suez Campaign: Background & Overview (October - November 1956)"* Accessed 23 February 2021. https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/background-and-overview-sinai-suez-campaign.
[50] Anti-Defamation League, *"1956 Suez Campaign"*, Accessed 23 February 2021. https://www.adl.org/resources/glossary-terms/1956-suez-campaign.
[51] Jewish Virtual Library, "*The Sinai-Suez Campaign: Background & Overview (October - November 1956)"* Accessed 23 February 2021. https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/background-and-overview-sinai-suez-campaign.
[52] UN General Assembly, A/RES/1000 (ES-I) 5 November 1956. Accessed 23 February 2021. https://www.un.org/unispal/document/auto-insert-188641/.
[53] Jewish Virtual Library, "The Sinai-Suez Campaign"

Lebanon all tried to build a diversion project to obtain water from the Jordan River as well as Israel.[54]

In late 1956, Israel decided to continue with the National Water Carrier project. However, Israel was careful to build the channel in such a way that it did not pass through the DMZs because the United States opposed it. Israel aimed to transfer water from Lake Tiberias to the Negev Desert. It continued this water project without consulting Syria and Jordan, which are the states that are riparian to the joint waters of Lake Tiberias.[55]

After Shishakli's ouster from power, the coalition began to establish close ties with Egypt. In February 1958, they agreed to become the northern province of the United Arab Republic, and Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Naser became the president of the union. Thus, Syria gave up its sovereignty and united with Egypt. However, this union lasted only three years, as Egyptian bureaucrats treated the Syrians like subordinates. Finally, with the coup in Syria in September 1961, the unity ended. Syria has again become an independent state. Established civilian but military-backed government undid socialist reforms which have been done under the United Arab Republic.[56]

In 1962, 1963, and 1964, there were three big incidents related to the water problem. These incidents were large enough to require the intervention of the United Nations Security Council. However, the Soviet Union made its pro-Arab stance clear during this period and vetoed 3 of the 4 resolutions that came to the Security Council.[57]

The first of the incidents that caused the Security Council to seize the situation took place on 16 March 1962 and was related to the rights to fish from Lake Tiberias. Clashes have emerged between Israeli patrol boats and Syrian forces. Israel attacked the village of Nuqayb on the northeast coast of Lake Tiberias, where Syrian forces are deployed. As a result, 30 Syrians and 5 Israelis died. The United Nations Security Council condemned the conflict and decided that Israel had violated the 1949 Ceasefire.[58] This was the last resolution that the Soviet Union did not veto.

[54] Neff, p. 35
[55] Ibid, p. 36
[56] Encyclopedia Britannica. (n.d.). Syria: The union with Egypt, 1958–61. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Accessed 31 January 2021. https://www.britannica.com/place/Syria/The-union-with-Egypt-1958-61.
[57] Neff, p. 35
[58] UN Security Council, S/RES/171 (1962) S/5111, 9 April 1962. Accessed 31 January 2021. http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/171.

On March 8, 1963, the Military Committee of Baathist officers staged a successful coup. This committee was founded by Syrian nationalist officers who were exiled during the United Arab Republic. The future Syrian president, Hafez Al Assad was among them. With this coup, the Baath rule in Syria began.[59]

When Israel came close to completing the National Water Carrier project in 1964, Arab leaders gathered in Cairo on 17 January 1964, condemning Israel and describing the project as an aggressive plan that violated the rights of riparian Arab states. Despite this, Israel completed the project on 28 May 1964. In late 1964, in the northern DMZ, Israel claimed that the Dan River, one of the tributaries of the Jordan River, and other surrounding springs were under its sovereignty. Syria claimed that these springs belong to it and the road Israel had built to observe the area violated Syrian territory. On 13 November 1964, the Syrian army opened fire on an Israeli patrol passing by that road. Israel responded by bombing the Northern DMZ and its Syrian targets within six miles with jets. The incident resulted in the deaths of seven Syrians and three Israelis. Finally, the Security Council has put the issue on its agenda. However, the resolution presented by the Security Council did not mention Israel's airstrikes. The resolution was supported by U.S. President Johnson but was vetoed by the Soviet Union on 17 December 1964, for holding Israel and Syria equally responsible.[60]

In response to these Israeli water projects, Syria and Lebanon wanted to retaliate by extending the direction of the Hatzbani and Baniyas rivers, which are tributaries of the Jordan River, to the east. However, this project began in February 1964 and ended with an Israeli attack that destroyed those diversion facilities.[61]

In 1964, at the Arab summit in Cairo, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was established, embracing the armed struggle for the liberation of Palestinian people. In fact, The PLO was an umbrella organization for many Palestinian organizations standing for an armed struggle with Israel. One of them was Fatah, led by Yasser Arafat.[62] After 1965, during the presidency of Amin al Hafez, Syria started to support Fatah guerillas which fight against Israel. Specifically, those Fatah guerillas were encouraged to raid Israel's National

[59] John Galvani, "Syria and the Baath Party." *MERIP Reports*, no. 25 (1974): 3-16. Accessed 4 February 2021. doi:10.2307/3011567.
[60] Neff, p. 37
[61] Slater, p. 90
[62] Jewish Virtual Library, "Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO): History & Overview", Accessed 11 April 2021. https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/history-and-overview-plo.

Water Carrier Project. [63]

Syria wanted to continue this project in the summer of 1966 and began work on the banks of the Baniyas River. However, on July 14, Israeli warplanes entered 8 miles into Syria, bombed the worksite, thus permanently frustrated the project. Following this attack, the Security Council once again took over the issue. With U.S. support, the Security Council has warned Syria to take measures to prevent violations of the Armistice Agreement. Israel, on the other hand, was invited to cooperate with the Mixed Armistice Commission. The proposal was once again vetoed by the Soviet Union on 4 November 1966, for holding Syria and Israel responsible for the conflict equally. The Soviet Union's position on the Side of Arabs in the Security Council has pushed the United States to support Israel more.[64]

As a result, Israel wanted to break Egypt's blockade by acting together with Britain and France in this period and punish Egypt for supporting the fedayeen guerrillas. In addition, Israel has decided to continue the construction of the National Water Project. For this reason, it is seen that the struggle between Israel and Syria focused on the use of water resources in this period. This period also witnessed an unsuccessful attempt of union between Egypt and Syria which lasted only three years. This union was terminated with a coup d'etat in Syria. Two years later, with the coup of Ba'athist officers, the Baath Party seized power in Syria. In 1964, Israel and Syria faced each other again due to the conflict over water resources. Although Syria and Lebanon started their water projects in retaliation for Israel's National Water Project, these projects were crippled by Israeli airstrikes. After that, Syria tried to hinder Israel's water projects by sponsoring the Fateh guerrilla attacks on Israel.

2.5. Golan for Peace (1967-1991)

Until late 1966, the Arab States, especially Egypt, were unwilling to get into a military conflict with Israel on the water issue. However, in November 1966 Egypt signed a mutual defense pact with Syria. Moreover, Egypt also started supporting Fateh guerilla raids on Israel which it had stopped supporting after the Suez Crisis. The next year, in May 1967, Egypt deployed troops in the Sinai Desert in case of any Israeli aggression against Syria. Soviet Union's misinformation that Israel is preparing to attack Syria may have pushed

[63] Ma'oz, 1999, p. 397
[64] Neff, p. 37

Egypt to make this move.[65]

On the other side, Israel had a rather unwarlike prime minister, Levi Eshkol, who do not want to be dragged into a war with the Arab States. However, he was forced to take military measures against Syria by both "hawk" leaders and the Israeli public. Eventually, Moshe Dayan, one of those hawk leaders, was appointed as Minister of Defense on 1 June 1967. Thus, each side was ready for war, and apparently, Israel was not the one who wants to get attacked first. As the situation escalated towards war, United States turned a blind eye and did not try to convince Israel not to make a pre-emptive strike against Syria.[66] Israel aimed to neutralize Egypt, drive it out of the Sinai Desert until the United Nations imposes a ceasefire.[67]

2.5.1. Third Arab-Israeli War (1967)

Finally, on 5 June 1967 Israel attacked Egypt. Israeli Air Force caught Egyptian airplanes off-guard and almost the entire Egyptian Air Force was destroyed. Simultaneously Israeli airplanes targeted Egypt's allies too. As a result, Egypt's allies shared the same fate: Jordan's entire air force and two-third of the Syrian air force were destroyed. One hour later, the Israeli army attacked Egyptian ground forces in the Sinai Peninsula. Thanks to initial success against the Egyptian Air force, Israel gained air superiority over Sinai and easily defeated Egypt's ground army as well.[68]

The Sinai Desert witnessed one of the greatest tank battles in history which resulted in the crushing of seven Egyptian divisions totaling 100,000 men.[69] On 6 June Gaza, on 7 June West Bank, and Old Jerusalem was captured. The cease-fire went into effect on the Israeli Jordanian Front on June 7.[70] When Israeli forces reached Suez Canal on June 8, Israel had taken control of the most of Sinai Peninsula. Egypt was forced to accept the UN cease-fire. Thus, fighting in Sinai ended on June 8. On June 9, Syria accepted previous UN Cease-fire resolutions if Israel was willing to honor them.[71] UN security council accepted

[65] Ma'oz, 1999, p. 398
[66] Ibid, p. 398
[67] Michael B. Oren, "Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East," (Ballantine Books, 2002), p. 80
[68] Sachar, p. 620
[69] Sachar, p. 627
[70] Jewish Virtual Library, UN Security Council Resolutions: Resolution 234 (June 6, 1967), Accessed 27 February 2021. https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/un-security-council-resolution-234-june-1967.
[71] The Six Day War, "Cease Fires", Accessed 27 February 2021. http://www.sixdaywar.org/content/ceasefires.asp.

Resolution 235, which confirms previous resolutions of 233 and 234.[72]

Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan considered the attack on the Golan Heights a suicide. He thought that Syria's strategic superiority in the region would lead to many casualties. Besides, he was afraid of U.S. and Soviet interference. The Golan Heights, on the other hand, was of tremendous importance to Israel's economy. Controlling the Golan meant controlling both sides of the Jordan River. In addition, the Golan Heights were adopted in the 1919 World Zionist Congress within the "Eretz Israel", the historical borders of Israel. Leaders like Ben Gurion considered the Golan as a rightful part of Israel.[73]

[72] UN Security Council, Resolution 235 (1967) of 9 June 1967, Accessed 27 February 2021. http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/235.
[73] Slater, p. 90

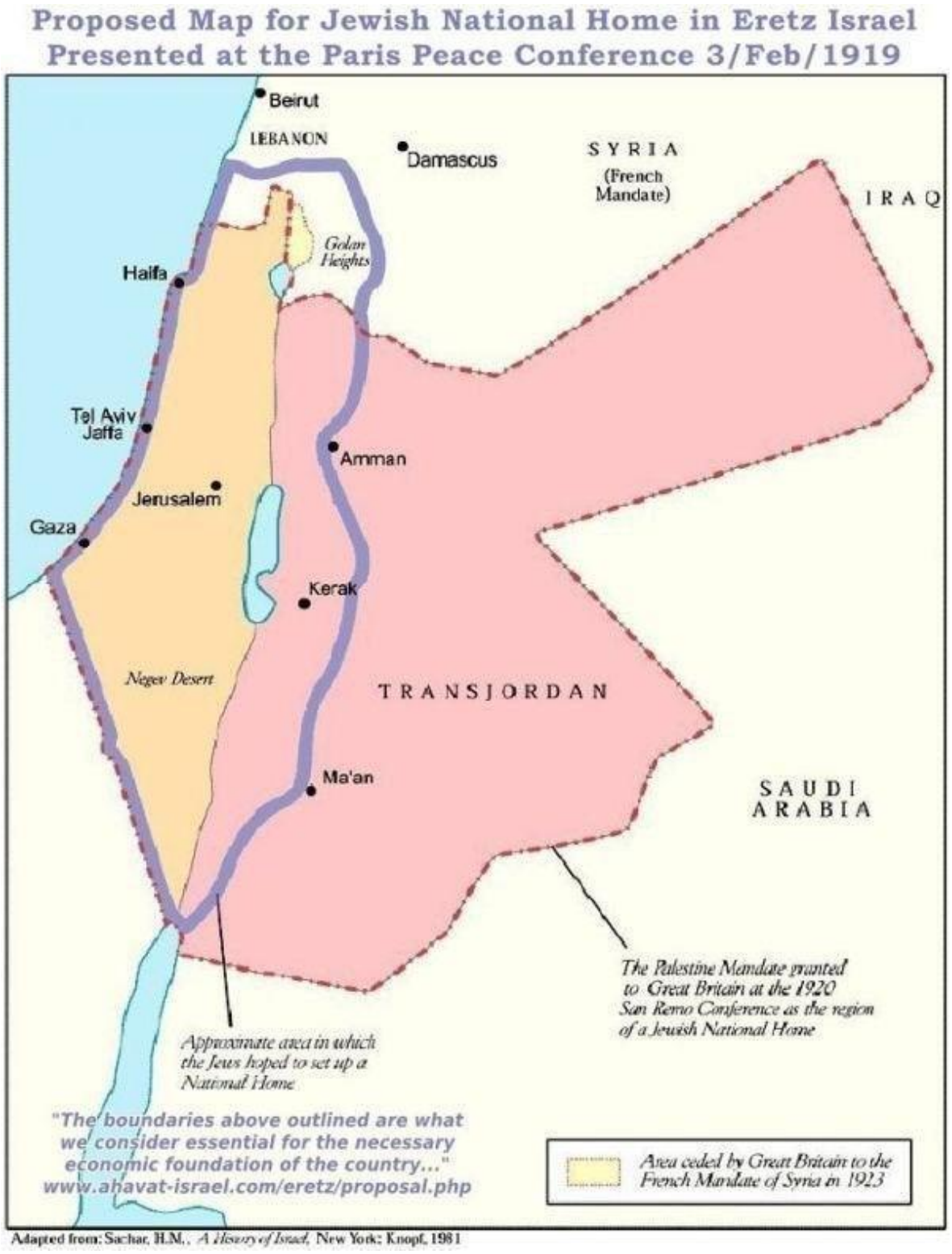


Figure 2.2*. Eretz Israel (Sourced from Sachar, H.M., A History of Israel, New York: Knopf, 1981)*

On June 10, despite the cease-fire, Israel advanced into Syria and seized the strategic positions in Golan Heights. During the war, a quarter of the 139,000 Syrians living in the Golan had to emigrate to Syria. Over time, only around 6,000 Syrians remained in the area,

mostly Druzes, which lived in the Northeast of the Golan.[74]

The ceasefire only came into force on 10 June 1967 and remained in force until 6 October 1973. On 22 November 1967, the United Nations Security Council issued Resolution 242. In this resolution, it was emphasized that obtaining territory through war is unacceptable. And Israel was called on to withdraw from territories it had occupied, such as the West Bank, Golan Heights, and Gaza. In addition to these decisions against Israel, it guaranteed free navigation through international waterways. This resolution is also known as the "Land for Peace" resolution and will be mentioned as a reference to the future Arab-Israeli Conflict.[75]

Resolution 242 was drafted to solve interstate problems. Thus, it completely ignored the Palestinian Arabs, a non-state actor in the region. For this reason, it was rejected by the Palestinian Liberation Organization and Syria.[76] It was only accepted by Israel in October 1968. Egypt and Jordan, meanwhile, welcomed the "land for peace" solution. While these two countries continue to have animosity towards Israel, they have not shut the door to peace initiatives submitted by the United States and the United Nations. Moreover, Jordan entered a de facto peace with Israel after 1970 due to its problems with the Palestine Liberation Organization. Syria's tough stance against Israel has not changed at all and has continued to support Palestinian guerrillas who have launched attacks against Israel. Among the reasons for this attitude towards Israel might be its unilateral annexation of East Jerusalem and its establishment of Jewish settlements in occupied territories such as the Golan, Sinai, and Gaza.[77]

2.5.2. Israel's Status Quo Strategy for Its Arab Neighbors After the 1967 War

In the aftermath of the 1967 War, Israel's main strategy for its Arab neighbors, including Syria, was to maintain the status quo. Reasons for this include the euphoria of victory brought on by a historic victory in Israel, public opinion that seeks to retain the territory obtained, and the U.S. support of the Israeli policy, which delays withdrawal until

[74] Neff, p. 37
[75] UN Security Council, S/RES/242 (1967) 22 November 1967, Accessed 27 February 2021, https://unispal.un.org/unispal.nsf/0/7D35E1F729DF491C85256EE700686136.
[76] Robert P. Barnidge, Jr. "Self-Determination, Statehood, and the Law of Negotiation: The Case of Palestine." (Bloomsbury Publishing. 28 January 2016) p. 72. Accessed 27 February 2021. https://books.google.com.tr/books?id=qiBCCwAAQBAJ&pg=PA72&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false.
[77] Ma'oz p. 400

the peace treaty. These are the main reasons that drove Israel to maintain the status quo. However, the rejection of the olive branch that Israel extended to its Arab neighbors through the United States after the 1967 War also paved the way for the adoption of this status quo policy. In exchange for peace, Israel was prepared to withdraw from its occupied territories, except East Jerusalem and Gaza. They also demanded no interference with the flow of the Jordan River and freedom of navigation through Suez Canal. This request was rejected by the Arab states. At the Arab Summit in Khartoum on 1 September 1967, it was decided that there would be no peace talks with Israel and that Israel would not be recognized. Syria refused to even attend the summit and declared that Israel can only be liquidated by force.[78]

In 1968, Egypt decided to start a war of attrition against Israel, which occupied the Sinai Peninsula, including the east bank of the Suez Canal. Shelling between the two sides has begun in the Suez Canal.[79] *"I cannot take over Sinai, but I can break the spirit of Israel by attrition,"* Egyptian President Abdel Nasser said in a speech on June 23, 1969. This war of attrition lasted until 7 August 1970, when Egypt agreed to a ceasefire under pressure from the Soviet Union.[80]

2.5.3. Hafez Assad Comes to Power

Hafez Assad, who was going stronger within the Baath movement that had been ruling Syria since 1963, seized power on 12 March 1971. Unlike his ultranationalist and anti-Israel comrades within Baath, he made a more moderate and pragmatic impression. Indeed, the most important feature that set him apart was his opposition to Syria's support for Palestinian guerrillas. He found this strategy unnecessary because he felt Syria did not have the military capacity to respond to Israeli retaliation. Assad, who now understands that pushing Israel back to its pre-1967 borders is no longer possible because of the power imbalance, has focused all his efforts on recovering the Golan.[81]

In March 1972, Hafiz Assad declared that Syria was no longer opposed to Resolution 242, also known as the "land for peace" resolution.[82] However, the government of Golda

[78] Ma'oz, 1999, p. 399
[79] Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, The War of Attrition (1968-70), Accessed 12 March 2021. https://mfa.gov.il/mfa/aboutisrael/history/pages/the%20war%20of%20attrition%20-1968-70.aspx.
[80] The Knesset, War of Attrition, Accessed 12 March 2021. https://www.knesset.gov.il/lexicon/eng/hatasha_eng.htm.
[81] Slater p. 93
[82] Ma'oz p. 400

Meir, which was in power in Israel at the time, refused to negotiate peace with Syria in exchange for the Golan. She maintained the same attitude while holding the Sinai Peninsula. By holding Sinai, Israel eliminated the possibility of blocking the Suez Canal and the Strait of Tirana by Egypt. Sharm-al Shaykh, especially in the southernmost part of the Sinai Peninsula, is of very strategic importance and controls the Strait of Tirana. Moshe Dayan, the Israeli defense minister at the time, stressed the importance of this region by saying, "Sharm-al-Shaykh without peace was better than peace without Sharm al-Shaykh." It also demonstrated the Meir government's position towards maintaining the status quo. It can be said that the Meir government's irreconcilable stance to maintain the status quo after the 1967 War sowed the seeds of the 1973 War.[83]

Israel had hoped that a landslide victory over the Arab armies would convince them that Israel was no longer indestructible. However, the situation was not as expected. On the contrary, the Arabs sought to regain their lost honor.

Meanwhile, Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser died on 29 September 1970 and was replaced by Anwar Sadat. Unlike Nasser, Sadat offered Israel a peace treaty in exchange for the return of the Sinai Peninsula in 1971.[84] Defense Minister Moshe Dayan welcomed the offer, but the Meir government rejected it.[85]

2.5.4. Fourth Arab-Israeli War (1973)

After the 1967 War, the losses of the Egyptian and Syrian armies were resupplied by the Soviet Union. Soviet experts took part in the training of the Arab armies for 6 years and prepared for a new war. Realizing that he could not take the Sinai Peninsula through diplomacy, Anwar Sadat took a more aggressive stance and continued his threats against Israel. However, these war preparations and threats were ignored by the Meir government.[86] Rather, the Meir government did not welcome the idea of a pre-emptive strike, fearing that such an attack would enhance Israel's aggressor status in the eyes of the world public again.

Arab states had almost four times as many planes, tanks, and armies as Israel. At the

[83] Ma'oz, 1999, p. 401
[84] Jewish Virtual Library, Anwar al-Sadat, Accessed 27 February 2021. https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/anwar-al-sadat.
[85] Ma'oz, 1999, p. 400
[86] Ira C. Eaker, "The Fourth Arab-Israeli War." *The Military Engineer* 66, no. 431 (1974): 156-60. p.156. Accessed 28 February 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/44572554.

same time, these armies were equipped with the latest Soviet equipment. On 6 October 1973, Egypt and Syria launched a well-organized surprise attack. Egypt was able to easily land on the east bank of the Suez Canal. Simultaneously, Syria attacked the Israeli army in the Golan Heights.[87] 6 October 1973 coincided with the Jewish holy day, Yom Kippur, and the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. While getting caught off-guard due to religious day, The Israelis were also outnumbered by both Egyptian and Syrian armies. For example, 180 Israeli tanks faced 1400 Syrian tanks in Golan Heights.[88]

Indeed, within 72 hours, Israel managed to mobilize all its reserves and stroke back to Egypt in the Sinai Peninsula. This was the first stage of the war. Afterward, Israel attacked Syria, which captured the Golan, and managed to repel it beyond the post-1967 borders. Israel wanted to take Syria out of the war by reaching Damascus. Gradually advanced to the outskirts of Damascus for a week and concluded the second phase of the war. In the next phase, Israel launched an offensive against Egypt in Sinai and, despite heavy losses, managed to push the Egyptian army beyond the Suez Canal. The third phase of the war was completed when the Israeli army landed on the west bank of the Suez Canal. When the fourth phase of the war was reached, Israel's goal was to destroy Egyptian troops in Sinai, advance towards Cairo, and ultimately drive Egypt out of the war.[89] At this point, the United States and the Soviet Union intervened and a ceasefire was declared on 22 October 1973, after 18 days of the war.[90]

Egypt and Syria became undisputed losers of the war because they could not reclaim the territories they lost in the 1967 war. Israel, on the other hand, has been the undisputed winner of the war by pushing back its enemies despite its surprise attack. From the perspective of great power, the Soviet Union has consolidated its prestige in the Arab world by continuing its arms support to its Arab allies. The United States, on the other hand, has attracted the reaction of oil-exporting Arab countries, especially with its supply support to Israel. As a result, they started to impose an oil embargo against the United States.[91]

In accordance with Resolution 338, a conference was held in Geneva in December

[87] Eaker, p. 157
[88] The Jewish Virtual Library, The Yom Kippur War: Background & Overview (October 1973), Accessed 28 February 2021. https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/background-and-overview-yom-kippur-war.
[89] Eaker, p. 157
[90] UN Security Council, S/RES/338 (1973) 22 October 1973, Accessed 28 February 2021, https://unispal.un.org/unispal.nsf/0/7FB7C26FCBE80A31852560C50065F878.
[91] Eaker, p. 158

1973 to find a solution to the Arab-Israeli problem. Israel has refused to negotiate with Syria because Syria has not published a list of Israeli soldiers it has captured. As a result, the United States, the Soviet Union, Israel, Jordan, and Egypt were present at the conference. The conference disbanded without any outcomes.[92]

Although no compromise has been reached at the Geneva Conference, it can be said that it paves the way for the disengagement agreement between Egypt and Israel to be signed on 18 January 1974.[93] This was followed by the disengagement agreement signed between Israel and Syria on 31 May 1974, which officially ended the Yom Kippur War. Under this agreement, the two sides freed the prisoners of war and a "UN Buffer Zone" was established outside the Golan, within the borders of Syria.[94] This disengagement agreement is still in force today, and the borders in the agreement are still de facto Israeli-Syrian borders. The United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) is still overseeing the implementation of this disengagement agreement in the region.[95]

Egypt and Israel signed another treaty, known as the "Sinai Interim Agreement", on 4 September 1975. With this agreement, the two sides pledged not to use military force against each other and not to blockade each other's ports. As a result, another UN Buffer Zone was established in Sinai.[96]

Yom Kippur War has pushed both Syria and Egypt to abandon military solutions and instead seek diplomatic ones. These two Arab states realized that the territory lost in the 1967 war could no longer be reclaimed by military means. In interviews with American statesmen in the 1970s, Hafez Assad reiterated that he wanted a gradual full peace settlement in exchange for the return of the Golan. This peace draft, based on 242 and 338 resolutions, contains Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories and a guarantee of the rights of the Palestinian people. In return, Assad said, the Golan could be demilitarized to address Israel's

[92] The Knesset, Geneva Conference, Accessed 28 February 2021, https://www.knesset.gov.il/lexicon/eng/geneva_eng.htm.
[93] Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Israel-Egypt Separation of Forces Agreement-1974 Accessed 28 February 2021, https://mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/guide/pages/israel-egypt%20separation%20of%20forces%20agreement%20-%201974.aspx.
[94] Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Israel-Syria Separation of Forces Agreement-1974, Accessed 28 February 2021, https://mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/guide/pages/israel-syria%20separation%20of%20forces%20agreement%20-%201974.aspx.
[95] Economic Cooperation Foundation, "Israel-Syria Disengagement Agreement (1974)", Accessed 28 February 2021, http://ecf.org.il/issues/issue/178.
[96] United Nations Peacemaker, "Interim Agreement between Israel and Egypt (Sinai II)", Accessed 28 February 2021, https://peacemaker.un.org/egyptisrael-interimagreement75.

security concerns.[97]

The 1973 War proved that Israel was not invincible and could no longer be wiped off the face of the earth. Arab leaders, especially Sadat, have realized that there is no military solution to the Arab-Israeli problem after Fourth Arab-Israeli War.[98] On 19 November 1977, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat visited Jerusalem, becoming the first Arab leader to visit Israel. During his three-day visit, he delivered a speech at the Knesset, the Israeli parliament. Sadat's visit, which sent messages of peace in his speech, broke the ice between Israel and Egypt.[99]

Meeting in the U.S. state of Maryland at the invitation of American President Jimmy Carter, Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat signed the "The Framework for Peace in the Middle East", also known as "Camp David Accords", on September 17th. With this treaty,

- A peaceful solution was agreed upon in accordance with Resolution 242.
- Granting autonomy to Palestinians in West Bank and Gaza was agreedupon.
- Israel and Egypt agreed on a peaceful settlement.[100]

On 26 March 1979, Israel and Egypt signed a peace treaty, as agreed at Camp David Accords. Thus, Egypt made peace with Israel after 30 years of state of war. It also became the first Arab country to recognize Israel. In return, Israel handed over the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt in exchange for the demilitarization of the peninsula and completely evacuated it within three years.[101]

Israel's objectives in making this peace treaty are,

- Wanting to secure its security by demilitarizing the vast Sinai Desert,

[97] Slater, p. 94
[98] Ma'oz, 1999, p. 401
[99] IDF & Defense Establishment Archives, "Egypt's President Sadat visit in Israel, November 1977", Accessed 28 February 2021, http://www.archives.mod.gov.il/sites/English/Exhibitions/Pages/Sadat-visit-in-Israel.aspx.
[100] Jimmy Carter. "Camp David Accords" *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 10 September 2020. Accessed 28 February 2021. https://www.britannica.com/event/Camp-David-Accords.
[101] Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty (26 Mar 1979), Accessed 28 February 2021, https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Peace/Guide/Pages/Israel-Egypt%20Peace%20Treaty.aspx.

- Removing Egypt, the most powerful and populous Arab country, from taking sides on the Arab-Israeli issue,

- Wanting to focus on Syria and the PLO.[102]

Meanwhile, Egyptian President Sadat's popularity has waned in his country as it has grown in the West. By making peace with Israel and causing various domestic problems, he won the hatred of many. He was eventually assassinated during a military parade in October 1981.[103]

2.5.5. Lebanese Civil War

Since the Cairo Treaty signed between the PLO and Lebanon on 3 November 1969, the PLO has been operating in southern Lebanon. According to this treaty, the PLO pledged to respect Lebanon's sovereignty, while Lebanon recognized the PLO as a legitimate actor in the south.[104] The number of Palestinians in Lebanon, which is also home to thousands of Palestinian refugees, has increased since the failed uprising in Jordan in September 1970.[105] PLO was exiled from Jordan by King Hussein after their failed attempt to take him down.[106]

Lebanon was ruled by a system in which Christian Maronites held power, even though Muslims were the majority. The fact that the system was religio-centric, created a power struggle between the Maronite, Sunni, Shiite, and Druze peoples. The PLO's involvement in Lebanon changed the balance. Over time, the Maronites began to see the PLO, which increased its autonomy, as a threat to the central government. On the other hand, Lebanese Muslims, disturbed by Christian rule, began to see the PLO as a loyal ally. Thus, in April 1975, the Lebanese Civil War began between the Maronite administration and the Lebanese Druze-backed PLO. Foreign powers such as Syria and Israel eventually got

[102] Ma'oz, 1999, p. 402
[103] Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopedia. "Anwar Sadat." *Encyclopedia Britannica*, December 21, 2020. Accessed 1 March 2021. https://www.britannica.com/biography/Anwar-Sadat.
[104] Rex Brynen, "PLO Policy in Lebanon: Legacies and Lessons." *Journal of Palestine Studies* 18, no. 2 (1989): 48-70. p.50, Accessed March 1, 2021. doi:10.2307/2537633.
[105] Minorities at Risk Project, "Chronology for Palestinians in Lebanon", 2004, Accessed 1 March 2021, available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/469f38b42.html.
[106] Rafael Reuveny, "Black September", *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 16 April 2020, Accessed 1 March 2021. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Black-September-political-organization-Palestine.

involved in this civil war.[107]

After being expelled from Jordan, Lebanon's importance increased for the PLO. By 1975, in Lebanon's civil war, the PLO found itself a party to the civil war and supported the Lebanese National Movement. On the other side, there was the Lebanese Front, which had the support of Syria.[108]

Egypt's "Sinai Interim Agreement" with Israel in 1975 brought Syria and the PLO closer. Now there was a Syria that wanted to be the PLO's only patron. The goal here was to reduce the loss of power caused by Egypt's neutralization in the Arab world as much as possible. On the other hand, there were other issues concerning Syria's interests in Lebanon. Syria wanted a peaceful solution with Israel after the Yom Kippur War as much as Egypt. However, if the "Rejection Front" within the PLO has increased its influence in Lebanon, the option of a peaceful solution with Israel would disappear. In this case, the Maronites living in Lebanon could have gone down the path of de facto separation, which was not something Syria would like at all. Hafez Assad took on a difficult task, trying to control both sides.[109]

On 25 October 1976, it was decided to have an Arab military force in Lebanon at the Arab League Summit in Cairo. This force, called the Arab Deterrent Force, consisted mostly of Syrian soldiers. Thus, Syria's military presence in Lebanon gained legitimate ground. Syria especially has taken control of the Beq'a region in Lebanon.[110]

Syria's first intervention in Lebanon in 1976 was against the PLO and the Lebanese left. The Maronite eventually entered Israel's orbit despite had been initially supported by Syria. This led Syria to side with the PLO, which had been on the opposite side.[111] Syria, which entered Lebanon at the invitation of Maronite President Franjieh, grew away from

[107] Arthur Mark Weisburd. "Continuation Wars." In *Use of Force: The Practice of States Since World War II*, (University Park, Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 1997):119-69. p.156. Accessed March 2, 2021. doi:10.5325/j.ctv14gpgmx.9. https://books.google.com.tr/books?id=ASPds6gT1CsC.
[108] Brynen, p. 51
[109] Lebanon, Syria and the PLO, Strategic Survey, 77:1, (1976): 81-88, p.86 DOI: 10.1080/04597237608460392.
[110] Weisburd, p. 157
[111] Rashid I. Khalidi. "Lebanon in the Context of Regional Politics: Palestinian and Syrian Involvement in the Lebanese Crisis." *Third World Quarterly* 7, no. 3 (1985): 495-514. p.505 Accessed 2 March 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3991961.

Maronites. Thus, the Syrian army has begun fighting the Maronite forces in Lebanon. [112]

Another supporter of Syria's intervention in Lebanon was the Amal Movement, founded in 1975 by Imam Musa as Sadr. Lebanon's Shiite Amal movement was involved in the Lebanese Civil War in later stages, even if it initially did not want to be involved in the civil war.[113]

Israel was not bothered by Syria's first intervention in Lebanon in 1976. Because Syria was in an anti-PLO position at first that was serving Israel's interests. Instead of protesting Syria's intervention, they agreed on certain conditions mediated by the United States. These conditions included Syria's not crossing the imaginary "red line" border and advancing into southern Lebanon, not using air force against land targets, and not installing surface-to-air missiles in Lebanon. Indeed, during Israel's intervention in 1978, there was no conflict between Israel and Syria. As Syria's attitude towards the PLO changes, Israel's position on Syria's military presence in Lebanon appears to have changed as well.[114]

Israel formed a Maronite militia called the South Lebanese Army and aimed to suppress the PLO presence in southern Lebanon. However, after the ceasefire was announced in October 1976, the PLO stepped up its activities in southern Lebanon, and the South Lebanese Army failed to prevent it. As a result, Israel has failed to fend off threats from southern Lebanon.[115]

On 11 March 1978, some PLO members which infiltrated into Israel from the Lebanese border carried out an attack. Three days later, the Israeli military launched an operation to push the PLO beyond the Litani River in Lebanon.[116] The UN Security Council called on Israel to withdraw from Lebanon, and the Israeli army withdrew. Resolution 425 was issued by the UN Security Council which establishes a peacekeeping force in Southern Lebanon under the name of "UN Interim Force in Lebanon" (UNIFIL).[117]

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[112] PBS News Hour, "Syria's Influence in Lebanon", 14 September 2006, Accessed 1 March 2021. https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/middle_east-july-dec06-lebanon_09-14.
[113] World Encyclopedia, "Amal.". Accessed 10 April 2021. https://www.encyclopedia.com/environment/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/amal.
[114] Weisburd, p. 158
[115] Weisburd, p. 159
[116] Israel Defense Forces, "Operation Litani", Accessed 1 March 2021. https://www.idf.il/en/minisites/wars-and-operations/operation-litani/.
[117] UN Security Council, S/RES/425(1978), 19 March 1978, Accessed 1 March 2021. https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/71622.

However, the UN peacekeepers were unable to prevent PLO attacks from the Lebanese border. The PLO continued attacks on Israel from the Lebanese border. However, the PLO's heavily wounding of Israel's ambassador to Britain was the last straw. On 6 June 1982, the Israeli army launched "Operation Peace for Galilee." The success of the operation prompted Israeli leaders to expand the extent of the operation. Thus, the new objectives of the operation were to completely remove the PLO from Lebanon and to persuade Lebanon to sign a peace treaty with Israel.[118]

Moreover, getting Syria out of Lebanon was one of Israel's goals now. Although some conditions were agreed upon in 1976, the subsequent change of Syria's attitude towards the PLO and the deployment of surface-to-air missiles in Lebanon prompted Israel to change its policy.[119] Between June 7 and June 11, Syria was also involved in the conflict. Since 1976, Syria has had a considerable number of troops in Lebanon. Although there were no clashes in Golan Heights, there were clashes on the Beirut-Damascus road, and it did not end well for the Israeli army. However, when the warplanes of the two countries faced off, Israel inflicted huge losses on Syria.[120] Despite its heavy losses, Syria managed to hold on to Lebanon and agreed to a ceasefire with Israel on June 11. Indeed, the ceasefire did not last long, and the Israeli army reached Beirut by June 14 and merged with the Maronite forces. Israel's goal was to get the PLO and Syria out of Beirut, and the struggle continued for weeks. Ultimately, on September 3, the PLO and Syrian forces agreed to leave Lebanon under the supervision of a multinational military force.[121] The Arab League Summit, which was convened on 6 September 1982, decided to recognize UN resolutions 242 and 338. This showed a change in the attitude of Arab countries towards Israel, unlike the Arab Summit in Khartoum in 1967, which decided to say, "no recognition, no negotiation." Syria was among the countries participating in this Arab Summit. The summit also called on Israel to withdraw from Lebanese territory.[122]

After the Islamic Revolution of Iran in 1979, the Islamic Republic of Iran sought to form a party among Lebanon's Shiites prone to its revolutionary ideas. As a result, Hezbollah

[118] Jewish Virtual Library, "Israel Air Force: In Operation Peace for the Galilee", Accessed 28 February 2021. https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/israel-air-force-in-operation-peace-for-the-galilee.
[119] Weisburd, p. 161
[120] Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Arab-Israeli Wars", Accessed 1 March 2021, https://mfa.gov.il/mfa/aboutisrael/history/pages/the%20arab-israeli%20wars.aspx.
[121] Weisburd, p. 162
[122] "Arab Summit: Fez Declaration Concerning Agreed Principles for Achieving Peace in The Middle East." International Legal Materials 21, no. 5 (1982): 1144-146. Accessed March 23, 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20692511.

was born during the Lebanese Civil War. Hezbollah was officially founded as a Lebanese party in 1983.[123] Unlike the Amal Movement, which made a more secular impression at the time, Hezbollah had a more revolutionist and fundamentalist tendency.[124] In addition, Shiites of Hezbollah were adopting the principle of *Velayat-e Faqih* (Guardianship of the Jurist), which considers the religious leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran to be a supreme religious authority.[125]

On 14 September 1982, Bashir Gemayel, the Lebanese president known for being close to Israel, was assassinated. On 17 May 1983, his successor, the new Lebanese President Amin Gemayel signed a U.S.-brokered peace treaty with Israel. Besides ending the state of war between the two countries, the peace treaty also established a safe zone in southern Lebanon and formalized the gradual withdrawal of the Israeli army.[126] After the peace treaty, the Israeli army withdrew from Beirut in September 1983 but maintained a presence in southern Lebanon. Meanwhile, the Lebanese Civil War was still raging, and the Syrian-backed opposition seized the upper hand. The progression of the civil war in favor of the Syrian-backed opposition has pushed Amin Gemayel to compromise with their patron, Syria. As a result, under pressure from Syria, he was forced to withdraw from the peace treaty he signed with Israel on 5 March 1984. Meanwhile, Israeli forces in southern Lebanon have become the target of increasing guerrilla attacks. After it became clear that a treaty with the central government was no longer possible, Israel decided to unilaterally withdraw to the safe buffer zone it had established in southern Lebanon and completed the withdrawal between February 1985 and June 1985.[127]

It can be said that the Lebanese Civil War was the scene of a power struggle between Israel and Syria. At the beginning of the Civil War, the two sides avoided conflict with each other, but in the later stages, the conflict became inevitable. While Syria's goal was to maintain its influence in Lebanon, Israel wanted to eliminate security threats. Syria has maintained its influence in Lebanon by putting pressure on the Maronite administration.

[123] Ziad Majed, "Hezbollah And the Shiite Community: From Political Confessionalization To Confessional Specialization", (The Aspen Institute, November 2010), p.4, Accessed 12 April 2021. https://www.aspeninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/files/content/docs/pubs/LRF_AW_digital_1122.pdf.
[124] Encyclopedia.com. "Hezbollah." Accessed 10 April 2021). https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/asia-and-africa/middle-eastern-history/hezbollah.
[125] International Crisis Group (ICG), "Hizbollah and the Lebanese crisis", 10 October 2007, *Middle East Report* N°69, p.17, Accessed 12 April 2021. https://www.refworld.org/docid/470dcda72.html.
[126] Economic Cooperation Foundation, "Israel-Lebanon Treaty (1983)", Accessed 1 March 2021. https://ecf.org.il/issues/issue/183.
[127] Weisburd, p. 163

Israel, on the other hand, maintained its presence in the buffer zone in southern Lebanon and strengthened the South Lebanon Army.

After Egypt signed a separate peace treaty with Israel in 1979, Syria's dream of a comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli problem was largely dashed. As a reflection of this, it can be said that in the early 1980s it shelved the diplomatic solution again and entered into a strategic rivalry with Israel. This strategic rivalry manifested itself in the Lebanese Civil War, and Syria tried to balance Israel's strategic position in the region with the help of the Soviet Union. On the other hand, in order to reclaim the Golan Heights and protect Damascus in a future conflict, it was necessary to obtain a military force equivalent to Israel's.[128]

Syria, however, has largely failed to balance Israel's military power. One of the main reasons for this was Syria's struggling to finance its military spending due to the economic crisis. For example, in 1985, 22% of Syria's gross national product was devoted to military expenditures, which decreased over the next decade. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union, where Gorbachev came to power in 1985, declared that it no longer supports a military solution to the Arab-Israeli problem. After 1988, these factors prompted Syria to seek diplomatic solutions with Israel again.[129]

As a result, this period first witnessed the Third Arab-Israeli War. In this war, Israel captured the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt and the Golan Heights from Syria. The Golan Heights has played a dominant role in Israel-Syria relations since this period. After the Third Arab-Israeli War, Israel followed a policy of preserving the status quo. This policy pushed Egypt and Syria to start a new war to take back the lands they lost to Israel. However, Israel emerged triumphant from the Fourth Arab-Israeli War as well. As a result, the Arab states realized that after this war, Israel could not be wiped off the map by military force. Egypt succeeded in reclaiming the Sinai Peninsula by signing a peace treaty with Israel in 1979. This set an example for Syria, which had been seeking ways to reclaim the Golan Heights diplomatically. Hafez Assad, who came to power in 1971, had already made his will in this direction clear. On the other hand, Lebanon was the place where Israel and Syria faced each other once again. In the Lebanese Civil War that lasted until 1990, Israel and Syria supported opposing sides. Israel occupied South Lebanon due to PLO attacks and made great efforts to

[128] Ma'oz, 1999, p. 412
[129] Ibid, p. 413

drive Syria out of Lebanon. Although Israel signed a peace treaty in 1983 with the Lebanese government, with which it cooperates, this treaty was later abandoned due to pressure from Syria. While Syria aimed to ensure its influence in Lebanon, Israel's main aim was to break through its isolation and minimize security threats by signing a peace treaty with Lebanon.

2.6. Peace Talks (1991-2000)

Egypt's separate peace with Israel in 1979 had largely eliminated the possibility of a comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. But at the same time, Egypt encouraged Syria to follow the same path and reclaim the Golan Heights via diplomacy. The economic difficulties in Syria and the USSR's declaration that it did not support a military solution to the Arab-Israeli problem anymore also pushed Syria to seek diplomatic solutions with Israel. On the other hand, the Lebanese Civil War, which had been continuing since 1975, ended in 1990.

Thus, Syria has chosen a path of rapprochement with the United States to lead peace with Israel. The United States responded positively to Syria's conciliatory stance due to its interests in the Middle East. Indeed, in November 1990, Syrian President Hafez Assad and U.S. President George Bush met in Geneva. Following the First Gulf War, in July 1991, Syria announced that it would participate in the Arab-Israeli peace process designed by the United States under more flexible conditions. Syria was to attend a regional conference sponsored by the United States and USSR to start direct negotiations with Israel. Since then, Syria has stopped demanding the recognition of PLO as representative of the Palestinian people and has only cited Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Syrian territories as a precondition for peace.[130]

On the Israeli side, both Labor and Likud parties maintained a stance against returning the Golan in exchange for full peace with Syria. Because the vast majority of The Israeli people were willing the Golan to be retained. Undoubtedly, the unilateral annexation of the Golan by Israel on 14 December 1981 also played a part in this public opinion. However, this attitude has changed since the 1991 Madrid Peace Process. The most striking example of this can be seen in opinion polls in Israel. In 1991, 30 percent of Israelis welcomed the idea of withdrawal from the Golan Heights for full peace with Syria.[131]

[130] Ibid, p. 413
[131] Ibid, p. 414

On 30 October 1991, the Madrid Conference began with the participation of Jordanian, Israeli, Syrian, Lebanese, and Palestinian representatives. Although no significant consensus was reached at this conference, it can be said that it paved the way to the Middle East Peace Process. The negotiations have been a major milestone in the start of bilateral talks between Arab states and Israel. Bilateral talks continued in Washington, with American mediation.[132]

During a total of five meetings from the autumn of 1991 to the spring of 1992, the Likud party was in power in Israel and the prime minister was Yitzhak Shamir. No progress was made in these talks because Syria insisted on the principle of "land for peace" while the Shamir government formulated peace as "peace for peace."[133] Israel's representative, Yossi Ben Aharon, opposed Syria's insistence on withdrawal as a precondition for peace, saying *"Peace is fluid, flexible and reversible, when territory is concrete and irreversible."*[134]

2.6.1. Rabin's Era

Yitzhak Rabin was elected new Israeli prime minister in July 1992. Unlike his predecessor Shamir, he said for the first time that United Nations Resolution 242 applies to Golan Heights.[135] At the sixth meeting on 24 August 1992, Israel officially informed Syria that it had abandoned the "peace for peace" formula and accepted Resolution 242. Syria then wanted a roadmap to form the basis of future peace talks. This roadmap identified four issues as the main pillars of the negotiations: security arrangements, normalization, borders, and steps for withdrawal from Golan Heights.[136]

One of the points of disagreement in the ongoing negotiations between the two sides was the extent of the withdrawal. Israel wanted to test Syria's commitment to peace during the withdrawal process, by extending the withdrawal over a period of five years. In addition, peace with Syria should include steps of normalization, such as diplomatic and trade relations. Syria, on the other hand, wanted Israel to withdraw to 4 June 1967 borders and dismantle the settlements it had established in the Golan Heights. Moreover, Syria was not

[132] Hasan Mohammad Al-Momani, "Israeli-Syrian Negotiation 1991-1996: Missed Opportunities and Elusive Peace.", *Dirasat: Human and Social Sciences 47*, no. 1 (2020): 221-232 p. 223 Accessed 25 March 2021. https://www.academia.edu/43176646/Israeli_Syrian_Negotiation_1991_1996_Missed_Opportunities_and_Elusive_Peace.
[133] Al-Momani, p. 224
[134] Daoudy, p. 223
[135] Ma'oz, 1999, p. 414
[136] Daoudy, p. 224

as keen as Israel on the process of moving peace one step further and achieving full normalization. Because there was concern that such a warm peace would increase Israel's hegemony in the region.[137]

The disagreement over withdrawal continued during negotiations in 1993. Israel said the depth of the withdrawal would be determined by the depth of peace. On the other hand, Syria's formula was "full withdrawal for full peace." The year 1993 is also important for the signing of the Oslo Treaty between Israel and the PLO. As a matter of fact, the Oslo Treaty has negatively affected peace talks between Syria and Israel. Because Israeli Prime Minister Rabin thought it was very difficult to convince the Israeli public to accept two peace agreements with serious concessions. Rabin also believed that peace with the Palestinians would strengthen Israel's position in negotiations with Syria. For this reason, Israel's priority was to make peace with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).[138]

Deal with Palestinians caused Rabin to be less enthusiastic about peace talks with Syria. Rabin argued that a peace treaty should be signed with Jordan instead of Syria. Bill Clinton, who came to power in the United States on 20 January 1993, argued that the momentum gained with Syria should not be lost.[139] To that end, Clinton met with Assad in Geneva in January 1994. As a result of this meeting, Assad announced that Syria is ready for full diplomatic relations with Israel in exchange for the complete withdrawal from the Golan Heights.[140]

Meanwhile, peace between Israel and the PLO has allowed Syria to focus directly on the Golan Heights. Bill Clinton has also worked hard to resolve disputes between the parties. As a result, the negotiations regained momentum. In fact, the Israeli Prime Minister Rabin said settlements in the Golan could be dismantled based on the outcome of a referendum. In the meantime, the United States has urged Israel and Syria to conclude negotiations on the issues they agree on and postpone the issues on which they disagree. Thanks to this, Israel and Syria have made great progress at this stage, but they have continued to disagree on the line that Israel will withdraw to. Syria was demanding that Israel should withdraw to 4 June 1967 borders. Thus, Syria would have access to Lake Tiberias and the Jordan River headwaters. Israel, on the other hand, insisted that the withdrawal line should be determined

[137] Al-Momani, p. 225
[138] Ibid, p. 226
[139] Ibid, p. 226
[140] Daoudy, p. 225

according to the 1923 border agreement between the Palestinian and Syrian mandatory governments and wanted it to include water resources in the Golan Heights. Israel, meanwhile, has proposed a three-stage withdrawal that would last a total of eight years, and as part of that, it withdrew its forces from some small towns. The purpose behind this proposal was to assess how much Syria intends to normalize the relations. Syria rejected this, demanding that the withdrawal should be completed in a maximum of one year, and refused to normalize relations until the Golan Heights was completely returned.[141]

In terms of security, there appears to be a dispute over demilitarized zones. Israel wanted the Golan to be completely demilitarized in exchange for its withdrawal from the Golan. Syria welcomed this but demanded the creation of mutual demilitarized zones on both sides of the border. Since this request was not accepted by Israel, no consensus was reached on this issue.[142] At the time, On 26 October 1994, Jordan signed a peace treaty with Israel, becoming the second Arab country to recognize it.[143]

As former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger put it, *"No war is possible without Egypt, no peace is possible without Syria."*[144] Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin also felt that peace with Syria was essential. He was aware that without Syria, there would be no comprehensive solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. However, peace with Syria seemed unlikely without territorial concessions.[145] Rabin, therefore, committed to withdrawing to the 1967 borders in exchange for full normalization. This commitment was called "deposit" and was the most important concession Israel has ever made. This was conveyed to the Syrian President Assad through the United States, in August 1993, which led him to believe in how willing Rabin was for making peace.[146] In exchange for this concession, Assad agreed to a treaty on the sharing of water resources in the Golan Heights. He subsequently pledged not to draw water from Lake Tiberias, a crucial source of drinking water for Israel.[147]

[141] Al-Momani, p. 227
[142] Ibid, p. 227
[143] Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Israel-Jordan Peace Treaty", Accessed 29 March 2021. https://mfa.gov.il/mfa/foreignpolicy/peace/guide/pages/israel-jordan%20peace%20treaty.aspx.
[144] Daoudy, p. 215
[145] Al-Momani, p. 228
[146] Daoudy, p. 224
[147] Slater, p. 96

2.6.2. Rabin's Death

Prime Minister Rabin was very hesitant to explain this territorial concession to the Israeli public. Therefore, he postponed the conclusion of the peace talks until the next election period.[148] Rabin was assassinated by a far-rightist Jew during a peace rally on 4 November 1995. When Shimon Peres took power as the new prime minister following Rabin's death, the Arab-Israeli peace process has entered a new phase.[149] Peres learned from Clinton at Rabin's funeral that Rabin had pledged to withdraw to the 1967 borders, which he had paid as a "deposit" for further negotiations. Although he did not make that promise himself, he said he would stick to it. However, Peres felt that the Israeli public would not agree to such a treaty.[150] Nevertheless, he wanted to continue negotiations with Syria. The Israeli and Syrian sides agreed to resume talks at The Wye River Plantation, sponsored by the United States.

The Wye River negotiations began in December 1995. During the negotiations, the issue of the 1967 borders was not raised. Instead, water and economic cooperation issues were focused on.[151] Until this stage, the issues agreed upon by both sides are:

- Israel agrees to withdraw from Golan in exchange for full peace and normalization.

- Syria agrees to cooperate with Israel on the economy, trade, tourism, and water sharing issues in exchange for a peace deal.

- Lebanon, which withdrew from its peace treaty with Israel under pressure from Syria in 1984, would also sign a peace treaty with Israel. Other Arab states would also be encouraged to do so.[152]

However, no consensus has been reached on the remaining issues. Meanwhile, anti-peace public opinion was building up in Israel. Peres had planned to call early elections and

[148] Patrick Seale. "The Syria-Israel Negotiations: Who Is Telling the Truth?" *Journal of Palestine Studies* 29, no. 2 (2000): 65-77. p. 75 Accessed 30 March 2021. doi:10.2307/2676537.
[149] Al-Momani, p. 228
[150] Daoudy, p. 225
[151] Ibid, p. 226
[152] Ma'oz, 1999, p. 414

resume negotiations after winning the election. After Peres called for early elections in February 1996, the decision was made to suspend the talks.[153] In February and March, there were a series of terrorist attacks in Israel carried out by Hamas. Shimon Peres halted negotiations altogether in March 1996 after Syria was coy in condemning these terrorist attacks.[154]

Failure of these negotiations can be attributed to several other reasons. One is that the parties are drowning in details rather than agreeing on fundamental issues. For example, an agreement was reached to withdraw from the Golan, but there was no middle ground found on the extent of this withdrawal. On the other hand, mutual mistrust prevails between the parties. Assad believed that Peres was using the negotiations as an election campaign.[155]

The environment of instability caused by Hamas attacks has undoubtedly caused the Israeli public to prioritize security. Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu was elected prime minister on 29 May 1996. The mismanagement of "Operation Grapes of Wrath" against Hezbollah in southern Lebanon by the Peres government also played a role in this victory. Netanyahu, a right-wing leader who prioritizes security, opposed the principle of "land for peace" and advocated the "peace for peace" formula, which was maintained by Israel until 1991.[156]

2.6.3. Netanyahu's First Term

Netanyahu's offer was not accepted by Syria as expected. Let alone peace talks, there have been hostile operations against Syria during Netanyahu's first term. Netanyahu chose to follow the "Lebanon first" policy in the negotiations. Accordingly, Lebanon would disarm the Iranian-backed Shiite Hezbollah and increase the influence of the Israeli-backed South Lebanon Army in the country. Netanyahu had planned to secure Israel's northern border in this way. Syria and Lebanon rejected the offer as expected.[157]

Another development during this period was the Israeli-Turkish axis. Israel and Turkey had signed The Military Training and Cooperation Agreement on 23 February 1996, before Netanyahu came to power. On 28 August 1996, Turkey and Israel signed another

[153] Daoudy, p. 226
[154] Ma'oz, 1999, p. 415
[155] Al-Momani, p. 228
[156] Ibid, p. 229
[157] Seale, p. 77

treaty involving the exchange of technical knowledge and expertise.[158] As a result of these developments, Syria and Iran felt directly targeted and began to form a closer relationship.[159]

2.6.4. Ehud Barak's Government

After taking over the Labor Party in 1997, retired general Ehud Barak stood for Rabin's peace formula: The depth of withdrawal would be determined by the depth of peace.[160] Ehud Barak was elected prime minister with a decisive victory in the May 1999 Israeli general elections. Barak won 56 percent of the votes, while Netanyahu won 44 percent. Labor's victory over Likud has raised expectations of a new peace process.[161]

Barak's victory pleased the United States, which wants peace talks between Syria and Israel to continue. President Clinton has charged Secretary of State Madeleine Albright to convince the Syrian and Israeli sides for negotiations. As a result, Syria and Israel agreed on 7 December 1999 to resume negotiations.[162] With the participation of Israeli Prime Minister Barak and Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Shara, the talks began in Washington on 15 December 1999.[163] Negotiations then continued in Shepherdstown from 3 January to 10 January 2000.[164]

When the U.S. persuaded Israel and Syria to return to negotiations, it told both sides what they wanted to hear. Syria thought negotiations would be resumed where they left off in March 1996. This means they thought that Rabin's commitment to withdraw to the 1967 borders was still valid. On the other hand, Israel joined the negotiations on the assumption

[158] Cevik Bir and Martin Sherman, "Formula for Stability: Turkey Plus Israel", *Middle East Quarterly*, (Fall 2002): 23-32. Accessed 31 March 2021. https://dev.meforum.org/511/formula-for-stability-turkey-plus-israel#_ftn1.
[159] Seale, p. 77
[160] Ma'oz, 1999, p. 415
[161] Eyal Zisser. "Israeli Syrian Peace Negotiations (December 1999–March 2000): A Missed Opportunity?", in *The Middle East Peace Process: Vision Versus Reality*, ed. Joseph Ginat, Edward Joseph Perkins and Edwin G. Corr (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2002): 229-246. p. 229. Accessed 31 March 2021. https://books.google.com.tr/books?id=Bcb7awnHwRgC&printsec=frontcover&hl=tr#v=onepage&q&f=false.
[162] Radwan Ziadeh, "The Israeli-Syrian Peace Negotiations: The Track of Lost Opportunities", in *The Middle East Peace by Piece: The Quest for a Solution to the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, ed. Hasan A. Barari, (Amman: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2009): 121-138. p. 132. Accessed 31 March 2021. https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/amman/06836-book.pdf.
[163] Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Israel and Syria Resume Peace Negotiations", Accessed 1 April 2021. https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/ForeignPolicy/Peace/Guide/Pages/Israel%20and%20Syria%20Resume%20Peace%20Negotiations.aspx.
[164] Zisser, 2002, p. 237

that it had not made such a commitment.[165]

During the negotiations, four separate committees were set up to discuss issues such as borders, security arrangements, water, and normalization. However, there was disagreement over which committee would meet earlier. Syria wanted the border committee to meet as soon as possible to see whether Israel is willing to withdraw to its 1967 borders. The Israeli side, on the other hand, wanted the borders to be determined lattermost according to the peace treaty to be reached on other issues of the negotiations. Israeli delegates attended meetings of the normalization committee and the security committee but did not attend when it came to meetings of the border committee.[166]

It was later learned that Ehud Barak's coalition partner in Israel, the Shas Party, had threatened Barak to terminate the coalition if the border commission was convened and the 1967 borders were discussed. Instead, Barak wanted to focus on water and show the Israeli public that Israel's access to water resources was guaranteed.[167]

On the other hand, there has been a kind of consensus on security arrangements. It was agreed that the withdrawal would be extended to a period of 2 years. However, Syria agreed to establish an early warning station in the Golan Heights under the supervision of the United States and France. The establishment of a joint delegation to monitor the free flow of rivers that feed Lake Tiberias was among the concessions made by Syria.[168]

Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Shara has been extremely flexible during the talks. However, the Israeli delegation continued to refrain from bringing up Rabin's commitment, which created a deep mistrust. As a result, the talks ended, and Hafez Assad announced that he ended all negotiations until he receives an open letter from Barak stating that Israel would withdraw to the 4 June 1967 borders.[169]

After the Shepherdstown talks failed, the United States struggled to reunite the parties. Clinton met with Hafez Assad in Geneva on 26 March 2000, but Barak did not attend. Barak had written to Clinton about Israel's new proposals for peace to be delivered

[165] Eyal Zisser. "The Israel-Syria negotiations - What went wrong?", *Orient: zeitschrift des Deutsche orient Institut* 42, no. 2 (January 2001): 225-251 p. 233. Accessed 1 April 2021. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/298105464_The_Israel-Syria_negotiations_-_What_went_wrong.
[166] Ziadeh, p. 133
[167] Daoudy, p. 227
[168] Ibid, p. 228
[169] Ziadeh, p. 134

to Assad during the talks. If the conditions written here were to be met, Barak would come to Geneva and resume negotiations. Earlier in his meeting with Clinton, Assad said there was no need to resume talks when he learned that Israel's new terms did not refer to the 4 June 1967 borders. Thus, the last attempt at negotiations for peace failed.[170]

As a result, the developments in the world and the region during this period led to the start of a peace process between Israel and Syria. The peace process between Israel and the Palestinians also played a major role in the initiation of this peace process. However, it also made a negative impact on concluding the Israeli-Syrian negotiations due to concessions made by the Rabin government. In addition, the United States has made great efforts for a peace treaty between Israel and Syria. Significant progress was made in the negotiations under the mediation of the United States, and Israel even agreed to withdraw from the Golan Heights in return for a full peace treaty. However, the two sides could not agree on the context of this withdrawal. While Syria wanted the withdrawal to be made according to the 4 June 1967 borders, Israel insisted on the 1923 borders. The fact that Jordan became the second Arab country to make peace with Israel in 1994 did not make a positive impact on these negotiations either. The assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Rabin, his successor Peres' concerns about the upcoming elections, and Syria's reluctance to condemn Hamas' attacks have led to the breakdown of negotiations. A final peace attempt under the Ehud Barak government failed because Israel was no longer willing to withdraw from the Golan Heights.

2.7. Post-2000

In the early 2000s, the last peace attempt between Israel and Syria had failed. Despite this, 2000 witnessed some developments that affected the course of Israel-Syria relations. One of them is Israel's decision to withdraw from Southern Lebanon. Israel was maintaining a military presence in the buffer zone in southern Lebanon since 1985. The area, which was controlled by the Israeli army and the pro-Israel South Lebanon Army, has occasionally witnessed low-intensity clashes between Israel and Hezbollah. Before Ehud Barak came to power, he had promised to withdraw completely from southern Lebanon by July 2000. Indeed, Israel withdrew completely from southern Lebanon on 25 May 2000, leaving the buffer zone to the South Lebanon Army. However, the Israeli-backed South Lebanon Army

[170] Ibid, p. 135

could no longer withstand the Hezbollah attacks and collapsed.[171] The line Israel withdrew to was marked with blue barrels by United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and designated as border demarcation between Israel and Lebanon. This line was accepted by both Israel and Lebanon and called the "Blue Line."[172]

2.7.1. Bashar Assad and Ariel Sharon Come to Power

On 10 June 2000, The Syrian President Hafez Assad passed away. His successor and son, Bashar Assad, had to stabilize Syria and resolve several domestic problems before he could resume peace talks. However, peace talks were an important part of solving these economic and domestic problems in their own right. The prevailing idea in Israel and the West was that Bashar Assad, who studied in Britain, would be more enthusiastic about integrating Syria into the western world and more cohesive about peace negotiations. Indeed, Bashar Assad was keen to continue the negotiations, but he maintained the same stance as his father on the issue of withdrawal to the 4 June 1967 borders.[173]

On 28 September 2000, leader of the Likud Party Ariel Sharon (the main opposition party in Israel at the time) visited Masjid al-Aqsa, a holy site for Muslims. The visit was not well received among Palestinians. Due to the negative acceleration created by the termination of the Oslo Process, the Second Intifada, also known as "Al Aqsa Intifada" began. This Palestinian uprising, which took place in Jerusalem, soon spread to Gaza and the West Bank. The uprising, which initially began as civil disobedience and protest, later became armed resistance against Israel.[174]

Bashar Assad's enthusiastic attitude to peace appears to have changed after the Second Intifada. Along with the Second Intifada, Hezbollah's increased aggressive attitude towards Israel prompted Bashar Assad to take an anti-Israeli stance rather than a leader seeking peace with Israel.[175]

In the February 2001 elections, Likud leader Ariel Sharon was unexpectedly elected as prime minister, defeating Ehud Barak. Ariel Sharon's primary goal was to put an end to

[171] Economic Cooperation Foundation, "Israeli Withdrawal from Lebanon (2000)", Accessed 12 April 2021. https://ecf.org.il/issues/issue/956.
[172] Israel Defense Forces, "What is the Blue Line?", Accessed 12 April 2021. https://www.idf.il/en/articles/what-is-the-blue-line/.
[173] Zisser, p. 251
[174] Just Vision, "Second Intifada", Accessed 4 April 2021. https://justvision.org/glossary/second-intifada.
[175] Zisser, p. 251

the Second Intifada and to find a solution to the Palestinian issue without withdrawing to the 1967 West Bank borders. Sharon was also reluctant to withdraw from the Golan. On the other hand, Syria has twice made contact to return to peace talks with Israel.[176]

Bashar Assad visited Turkey in January 2004 and asked The Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan to mediate between Israel and Syria. Turkey's initiatives were not responded to by Israel, and in September 2004, Turkey gave up. After September 2004, Switzerland acted as a mediator. Since then, Israeli diplomat Alon Liel and Syrian American businessman Ibrahim Suleyman have met a total of eight times. These secret talks ended in July 2006 when Israel refused to move them to the level of formal talks. This was because Israel did not want to contradict the U.S. policy of isolating Syria. Unlike the previous Clinton administration, the Bush administration did not support Israel's peace with Syria.[177]

Despite these requests, however, Bashar Assad's official statements were extremely harsh and contained an anti-Israeli tone. As a result, the Sharon government has rejected both of these formal dialogue requests.[178]

2.7.2. Syria's Withdrawal from Lebanon and Israel's Second Lebanon War

In September 2004, the United Nations Security Council issued Resolution 1559. This resolution called on all foreign states in Lebanon to withdraw their troops. Its direct target was Syria, which had troops in Lebanon since 1976.[179] Although the Lebanese Civil War, which began in 1975, ended in 1990, Syria had a military presence in Lebanon at the time. However, on 30 April 2005, after 29 years of military presence, Syria withdrew its troops from Lebanon.[180]

After Israel's complete withdrawal from southern Lebanon in May 2000, Hezbollah took control of the area. Hezbollah, which received equipment support from Syria and Iran, was strengthened in this region and was able to pose a serious threat to Israel thanks to its

[176] Itamar Rabinovich, "Damascus, Jerusalem, and Washington: The Syrian Israeli Relationship as a U.S. Policy Issue", (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 2009) p.10, Accessed 4 April 2021. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/03_syria_israel_rabinovich.pdf.
[177] Berna Süer, "Syrian-Israeli Peace Negotiations: An Analysis from the Perspective of Ripeness Theory", *Orta Doğu Etütleri* 3, no:2, (2012): 217-254, p. 246. Accessed 5 April 2021. https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/209673.
[178] Rabinovich, 2009, p. 11
[179] UN Security Council, S/RES/1559(2004), 2 September 2004, Accessed 12 April 2021. https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/529421.
[180] Al Jazeera, "Syria's role in Lebanon", 14 October 2007, Accessed 12 April 2021. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2007/10/14/syrias-role-in-lebanon.

short-range surface-to-surface missiles. The conflict, also called the Second Lebanon War, began on 12 July 2006, when Hezbollah attacked Israel with artillery fire and kidnapped two Israeli soldiers. Israel then launched "Operation Change of Direction" and invaded southern Lebanon. The operation aimed to rescue kidnapped Israeli soldiers and expel Hezbollah from southern Lebanon. Hezbollah responded to the Israeli operation with roughly 4,000 rocket attacks on northern Israeli cities.[181] Finally, on 11 August 2006, the United Nations Security Council issued Resolution 1701, calling ceasefire, and urging parties to respect the "Blue Line." This ceasefire was agreed upon by Israel on August 12, thus effectively ended the Second Lebanese War.[182]

Factors such as Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005, Israel's occupation of Lebanon in 2006, and the growing Shiite Sunni polarization in Lebanon have brought Amal and Hezbollah together. These two Shiite parties, which fought each other in the Lebanese Civil War, decided to form a coalition.[183]

2.7.3. Olmert's Term

Ehud Olmert, who was elected prime minister of Israel in the spring of 2006, initially maintained Sharon's position, refusing to negotiate any kind of negotiations with Syria. Instead, he chose to focus on the Palestinian issue like his predecessor. The reasons for this stance were the same as Sharon's: The Bush administration's opposition to the Israeli-Syrian negotiations. But that attitude has changed over time. Instead of rejecting the negotiations altogether, he put forward certain conditions that Syria must meet to continue the negotiations. Meanwhile, the Bush administration changed its mind and said it was not taking a stand against the Israeli-Syrian negotiations anymore. But unlike the Clinton administration, it refused to take on any mediation duties.[184]

[181] The Knesset: Lexicon of Terms, Second Lebanon War, Accessed 12 April 2021. https://www.knesset.gov.il/lexicon/eng/Lebanon_war2_eng.htm.
[182] Jewish Virtual Library, "Second Lebanon War: Background & Overview (July 12 - August 14, 2006)", Accessed 12 April 2021. https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/background-and-overview-second-lebanon-war.
[183] Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, "Lebanon: Amal Movement", Accessed 11 April 2021. https://www.refworld.org/docid/548172874.html.
[184] Rabinovich, 2009, p. 17

2.7.4. Turkish Mediation in 2008

In February 2007, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert appealed to Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan to act as a mediator between Israel and Syria.[185] Turkey, which plans to increase its reputation by taking on the role of mediator in regional crises, welcomed this. In May 2008, the Israeli and Syrian parties confirmed that they had held talks through Turkey. However, this process ended with the start of "Operation Cast Lead" in December 2008. Two days before the start of the operation, the Israeli Prime Minister Olmert was in Ankara for talks but he did not mention anything about the operation. Following these developments, Turkey renounced its role as a mediator. A month later, Erdogan sharply criticized The Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres during the Davos Talks. This incident is also known as the "One Minute Crisis," which plunged Turkish Israeli Relations into crisis.[186]

Ahmet Davutoglu, the Turkish foreign minister at the time, who was the mediator between Israel and Syria, stated that these 6-month indirect negotiations were the result of a three-year effort.[187] In addition, Davutoglu said in an interview with Cairo Review:[188]

> Turkey strongly believes that the Middle East peace process should be advanced in all three tracks, namely the Israeli–Palestinian, Israeli–Syrian, and Israeli–Lebanese tracks. With this understanding, Turkey mediated between Israel and Syria in the past. As both parties were about to launch direct negotiations, the process was disrupted by the Israeli attack against the Gaza Strip. We strongly hope that this track as well would be revived as soon as possible once the conditions in the region normalize.

Israel and Syria have met a total of five times mediated by Turkey. During the initial four meetings, they shared a consensus on security and many other issues. In the fifth meeting, Turkey asked the parties to determine the answers to the following questions:

- Where is the line Israel will withdraw to?

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[185] Ibid, p. 17

[186] Murat Ülgül. "The Decline of the 'Syrian Effect' in Turkish-Israeli Relations". *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi* 16 (2019): 135-148, p. 139. Accessed on 7 April 2021. https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/756762.

[187] Ahmet Davutoglu, "Turkey's Mediation: Critical Reflections from the Field", *Middle East Policy* 20, No. 1, (2013): 83-90, p. 87. Accessed 4 September 2021. https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/TurkeysMediation_Davutoglu_2013.pdf.

[188] Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Interview by Mr. Ahmet Davutoğlu published in AUC Cairo Review (Egypt) on 12 March 2012", Accessed 3 September 2021. https://www.mfa.gov.tr/interview-by-mr_-ahmet-davuto%C4%9Flu-published-in-auc-cairo-review-_egypt_-on-12-march-2012.en.mfa.

- How Syria's relations with Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas will develop after the peace deal with Israel?

Previous negotiations involved steps to formalize peace in exchange for territory, but for the first time "strategic realignment" was discussed during the talks under Turkish mediation. Territory for strategic realignment meant that Syria would review its partnership with Iran and Hezbollah in exchange for territory. Although these talks have come a long way, they have not evolved directly into peace negotiations for three main reasons:

- Any commitment by Olmert on withdrawal from Golan could have been used against him by far-right parties in the 2009 election.

- Olmert did not have much authority as a lame-duck prime minister to conclude peace talks a year before the elections.

- Syria wanted to wait for the inauguration of the new U.S. President Barrack Obama, and the end of the Israeli elections to conclude peace talks. Instead, its main goal was to get the commitment on withdrawal to the 1967 borders and to ensure a clear definition of this withdrawal line.[189]

An interesting fact was that Israel carried out an airstrike on the Syrian nuclear reactor while negotiating with Syria under Turkish mediation. The Syrian nuclear facility, which had been established with the support of North Korea, was destroyed by Israeli F-16s during "The Operation Outside the Box." Israeli officials admitted this, 11 years after the operation.[190]

2.7.5. Obama Era and Netanyahu's Second Term

Barack Obama took office on 20 January 2009. In Israel, on 31 March 2009, Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu became prime minister after ten years of break. In fact, the arrival of new governments in both countries offered a fresh start for solving the Syrian problem. The new Israeli government had to decide what kind of policy to pursue in Syria. This policy undoubtedly had to be compatible with the new U.S. administration. For the Obama administration, Syria was small but important for the whole national security.

[189] Rabinovich, 2009, p. 18
[190] BBC, "Israel admits striking suspected Syrian nuclear reactor in 2007", 21 March 2018, Accessed 7 April 2021. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-43481803.

According to Obama, who advocated dialogue with Iran during the election campaign, Syria was of great importance. Because it was one of Iran's most important strategic partners. There were four possible paths for Obama:

- Establishing a dialogue with Iran and facilitating the path to Syria-Israel peace talks.
- Resolving both U.S. and Israeli security concerns by separating Syria from Iran somehow.
- Using force against Syria.
- Ignoring the Syrian issue and focusing on the Palestinian issue.[191]

Bashar Assad's priority was to free Syria from economic sanctions. For this reason, he was open to a possible rapprochement with the United States. He believed that improving Syria's economic conditions would strengthen his regime as well. [192] The Obama administration appointed U.S. bureaucrats Jeffrey Feltman and Daniel Shapiro to visit Syria in February 2009. It can be said that the main purpose of this visit is to convince Syria to end its partnership with Iran.[193] Issues such as Iran's nuclear program, human rights violations in Syria, Israeli-Syrian peace negotiations, and Syria's support for terrorist groups were discussed. Assad has completely denied supporting foreign fighters in Iraq. Hezbollah and Hamas, he argued, were legitimate representatives elected by the Lebanese and Palestinian peoples. When Feltman and Shapiro visited Damascus again in May 2009 and returned, the Obama administration renewed the *Syria Accountability Act*, which imposed sanctions on Damascus. According to Obama, this was necessary due to Syria's ongoing destabilization efforts in Iraq.[194]

[191] Rabinovich, 2009, pp. 21-22
[192] Kilic Bugra Kanat, "A Tale of Four Augusts: Obama's Syria Policy" (Washington DC: SETA Foundation, 2016), p. 34
[193] Kanat, p. 39
[194] Kanat, p. 43

2.7.6. Bashar Assad's Peace Initiative in 2010

Former U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said in his memoirs that in 2010, Bashar Assad wrote a letter to Obama to broker The Syria-Israel talks.[195] The Obama administration, which has been struggling on the Palestinian issue, decided to make efforts to restart the Syria-Israel negotiations.[196] These negotiations were very serious and conducted through mediators appointed by the Obama Administration. Frederic C. Hof, one of the mediators appointed by the Obama Administration, said in a blog about the related talks:[197]

> Forty-four years later, Assad's son would take a giant step toward losing the Golan Heights for Syria permanently. For several months leading up to mid-March 2011, I had been shuttling between Jerusalem and Damascus as a deputy to Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George Mitchell. I had in my briefcase a draft Israeli-Syrian treaty of peace; a document I had composed with the help of a senior White House official. My objective was formal Israeli-Syrian peace: the phased, gradual withdrawal of Israel from all territory taken from Syria in 1967, and Syria's complete geopolitical reorientation away from Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas toward the West. Syrian implementation of treaty terms would be matched by the step-by-step lifting of American sanctions.

Although Netanyahu has declared that Israel will not withdraw from the Golan under any circumstances, these talks have continued until the Syrian Crisis broke out in March 2011.[198]

As a result, the 2000s did not witness positive developments in Israel-Syria relations as in the 90s. Although it was hoped that a new peace process would be initiated thanks to Bashar Assad, who succeeded Hafez Assad, the momentum in the 90s could not be achieved. As a matter of fact, the deepening of the Israeli-Palestinian problem also played a role in this. The Second Intifada deepened the crisis and this negatively affected the Israeli-Syrian relations. In addition, the struggle between Israel and Hezbollah pushed Syria to take a more

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[195] Amir Tibon, "Kerry Reveals Details of Assad's Secret Letter to Netanyahu in 2010.", *Haaretz,* 5 September 2018. Accessed 8 April 2021. https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/syria/.premium-kerry-reveals-details-of-secret-2010-assad-netanyahu-letter-1.6448772.

[196] Itamar Rabinovich, "Israel's View of the Syrian Crisis", (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 2012), p.4, Accessed 8 April 2021. https://www.brookings.edu/research/israels-view-of-the-syrian-crisis/.

[197] Frederic C. Hof, "The Golan Heights: Avoiding an Unforced Error," *Atlantic Council*, 20 July 2018, Accessed 25 May 2021. https://atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/syriasource/the-golan-heights-avoiding-an-unforced-error/.

[198] Itamar Rabinovich, "The Devil We Know Revisited: Israeli Thinking on the Future of the Assad Regime", *INSS Insight* No. 427, (2013), p.2, Accessed 10 May 2021. https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/165885/427%20-%20(FILE)1368963793.pdf.

aggressive stance towards Israel. Despite this, Bashar Assad was eager to make peace with Israel because he thinks he will find a solution to the economic problems in his country thanks to this peace process. However, the peace talks, which were mediated by Turkey and United States respectively, did not yield any results.

2.8. Chapter Conclusion

Israel-Syria relations have witnessed wars and military conflicts until 1973. The first two years of the ceasefire signed between Israel and Syria in 1949 were quiet, but then the struggle for dominance over the DMZs that would last until 1956 began. From 1956 to 1967, this struggle focused on the use of water resources. Ever since the Israeli occupation of the Golan Heights in the Third Arab-Israeli War, the Golan Heights has been the key point in relations. After Israel won the Fourth Arab-Israeli War in 1973, Israel and Syria signed a disengagement agreement in 1974. After this agreement, the Israel-Syria land border has become a de-conflict zone. However, the power struggle between Israel and Syria has not ended. The two countries supported opposing sides in the Lebanese Civil War that started in 1975 and moved their rivalry on Lebanese territory. Egypt's reclaim of the Sinai Peninsula by making peace with Israel set an example for Syria. After Syria was convinced that Israel could no longer be liquidated through war, a period of detente and negotiations started for the two countries. Peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians also play a major role in this. As a result, since the 90s, a series of peace negotiations between Israel and Syria have been witnessed. Significant progress has been made in these peace negotiations, and the government of Yitzhak Rabin has agreed to return the Golan in exchange for peace. However, negotiations could not be concluded due to Rabin's assassination and Israel's internal political dynamics. Rabin's death and the subsequent government of the Likud Party, which did not favor the return of the Golan, are among the factors that contributed to this. After 2000, Hafez Assad's death and his son Bashar Assad's succession increased the hopes for peace. However, the beginning of the Second Intifada in this period caused tension in relations. In the negotiations that started under Turkish mediation in 2008, Israel began to demand more than peace. In return for peace, Israel demanded Syria to end its strategic cooperation with Iran and withdraw its support for Hezbollah. Israel repeated the same demand in the negotiations held under the American mediation in 2010.

As a result, the relations between the two countries, which started with the declaration of war and continued with more wars, were followed by a proxy war period in

Lebanon. After that, there was a process of detente and peace negotiations. As a matter of fact, the period in which the two countries came closest to peace was the period of peace negotiations in the 90s. After the 2000s, the peace process became more difficult due to the new regional dynamics and increasing expectations of Israel. However, it is possible to talk about peaceful contacts between the two countries until the inception of Arab Spring.

3. DETERMINANTS OF ISRAELI FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS ARAB SPRING

3.1. Introduction

The Arab Spring is a term used to describe revolutions in Arab countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, and Yemen, and the ongoing civil war in Syria. The Arab Spring is still an ongoing process and it is not possible to predict when it will be completed.[199] The word "spring" has been used in the past for various social movements such as Polish Spring(1956, 1982), Seoul Spring(1979), and Prague Spring(1968). On 6 January 2011, it first appeared in an article titled "Obama's Arab Spring" published by Marc Lynch in Foreign Policy magazine.[200]

The process, which has been called the "Arab Spring" in the international press and academic circles, began on 17 December 2010 when a peddler named Mohamed Bouazizi from Sidi Bouzid, Tunisia, set himself on fire in response to the seizure of his cart. This isolated incident, which was only on the Tunisian agenda initially, was a spark that ignited the protests. The protests began on the same day and spread throughout the country. Zine al-Abidin Ben Ali, who has ruled Tunisia since 1987, said the protesters would be severely punished. Protests spread to Algeria on 6 January 2011. Meanwhile, protests in Tunisia escalated into riots with the participation of police and military members. Ben Ali fled to Saudi Arabia on January 14, handing over the reins to his deputy Muhammad Ghannouchi. Within a month following, the Ben Ali regime fell, and the rebellion succeeded.[201]

On January 17, a month after Bouazizi set himself on fire, this time an Egyptian restaurant owner set himself on fire to protest the poor economic conditions. As a matter of fact, this incident did not have a similar effect as in Tunisia. On January 25, however,

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[199] Elia Podeh, "Foreword: The Arab Spring as an Historical Opportunity", in *Israel and the Arab Spring: Opportunities in Change*, ed. Nimrod Goren and Jenia Yudkevich, (Mitvim and the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation, 2013): 6-7, p.7, Accessed 14 April 2021. https://www.fes.org.il/shop/israelarabspring.
[200] Habib Toumi, "Who coined 'Arab Spring'?", *Gulf News*, 17 December 2011, Accessed 30 April 2021. https://gulfnews.com/world/gulf/who-coined-arab-spring-1.952310#.
[201] Hamid Dabashi. "Decentering the World: How the Arab Spring Unfolded." in *The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism.* (London, England: Zed Books, 2012):17-40, p.17. Accessed 23 April 2021. https://books.google.com.tr/books?id=oN1iDgAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=tr#v=onepage&q&f=false .

celebrations for the national day turned into a protest against the Mubarak regime. Activists called it a "Day of Rage." On January 29, the Egyptian army intervened, and Mubarak announced that he disbanded the government. However, the protesters gathered in Tahrir Square and wanted Mubarak to resign, while Mubarak resisted. On February 11, Vice President Omar Suleiman announced Mubarak's resignation and the Egyptian Army's takeover. The United States and the European Union were following developments in Egypt with astonishment and Israel was following with fear. Iran, on the other hand, hoped the revolution in Egypt would be called the Islamic revolution.[202]

Protests began in Benghazi, Libya, on February 16. In addition to the domino effect of successful revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, the main reason for the protests was the arrest of human rights activist Fathi Tarbel. Hundreds of demonstrators were killed in clashes between demonstrators and security forces on February 21. Muammar Gaddafi, who had been ruling Libya since 1969, did not back down, but rather threatened the demonstrators. Protests had spread to cities such as Tripoli and Zwiyah, and the Gaddafi regime was trying to suppress them in a bloody way. On March 3, U.S. President Obama demanded Ghaddafi to step down. The International Criminal Court announced that Gaddafi could be prosecuted for crimes against humanity. On March 18, the UN Security Council declared a no-fly zone over Libya and authorized NATO to take an action without deploying troops in Libya. On March 19, NATO air forces began bombing the Gaddafi regime targets. On May 4, the International Criminal Court ruled that Gaddafi had committed war crimes. Gaddafi, however, was not planning to give up as easily as Mubarak and Ben Ali. Israel, on the other hand, was concerned about whether the regime after Gaddafi would be hostile to Israel.[203]

In Yemen, protests began on January 23. In response to the protests, President Ali Abdullah Saleh announced that he would never run for the presidency anymore, but the protesters were not satisfied. On February 3, Yemenis planned their own "day of rage" and 20,000 people took to the streets in the Yemeni capital Sana. In the face of increased demonstrations, President Saleh announced on March 10 that he would draft a new constitution. However, the protests continued, and peaceful demonstrations were bloodily suppressed. Meanwhile, some Yemeni security forces joined the protesters. In June 2011,

[202] Ibid, pp. 17-18
[203] Ibid, pp. 18-19

President Saleh got wounded in an attack and fled to Saudi Arabia.[204]

On February 14th, Bahrainis launched their own "Day of Rage" demonstrations. Bahrain, whose population is predominantly Shiite, has been ruling by a Sunni monarchy. The Sunni regime blamed the Iran Islamic Republic for agitating the demonstrations. In fact, the demonstrations started due to similar reasons with other Arab countries. However, the regime depicted them as a sectarian conflict. After the demonstrations were violently suppressed, as in other Arab countries, a larger crowd gathered in Pearl Square and the main opposition party withdrew from parliament. Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa's only response to this was to release a few political prisoners. On March 14, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) members intervened in the conflict by sending troops to Bahrain. Although the King of Bahrain declared martial law, the demonstrations did not stop. The square was destroyed because it was feared that Pearl Square, the rallying point for the demonstrators, would become symbolic like Tahrir Square of Egypt. As a result, some demonstrators were imprisoned, parties representing Shiites were banned, but unlike other Arab countries, there was no regime change.[205]

Syrians declared their "Day of Rage" on social media on February 5, long before the Bahrainis. The initial demonstrations were more limited than in Egypt, and a small number of demonstrators were immediately arrested. By March, huge demonstrations were taking place in Damascus demanding the release of some political prisoners. These demonstrations were also violently suppressed, and some demonstrators were arrested. Protesters were killed by regime forces during demonstrations that spread to the city of Daraa. Bashar Assad accused those who were involved in the protests of being Israeli agents. On April 12, some military members were killed because of refusing to open fire on protesters. On April 16, Bashar Assad promised to abolish the state of emergency, but more arrests and more violence against peaceful demonstrations continued. On April 21, the state of emergency was lifted, but in May the Assad regime attacked protesters with tanks in cities such as Deraa, Banyas, and Homs. Meanwhile, the United States and European Union reacted to the violence against the demonstrators and threatened to impose sanctions on the Assad regime. But the way the Assad regime deals with the demonstrations has not changed.[206]

[204] Ibid, pp. 19-20
[205] Ibid, p. 20
[206] Ibid, p. 21

With the Arab Spring, the Middle East witnessed radical changes. The weakening of Arab states gave non-Arab states an advantage and accelerated geopolitical competition in the region. On the other hand, the disappearance of the secular Arab regimes in Egypt and Tunisia strengthened Islamist elements in these countries. In Yemen, Syria, and Libya, the lack of central authority increased the number of non-state armed actors. These non-state armed actors have often become elements of proxy wars in these countries. As a result of the ongoing internal conflicts, countries such as Libya, Yemen and Syria were the subjects of respective external interventions.

Conversely, in Arab countries such as Morocco, Algeria, Oman, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, the effects of the Arab Spring were limited to small demonstrations. But from Morocco to Oman, almost every Arab country has been affected by the Arab Spring. The demonstrations in the mentioned Arab countries were aimed at responding to corrupt rulers, economic difficulties, unemployment, and repressive governments.[207] Some of these reactions were limited to small demonstrations. Some demonstrations brought successful democratization, as in Tunisia, and some brought ongoing civil wars, as in Libya, Yemen, and Syria.



Figure 3.1. *Consequences of the Arab Spring (sourced from https://www.observerbd.com/details.php?id=149110)*

It is not possible to say that Israel, which has a geographical location surrounded by Arab states, is not affected at all by this process that is ravaging the Arab world. However, the Arab Spring does not pose a direct threat to Israel. In other words, Israel was not the

[207] Ibid, pp. 21-22

subject of the Arab Spring demonstrations. On the other hand, as "an island in the middle of the Arabian Sea", it is inevitable that it will be affected by this flood.[208]

This contradictory situation is reflected in a contrast to Israel's foreign policy and domestic politics. Israel has chosen to follow a "wait and see" policy by not interfering in the internal affairs of the Arab states, neither politically nor militarily. On the other hand, many Israeli politicians who have a say in the government, have pointed out the threats posed by the Arab Spring to Israel's security in their political discourses.[209] Indeed, there appears to be a stark difference in the statements related to the Arab Spring made by Netanyahu, leader of the Likud Party and prime minister at the time. In his speeches to the outside world, Netanyahu painted an optimistic picture regarding the Arab Spring demonstrations, while painting a pessimistic picture in his speeches to the Israeli public.[210]

From today, it is possible to say that Netanyahu's government has pursued a defensive strategy for the Arab Spring despite its alarmist rhetoric in domestic politics.[211] On the other hand, at the time of the events, Israeli decision-makers did not consider the Arab Spring protests to be a phenomenon on a regional scale. Even if the protests in Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, Libya, Bahrain, and Syria have some similar characteristics, they have argued that they should be treated separately. As a result, it can be said that Israel has taken a different level of approach to each of the events in these countries.[212] However, when Israel's Arab Spring policy is overviewed as a whole, the common feature is observance and cautiousness. The main reason behind this is the deterioration of the regional status quo that poses several dangers to Israel.[213]

Political, geopolitical, and defensive reasons need to be thoroughly understood in order to study and analyze Israel's Arab Spring policy. Not only domestic political considerations, but also Israel's geopolitical situation and its defense doctrine have

[208] Martin Beck, "Watching And Waiting" And "Much Ado About Nothing"? Making Sense of the Israeli Response to the Arab Uprisings. *Palgrave Commun* 2, 16079 (2016), p. 2, Accessed 27 June 2021. https://doi.org/10.1057/palcomms.2016.79.
[209] Ibid, p. 2
[210] Lior Lehrs, "Egyptian Plague or Spring of Youth? The Israeli Discourse Regarding the Arab Spring.", in *Israel and the Arab Spring: Opportunities in Change*, ed. Nimrod Goren and Jenia Yudkevich, (Mitvim and the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation, 2013): 8-25, p.10. Accessed 14 April 2021. https://www.fes.org.il/shop/israelarabspring.
[211] Beck, p. 2
[212] Amichai Magen, "Comparative Assessment of Israel's Foreign Policy Response to the 'Arab Spring'". *Journal of European Integration* 37, no.1 (2015): 113–133, p. 116, Accessed 4 June 2021. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/07036337.2014.975992?journalCode=geui20.
[213] Ibid, p. 117

influenced Israel's steps in the Arab Spring one way or another. In addition, Iran is of particular importance in determining Israel's Arab Spring policy, so it deserves a separate title. Specifically, when analyzing Israel's policy on Syria after the Arab Spring, these political, geopolitical, defensive determinants and the Iranian factor play an important role. Therefore, it is necessary to address them first.

3.2. Political Dynamics

Among Israeli politicians and the Israeli public, there are three main views on the Arab Spring uprisings. The first view asserts that the Arab Spring uprisings would have dire consequences for Israel. While this negative view is more popular than others, it is accepted by Prime Minister Netanyahu and other right-wing Israelis. The second one is the view that opposes the first one and emphasizes the possible positive consequences of the events. This view, espoused by politicians such as Shimon Peres and Natan Sharansky, is also common among Arab Israeli citizens. While the third view generally accepts the negative picture of the Arab Spring, it also takes into account the positive consequences of the Arab Spring. This moderate view, which makes a more complex reading of the potential consequences of the Arab Spring uprisings, is mostly accepted by the security and diplomatic circles.[214]

Netanyahu, the leader of the Likud Party and Israeli prime minister at the time, has made his position in Israeli politics clear regarding the Arab Spring. In his opening speech in October 2011 at the Knesset he said: *"Friends, if I had to summarize what we can expect in the region, I would use two terms: instability and uncertainness."* In another speech at the Knesset on 23 November 2011, he used clearer phrases, describing the Arab spring as *"Islamic, anti-Western, antiliberal, anti-Israeli and anti-democratic wave"*. It can be said that this statement has become the semi-official language of political communication in Israel.[215]

Like Netanyahu, Avigdor Liberman, leader of the Yisrael Beitenu party and foreign minister at the time, does not have positive views on the Arab Spring. This came about when a letter he wrote to Netanyahu was leaked to the press. In this letter, Liberman expressed concern about developments in Egypt: *"We cannot rule out that a new president is elected*

[214] Elia Podeh and Nimrod Goren, "Postscript: Israel in the Wake of the Arab Spring", in *Israel and the Arab Spring: Opportunities in Change,* ed. Nimrod Goren and Jenia Yudkevich, (Mitvim and the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation, 2013): 98-102, p.98. Accessed 14 April 2021. https://www.fes.org.il/shop/israelarabspring.
[215] Beck, p. 2

in Egypt, Egypt will violate the peace treaty materially and pour significant forces to Sinai." In addition to Netanyahu and Liberman, there are many advocates of this negative view within the Israeli security establishment. Retired Major General Yoav Glant commented *"Might turn out to be a long and cold Islamic Winter"* on the Arab Spring.[216] The intelligence department of the IDF also discussed this issue and decided to use the term "Upheaval" instead of officially using the term "Arab Spring".[217]

There are also politicians and statesmen who oppose the negative picture painted by politicians such as Netanyahu and Liberman, suggesting that the Arab Spring brought great opportunities for Israel. The most important representative of this view was the Israeli President Shimon Peres. In a column for The Guardian, Peres expressed his support for the Arab Spring: *"Israel welcomes the wind of change and sees a window of opportunity."*[218] Netanyahu's statements to the foreign press have similar views with Peres. However, unlike Netanyahu, Peres has also taken a supportive stance in favor of the Arab Spring in domestic political debates. In a speech at the Knesset, Peres said: *"There is no doubt that the good of the entire region, including Israel, is for a new alignment to arrive, a reconstruction of the Middle East so that it has food to eat and freedom to breath."* Peres acknowledged the risks of the Muslim Brotherhood coming to power but also argued that such organizations could not solve problems such as poverty and oppression. According to Peres, even if organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood succeeded in the short term, the long-term winners would be democracy and freedom. Another Israeli politician who thinks like Peres is Natan Sharansky. Sharansky wrote a column in The Washington Post in December 2011 and criticized supporting dictators for the sake of stability. Sharansky, like Peres, said that the Arab Spring would have positive consequences in the long term, if not in the short term, and emphasized that Western countries should take steps to accelerate this.[219]

The third opinion is accepted by those who acknowledge the possible negative effects of the Arab Spring but also think that it can offer various opportunities for Israel. According to those who advocate this view, the Arab Spring process is complex for Israel in a way that cannot be considered positive or negative in its entirety. The former head of military intelligence Amos Yadlin described the Arab Spring as *"More of an opportunity than a*

[216] Lehrs, p. 12
[217] Ibid, p. 8
[218] Shimon Peres, "We in Israel Welcome the Arab Spring", The Guardian, 1 April 2011, Accessed 1 July 2021. https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/apr/01/palestinians-science-soil-arab-uprisings.
[219] Lehrs, pp. 13-14

risk." In making such a prediction, Yadlin referred to the Arab Spring process weakening the Iran-led bloc: *"What is happening today in the Arab World, weakens the radical alliance that was working against Israel."* Former Mossad Chief Meir Dagan, like Yadlin, pointed out that the Arab Spring would make Israel's work easier militarily. Apart from the security establishment, there are also advocates of this third view in diplomatic circles. One of them is Yitzhak Levanon, who was the Israeli ambassador to Cairo until November 2011. Levanon said that there should not be focused only on the negative sides of the events in Egypt. He noted that after a long period of one-party rule, Egypt entered a period of coalitions. Levanon also stated that the Muslim Brotherhood is not as dangerous as reflected in Israel, on top of that it may have a positive effect on Hamas in the future.[220]

3.2.1. Israeli Public Opinion Towards Arab Spring

Since Israel has democratic governance, the views of the Israeli people regarding the Arab Spring should also be taken into account when analyzing Israeli policy. The most striking detail is that Jewish Israelis and Arab Israelis have different ideas for the Arab Spring. 21% of Israel's population is Arab, and 83% of this Arab population is Muslim.[221] A series of surveys conducted by the Peace Index in the early stages of Arab Spring provides data to understand the Israeli public's views on the Arab Spring and the difference in opinion between Arabs and Jews.

This difference of opinion between Israeli Jews and Arabs is more clearly manifested when they are asked specifically about the events in Egypt. In general, Jewish Israelis have a negative view of the turmoil in Egypt. 70% of Israeli Jews believe that the revolution in Egypt cannot become a functioning democracy. Israeli Arabs, on the other hand, have an opposed idea. 74% of Israeli Arabs think that the revolution in Egypt will bring democracy to Egypt. On the other hand, 50% of Jewish Israelis think that a radical Islamist regime would be formed in Egypt, while only 28% of Israeli Arabs think so. While 52% of Israeli Jews oppose the U.S. policy of supporting protests in Egypt, 70% of Israeli Arabs support this U.S. policy. Also, in February 2011, 46% of Israelis think that the revolution in Egypt will negatively affect Egyptian-Israeli relations, while 21% think it will have a positive effect. 83% of Israelis want Israel not to interfere in the events in Egypt. In another poll a year later,

[220] Ibid, pp. 14-15
[221] Mitchell Bard, "The Status of Arabs in Israel", Jewish Virtual Library, Accessed 2 July 2021. https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-status-of-arabs-in-israel.

the same question was asked about Syria, and 79% of Israelis agreed that Israel should not intervene in Syria.[222]

According to a recent survey conducted by the Peace Index in March 2011, 48% of Israelis believe that events in the Arab World will have positive consequences for Israel. 30% believe there will be negative consequences. 55% of the Israeli people welcome these events positively for the people of the region. 29% see them as negative developments for the people of the region.[223]

In another Poll in November 2011, 63% of Israelis thought the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel was not in danger, while 13% thought the peace treaty was in danger. When Muslim Brotherhood candidate Mohamed Morsi became Egyptian president in June 2012, Israeli newspapers made alarming headlines, but the Israeli public did not react accordingly. The number of Israelis who believed that the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt would not be terminated increased to 74% after Morsi became president. The number of people who believed the treaty would be terminated fell to 6%.[224]

As a result, the general opinion of the Israeli public is that neither Egypt nor Syria should be intervened by Israel. There are significant differences of opinion between Israeli Jews and Israeli Arabs. After the Muslim Brotherhood's victory in Egypt, the people of Israel did not panic as much as predicted. On the contrary, polls show that concerns about the perpetuity of the peace treaty have decreased.

3.2.2. Democratization of the Region

The most different aspect of Israeli decision-makers' predictions about the Arab Spring from their American and European counterparts is the contribution of demonstrations to democratization. Israel certainly did not see these demonstrations as a precursor to political liberalization and democracy.[225] Indeed, it is clear that the Obama administration and Likud Government disagreed on this issue. Obama administration decided to support demonstrations that demand democracy in the region without taking into account Israel's

[222] Lehrs, pp. 16-17
[223] Ibid, p. 15
[224] Ibid, p. 16
[225] Magen, p. 117

security concerns.[226]

For years, Israel has iconically used the slogan of "the only democracy in the Middle East." Israel's successful democracy in the Middle East and its alignment with Western values functioned as a strong link in its relations with the West. The fact that the Arab Spring protests came out with desires for more democracy and more freedom was damaging Israel's slogan. The emergence of other states in the Middle East that aligned with Western values would undoubtedly eliminate Israel's uniqueness in this area. Israel prided itself on the fact that Arab Israelis living within its borders had far more rights than their relatives living in neighboring totalitarian Arab regimes.[227]

Israel's claim to uniqueness in the Middle East in the context of democracy also manifested itself in the field of secularism. Israel, despite describing itself as a "Jewish state" and a "Jewish democracy," claimed to be the only Middle Eastern democracy surrounded by fundamentalist Islamic states. Confessional states like Lebanon, or non-libertarian states against members of other religions, such as Saudi Arabia, were examples of Israel's claim. Indeed, compared to such states, Israel was more similar to Western democracy.[228]

Israel's harsh military measures were often explained to the international public by the anti-democratic and repressive nature of the Middle East. If Israel is compared to democratic Arab states instead of the tyrannical regimes around it, it may not have as much political maneuvering as it used to. For example, it could have come under more international pressure for blockading Gaza. On the other hand, there could have been a change in the balance of power because of the Arab Spring. For example, while Egypt in the Mubarak era was a country that bowed to every western desire, having a democratic regime could increase Egypt's strategic importance.[229]

Israel, on the other hand, has always dealt with authoritarian Arab rulers and elites. Israel even signed peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, which have had non-democratic regimes.[230] However, after the fall of authoritarian regimes in some Arab countries after the Arab Spring, Israel would also have to deal with the "Arab street". This was not good news

[226] Sandler, p. 129
[227] Ibid, p. 45
[228] Bresteeth, p. 46
[229] Ibid, pp. 54-55
[230] Jeffrey S. Morton and Nicole Shortt, "The Arab Spring: Implications for Israeli Security", *Mediterranean Quarterly* 23, no.3 (2012): 34-51, p. 49, Accessed 23 June 2021. https://muse.jhu.edu/article/483953.

for Israel, which has a negative image in the Arab world. It seemed very difficult for Israel to reach the Arab masses and to make as much progress in the Arab-Israeli peace process as it did with authoritarian rulers.[231]

3.2.3. The Factor of Political Islam

The prevailing view within Israel was that the main driving force of these protests in the Arab world was the idea of Islamism. However, Islamist thought, or Islamist parties had little role in the protests in those Arab countries. However, the fact that Islamist parties have not cooperated with the former repressive regimes has taken them one step further in democratic elections. Even if they were not the main driving force of the Arab revolutions, Islamist parties got the best of the Arab Spring with their victories in the elections.[232]

Several parties competed in Tunisia's October 2011 elections, including a Jewish party. Rashid al-Ghannoushi, leader of the al-Nahda party, won the election with 41% of the vote. The Al-Nahda movement was a moderate Islamist party. There was not any anti-Israeli rhetoric and they gave a pro-Western impression. In Tunisia's neighbor Libya, the National Forces Alliance, a moderate Islamist party, came to power. In the July 2012 elections, they won almost half of the seats reserved for political parties. In Algeria, which did not have active participation in the Arab Spring, Islamist parties failed in the 2012 elections by taking only 10% of the vote. In Morocco, North Africa's only monarchy, King Mohammed VI embarked on democratic reforms in 2011. Morocco was already governed by a regime that was compatible with the West and had a positive attitude towards Israel. Egypt, on the other hand, had a much broader Islamist revolution than other Arab countries. In the 2012 elections, The Freedom and Justice Party, backed by the Muslim Brotherhood, won 45% of seats in parliament, while the more radical Salafist Party won 28%. That meant 73% of seats in Egypt's parliament were held by Islamists. In addition, on 12 August 2012, Muslim Brotherhood leader Mohamed Morsi was elected president with 52% of the votes.[233]

During the Arab Spring, political Islamist parties came to power in countries such as Tunisia and Egypt, raising debates about political Islam in Israel. Those who are skeptical of Islam suggested that not only political Islam, but Islam itself was fanatical, evil, radical,

[231] Podeh and Goren, p. 101
[232] Moshe Ma'oz, "Political Islam and the Arab Spring" in *Israel and the Arab Spring: Opportunities in Change*, ed. Nimrod Goren and Jenia Yudkevich, (Mitvim and the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation, 2013): 42-51, pp. 46-47, Accessed 14 April 2021. https://www.fes.org.il/shop/israelarabspring.
[233] Ibid, p. 44

expansionist, anti-Western, and anti-Semitic. According to them, the sole purpose of Islam was to establish a caliphate governed by sharia and to fight the Judeo-Christian civilization. On the other hand, moderate thinkers and Islamic scholars say that the picture is much more complicated than this, and radical/political Islam and moderate Islam should be separated. It is a well-known fact that radical factions within Islam pose a threat not only to the West and Israel but also to pragmatist Muslim regimes. However, these radical factions do not form the main backbone of the Islamic world. On the other hand, radical factions are also divided into themselves. For example, Hezbollah and Iraq's Shiite militias are affiliated with the religious authority in Iran, while Sunni groups such as al-Qaeda, Hamas, and Salafists paint a more dispersed picture. There are conflicts between Shiite and Sunni radical Islamists, as well as between Sunni organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Qaeda.[234]

A third of the 57 member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation is in the process of democratization, while the rest are governed by authoritarian regimes. Although Muslim-majority countries governed by these authoritarian regimes have human rights violations, many of them do not follow a policy with radical Islamic views. Pragmatism prevails in the approach of many of them to Western countries and Israel. Such Muslim countries are examples against the school of Islamophobic thought that views Islam as a whole.[235]

On the other hand, political Islamic movements in the Arab World have been perceived as dangerous and threatening by Israel. These political Islamist movements were directly associated with terrorism and Iran and were seen as movements in which dialogue was not possible. However, with the Arab Spring, some of these movements came to power and some of them had a say in their country's governments. These developments have caused such political Islamist movements to follow a more moderate line. This has made it easier for Israel to establish formal or informal dialogues with such movements.[236]

3.3. Geopolitical Dynamics

With the Arab Spring, the changes in power in the Arab World have also led to radical geopolitical changes in the region. The disappearance of some authoritarian Arab regimes, the weakening of some Arab states, led the region to uncertainty and instability. This crisis

[234] Ibid, p.42
[235] Ibid, p.49
[236] Lehrs, p.24

of Arab states was working in favor of non-Arab states such as Iran and Turkey in terms of the balance of power. On top of that, all these developments heralded the change of the regional environment that Israel had accommodated itself.[237]

First of all, the radical change of the political order in the Arab world was very important for Israel, which has a geostrategic position surrounded by hostile Arab neighbors. Like the rest of the world, whether the wind of change created by the Arab Spring would give birth to more democratic regimes was an object of curiosity in Israel. However, such radical change would certainly require a rethinking of Israeli foreign policy.[238]

3.3.1. Fear of Regional Isolation

In Israel, which has a geostrategic position surrounded by Arab states, there have been those who have welcomed the demonstrations in Arab countries that demand more democracy and freedom. Because according to those, it was easier to improve relations with democratic regimes. On the other hand, there have been those who disagreed with this view and were skeptical of this democratization process in the Arab countries. This was because the democratization movement in the Arab Spring brought Islamist parties one step closer to power. Furthermore, Islamist movements in Arab spring countries were much more hostile towards Israel than authoritarian Arab regimes.[239]

The underlying reason for the concern about the benefits of Islamist movements from this democratization process is undoubtedly the fear of geographical isolation. Israel has signed a peace treaty with Jordan and Egypt, the neighbors it has fought in the past, and has come a long way to make peace with Syria. However, it owes this peace process to the acceptance in the mentioned Arab countries that Israel can no longer be destroyed by force. Therefore, Israel's Arab neighbors uneasily considered making peace with Israel. This "uneasily signed peace" has been maintained through authoritarian Arab leaders. In an environment where power moves from authoritarian leaders to political Islamist movements, the continuity of these peace treaties is also endangered. This naturally puts Israel in jeopardy

[237] Efraim Inbar, "The Strategic Implications for Israel", in The Arab Spring, Democracy and Security Domestic and International Ramifications, ed. Efraim Inbar, (London, England: Routledge, 2013): 145-165, p. 145, Accessed 5 June 2021. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203539132.
[238] Yaron Katz, "The Impact of Social Revolutions on the Arab-Israeli Conflict," *Economics, Politics and Regional Development* 1, no. 1, (2020): 17-28, p. 22, Accessed 19 June 2021. http://www.scholink.org/ojs/index.php/eprd/article/view/2806.
[239] Berti, p. 130

of once-dreaded geographical isolation.[240]

When the Arab Spring protests first began in Tunisia in 2010, Israel chose to pursue a "wait and see" strategy by declining to comment in favor of neither Ben Ali nor protestors. Although official relations between the two countries entered a standstill period after Second Intifada, partnerships in the fields of trade and tourism continued. When the Ben Ali regime collapsed, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he only hoped the ongoing instability in the Middle East would end as soon as possible. Deputy Prime Minister Silvan Shalom, more bluntly, expressed concern that Tunisia was shifting towards "extremist forces" in the Arab world. Such a shift could jeopardize Israel's informal relations with Tunisia, such as trade and tourism ties.[241]

On the other hand, when the demonstrations in Tunisia spread to Egypt, we see Israeli statesmen taking a more open stance. When the first uprising in Egypt began, Prime Minister Netanyahu called Obama and several Western leaders to make them assure that any regime in Egypt would adhere to the 1979 peace treaty.[242] Netanyahu's concerns were undoubtedly not in vain. Because in Egypt, it was inevitable that the transfer of power from military authorities to civilian authorities would affect Egyptian-Israeli relations. According to a Pew Research Center survey in 2012, 61% of Egyptians wanted the peace deal with Israel to be terminated. In the same year, another poll conducted by the University of Maryland found that 97% of Egyptians view Israel as a threat.[243]

Meanwhile, Muhammad Badie, the leader of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood movement, said the 1979 Peace Treaty should be rediscussed after the elections. Badie also said the Rafah border gate which connects Egypt to Gaza should be reopened. The Rafah border gate was closed during the Mubarak era to prevent Hamas from supplying weapons from Egypt. As Badie proposed, on 28 May 2011, the Rafah border gate opened without consulting Israel.[244]

On the other hand, the overthrown Mubarak regime was not hostile to Israel, although

[240] Inbar, 2013, p. 150
[241] Berti, p. 131
[242] Nicos Panayiotides, "Is The "Arab Spring" Israel's Winter? Strategic Instability in The Middle East." *International Journal on World Peace* 29, no. 1 (2012): 21-40, p.22, Accessed 14 April 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23266587.
[243] Ayoob, p. 5
[244] Panayiotides, pp. 23-24

it did not have good relations with Israel. Hosni Mubarak has used Israeli hatred of the Egyptian people for years to preserve the legitimacy of his regime. Mubarak, however, has not attempted to violate the peace, even if he has not turned the cold peace with Israel into a warm peace. For these reasons, and thanks to the long-standing stability provided by his regime, Israel took a stance to maintain the status quo in Egypt.[245]

By the end of 2013, Mohammed Morsi, the president-elect after Mubarak, had been displaced by a military coup. His successor, defense chief Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi, had a worldview similar to the Mubarak regime. For this reason, Israel welcomed this government changeover in Egypt. Moreover, it signed cooperation protocols with Sissi's administration in the fields of defense and energy, which are still in effect.[246]

3.3.2. Regional Balance of Power

The civil unrest in the Arab World affected every Arab state and inevitably weakened them more or less. Arab states, which had to focus on domestic problems, were deprived of the ability to build national power and project it outside their borders. The weakening of Arab states has led to the rise of non-Arab states such as Iran, Turkey, and Israel in the balance of regional power.[247]

Therefore, besides regional isolation, it is necessary to address Israel's reflexes after the Arab Spring in terms of the balance of power. It cannot be said that the only reason for Israel's reaction to the regime change in Egypt more than Tunisia was the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt. At the same time, due to its geostrategic position, Egypt was more valuable to Israel than Tunisia in terms of the role it would play in the regional balance of power. In particular, Iran's intervention in the protests and increasing its influence in Egypt would definitely pose a security threat to Israel.[248]

Indeed, Iran has described the demonstrations in Egypt as "a revolution inspired by Imam Khomeini." On the other hand, Turkey supported the anti-Mubarak protests in Egypt as Iran did. Likewise, the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt was suitable for the

[245] Berti, pp. 131-132
[246] Lazar Berman, "How Israel Kept The Arab Spring from Becoming the Winter of Its Discontent", *The Times of Israel*, 16 April 2021, Accessed 20 June 2021. https://www.timesofisrael.com/how-israel-kept-the-arab-spring-from-becoming-the-winter-of-its-discontent/.
[247] Inbar, 2013, p. 147
[248] Berti, p. 132

ideological agendas of both Iranian and Turkish rulers. However, Egypt was a country that was pointed as the leader of the Arab world and was a needed actor to balance the influence of Iran and Turkey in the region. However, after the Muslim Brotherhood's rule, Egypt has been so far from balancing Iran and Turkey, on top of that, entered their orbit.[249]

Syria, on the other hand, had a different mechanism from Egypt in terms of the balance of power. Iran and Turkey, who agreed on the change of power in Egypt, clashed when it came to the protests in Syria. While Turkey openly supports the Sunni opposition in Syria, Iran has sided with the Assad regime from the very beginning.[250] The spread of the Arab Spring to Syria is an example of being stuck between fear and hope for Israel. Israel both saw the collapse of the Assad regime as a major blow to Iran and was aware of the opportunities created by turning a new page with its northern neighbor. On the other hand, Israel was concerned about the emergence of another Islamist regime on its border.[251]

Undoubtedly, a regime change in Syria would have both good and bad consequences for Israel. The overthrow of the Assad regime could destroy one of Iran's most important allies, so Israel could gain a huge advantage in the regional balance of power. However, this advantage could be destroyed by the replacement of the Assad regime with a populist and anti-Israeli government, worsening Israel's regional isolation. On the other hand, the Assad regime, despite its anti-Israeli rhetoric, has kept its land borders calm since it signed the disengagement agreement in 1974. But with a populist Syrian government after the Assad regime, the Israeli-Syrian border could become a conflict zone again. Moreover, it wouldn't be surprising if the populist government after the Assad regime makes an effort to reclaim the Golan Heights.[252]

For years, Israel thought that returning the Golan Heights to Syria in exchange for complete peace would break Iran's influence in the region. However, in a civil war environment where the legitimacy of the Assad is questioned, this was no longer an option. It was unclear whether such an agreement would remain in force in a possible change of government in Syria. Moreover, a region of high strategic value like the Golan Heights could not be abandoned in such a period of instability.[253] All these concerns were pushing Israel

[249] Inbar, 2013, pp. 147-148
[250] Ibid, p. 148
[251] Berti, p. 135
[252] Ayoob, p. 5
[253] Joshua Mitnick, "Amid Syria's Turmoil, Israel Sees Assad As the Lesser Evil"

to take an ambivalent stance, if not against regime change in Syria.

Another geopolitical development caused by the Arab Spring is the emergence of Saudi Arabia as the leader of the Sunni Arab world. After the Muslim Brotherhood's rule in Egypt, Saudi Arabia remained the only actor that could balance Iran and Turkey. Despite this, Saudi Arabia formed a temporary alliance with Turkey to overthrow the Assad regime. Israel and Saudi Arabia have also become covert allies, as they have common interests in balancing Iran. As a matter of fact, Saudi Arabia's military intervention in Bahrain is nothing but an effort to balance Iran's influence in the Gulf region.[254]

Iran's hegemonic ambitions in the region have brought Israel closer to other Gulf states. Although Israel does not have official diplomatic relations with countries such as Saudi Arabia and Oman, the Iranian threat has brought these countries together and caused them to cooperate in various fields.[255] The UAE and Bahrain joined the Arab states that recognize Israel by signing a peace treaty with Israel on 15 September 2020.[256] These developments show how effective Iran's hegemonic ambitions are in Arab-Israeli relations. Thus, the focus of Israel's relations with moderate Arab states has shifted from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to the Iranian threat.[257]

As a result, the Arab Spring process caused some geopolitical changes in favor of non-Arab states in the Middle East. These changes both positively affected Israel as it is a non-Arab actor and brought some risks with it. The most important of these risks is the regional isolation of Israel. The rise of Islamist movements rather than authoritarian Arab regimes supports this concern of Israel. It can be said that Israel's policies towards Egypt were built according to this concern. In the Syrian issue, Israel had similar concerns as in Egypt. Although there is no peace treaty between Israel and Syria, the Israeli Syrian border has been quiet since 1974. This situation can be changed by a Sunni populist government that can replace the Assad regime. On the other hand, the Assad regime is an important ally of Iran and its elimination would weaken Iran considerably in terms of the balance of power. For this purpose, Israel has established close relations with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries, whose interests are common with it. Even some Gulf states such as the UAE and

[254] Inbar, 2013, p. 148
[255] Katz, pp. 22-23
[256] The Arab Weekly, "Historic Peace Agreement Signed Between UAE, Bahrain And Israel", 16 September 2020, Accessed 22 June 2021. https://thearabweekly.com/historic-peace-agreement-signed-between-uae-bahrain-and-israel.
[257] Katz, p.23

Bahrain have officially recognized Israel and established diplomatic relations. All of these are the results of the rise of Israel as a non-Arab power after the Arab Spring and being a significant actor to balance Iran.

3.4. Military and Security Dynamics

Israel's size and geostrategic location make it a difficult country to defend. It has a smaller territory than its regional rivals, with a land of 22000 square kilometers. Moreover, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon, which are bordering with Israel, are states that have waged war with Israel in the past. Therefore, Israel is surrounded by states and non-state actors that threaten its existence.[258]

For this reason, Israel's national security strategy has a defensive approach that prioritizes securing Israel's existence. Despite this, Israel's military strategy is offensive. Because it is not possible to defeat the enemy with a defensive position in times of conflict and an inactive position in times of calm. Victory cannot be achieved without defeating the enemy, and Israel's security cannot be fully ensured without victory.[259]

3.4.1. Campaign Between the Wars

Israeli defense doctrine is based on the components of deterrence, early warning, defense, and victory. In order to realize these principles, the Israeli army follows certain strategies in situations of emergency, war, and calm. One of the most important of these strategies is Campaign Between the Wars (CBW). According to the Campaign Between Wars strategy, the Israeli army takes proactive offensive measures against its enemies without waiting for a war to break out. Thanks to these offensive measures, the enemy army will be deterred and a new war will be prevented. At the same time, the enemy army will be weakened and Israel will be more advantageous in a possible war.[260]

In the public defense doctrine published by Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in 2015, the main threats facing Israel are listed as follows:

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[258] Jeffrey S. Morton and Nicole Shortt, "The Arab Spring: Implications for Israeli Security", *Mediterranean Quarterly* 23, no.3 (2012): 34-51, pp. 35-36, Accessed 23 June 2021. https://muse.jhu.edu/article/483953.
[259] Gadi Eisenkot and Gabi Siboni, "Guidelines for Israel's National Security Strategy", (Washington DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2019), p. 29, Accessed 24 June 2021. https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/media/4613.
[260] Ibid, pp. 32-33

- States: Distant (Iran) and nearby (Lebanon)
- Failed states and states in a process of disintegration (Syria)
- Substate organizations (Hezbollah, Hamas)
- Terrorist organizations without links to a particular state or community (Islamic Jihad, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, ISIS, and others)[261]

The first of these threats is the Islamic Republic of Iran and Hezbollah, which operates in Lebanon as its proxy. These two actors intervened in Syria to help the Assad regime after the Arab Spring demonstrations turned into a civil war in Syria. Israel's efforts to prevent Iran's entrenchment in Syria and its attacks on Hezbollah on Syrian territory are part of its Campaign Between the Wars strategy.[262]

Going back a little further, the attacks on the nuclear facilities of Syria and Iraq can also be shown as part of Israel's Campaign Between the Wars strategy. Similarly, Israel has been one of the countries most opposed to Iran's nuclear enrichment program. Because, in order for Israel to remain a deterrent actor, its conventional military dominance in the Middle East must be secured and it must have nuclear exceptionalism. The way to do this is to prevent Israel's enemies from having a military capacity to compete with Israel's.[263]

3.4.2. The Decline of Israel's Deterrence

Israel's deterrence is not limited to the conventional warfare capability of the Israeli army. Knowing that the United States is Israel's de facto ally is also a major deterrent to Israel's enemies. The hesitant and complex reactions of the Obama Administration during the Arab Spring process have been interpreted as a decrease in the U.S. influence in the Middle East. This interpretation negatively affected Israel's deterrence capacity.[264]

Another reason that led to the decrease in Israel's deterrence capacity during the Arab

[261] Detterring Terror: How Israel Confronts the Next Generation of Threats, English Translation of the Official Strategy of the Israel Defense Forces, trans. Susan Rosenberg, (Cambridge: Belfer Center Special Report, 2016), Accessed 20 June 2021. https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/legacy/files/IDF%20doctrine%20translation%20-%20web%20final2.pdf.
[262] Ben Caspit, "Israel's dilemma over its 'war between wars'", *Al-Monitor*, 29 October 2019, Accessed 24 June 2021. https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2019/10/israel-war-iran-syria-lebanon-strategy-us-trump-yemen.html.
[263] Mohammed Ayoob, "The Arab Spring: Its Geostrategic Significance", *Institute for Social Policy and Understanding*, 2012, pp.6-7, Accessed 21 April 2021. https://www.ispu.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/2012_The-Arab-Spring-Policy-Brief.pdf.
[264] Inbar, 2013, pp. 148-152

Spring is the transformation of once-deterred states into weak states. Arab states that have fought Israel in the past are too busy with their internal affairs to form a coalition against Israel today. Moreover, the economic and technological gap between Israel and the Arab states has increased considerably since the last Arab-Israeli war. In other words, the option of Arab states to build an army to rival Israel's conventional military power has largely disappeared.[265]

Therefore, it can be said that the risk of these states waging war against Israel has largely disappeared. Even if this risk disappears, the instability in the neighboring Arab states that turns them into failed states is also a stated threat in the public defense doctrine of the IDF. "Failed state" refers to an advanced stage of a state's weakness. The weakness of a state can be measured by looking at whether the state fulfills certain conditions. These conditions are:

- The state's inability to control the means of violence within its borders
- Denial of the legitimacy of the state by most of its citizens
- The inability of the state to provide basic public services to its citizens due to lack of resources or institutional failures.[266]

After the Arab Spring, authoritarian regimes ended in some states, dictatorial order continued in others, but most countries were dragged into great instability. Historical records show that states in the democratization process are more disadvantaged than authoritarian regimes in terms of stability. Authoritarian regimes have ended in some Arab countries such as Libya and Yemen, but these countries have become failed states as a result of internal turmoil. In addition to these, Syria has entered the disintegration process.[267]

Israel's defense strategy is based on dealing with and deterring powerful states.[268] However, when a state becomes a failed state, this deterrence factor disappears. Because weak or failed states have a much more complex and decentralized decision-making process compared to states with a strong central authority. This makes them very difficult to deter

[265] Ibid, p. 152
[266] Ehud Eiran, "Israel and Weak Neighboring States: Lessons from the Israeli Experience in Lebanon", in *Israel and the Arab Spring: Opportunities in Change*, ed. Nimrod Goren and Jenia Yudkevich, (Mitvim and the Friedrcih-Ebert Foundation, 2013): 59-68, p.59, Accessed 25 April 2021. https://www.fes.org.il/shop/israelarabspring.
[267] Inbar, 2013, pp. 146-147
[268] Eiran, pp. 59-60

compared to states with strong and centralized political control.[269]

In conclusion, it can be said that deterrence takes an important place in Israel's defense strategy. The Campaign Between the Wars strategy followed by the Israeli army is a significant pillar of this. According to this strategy, the Israeli army carried out attacks against the elements it saw as a threat. However, there were some developments that led to the erosion of Israel's deterrence during the Arab Spring process. One of them is the U.S. policy during this process, and the other one is the emergence of failed states. Supposably, having a strong ally like the U.S. is a deterrent factor, but the fact that the US's influence in the Middle East was brought into discussion has negatively affected Israel's deterrence. On the other hand, since failed states are not governed by a sovereign decision-making mechanism, they are more difficult to deter than functioning states. All these developments inevitably affected Israel's security.

3.5. Terrorism Dynamics

Terrorism has been a major element of the Arab-Israeli problem from the very beginning. The main sources of terrorism from the viewpoint of Israel were the Palestinian fedayeen and the PLO in the past, but these groups were later replaced by Islamist organizations such as Hamas and Hezbollah.[270] Although Hamas and Hezbollah have a voice in the respective administrations of Gaza and Lebanon, they are recognized as terrorist organizations by the State of Israel.[271]

In other words, terrorism had been playing an important role in Israel's threat perception even before the Arab Spring began. However, the Arab Spring has had an impact on the armed groups that Israel is dealing with, as most of them contain Arab and Islamic elements. On top of that, the weakening of some Arab states after the Arab Spring enabled the conventional and non-conventional weapons of these states to fall into the hands of the armed groups that want to harm Israel.[272] [273] It can be said that the Arab Spring has played a

[269] Inbar, 2013, p. 152
[270] Charles David Freilich, "Israel's Counter-Terrorism Policy: How Effective?", *Terrorism and Political Violence* 29, no. 2, (2015): 359-376, p. 360, Accessed 17 June 2021. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09546553.2015.1044602.
[271] Israel Ministry of Justice, "List of Terror Organizations and Individuals", Accessed 17 June 2021. https://www.justice.gov.il/En/Units/FBPS/DNFBPDuties/Pages/List-of-Terrorist-Organizations-and-Individuals.aspx.
[272] Inbar, 2013, p. 153
[273] Inbar used the term of terrorist organization when defining these groups. Due to controversy about the natures of Hamas and Hezbollah, the term of armed groups preferred in this thesis.

part in Israel's terrorism dynamics, due to its direct or indirect effects on the groups that are regarded as terrorist organizations by Israel. Therefore, in order to understand Israel's Arab Spring policy, it is useful to dig into the effects of the Arab Spring on the armed groups that Israel views as terrorist threats. From the viewpoint of Israel, the major terrorist threats before the Arab Spring can be categorized under the following three titles: Palestinian armed groups, Global/local jihadist organizations, and Iran-backed Shiite militias.[274]

3.5.1. Palestinian Armed Groups

Activities of the armed groups in Palestine are carried out mostly by Hamas, which controls Gaza and is also influential in the West Bank. In addition to Hamas, there are organizations of relatively smaller influence, such as the Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and the Popular Resistance Committees. However, when talking about terrorism originating from Palestine, the first organization that comes to mind is Hamas. Hamas is an organization that also has sympathizers among Israeli citizens of Arab origin.[275]

Hamas was founded as the Palestinian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood and has had strong ties to the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. In addition, Hamas is the biggest opposition to the Fatah administration, which is considered the legitimate administration in Palestine by Israel. If one of the revolutions caused by the Arab Spring were to occur in the Palestinian territories, it would undoubtedly be Hamas that would benefit from it. The fact that the Muslim Brotherhood gained strength in Egypt and other Arab countries after the Arab Spring served the interests of Hamas. Especially after the Muslim Brotherhood came to power in Egypt, the opening of the Rafah Border Gate pleased Hamas. In addition, after the Egyptian army's control over the Sinai Peninsula weakened, Hamas began to use it as a new base for rocket attacks on Israel. Sinai has become a new front opened by Hamas and other jihadist organizations against Israel, thanks to its geographical proximity to Gaza and Egypt's authority gap in the region.[276]

On the other hand, Hamas showed a passive attitude when the Arab Spring demonstrations spread to Syria and turned into a civil war. It did not want to support the Syrian opposition because Hamas' management staff was residing in Syria. They also did

[274] Boaz Ganor, "The Challenge of Terrorism", in *The Arab Spring, Democracy and Security Domestic and International Ramifications*, ed. Efraim Inbar, (London, England: Routledge, 2013): 89-107, p. 97, Accessed 5 June 2021. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203539132.
[275] Ibid, p. 97
[276] Ibid, p. 98

not openly support the Assad regime because the Muslim Brotherhood in Syria was on the opposite side of the Assad regime in the Syrian Civil War.[277]

Another development that concerns Hamas after the Arab Spring is the signing of a reconciliation agreement between Hamas and Fatah under the mediation of the new government in Egypt. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu defined this treaty as *"A tremendous blow to peace and a great victory for terrorism."*[278]

In brief, Hamas won some and lost some with the Arab Spring. After the Arab Spring, the increasing power of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Salafists in Egypt enabled Islamist groups such as Hamas to gain a new state sponsorship. However, the Syrian Civil War has left Hamas in a dilemma. It was impossible for it to openly support the Assad regime as it would damage its popularity. If it has supported the opposition, it could lose its privileges in Syria. On the other hand, if the opposition had won the civil war, it would still be able to maintain these privileges thanks to its ties to the Muslim Brotherhood.[279]

3.5.2. Global/Local Jihadist Organizations

According to the Egypt-Israel peace treaty, Egypt could not keep military units in the Sinai Peninsula. For this reason and due to the geographical distance of the region from the Egyptian heartland, Egypt has long had difficulty establishing authority over the Sinai Peninsula. This has made the Sinai Peninsula a very attractive region not only for arms smuggling but also for terrorists that want to harm Israel. Thus, global jihadist groups such as al-Qaeda, as well as Palestinian groups, benefited from the authority gap in the region.[280]

Egypt's control over the Sinai Peninsula was weakened after the Arab Spring. The temporary military government, which was established after the overthrow of the Mubarak regime, also did not seem to be able to achieve this, as it was dealing with internal turmoil. However, some jihadists who escaped from prison after the regime change fled to the Sinai Peninsula. As these global jihadist groups also targeted the Egyptian army, the new government in Egypt decided to take bold steps in this regard. With special permission from Israel, Egypt deployed its troops to the Sinai. In this way, Israel supported the Egyptian

[277] Ibid, p. 98
[278] Ethan Bronner, "Palestinian Factions Sign Accord to End Rift", *The New York Times*, 4 May 2011, Accessed 6 June 2021. https://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/05/world/middleeast/05palestinians.html.
[279] Ganor, p. 98
[280] Ibid, p. 99

army's struggle against terrorism, which is a major security threat for Israel. However, the later attacks on the energy lines going to Israel show that the Egyptian army has not been completely successful in this regard.[281]

One of the jihadist groups operating in Sinai was the religious fundamentalist organization Ansar Beit Al-Maqdis (Supporters of Jerusalem), affiliated with al-Qaeda. This organization was carrying out rocket attacks against Israel from north of Sinai. However, after the military coup in Egypt in 2013, they directed their attacks to the Egyptian security forces. Then they took the name of Wilayat Sinai (Sinai Province) by pledging allegiance to the Islamic State in November 2014. Thus, the Islamic State, or more commonly known as the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS), has become an actor in the region.[282]

In 2015, ISIS announced with videotapes that it was targeting Israel. However, there has been no serious incident between ISIS and Israel, apart from the shooting at patrolling Israeli soldiers in the Golan Heights on 27 November 2016. At the beginning and end of 2017, rocket attacks were carried out on Israel by Sinai Province, which had sworn allegiance to ISIS.[283] Although ISIS reiterated its threats to Israel in 2020, ISIS attacks on Israel have remained weak so far. However, Israel perceived ISIS as a threat and took military and legal measures in this direction. Against the danger of ISIS, the number of military units on the border of Egypt, Jordan, and Syria has been increased. In addition, Israel recognized ISIS as a terrorist organization, and Prime Minister Netanyahu said that Israel could take part in the coalition to be formed against ISIS.[284] Despite this, Israel is not part of the international coalition against ISIS.[285]

Contrary to its policy of using military force against the terrorist threats from Lebanon and Syria, Israel has chosen not to use military force against the religious fundamentalist threat in Sinai. Military intervention in the Sinai Peninsula was discussed from the collapse of the Mubarak regime to the military coup in 2013. However, Israeli

[281] Ibid, p. 100
[282] BBC News, "Sinai Province: Egypt's Most Dangerous Group", 12 May 2016, Accessed 8 June 2021. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-25882504.
[283] The Wilson Center, "Timeline: The Rise, Spread, and Fall of the Islamic State", 28 October 2019, Accessed 22 May 2021. https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/timeline-the-rise-spread-and-fall-the-islamic-state.
[284] Mohammed Khalfan Al-Sawwafi, "ISIS and Israel: Implications and Outcomes of Shifting Positions", 19 March 2020, Accessed 10 June 2021. https://trendsresearch.org/insight/isis-and-israel-implications-and-outcomes-of-shifting-positions/.
[285] The Global Coalition, "Partners List", Accessed 10 June 2021. https://theglobalcoalition.org/en/partners/.

decision-makers opposed the idea of military intervention in the Sinai, since such an intervention would undermine Israel's peace treaty with Egypt. Instead, it can be said that Israel encouraged the Egyptian army to fight against religious fundamentalism in the Sinai, bending the terms of the signed peace treaty, and even providing intelligence support to Egypt.[286]

3.5.3. Iran-Backed Shiite Militias

The first organization that comes to mind when talking about Iran-backed Shiite militias is Hezbollah, which Israel faced in the 2006 Lebanon War. After the 2006 Lebanon War, Hezbollah tried to recover itself with the help of Iran and Syria. The reason for this effort is to be prepared for a new military encounter with Israel. Indeed, Hezbollah has increased its short, medium, and long-range missile capabilities from 2006 to the Arab Spring. In fact, it was stated by the U.S. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates in 2011 that Hezbollah may have chemical and biological weapons. In addition to all these military developments, Hezbollah also increased its political influence in Lebanon.[287] All these show that Hezbollah continued to pose a threat to Israel after the Arab Spring.

In the early days of the Arab Spring, Hezbollah supported the street demonstrations and even tried to reflect these demonstrations in line with his own "resistance" discourse. In particular, the overthrow of Egyptian leader Hosni Mubarak, who criticized Hezbollah in the 2006 Lebanon War, was welcomed by Hezbollah. While supporting the street demonstrations in Tunisia and Egypt, Hezbollah leader Hasan Nasrallah emphasized the aspect of the demonstrations that demand more freedom and social equality.[288]

When the Arab Spring demonstrations spread to Syria, there has been a clear difference in the attitude of Hezbollah. Hezbollah, which supported street demonstrations in Tunisia and Egypt, refrained from doing the same for those in Syria and even claimed that these demonstrations were organized by the West. Even after the demonstrations turned into a civil war, Hezbollah continued to side with its historical ally: the Assad regime.[289] From the moment the demonstrations in Syria turned into a conflict between the opposition and

[286] Magen, p. 126
[287] Ganor, pp. 100-101
[288] Benedetta Berti, "Hizbullah, Hamas, and the "Arab Spring",—Weathering the Regional Storm?", *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* 6, no.3, (2012): 21–29, p. 22, Accessed 12 June 2021. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/23739770.2012.11446516?journalCode=rifa20.
[289] Ibid, p. 23

the regime, Hezbollah fighters came to Syria and were involved in these conflicts on the side of the Assad regime. Highly likely, Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian Civil War cannot be considered independent of its patron, Iran. Because Iran has supported the Assad regime from the very beginning of the Syrian Civil War and wanted Hezbollah to do the same.[290]

The weakening of the authority in Syria and Hezbollah's intervention in the Syrian Civil War also posed the risk of Hezbollah's access to advanced Syrian weapons. If Syria's chemical weapons, ballistic missiles, and air defense systems have fallen into the hands of Hezbollah, that would be a serious threat to Israel.[291]

In addition to Hezbollah, the fact that other Shiite militias under Iranian control have increased their influence in Syria and Iraq is seen as the most important conventional threat by Israel. The reason Hezbollah and other Shiite groups led by Iran pose such a great threat to Israel is the possibility of a large-scale war on Syrian soil. The focus of Hezbollah and other Shiite groups on increasing their missile capacities in Syria confirms this concern of Israel. After the 2006 Lebanon War, a mutual deterrence had developed between Hezbollah and Israel. Unless Hezbollah attacks Israel from Lebanon, Israel would not attack Hezbollah in Lebanon. However, the fact that Hezbollah gained the capacity to attack Israel from Syria upset this balance. This caused Israel to perceive this situation as a threat.[292]

According to Former IDF Chief of Staff Gadi Eizenkot, as of 2016, there are 3,000 Iranian operatives, 6,000 Hezbollah militants, and 11,000 Iranian-backed Shiite militias in Syria. This situation made it necessary for Israel to intervene in Syria, albeit limited. Israel has carried out thousands of airstrikes against these groups in Syria so far.[293]

In brief, it is a worrying situation for Israel that the Muslim Brotherhood came to power in Egypt as a result of the Arab Spring and subsequently established close relations with Hamas. Prime Minister Netanyahu described the Muslim Brotherhood's mediation between Fatah and Hamas as a "victory of terrorism." In the Syrian Civil War, however, Hamas refused to side with the Assad regime. Such a difference of opinion within the

[290] Ganor, p. 101
[291] Inbar, 2013, p. 153
[292] Udi Dekel, Carmit Valensi, and Orna Mizrahi, "The Northern Arena: Toward a Large-Scale Conflict" in *Strategic Survey for Israel: 2019-2020*, eds. Itai Brun and Itai Shapira, (Tel Aviv, Israel: INSS, 2019): 31-36, p. 34, Accessed 15 June 2021. https://www.inss.org.il/publication/strategic-survey-for-israel-2019-2020/.
[293] The Times of Israel, "Outgoing IDF Chief: Israel Has Struck 'Thousands' of Iranian Targets in Syria", 12 January 2019, Accessed 15 June 2021. https://www.timesofisrael.com/outgoing-idf-chief-israel-struck-thousands-of-iranian-targets-in-syria/.

"resistance block" led by Iran has been a positive development for Israel. Israel did not follow a strategy of using force against the jihadist terrorist organizations that emerged on its southern borders, as it did in Lebanon and Syria. Instead, it chose to cooperate with the newly established Egyptian military government and paved the way for them to deal with this problem. When it comes to Hezbollah and Iran-backed Shiite militias, Israel has chosen to take much more aggressive measures. It has even resorted to military measures such as airstrikes to prevent these groups from taking advantage of the civil war in Syria. This shows that Hezbollah and Iran-backed Shiite militias are threats that are taken more seriously by Israel.

3.6. Dynamics of Iran

3.6.1. Transformation of Iran-Israel Relations

Iran and Israel were two allies with very good relations within the context of the Nixon Doctrine during the Cold War. The Iranian Islamic Revolution, which took place in 1979, fundamentally affected the relations between the two countries, and once friends became fierce enemies. The newly established theocratic regime did not recognize Israel and even wanted to wipe it off the map. The regional change created by the Islamic Revolution in Iran adversely affected American and Israeli interests.[294]

The leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini, defined the U.S. as "The Great Satan" and Israel as "The Little Satan."[295] However, Israel did not abandon its peripheral alliance policy despite all these negativities. Instead, it interpreted Khomeini as a passing phenomenon and focused on repairing relations with Iran in the post-Khomeini era. Because Israel had invested too much in Iran and Iran was still a very important geostrategic actor to balance the Arab states. For these reasons, fearing that Iraq might emerge from the war as the new leader of the Arab world, Israel supported the Iranian side in the Iran-Iraq War that lasted from 1980 to 1988.[296]

Iraq under Saddam Hussein, which had lost a war to Iran in 1988, lost as well to the

[294] Panayiotides, p. 32
[295] Natan Sachs, "Iran's revolution, 40 years on: Israel's reverse periphery doctrine", *Brookings*, 24 January 2019, Accessed 17 April 2021. https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2019/01/24/irans-revolution-40-years-on-israels-reverse-periphery-doctrine/.
[296] Trita Parsi, "Israel-Iranian Relations Assessed: Strategic Competition from the Power Cycle Perspective." *Iranian Studies* 38, no. 2 (2005): 247-69, p. 255. Accessed 17 April 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4311724.

United States in First Gulf War in 1991. Thus, the common enemy of Iran and Israel disappeared. When factors such as Israel's peace attempts with Arab states in the 90s were added to this, no power in the region could pose a threat to Israel other than Iran. On the other hand, Iran continued to see Iraq as a threat until Saddam was overthrown in 2003 and was not as flexible as Israel in reviewing its strategic threat perception.[297]

Israel's perceiving of Iran as a threat became clear after Labor's victory in the 1992 elections. After the end of the Cold War, a new threat was needed other than communism in order to keep the US-Israel alliance strong. That threat was radical Islam, and its representative was Iran.[298] Iran's pursuit of nuclear technology has further fueled Israel's concerns. Shimon Peres defined Iran and its nuclear program as an existential threat to Israel in 1993.[299]

Iran, which had reduced its financial support to groups such as Hezbollah in the early 1990s, increased its support to both Hezbollah and the "rejectionist" groups within the PLO since the signing of the Oslo I Accord between the PLO and Israel in 1993. The tense relations between Sunni groups and Iran due to sectarian differences showed a different course after this period.[300]

The terrorist attacks before the 1996 elections in Israel had a great impact on the victory of Likud leader Netanyahu. The Labor Party thought that Iranians who wanted to undermine the negotiation process were behind the explosions. The newly elected Netanyahu sought to repair relations with Iran, even if he froze the negotiation process with the Palestinians and Syrians. The Likud Party was ideologically opposed to the Oslo Process with the Palestinians. However, they thought that establishing close relations with Iran, a non-Arab state, was in line with Israel's traditional environmental doctrine. The Iranian side, on the other hand, preferred Likud to Labor because Likud was not willing to make peace with the Palestinians. However, Netanyahu's efforts towards rapprochement during this period came to an end when Iran developed the Shabab-3 ballistic missiles that could hit Israel in 1997.[301]

Yet it wasn't until the early 2000s, or even the Second Gulf War, that Iran made it to

[297] Ibid, pp. 258-259
[298] Ibid, p. 260
[299] Ibid, p. 249
[300] Ibid, p. 264
[301] Ibid, pp. 265-267

the top of Israel's threat list. The disclosure of Iran's Natanz nuclear facility in 2002 caused the Israeli public to have similar concerns with Israeli policymakers. Israeli analysts were also concerned about increased Iran's support to Syria and non-state actors such as Hamas and Hezbollah, following the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and Lebanon. In the early 1990s, Labor politicians such as Yitzhak Rabin and Shimon Peres argued that peace with the Palestinians would strengthen Israel's hand in dealing with Iran. In the early 2000s, this argument was reversed, and Israel began to see that Iran had to be dealt with before making peace with the Palestinians. Netanyahu claimed that Iran, through Hezbollah and Hamas, dominates the moderates and hinders the peace process.[302]

One of the reasons why Iran came to the top of Israel's threat list was its attempts to change the balance of power in the Middle East. To the detriment of the United States and its allies, Iran was increasing its military capacity day by day. For Israel, Iran was a radical state with regional hegemonic ambitions. There were four basic strategies that Iran followed to achieve this regional hegemony:

- Nuclear Project
- Support for terrorism
- Attempts to weaken pragmatic Arab regimes allied with the U.S.
- Spreading its ideological and theological ideas in the Islamic world.[303]

3.6.2. Arab Spring and Iran

In an interview with AFP in 2011, Prime Minister Netanyahu expressed his concerns that the Arab Spring could turn into an "Iranian Winter."[304] Indeed, after the overthrow of Egyptian dictator Mubarak, one of Israel's main concerns was how this revolution would affect Iran's influence in the region. The worst-case scenario for Israel was the establishment of an Iranian-model Islamist regime in Egypt after Mubarak. Israel focused more on the opportunities that the Arab revolts would give Iran to increase its influence in the region but did not take into account the difficulties that the Arab revolts would bring to Iran. On the

[302] Dalia Dassa Kaye, Alireza Nader, and Parisa Roshan. "Israel and Iran: A Dangerous Rivalry." (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2012) pp. 23-24, Accessed 19 April 2021. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2011/RAND_MG1143.pdf.
[303] Ibid, p. 25
[304] The Jerusalem Post, "Netanyahu: 'Arab Spring' could turn into 'Iranian Winter'", 20 April 2011, Accessed 15 April 2021. https://www.jpost.com/diplomacy-and-politics/netanyahu-arab-spring-could-turn-into-iranian-winter.

other hand, the start of the Syrian Civil War offered Israel a great opportunity to sow discord in Iran's resistance block.[305]

The resistance block led by Iran was a coalition dominated by short-term strategic interests rather than ideological and religious affinities. It consists of Hamas, Hezbollah, Syria, and Iran. The policy differences of the members of this alliance due to internal pressure prevent Iran from forming a grand strategy. The weakest link of this bloc is arguably Syria, which is dealing with a civil war. Syria has long been Iran's most important ally among Arab countries. However, the ongoing civil war put Syria's role in jeopardy. Hamas, another member of the resistance block, has refused to support the Assad regime in the civil war to maintain its populist image.[306]

However, it is debatable whether Iran benefited from the Arab Spring revolutions as much as Israel had worried. In a political order where the call for popular governance is increasing, Iranian-style politics has begun to lose its popularity. Because Iran often emphasized the dependency of the authoritarian Arab regimes on the U.S. and their insensitivity to issues such as the Palestine question. Besides, it was challenging both these authoritarian regimes and the U.S.-backed security order by helping various Shiite and Sunni extremist groups in these countries. The Arab Spring led to a decrease in the audience that Iran addressed on this issue. Because, unlike the previous Arab revolutions, the new type of populist movement that emerged during the Arab Spring had a pragmatic structure rather than an ideological one. Most importantly, this new type of politics is aimed at gaining public support, but not outside support. It was soon realized by the pro-democracy Arab youth that Iran's real aim was to spread the idea of an Islamic revolution.[307]

3.6.3. Iran's Intervention to Syria

The roots of the alliance between Iran and Syria go back to the 1979 Iranian Islamic revolution. At first glance, it seems difficult for a secular and pan-Arabist Arab republic to get along with a pan-Islamic theocracy. However, these two countries have come together in line with the common interests of neutralizing the offensive capacities of some countries (Iraq in the past and Israel today) and preventing American expansion in the Middle East.

[305] Kaye, Nader, and Roshan, p. 26
[306] Kaye, Wehrey and Doran, pp. 184-185
[307] Dalia Dassa Kaye, Frederic Wehrey, and Michael Scott Doran. "Arab Spring, Persian Winter: Will Iran Emerge the Winner from the Arab Revolt?" *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 4 (2011): 183-88, p.184, Accessed April 15, 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23039620.

Besides, Syria is ruled by the Arab Alawi elite. Alawism has been accepted as one of the sub-branches of Shiism by the theocratic government in Iran. Such strategic and religious reasons have led Iran and Syria to come together as allies.[308]

When the civil war in Syria began, Iran intervened militarily. Iran's ultimate goal with its military intervention in Syria is to decisively defeat the opposition and secure the Assad regime. Because, by connecting Iran to Lebanon via Iraq, Syria consists an important piece of the strategic puzzle of the Middle East for Iran. In addition, Syria was of great importance in terms of establishing a military presence on the borders of "the Little Satan", Israel. Therefore, being in Syria militarily would give Iran a big trump card in a future military crisis with Israel.[309]

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) is the backbone of Iran's military presence in Syria. Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps-The Quds Force is essentially a sub-branch of the IRGC but acts as an independent organization. Therefore, IRGC plays a role in the Syrian Civil War with its sub-branches such as Ground Forces, The Quds Force, Intelligent Service, and Law Enforcement. This role played by the IRGC is to both provide military consulting to the regime forces and command pro-regime proxy forces.[310]

Reportedly, there were around 80,000 Shiite militias in Syria at the height of the Syrian Civil War. These Shiite militias, including Hezbollah militants, are commanded and managed by the IRGC and Quds Force. These Shiite militias, commanded by Iranian officers, have been of great use in the Syrian Civil War, ensuring that the Assad regime survived and largely defeated the opposition. However, Iran has not withdrawn its military personnel from Syria despite this decisive victory of the Assad regime. Moreover, it has started to build various military bases, headquarters, and weapons depots for the permanent presence of Shiite militias and Iranian military personnel in Syria. On top of that, Iran continued to develop the rocket arsenals of the Shiite militias in Syria. All these steps taken

[308] Marcin Andrzej Piotrowski, "Iran's Reactions to the Arab Spring and the Crisis in Syria", *The Polish Institute of International Affairs Bulletin* No. 99(316), 26 October 2011, Accessed 3 July 2021. https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/134824/Bulletin%20PISM%20No%2099%20(316)%20October%2026%20201 1-1.pdf.

[309] Nader Uskowi, "The Evolving Iranian Strategy in Syria: A Looming Conflict with Israel", *Atlantic Council Issue Brief* (September 2018), p. 1, Accessed 3 July 2021. https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/The_Evolving_Iranian_Strategy_in_Syria.pdf

[310] Cristin Cappelletti, "Dynamics of The Iranian Role in The Syrian Civil War", Master's Thesis. Middle East Technical University, 2018, pp. 64-65. Accessed 3 July 2021. https://etd.lib.metu.edu.tr/upload/12621990/index.pdf.

by Iran are unacceptable for Israel. With its attacks in Syria, Israel shows how determined it is to prevent Iran's presence on its border. However, if Iran retaliates against these attacks, the two countries could be dragged into a full-fledged war on Syrian soil at any moment.[311]

As a result, Iran has a very significant place in Israel's Arab Spring policy. While these two countries had been strategic allies until the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979, the ideological change in Iran caused this situation to do a 180-degree turn. Therefore, Iran has become the biggest threat to Israel. When the Arab Spring started, Israel's main concern was the emergence of Iranian-like regimes in Arab countries and Iran's increasing influence in the Middle East. Indeed, it did not turn out as expected. However, Iran directly intervened in the Syrian Civil War, enabling the Assad regime to gain a great advantage. Although it is now clear that the Assad regime is permanent, Iran has not put an end to its military presence in Syria, on the contrary, it has been trying to increase it. This means that alarm bells are ringing for Israel. Inevitably, the emergence of its biggest enemy on its northern border has directly affected Israel's Syria policy.

[311] Uskowi, pp. 2-5

4. PERIODIZATION OF THE SYRIAN CRISIS AND ISRAELI POLICY

4.1. The Inception of Revolts (2011-2013)

The spread of small-scale demonstrations in the capital Damascus to the southern Syrian city of Daraa, near the Jordanian border, in mid-March 2011 is considered the beginning of the Syrian Civil War. The incidents began when 20 teenagers scratched anti-regime graffities in the city of Daraa. Regime forces have arrested, tortured, and even killed some of the teenagers. Reacting to this brutal treatment, the people of Daraa took to the streets, and the protests began. At least six protesters were killed when regime forces opened fire on the protesters. Fearing protests that did not end until April, the regime began sending reinforcements to the city of Daraa. The city's electricity and telephone lines were cut off, protesters' homes were raided, and more than 25 more protesters were killed by regime forces in the process. In the city of Daraa, the violence of the regime spread throughout Syria through social media. Thus, the demonstrations spread to other parts of the country such as the cities of Baniyas and Homs. At this stage, regime forces killed more than 400 protesters, and it became clear that they had no intention of peacefully dealing with the demonstrations.[312] Syrian President Bashar Assad has refrained from making any concessions aimed at calming the demonstrations from the start. As if that wasn't enough, he accused the demonstrators of being conspirators who implement the Israeli agenda.[313]

4.1.1. Early Israeli Response to Syrian Crisis

In the early months of the Syrian Crisis, Israel declined to comment in support of neither Assad nor the opposition. In an interview on 23 April 2011, when asked if he would be happy with the overthrow of the Assad Regime, Binyamin Netanyahu replied: *"Any answer I'll give you wouldn't be a good one. […] We would like to see everywhere, including*

[312] David S. Sorenson, "From Da'ara to the Islamic State" In *Syria in Ruins: The Dynamics of the Syrian Civil War* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2016):32-58, pp.32-33, Accessed 9 May 2021. https://books.google.com.tr/books?id=SKLiDAAAQBAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=tr#v=onepage&q&f=false.

[313] Katherine Marsh and Martin Chulov, "Assad Blames Conspirators for Syrian Protests", *The Guardian*, 30 March 2011, Accessed 22 May 2021. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/mar/30/syrian-protests-assad-blames-conspirators.

in Syria, genuine reforms for democracy, genuine emergence of democracy. That is no threat to any of us."[314]

According to Berti, the reason Netanyahu did not make a clear statement in favor of the opposition at this stage is that such a statement would strengthen Assad's accusation of "Israeli conspirators" against the protesters.[315] But the reason behind Netanyahu's lack of a clear stance towards the protesters at this stage could also be that he is unsure which group is the main driving force of the protests.

At this stage, however, there were some Israeli politicians who supported the opposition despite the Netanyahu government's skepticism of protesters. Israeli President Shimon Peres speaks in support of protests in Syria during a visit to an Israeli military base on the Lebanese border on 22 March 2011: *"Syria is a poor country with a low quality of life. […] Democracy needs to be allowed into a country the moment the young generation opens its eyes. The young people have questions about why they are living in poverty. A family that cannot provide food for itself is tragic*."[316]

When the Syrian uprisings began, there was a debate among Israeli statesmen and defense establishment about whether to support Assad or opposition forces. Ephraim Sneh, former deputy defense minister of Israel, had similar doubts about the Syrian opposition's tendency like Netanyahu: [317]

> We prefer the devil we know. Although the Islamist forces are not the majority in the opposition, they are better organized and politically competent. And if we fantasize today that one day, we will be able to take the secular regime in Syria outside the Iranian orbit, it may be more difficult, if not impossible, if the regime is an Islamist one.

Druze Israeli parliament member Ayoub Kara was concerned about the developments in Syria. According to Kara, religious extremism was more dangerous than political extremism: *"I prefer the political extremism of Assad over religious extremism. […] We don't want religious extremism on the border."* Alon Liel, a former managing director

[314] Joel Greenberg, "Israel Warily Reckons Possible Outcomes in Syria", *The Washington Post*, 23 April 2011, Accessed 9 May 2021. http://www.pressreader.com/usa/the-washington-post/20110423/287307543591821.
[315] Berti, p. 136
[316] Yaakov Katz, "IDF: Assad May Create Tension at Border to Divert Attention from Troubles At Home," *The Jerusalem Post*, 23 March 2011. Accessed 21 May 2021. http://www.jpost.com/Defense/Article.aspx?id=213369.
[317] Joel Greenberg, "Israel Warily Reckons Possible Outcomes in Syria"

of the Israeli foreign ministry who has advocated in the past for Israel-Syrian peace talks, agreed with Kara and drew attention to possible instability after the fall of the Assad regime: *"Assad is definitely an enemy who helps Hamas and Hezbollah. But the disintegration is frightening. […] There is no one opposition group that can take control of Syria. It's quite a mess."*[318] On the other hand, the Israeli Minister of National Infrastructure Uzi Landau thought Assad's departure had many short-term advantages for Israel. According to Landau, since Assad is Iran's most important ally, it would be a major blow to Iran.[319]

It is possible to say that the protests in Syria began with modern and secular demands such as freedom, more democracy, more human rights, as in other Arab Spring protests. The Israeli President Shimon Peres has already expressed his support, emphasizing the demands of the demonstrations. However, as Ephraim Sneh put it, radical Islamist groups in Syria could eventually take control of the opposition in Syria and channel these protests into their own political agendas. The success of the protests thanks to these Islamist groups could give these Islamist groups a big say in the new administration. In the long run, this could make it much more difficult to get Syria out of Iran's orbit. After all, since the Assad regime is based on secular Baathist ideology, it was much easier for Israel to meet with him on common ground.

Despite all these controversies, Israel chose to take a passive stance in these early stages of the civil war. Even if it had already actively chosen to intervene, its influence inside Syria was quite limited. In addition, Israel's outspoken support for the ongoing protests in Syria would justify Assad's demonizing of protesters, which calls them Israeli agents. It was clear that the Assad regime, which promoted the protests as a conspiracy of foreign powers from the very beginning, would not miss such an opportunity. Instead of giving such leverage to the regime, Israel chose to set its red lines and observe the events. The most significant red line was to prevent sophisticated weapons systems from falling into the hands of jihadist/extremist groups. One of the groups perceived in this way was Hezbollah, which is located in Lebanon.[320]

[318] Joshua Mitnick, "Amid Syria's Turmoil, Israel Sees Assad As the Lesser Evil," *The Christian Science Monitor*, 6 May 2011. Accessed 22 April 2021. http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2011/0506/Amid-Syria-s-turmoil-Israel-seesAssad-as-the-lesser-evil.
[319] Herb Keinon, "If PA Goes To UN, Declare All Agreements Null" *Jerusalem Post*, 31 August 2011. Accessed 22 April 2021. http://www.jpost.com/DiplomacyAndPolitics/Article.aspx?id=236068.
[320] Rabinovich, 2013, pp. 2-3

4.1.2. From Passive to Condemnatory Stance Against Assad Regime

Since the end of 2011, as the Assad regime's violence against civilians has increased, Israel has abandoned its passive stance and begun to condemn the Assad regime. Because Israeli statesmen started to think that the Assad regime would lose the civil war.[321] Israel's Defense Minister Ehud Barak said in a speech to the Israeli parliament's Foreign Relations and Defense Committee: [322]

> Though it is difficult to put an exact date on when the government will fall, the trend is clear, and every day that passes brings the government closer to its end. […] The cracks in the Syrian leadership are deepening, the economic situation is deteriorating and the military is having a hard time dealing with the opposition and the army deserters.

In March 2012, Israel offered humanitarian aid to civilians in Syria through the International Committee of the Red Cross. Commenting on developments in Syria, Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman said Israel should inspire the international community to stop the massacres in Syria: [323]

> The Jewish state cannot sit by and do nothing while these atrocities are taking place in a neighboring state and people are losing their entire World. […] Even though Israel cannot intervene in events occurring in a country with which it does not have diplomatic relations, it is nevertheless our moral duty to extend humanitarian aid and inspire the world to put an end to the slaughter.

Following the massacre of civilians in Houla on 25 May 2012, Israel once again condemned the Assad regime. Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak said the world must stop talking and take an action: [324]

> These events in Syria compel the world to take action, not just talk, but action. These are crimes against humanity and the international community must not stand on the sidelines.

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[321] Berti, p. 136

[322] Isabel Kershner, "Israel, Expecting Syrian Collapse, Braces for Refugees", *The New York Times*, 10 January 2012, Accessed 18 May 2021. https://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/11/world/middleeast/israel-braces-for-refugees-in-event-of-syria-collapse.html.

[323] Tovah Lazaroff, "Israel Offers Humanitarian Aid to Syria", *The Jerusalem Post*, 4 March 2012, 22 May 2021. https://www.jpost.com/Middle-East/Israel-offers-humanitarian-aid-to-Syria.

[324] Reuters, "Israel Urges Tougher Action Against Assad", 30 May 2012, Accessed 18 May 2021. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-syria-crisis-israel-idUSBRE84T0JE20120530.

> […] I don't think that Assad lost an hour's sleep last night because of those people leaving ... and more concrete action is required.

Lieberman spoke of the need for Israel to inspire the world to stop this massacre. Ehud Barak said in this speech that action against the Assad regime is now needed. However, he did not elaborate on what steps should be taken against Assad. The referred "action" might have meant many things, from economic sanctions to military intervention. After the Assad regime has been proven to use chemical weapons against its people, it appears that Israel has started to openly support the international military intervention in Syria.

4.1.3. Chemical Weapons Crisis

In July 2012, the Assad regime officially admitted to possessing chemical weapons. However, it was stated by the regime that these chemical weapons will never be used against the Syrian people and will only be used against foreign invaders. It had been already known to U.S. intelligence for many years that the Assad regime possesses chemical weapons. But after this was publicly announced, on 20 August 2012, U.S. President Barrack Obama declared that the use of chemical weapons in Syria was the U.S. red line. However, despite this U.S. red line, the Assad regime has repeatedly used chemical weapons against its people. The chemical weapons attack that killed more than 1,000 civilians in Ghouta on 21 August 2013, made limited military intervention of the United States a current issue.[325]

Amos Yadlin, Israel's former military intelligence chief, was among those who argued that contrary to prevailing opinion, the overthrow of the Assad regime would serve Israel's interests. Yadlin thought that post-crisis Syria would be less dangerous than the old Syria in any case and while the Syrian army's attention turned inward, this threat had to be eliminated forever.[326] According to him, *"He [Assad] is much more dangerous to Israel than any regime that would follow him, because he allows Iran to smuggle missiles and weapons into Lebanon."*[327]

Israel's outgoing ambassador to the U.S., Michael Oren, made assessments about the

[325] Arms Control Association, "Timeline of Syrian Chemical Weapons Activity, 2012-2021", Accessed 17 May 2021. https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/Timeline-of-Syrian-Chemical-Weapons-Activity.
[326] Ben Caspit, "Former Aman Chief Offers Realism on Threats to Israel", *Al-Monitor*, 8 February 2013, Accessed 17 May 2021. https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2013/02/former-head-intelligence-israel-not-under-immediate-threat.html#ixzz6v8GRk0Jz.
[327] The Jerusalem Post, "Amos Yadlin: Assad's fall is good for Israel", 19 May 2013, Accessed 17 May 2021. https://www.jpost.com/Breaking-News/Amos-Yadlin-Assads-fall-is-good-for-Israel-313596.

Assad regime to The Jerusalem Post. In these statements, Oren made it clear that he had a more negative view of the Assad regime:[328]

> The initial message about the Syrian issue was that we always wanted [President] Bashar Assad to go, we always preferred the bad guys who weren't backed by Iran to the bad guys who were backed by Iran. […] We understand that they (jihadists in Syrian opposition) are pretty bad guys. […] Still, the greatest danger to Israel is by the strategic arc that extends from Tehran to Damascus to Beirut. And we saw the Assad regime as the keystone in that arc. That is a position we had well before the outbreak of hostilities in Syria. With the outbreak of hostilities we continued to want Assad to go.

When asked about Assad's use of chemical weapons on his own people, he replied:

> The chemical weapons were an American red line, it wasn't an Israel red line. […] Our red line was that if Iran and Syria try to convey chemical weapons or game changing weaponry to Hezbollah or other terrorist organizations, that Israel would not remain passive. We were prepared to stand by the red line, and still are.

Similar to Yadlin, with these statements Oren was challenging the prevailing view claims that Assad was "The Lesser Evil." He once again underlined that the red line that Israel cannot ignore was the delivery of sophisticated weapons to Hezbollah.

In the Israeli public, the Assad regime's use of chemical weapons against the Syrian people and the increasing number of civilian deaths have led to an increase in the number of people who think like Yadlin and Oren. Israeli statesmen, on the other hand, supported Obama's limited military intervention against the Assad regime. Even if the Assad regime was not overthrown, they thought that punishing him in this way would send a powerful message to Iran, which has nuclear ambitions. However, the most profitable outcome for Israel was neither the Assad regime's victory nor its overthrow. The most profitable outcome for Israel was preserving the status quo and prolonging the civil war as long as possible.[329]

[328] Herb Keinon, "Israel Wanted Assad Gone Since Start of Syria Civil War", *The Jerusalem Post*, 17 September 2013, Accessed 15 May 2021. https://www.jpost.com/syria-crisis/oren-jerusalem-has-wanted-assad-ousted-since-the-outbreak-of-the-syrian-civil-war-326328.

[329] Jodi Rudoren, "Israel Backs Limited Strike Against Syria", *The New York Times*, 5 September 2013, Accessed 19 May 2021. https://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/06/world/middleeast/israel-backs-limited-strike-against-syria.html.

4.1.4. Conclusion

To summarize, it can be said that Israel preferred to stay out of the Syrian Crisis, except for some exceptional issues in this period. When the issue of chemical weapons came to the fore, it supported the intervention of the international community and the United States rather than punishing the Assad regime by itself. Exceptionally, it was directly involved in the Syrian Civil War on three issues. These three issues are:

- Preventing the humanitarian crisis on its border. Humanitarian aid was provided to the Syrian people which live close to the Israel-Syria border.
- Preventing the spread of the conflict to Israeli territory. Attacks from the Syrian side of the border such as artillery fire were immediately retaliated.
- Preventing the sophisticated arms shipments to Hezbollah. These shipments were neutralized by the Israeli air force but no responsibility was taken for these attacks.[330]

As a result, Israel followed a neutral policy towards the Assad regime and the opposition during this period. However, towards the end of 2011, it argued that the international community should intervene in the crisis after the Assad regime increased the violence against the Syrian people. But as Lieberman said, Israel does not even have diplomatic relations with Syria. Therefore, Israel has only called on the international community to intervene. Later, after it was proven that the Assad regime used chemical weapons, it became clearer that this intervention could include military measures. His attitude towards the dissidents has been skeptical since the beginning of the revolts. Even if it is not skeptical, it is clear that open support to the opposition will not benefit the opposition. For this reason, Israel provided only humanitarian aid to the opposition during this period. On the other hand, Israel's attitude towards Hezbollah has not changed. Weapons shipments to Hezbollah have been Israel's red line since the beginning of the Syrian Civil War, and when Israel detected these shipments, it did not hesitate to hit them. However, it refrained from taking responsibility for these attacks on these arms shipments.

[330] Itamar Rabinovich and Carmit Valensi, "Syrian Requiem: The Civil War and Its Aftermath" (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2021), p. 140, Accessed 25 May 2021. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv15r57zp.

4.2. Rise of ISIS (2013-2015)

The Islamic State, also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Sham (ISIS), Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), and Daesh, is a Salafi jihadist terror organization, which first appeared on the stage of history in 2004, as "al-Qaeda in Iraq". Over the years, their effectiveness has declined as the U.S. military increased its activity in Iraq. This terrorist organization, which benefited greatly from the instability in Syria and Iraq, started to be mentioned again in these countries, especially after the Syrian Civil War began. However, it has been well-known by the world since 2013, when it changed its name to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Sham (ISIS). ISIS launched an attack on the Iraqi cities of Mosul and Tikrit in June 2014. On June 29, ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced that the terrorist organization, which controls an area from Aleppo in Syria to Diyala in Iraq, has changed its name to The Islamic State.[331]

The rise of ISIS has sparked controversy within Israel's security establishment. A school of thought saw this jihadist organization as a major threat to Israel. Another school of thought saw the resistance block led by Iran and the Shiite militias as more serious threats than ISIS.[332] Because, when looking at the regions where ISIS has succeeded, it might be seen that those regions are within the borders of failed states with weak armies. There is no coincidence that ISIS gained a significant amount of territory in Syria after the start of the Syrian Civil War. Doubtlessly, it has achieved great success thanks to the instability in Syria and Iraq. In the Sinai Peninsula, ISIS carried out several hundred terrorist attacks for years but was eventually neutralized by the Egyptian army. They managed to organize in the Sinai Peninsula because it is a region where the state authority is weak, just like in Northern Syria. On the other hand, when ISIS faced well-equipped and organized Violent Non-state Actors (VNSA) such as the PYD/YPG, they could not achieve great success.[333]

[331] The Wilson Center, "Timeline: The Rise, Spread, and Fall of the Islamic State", 28 October 2019, Accessed 22 May 2021. https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/timeline-the-rise-spread-and-fall-the-islamic-state.
[332] Itamar Rabinovich, "How Israel Weighed Its Syria Policy, Before and After the Uprising", *Newlines Magazine*, 21 March 2021, Accessed 19 May 2021. https://newlinesmag.com/first-person/how-israel-weighed-its-syria-policy-before-and-after-the-uprising/.
[333] Efraim Inbar, "How Dangerous Is ISIS to Israel?", *Begin-Sadat Perspectives Paper*, no.306, pp.1-2, 7 August 2015, Accessed 22 May 2021. www.jstor.org/stable/resrep04403.

4.2.1. Israel and PYD/YPG

The Democratic Union Party (Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat-PYD) is a Kurdish armed actor whose nature is controversial. The PYD was originally founded in 2003. It is a part of the umbrella organization called Kurdistan Communities Union (Koma Civaken Kurdistan-KCK), which was established by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistane-PKK). The People's Protection Units (Yekineyen Parastina Gel-YPG) is the armed wing of the PYD and was established in 2004. During the Syrian Civil War, the PYD/YPG emerged as an important actor with the capacity to fight conventionally and non-conventionally, as well as displaying quasi-state characteristics.[334] The fact that it is a member of the same umbrella organization as the PKK, which is defined as a terrorist organization by the USA, NATO, the European Union, and many other countries, causes controversy about its nature. Turkey sees PYD/YPG as the Syrian branch of the PKK and wants the international community to accept it as such.[335]

When the Assad regime largely withdrew from Kurdish areas in northern Syria as of July 2012, the PYD/YPG largely filled the power vacuum that remained. The world's awareness of the PYD/YPG roughly coincides with ISIS. Because, especially after 2014, the PYD/YPG has been the main combatant force in the fight against ISIS.[336] The PYD/YPG aimed to create an autonomous region under its control in Northern Syria, where Kurds live predominantly. It mostly planned to do this by seizing the lands controlled by ISIS. Its attacks against ISIS were supported by the U.S. air force.[337]

Israel has always chosen to establish good relations with non-Arab Middle Eastern minorities to break through its isolation in "the Arab sea", and the Kurds are one of these non-Arab minorities. For this reason, Israel has always been a regional power that views the

[334] Özlem Kayhan Pusane. "How to Profile PYD/YPG as an Actor in the Syrian Civil War: Policy Implications for the Region and Beyond" In *Violent Non-State Actors and the Syrian Civil War: The ISIS and YPG Cases*, ed. Özden Zeynep Oktav, Emel Parlar Dal, and Ali Murat Kurşun, (Basel, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2018): 73-90, p. 73-75, Accessed 23 May 2021. https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9783319675275.
[335] Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "PKK", Accessed 22 May 2021. https://www.mfa.gov.tr/pkk.en.mfa.
[336] Pusane, p. 76
[337] H. Akın Ünver, "Contested Geographies: How ISIS and YPG Rule "No-Go" Areas in Northern Syria" In *Violent Non-State Actors and the Syrian Civil War: The ISIS and YPG Cases*, ed. Özden Zeynep Oktav, Emel Parlar Dal, and Ali Murat Kurşun, (Basel, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2018): 35-52, p. 40, Accessed 23 May 2021. https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9783319675275.

independence of the Kurds positively. Relations between Israel and Iraqi Kurds date back to the last century. On the other hand, relations between the Syrian Kurds and Israel also increased during this period when the PYD/YPG was waging an effective war against ISIS. On top of that, Israel welcomes the PYD/YPG's demands such as self-government in Syria. More precisely, there is not much difference for Israel between the emergence of Syrian Kurds as an independent political entity in the region or remaining a non-state actor. Both of these scenarios serve the interests of Israel. On the other hand, the indecisive attitude of the PYD/YPG towards the Assad regime and its connections with the PKK pose a problem for Israel. Nevertheless, Israel sent humanitarian aid to the PYD/YPG and even received intelligence support from them. Because after all, both sides perceive ISIS as a threat.[338]

4.2.2. ISIS or Iran: Which One Comes First as A Security Threat?

ISIS, as an extremist terrorist organization operating on Israel's borders, naturally created fear and anxiety and was perceived as a threat by Israel. According to Efraim Inbar, the worst-case scenario for Israel was the expansion of ISIS and similar Salafi jihadist organizations towards the Golan that turns Syria into a "Hamastan". Essentially, Israel has been quite successful in pushing Hamas into Gaza so far. Moreover, ISIS does not have the support that the Palestinians have in the international community, so if Israel faced such a threat, it could have taken tougher action. In addition, the Israeli army has much more superior technical equipment, organization, and experience compared to the PYD/YPG. Considering the poor performance of ISIS against the PYD/YPG, it would not have been a tough foe against the IDF. Moreover, ISIS is a non-state actor after all. According to Efraim Inbar, non-State actors can never be as dangerous as states because states have the capacity to acquire nuclear weapons. What is meant by the state here, is Iran. For these reasons, it would be difficult to say that ISIS is at the top of Israel's threat perception even if it has made great gains on the field during this period. ISIS has never been the main threat to Israel, at least it could not overtake Iran in this regard.[339]

Iran's military intervention in the Syrian Civil War began in late 2011 and early 2012. In the early stages of the civil war, low-profile support was provided to the Assad regime, including financial assistance, weapons, and military equipment. However, in mid-2014, Iran's military activity in Syria intensified as ISIS enhanced its presence in Syria and Iraq.

[338] Pusane, pp. 83-84
[339] Inbar, 2015, pp. 2-3

Iran has sent its 2,500 soldiers to Syria to fight against ISIS and the Syrian opposition. There were also Iranian-backed Shiite militias led by commanders of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). While IRGC officers organized only local Shiites in Syria as militias in the early stages of the civil war, later Shiite militias were brought to Syria from Iraq. In the Spring of 2013, Hezbollah also began to be directly involved in the conflicts. With its 8,000 militias, Hezbollah has achieved far greater success than the Assad's army, especially in urban warfare. Thus, Hezbollah has changed the course of the Syrian Civil War. It is known that Iran hired even the Afghan Shiites to fight in Syria. Reportedly, the number of Shiite militias in Syria is more than the soldiers of the Assad regime.[340]

Iran, Iran-backed Shiite militias, and Hezbollah have remained the primary threats to Israel in this period of the rise of ISIS. Due to perceiving Iran and its proxies as the main threats, Israel's policy towards Hezbollah did not change during this period. Blocking any sophisticated weapons shipments to Hezbollah remained as Israel's red line. In January 2013, Israel destroyed missiles being sent to Lebanon near Damascus. After these missiles were destroyed, presumably for Hezbollah, Israel refrained from taking responsibility for the attack to prevent possible retaliation. But in the months that followed, it felt no need to hide its attacks as Iran and Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian Civil War increased. Similarly, Russia's decision to supply the S-300 air defense systems to Syria during this period was unacceptable for Israel. Israel did not want these sophisticated air defense systems to be deployed on its northern borders, including Lebanon.[341]

At the end of May 2013, an anonymous Russian official announced that Russia had suspended delivery of the sophisticated S-300 air defense systems to Syria. He said that they hope Israel would stop its airstrikes on Syrian soil in return.[342] Netanyahu brought up this issue during his visit to Russia on May 14 and requested that this air defense system, which has a range of up to 200 kilometers and has the capacity to intercept Israeli fighter jets, should not be given to Syria.[343]

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu told Army Radio that Syria will continue to prevent

[340] Israel Defense Forces, "Iranian Forces Deployed in Syria", Accessed 25 May 2021. https://www.idf.il/en/minisites/iran/iran-in-syria/iranian-forces-deployed-in-syria/.
[341] Rabinovich, 2013, p.3
[342] Ron Friedman, "Russia Canceled S-300 Deal With Assad, Report Says", *The Times of Israel*, 26 May 2013. Accessed 11 May 2021. https://www.timesofisrael.com/russia-cancels-s-300-sale-to-syria/.
[343] The Times of Israel, "In Talks With Netanyahu, Putin Urges Restraint On Syria", 14 May 2013. Accessed 12 May 2021. https://www.timesofisrael.com/in-chat-with-netanyahu-putin-urges-restraint-on-syria/.

arms transfers to Hezbollah with great determination: [344]

> We are acting in accordance with the policy we had set to prevent as much as possible the transfer of advanced weapons to Hezbollah and terror elements. […] The Israeli government is operating in a responsible, determined and level-headed manner in order to ensure the supreme interest of the country, which is the safety of its citizens.

An anonymous Israeli official stated in line with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's statements, that Israel will continue to intervene in the arms transfers of Syria to Hezbollah with airstrikes: [345]

> The transfer of such weapons to Hezbollah will destabilize and endanger the entire region. […] If Syrian President Assad reacts by attacking Israel, or tries to strike Israel through his terrorist proxies, he will risk forfeiting his regime, for Israel will retaliate. […] Israel has so far refrained from intervening in Syria's civil war and will maintain this policy as long as Assad refrains from attacking Israel directly or indirectly.

As can be seen from these statements, Israel was determined at all costs to prevent Hezbollah from acquiring sophisticated weapon systems. These statements also indicated that Israel could topple the Assad regime if it wanted to. However, at this stage, Israel preferred to keep the Assad regime under control instead of overthrowing it.

An Israeli intelligence official clarified this issue in an interview with the London Times, saying that a weakened but stable Syria is the best scenario for both Israel and the region: [346]

> Better the devil we know than the demons we can only imagine if Syria falls into chaos, and the extremists from across the Arab world gain a foothold there. […] We originally underestimated Assad's staying power and overestimated the rebels' fighting power.

The day after this interview was published, Prime Minister Netanyahu said that the views of this Israeli intelligence officer did not reflect the position of the Israeli government.

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[344] People's Daily, "Israel to Continue Preventing Transfer of Arms to Hezbollah: PM", 20 May 2013, Accessed 13 May 2021. http://en.people.cn/90777/8249624.html.
[345] Barak Ravid, "Israel Publicly Warns Assad: If You Attack Us, We Will Topple Your Regime", *Haaretz*, 15 May 2013, Accessed 10 May 2021. https://www.haaretz.com/israel-warns-assad-don-t-attack-us-1.5242907.
[346] Sheera Frenkel and Roger Boyes, "Islamist Fear Drives Israel to Support Assad Survival", *The Times of London*, 18 May 2013. Accessed 11 May 2021. https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/islamist-fear-drives-israel-to-support-assad-survival-5wmd7lpsmjh.

He also reiterated that Israel is not willing to take any position on the governance of Syria.[347] On the other hand, Syrian President Bashar Assad claimed in an interview in May 2013 that Israel was providing intelligence support to the Syrian opposition.[348]

4.2.3. Israeli Arms Support to Syrian Opposition

By August 2013, the Assad regime claimed that some of the weapons obtained from the rebels in Idlib were Israeli-made, thus Israel was supplying weapons to the opposition. It was previously claimed by Hezbollah that Israel provided weapons and equipment to the anti-Assad opposition, but it was denied by Israel. This claim of the Assad regime was also denied as before.[349]

When we evaluate these claims in the light of the present, the claims of the Assad regime are correct. In 2013, Israel started to provide weapons to moderate opponents called the Free Syrian Army (FSA). These opposition factions, which are assisted with weapons, are mostly those operating in the southern regions such as Daraa, Quneitra, and the outskirts of Damascus. At least 12 opposition groups have been assisted in this way, two of which are known to be Syrian Golan's Forsan al-Jolan (Knights of Golan) and Beit Jinn's Liwaa Omar bin al-Khattab. This military support is given by Israel to the opposition also included fire support. Israel has supported such moderate opposition groups to prevent Iran-backed militias and ISIS from controlling areas close to the Israeli border.[350] Before his retirement in 2019, IDF chief of staff Gadi Eisenkot admitted in an interview with the Sunday Times that weapons were being provided to opposition groups around the Golan Heights.[351]

In early 2014, the FSA announced the establishment of the Southern Front, with 20,000 fighters in southern Syria. By August 2014, the Southern Front had succeeded in dominating the entire Israeli-Syrian border, besides Jabhat al-Nusra. The Southern Front

[347] Barak Ravid, "Netanyahu: Not True That Israel Prefers Assad to Rebels", *Haaretz*, 19 May 2013, Accessed 11 May 2021. https://www.haaretz.com/israel-doesnt-prefer-assad-says-pm-1.5243369.
[348] Haaretz, "Assad Accuses Israel of Providing Intelligence to Syrian Rebels", 18 May 2013. Accessed 12 May 2021. https://www.haaretz.com/assad-accuses-israel-of-aiding-syrian-rebels-1.5243269.
[349] Stuart Winer, "Syria Says It Captured Israeli Weapons from Rebels", *The Times of Israel*, 21 August 2013, Accessed 23 May 2021. https://www.timesofisrael.com/syria-says-it-captured-israeli-weapons-from-rebels/.
[350] Elizabeth Tsurkov, "Inside Israel's Secret Program to Back Syrian Rebels", *Foreign Policy*, 6 September 2018, Accessed 25 May 2021. https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/09/06/in-secret-program-israel-armed-and-funded-rebel-groups-in-southern-syria/.
[351] Judah Ari Gross, "IDF Chief Finally Acknowledges That Israel Supplied Weapons to Syrian Rebels", *The Times of Israel*, 14 January 2019, Accessed 25 May 2021. https://www.timesofisrael.com/idf-chief-acknowledges-long-claimed-weapons-supply-to-syrian-rebels/.

continued to be the most active actor in this region until Russia intervened in Syria.[352]

Israel's main goal between 2014-2015 is to prevent Iran and Hezbollah from establishing a military infrastructure in the Syrian Golan. This was the main motivation for the military support given to the opposition on the Israeli-Syrian border. Until the Russian intervention, Israel followed this strategy. In January 2015, a Hezbollah leader and an Iranian general were killed in an Israeli attack on the Syrian Golan.[353] Thus it can be said that by supporting the Syrian opposition, Israel did not focus on overthrowing the Assad regime but wanted to secure its border.

4.2.4. Conclusion

Even in this period, Israel refrained from expressing a clear opinion on the Assad regime's future. There was still debate among Israeli soldiers, politicians, and officials over whether a weakened Assad regime or the opposition's rule would be more beneficial for Israel. For instance, Ex-IDF chief of staff Dan Halutz was among those who feared that radical Islamist organizations would benefit from the power vacuum caused by the fall of the Assad regime: [354]

> The regime in Syria kills its citizens every day, but we must acknowledge that the opposition in Syria is composed of Muslim extremists like al-Qaeda. […] The question 'what is better for Israel?' is an important question because we must ask ourselves if we want to trade the bad regime, we know for the very bad regime that we don't know, and this is something that requires serious consideration. […] At the moment it looks like even in the rest of the world, they understand that they cannot replace the Assad regime as long as they don't know who will take its place. […]Right now it looks like the alternative is forces that will endanger the stability of the region.

In general, a weakened but stable Assad regime was considered lesser of evil in Israel. Because the power vacuum and chaos that would occur after Assad's removal were unpredictable. There was a prevailing opinion that radical terrorist organizations that benefit from an unstable Syria would pose a great security threat to Israel. On the other hand, Rabinovich oppositely argued that the Assad regime's close relations with Iran and

[352] Boms, p. 6
[353] Rabinovich and Valensi, pp. 141-142
[354] Spencer Ho, "Ex-IDF Chief: Israel Prefers That Assad Stay In Power", *The Times of Israel*, 11 December 2013, Accessed 13 May 2021. https://www.timesofisrael.com/ex-idf-chief-israel-prefers-that-assad-stay-in-power/.

Hezbollah already pose a major threat to Israel. Assad did not even hesitate to use chemical weapons on his people to not lose his power. This fact has already made Assad one of the main security threats. However, Rabinovich felt that Israel should not take a clear stand on the future of the Assad regime.[355]

Indeed, just as Rabinovich suggested, Israel refrained from taking an official position on the Assad regime's fate during this period. Another alternative for Israel was to take military measures against Iran's growing influence in Syria. Israel vacillated between these two options. However, it did not make a definite and clear choice between these two in this period. Instead, it focused on maintaining its three red lines. In cases where these red lines were violated, it preferred to respond. These responses are:

- Preventing the advanced weapon shipments to Hezbollah
- Preventing the spread of the Syrian Crisis to its own territory
- Preventing radical elements such as ISIS or Iranian-backed militias to appear on the Israeli-Syrian border. For that purpose, humanitarian aid and weapon supplies were provided to some opposition groups adjacent to the Israeli-Syrian border.[356]

As a result, while Israel concerns the rise of ISIS, it has never seen it as a threat as great as Iran. PYD/YPG's effective war against ISIS has an impact on this. PYD/YPG's filling the power vacuum left behind by ISIS also suits Israel's interest. Since the PYD/YPG is under the control of a non-Arab minority, gaining power as an actor is in line with Israel's grand strategy. Preventing military supplies to Hezbollah continued in this period, as in the previous period (2011-2013).

While the support given by Israel to the opposition in the previous period was limited to humanitarian aid, it also included military aid in this period. Unlike the first period, Israel provided weapon support to the moderate opposition and even maintained it in great privacy. However, the opposition groups supported by Israel are mostly located in the south of Syria. In other words, Israel supported these opposition groups not to overthrow the Assad regime, but to secure its border. Because Israel perceives the entrenchment of radicals such as ISIS and Iran-backed groups on its border as a primary security threat. Israel's support to the opposition groups on the border continued until Assad forces regained control of these

[355] Rabinovich, 2013, p.3
[356] Boms, p. 3

regions thanks to Russia's intervention.

4.3. Regional Competence (2015-2021)

The year 2015 is an important breaking point in the Syrian Civil War due to Russia's military intervention in Syria. In fact, Russia has been already intervening in the Syrian Civil War on a limited level since 2011. Simply put, being a permanent member of the UN Security Council, has prevented Western countries from justifying their military intervention to overthrow Assad. Since 2012, it has started to provide military equipment and vehicles to the Assad regime. It has also supported the Assad regime economically since the beginning of the civil war. These supports, which lasted until 2015, can be classified as medium-scale interventions. Because until 2015, Russia, like Iran(except IRGC commanders), did not support the Assad regime by sending its troops to Syria. However, after September 2015, the extent of this support changed to large-scale intervention. Because Russia is now on the field with its army.[357]

Russia's intervention in the Syrian Civil War has been a very important turning point for Israel. Since then, Israel has had to deal with the presence of Russia on its borders. Because Israel was concerned that Russia's military presence in Syria would limit the Israeli Air Force's freedom of movement in Syrian airspace.[358] Indeed, Israel made great efforts to prevent its air force from having a conflict with the Russian air force. In addition to the operational dimension, Israel now had to act by taking Russian hegemony into account. Russia, on the other hand, was Iran's ally and partner in Syria. Despite this, Russia was trying to establish good relations with Israel. Moreover, it was trying to limit its ally Iran's influence in Syria to some extent. Therefore, protecting Israel's interests in Syria was something both Russia and the United States wanted.[359]

After Russia's intervention, the Assad regime gathered its strength and launched an offensive against the opposition. One of the places where clashes took place between the Assad regime and the opposition was the city of Aleppo, one of the largest cities in Syria. In July 2016, East Aleppo was surrounded by regime forces and 200,000 civilians were cut off from the world. A former head of Israel's Military Intelligence Amos Yadlin compared the

[357] Samuel Charap, Elina Treyger, and Edward Geist, "Understanding Russia's Intervention in Syria" (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2019), p. 13-14, Accessed 25 May 2021. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR3180.html.
[358] Rabinovich, 2021.
[359] Ibid, p. 144

events in the region to genocide and called on the international community to intervene. Yadlin assumed that Assad's murderous actions against his own people gather support for ISIS, so Assad should be eliminated first.[360]

Israel's aid to Syrian civilians has continued since 2012, albeit to a limited extent. However, by 2016, Israel systematized this humanitarian aid. In June 2016, it decided to expand the scope of humanitarian aid it provides to civilians on its northern border. As a result, IDF Northern Command launched "Operation Good Neighbor." The purpose of Operation Good Neighbor was to help as many civilians as possible, such as health, infrastructure, and basic living materials, without contradicting Israel's non-interventionist policy towards the Syria crisis. Activities for this purpose started in August 2016. According to the IDF, Israel had two reasons for launching this operation. Firstly, humanitarian values, secondly, the contribution of these aids to Israel's security.[361]

4.3.1. End of the Total Civil War

After 2016, Israel felt that the opposition could no longer pose a serious military threat to the Assad regime. But it wasn't sure that the Assad regime would soon be able to gain full control over all of Syria. Because of that, Israel built its policies accordingly.[362]

The real breaking point for Israel was the Assad regime's victory in Aleppo in December 2016. This victory terminated the total civil war. From this date on, Israel had to develop a new policy towards the Assad regime, which had gained momentum to regain its authority over Syria. Accordingly, since the Assad regime's victory in Aleppo, Israel's Syria policy has focused entirely on the Iranian threat. Because Iran was trying to increase its military infrastructure in Syria. Iran's strategy has been to supply Hezbollah with a large number of rockets and missiles so far. In this way, Iran both ensured the security of Hezbollah in Lebanon and took precautions against Israel's attacks on its nuclear facilities. After achieving great success in preventing the collapse of the Assad regime, Iran decided to change this strategy. In addition to deterring Israel with the missiles it provided to Hezbollah, it wanted to establish a military presence in Syria by itself without any proxy.

[360] The Times of Israel, "Former Israeli general: Assad's actions resemble 'genocide'", 22 July 2016, Accessed 27 May 2021. https://www.timesofisrael.com/former-israeli-general-assad-actions-resemble-genocide/.
[361] Israel Defense Forces, "Operation Good Neighbor", Accessed 27 May 2021. https://www.idf.il/en/minisites/wars-and-operations/operation-good-neighbor/.
[362] Rabinovich, 2021.

Thus, Iran would be able to show a military presence at the tip of the Shiite Crescent extending to the Eastern Mediterranean.[363]

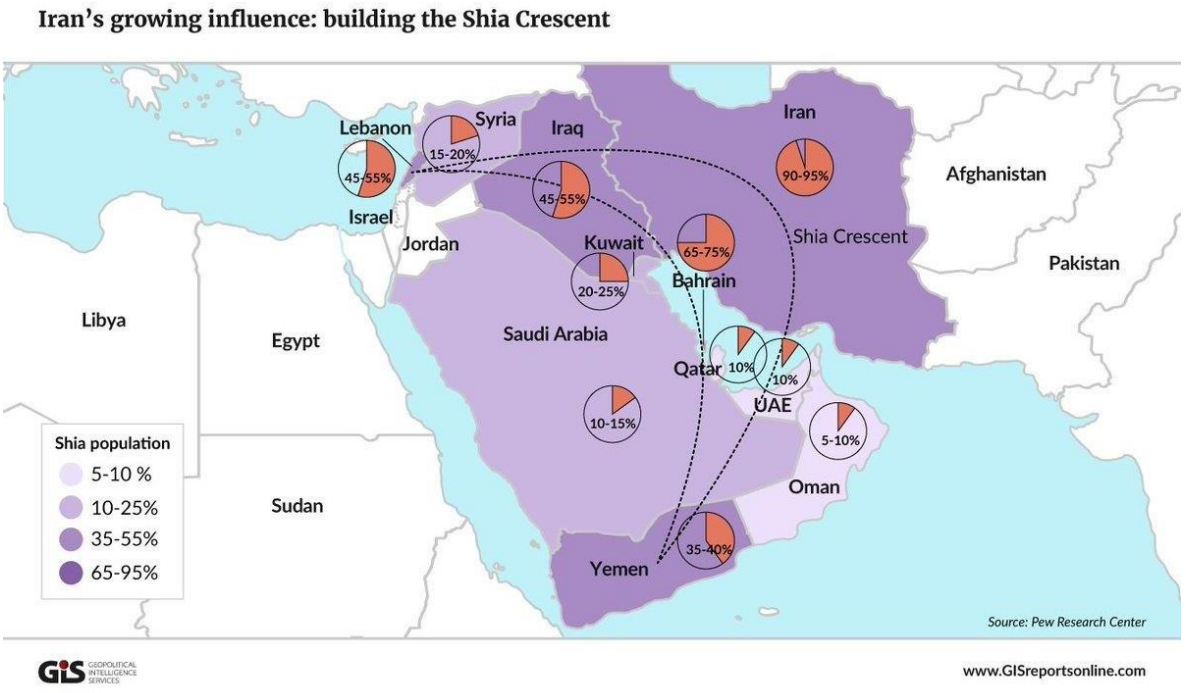


Figure 4.1. *Shia Crescent (Sourced from www.gisreportsonline.com)*

In the face of this situation, Israel accepted that Assad would regain most of Syria's control. Therefore, it concentrated all its efforts on preventing Iran and Hezbollah from entrenching in the small Syrian-controlled part of the Golan Heights. Thus, it would have prevented Iran from opening a single front reaching the Syrian Golan from the Eastern Mediterranean. However, it intended to prevent Iran from increasing its military presence in inner Syria as well. Since 2016, Israel has been attacking Iran's military bases and arms shipments in Syria. While Israel was doing all this, it managed to not face Iran's strategic partner Russia.[364]

In general, 2017 was a year in which the pro-regime axis made gains. While Assad's opponents and the international coalition have focused on the fight with ISIS, the Assad regime has made serious gains on the ground with the support of Russia and Iran. It also

[363] Ibid.
[364] Ibid.

made reconciliation agreements with the rebels, enabling them to disarm and even join pro-regime militias.[365]

Israel's policy of preventing advanced arms shipments to Hezbollah has not changed at all. On 17 March 2017, Israel attacked a convoy carrying weapons to Hezbollah again. Syria responded to this attack with missile strikes. This was the most serious incident between Israel and Syria since the beginning of the civil war. So far, Syria has either not responded to such attacks or has given an insignificant response. However, missile shots were a very clear response this time. Netanyahu said Israel did what it must be done and will continue to do so, adding: *"That's how it was yesterday and that is how we shall continue to act."* According to Assaf Orion, a researcher at Israel's Institute for National Security Studies, Syria's this first response to the Israeli attacks, which had been continuing since 2011, contained the message of *"I am not as weak as I used to be."* However, Israel had no intention of changing this red line.[366]

4.3.2. Ceasefire in South Syria

On 7 July 2017, U.S. President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin reached an agreement for a ceasefire in Southern Syria during the G20 talks. The armistice covered settlements such as Daraa, Quneitra, and Sweida. Quneitra, which would be one of those "De-escalation zones", was also a region directly bordered by the Golan Heights, hence Israel.[367]

From Israel's point of view, this ceasefire agreement was a positive development, but not pleasing enough. It was a positive development because the ceasefire froze the lines where the regime forces, Iranian militias, and the opposition are located in the region. Thus, the Iranian militias would not be able to open a corridor stretching from Iraq to Iran due to their position. In addition, the conflicts between the regime forces and Iranian militias with the opposition would no longer spread to the Golan. Therefore, the ceasefire would contribute to alleviating the humanitarian crisis in southern Syria. On the other hand, although the ceasefire agreement froze the Shiite militias and Hezbollah where they were

[365] Boms, p. 8
[366] Steve Weizman, "Netanyahu: Syria Raids Targeted 'Advanced' Hezbollah Arms", *The Times of Israel*, 18 March 2017, Accessed 26 May 2021. https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-syria-raids-targeted-advanced-hezbollah-arms/.
[367] Ellen Francis, "U.S.-Russian ceasefire deal holding in southwest Syria", *Reuters*, 9 July 2017, Accessed 25 May 2021. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-idUSKBN19U08D.

located, it did not remove them from the region. If the ceasefire was broken somehow, these militias would be able to easily control the line from the Syria-Iraq border to the Syrian-Jordanian border, or worse, establish a front in the Syrian Golan. This was something that Israel certainly did not want. Israel has tried hard to prevent this scenario so far.[368]

As a result of these concerns, Israel announced that it would continue its attacks on Iranian militias and Hezbollah in Southern Syria. Because the ceasefire signed on July 7 kept the enemy elements in Syria away from each other, but it did not keep the elements hostile to Israel away from Israel. When the U.S. and Russia met again to expand the extent of the ceasefire signed on July 7, they also discussed Israel's concerns about Iran-backed militias. In fact, Israel was making great diplomatic efforts for these two superpowers to make them keep the Iranian militias away from the Golan Heights. As a result, the U.S. and Russia reached an agreement on keeping the Iranian-backed militias at a certain distance from the Golan. However, the details of this agreement were not specified.[369]

At the end of 2017, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu threatened Bashar Assad with military intervention in the Syrian Civil War if he allows Iran to establish a military presence in Syria. Thus, Israel signaled for the first time that it could abandon the non-interventionist policy that it had pursued since the beginning of the civil war. Until now, Israel had responded to the gunfire coming from the Syrian border and destroyed the arms shipments to Hezbollah countlessly. However, it did not launch an attack that would directly target Assad's forces. On the other hand, in case the scope of the ceasefire is extended, Israel was trying to make everyone withdraw their military forces except the countries that were officially invited to Syria. The only country that was officially invited to Syria is Russia. However, Netanyahu said that Israel would not remain silent if an official invitation was made to Iran, as it was to Russia: [370]

> The goal must be to minimize Iran's influence, not only in Lebanon but also in Syria… Israel has tried up until now not to intervene in what is going on in Syria. But after

[368] Ron Ben-Yishai, "Concern in Light of Ceasefire: Iran Will Continue to Move Forward on A Land Corridor to Lebanon" [Hebrew], *Ynet*, 9 July 2017, Accessed 25 May 2021. www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-4986376,00.html.
[369] Dan Williams, "Israel Signals Free Hand in Syria As U.S., Russia Expand Truce", *Reuters*, 12 November 2017, Accessed 25 May 2021. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-israel/israel-signals-free-hand-in-syria-as-u-s-russia-expand-truce-idUSKBN1DC0HY.
[370] The Times of Israel, "Netanyahu Said to Warn Assad: We'll Strike If You Let Iran Set Up Bases in Syria", 26 November 2017, Accessed 25 May 2021. https://www.timesofisrael.com/netanyahu-said-to-warn-assad-well-strike-if-you-let-iran-set-up-bases-in-syria/.

> the victory over Islamic State, the situation has changed because the pro-Iranian forces have taken control… From now on, Israel sees Iran's activities in Syria as a target. We will not hesitate to act, if our security needs require us to do so.

4.3.3. Reunion With "Former Neighbor"

By mid-2018, Assad forces have captured southwestern Syria with the support of Russia and Iran. This area was previously under the control of Israel-backed opposition forces. Thus, Israel and the Assad regime became neighbors again. For this reason, Israel had to follow a new strategy. In July 2018, Israel reached an agreement with Russia that only Assad forces would be deployed in these border areas. In return, Russia would ensure that Iran-backed militias do not come within 80 kilometers of the Israeli border and would not prevent Israeli attacks on Iranian targets on Syrian soil.[371]

In August 2018, Russian President Putin's special envoy for Syria, Alexander Lavrentiev, announced that Iran-backed militias had withdrawn 85 kilometers away from the Golan. He added that Iranian advisers may be present within the Syrian army on the border, but all militias and heavy weapons capable of harming Israel would be withdrawn 85 kilometers away. Israel, on the other hand, saw this as a necessary but insufficient step. Because Israeli officials thought that the civil war was over and Iran had no reason to be in Syria. Russian officials, on the other hand, said that Russia could not force Iran out of Syria and this was the best Russia could do. In addition, Russia would continue to ignore Israeli airstrikes against Iran and Hezbollah targets.[372]

This treaty is the result of Russia's diplomatic maneuverability. Israel is right to be dissatisfied with this treaty because the Iranian threat to Israel continued. Iranian militias may have withdrawn from Israeli borders, however, if Iran deploys ballistic missiles inside Syria, it could still hit Israel. On the other hand, since the end of September 2018, Russia has started to intervene in Israel's airstrikes inside Syria again.[373]

On September 24, 2018, Russia announced that it would deliver the S-300 air defense systems to Syria within two weeks. Russia had chosen to postpone this delivery in 2013 as

[371] Elizabeth Tsurkov, "Inside Israel's Secret Program to Back Syrian Rebels"
[372] Polina Nikolskaya and Dan Williams, "Russia Says Iranian Forces Pulled Back from Golan In Syria; Israel Unsatisfied", *Reuters*, 1 August 2018, Accessed 25 May 2021. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-golan/russia-says-iranian-forces-pulled-back-from-golan-in-syria-israel-unsatisfied-idUSKBN1KM4GS.
[373] Rabinovich and Valensi, p. 145

a result of Israel's great diplomatic efforts. It can be said that Russia took such a decision after Israel indirectly caused the downing of a Russian IL-20 surveillance plane a week before this announcement. While Israeli jets attacked an Iranian target, Syrian air defense missiles targeted Israeli jets but instead shot down the Russian surveillance plane. Russia blamed Israel for this event.[374] According to Rabinovich, this is the only major collision Israel has ever had with Russia.[375] Netanyahu announced that despite Russia's S-300 decision, Israel will continue to prevent Iran's military entrenchment in Syria, and while doing this, it will act in coordination with the Russian army.[376] As a matter of fact, in October 2018, Russia completed the S-300 delivery to Syria.[377]

A large-scale Israeli air campaign was launched against Iranian and Hezbollah targets in Syria on 25 December 2018. This was the largest airstrike since Russia took an interventionist stance against Israeli airstrikes in September 2018.[378] With this operation, Israel abandoned its "general acknowledgment, specific ambiguity" policy in Syria. Israel has admitted that it is conducting operations against Iranian targets in Syria but has not claimed responsibility for the attacks until then. However, after 2019, Israel started to take responsibility for some of the attacks it organized. For example, Netanyahu announced that the Iranian arsenals, which were attacked at Damascus International Airport on 13 January 2019, were bombed by the IDF.[379]

4.3.4. Attitude Towards Turkish Operations Against PYD/YPG

The years of 2018 and 2019 witnessed some changes in Syria that indirectly concerned Israel. Some of these were Turkey's operations against the PYD/YPG in Northern Syria and Trump's decision to withdraw U.S. forces from Syria. Unlike Israel, Turkey was a regional actor that was extremely uncomfortable with the PYD/YPG presence in northern Syria. It first launched "Operation Euphrates Shield" in the summer of 2016. Turkey claimed that the operation targeted both ISIS and PYD/YPG. At the beginning of 2018, it launched the second military operation, called "Operation Olive Branch," against the PKK/YPG in

[374] Reuters, "Netanyahu: Israel Will Continue Operations in Syria Against Iran", 25 September 2018, Accessed 25 May 2021. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-russia-israel-idUSKCN1M51KE.
[375] Rabinovich, 2021.
[376] Reuters, "Netanyahu: Israel Will Continue Operations in Syria Against Iran"
[377] Reuters, "Russia Completes Delivery Of S-300 System to Syria", 2 October 2018, Accessed 25 May 2021. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-syria-russia-s300-idUSKCN1MC2FT.
[378] Rabinovich and Valensi, pp. 225-226
[379] Judah Ari Gross, "IDF Chief Finally Acknowledges That Israel Supplied Weapons to Syrian Rebels"

northern Syria. Although Turkey claims that it targeted both ISIS and PYD/YPG in this operation, it can be said that it mostly targeted PYD/YPG. Because there was no ISIS presence in town on Afrin, which was within the scope of operation. It can be said that the U.S. largely turned a blind eye to this second operation, except that it prevented Turkey from taking the city of Munbij.[380] In December 2018, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan called U.S. President Donald Trump and said that the ISIS threat in Syria had largely disappeared and the Turkish army could take care of the rest. Upon this meeting, on 19 December 2018, U.S. President Donald Trump declared that ISIS has defeated and American troops no longer had a reason to stay in Syria. Trump was criticized by The U.S. special envoy for Syria, James Jeffrey. Jeffrey argued that the U.S. army should stay in Syria until the ISIS threat is completely eliminated. However, the U.S. had to persuade the Assad regime for reform and ensure that Iran's long-range missile capabilities are cleared from Syria.[381]

Although Trump announced that he would withdraw all American troops from Syria, instead he reduced their numbers from 2,500 to 1,000. As of December 2018, Turkish President Erdogan and U.S. President Trump held a meeting in October 2019. Following this meeting, on 7 October 2019, U.S. President Donald Trump announced that American troops would withdraw from the regions where Turkey would carry out an operation. This clearly showed that a green light was given to Turkey for the operation.[382] As a result, Turkey launched Operation Peace Spring on 9 October 2019, the third of its operations against Syria. Israel opposed the operation, concerning that this operation would increase Iranian influence in the region. The day after the operation's start, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that Israel was ready to provide humanitarian aid to the Kurds in northern Syria. Moreover, Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Tzipi Hotovely explained why Israel was against this operation: [383]

> Israel indeed has a salient interest in preserving the strength of the Kurds and the additional minorities in the north Syria area as moderate and pro-Western elements. […] The

[380] Rabinovich and Valensi, pp. 136-137
[381] Ibid, pp. 211-212
[382] Karen DeYoung, Missy Ryan, Kareem Fahim and Sarah Dadouch, "Republicans Assail Trump's Decision to Pull Troops from Northern Syria As Turkey Readies Offensive", *The Washington Post*, 8 October 2019, Accessed 26 May 2021. https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/trump-administration-to-pull-troops-from-northern-syria-as-turkey-readies-offensive/2019/10/07/a965e466-e8b3-11e9-bafb-da248f8d5734_story.html.
[383] The Times of Israel, "Israeli Official: Jerusalem Providing Aid to Kurds Since U.S. Pullout in Syria", 7 November 2019, Accessed 26 May 2021. https://www.timesofisrael.com/official-israel-providing-aid-to-kurds-since-us-pullout-in-syria/.

> possible collapse of the Kurdish hold in north Syria is a negative and dangerous scenario as far as Israel is concerned. It is absolutely clear that such an event would bring about a bolstering of negative elements in the area, headed by Iran.

These statements of the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs paint a more strategic picture and draw attention to the PYD/YPG's structure compatible with western values. From these statements, it can be concluded that Israel is more concerned about Iran's increasing influence in the region rather than the fate of PYD/YPG.

In 2014, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared that he was leaning towards the idea of an independent Kurdish state. At the beginning of 2016, Israeli justice minister Ayelet Shaked made a statement that an independent Kurdish state was in Israel's interests: [384]

> We must openly call for the establishment of a Kurdish state that separates Iran from Turkey, one which will be friendly towards Israel. […] The Kurdish people are a partner for the Israeli people. […] The Kurds are an ancient, democratic, peace-loving people thathave never attacked any country. […] It is time to help them.

After the PYD/YPG declared autonomy in northern Syria in 2016, Ofra Bengi, head of the Kurdish studies program at Tel Aviv University, said that Israel should improve its relations with the PYD/YPG: [385]

> Israel can gain friendship with a party that is stable, pro-Israel, more democratic, more open, and liberal. The role of women in Kurdish Syria is open, more egalitarian than any other place in the region. […] Turkey supports Hamas that openly seeks to annihilate Israel. While this is still the case, Israel should at least have the right to provide humanitarian support the Syrian Kurds. […] Israel should openly support and endorse Kurdish aspirations in Syria and the Syrian political factions should publicly declare these relations. At the end of day, this will be good step for the stability and coexistence in the region. […] Israel can have a trustworthy and reliable ally in the new Syria and I think the Kurds are the ones ready for that.

It is a fact that Israel sees the PYD/YPG as an actor that can balance not only Turkey,

[384] Tamar Pileggi, "Justice Minister Calls for An Independent Kurdistan", 20 January 2016, Accessed 26 May 2021. https://www.timesofisrael.com/shaked-calls-for-an-independent-kurdistan/.
[385] Dov Lieber, "After Declaring Autonomy, Syrian Kurds 'Open To Ties With Israel'", 18 March 2016, Accessed 26 May 2021. https://www.timesofisrael.com/after-declaring-autonomy-will-israel-embrace-syrias-kurds/.

but also Iraq, Iran, and the Assad regime. Supporting Kurdish factions in the region indeed threatens the territorial integrity of these countries. However, the preoccupation of these countries with issues related to territorial integrity strengthens Israel's security and geopolitical position. Israel has been already implementing this strategy against Arab states. After the worsening of relations after 2010, it can be said that Turkey is also included in this scenario. Turkey's policy of supporting groups such as the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas, which increased after 2010, is against Israel's interests. Since Turkey's dealing with a problem like the PYD/YPG on its borders will limit its sphere of influence in the Arab world, and that would serve Israel's interests. As a matter of fact, despite its three military operations, the PYD/YPG continues to pose a threat to Turkey.[386]

On the other hand, there are assertions that Israel is using the PYD/YPG-controlled areas in northern Syria to attack enemy targets in Iraq. An Iraqi official claimed that the drone attacks on Iranian-backed militia in Iraq were carried out by Israel from the areas controlled by PYD/YPG.[387] If this claim is true, it shows that the PYD/YPG is much more important to Israel strategically than previously thought. Israel has not accepted or denied these claims. However, Prime Minister Netanyahu's remarks about the attacks on Iran-backed militias in Iraq, *"Iran has no immunity, anywhere ... We will act — and currently are acting — against them, wherever it is necessary,"* increases the probability of this claim to be true.[388]

4.3.5. Golan Issue

U.S. President Trump issued a presidential decree on 25 March 2019, recognizing Israel's annexation of the Golan. However, Israel did not annex the Golan in 1981, but only extended Israeli laws to the Golan. It can be said that Trump took this decision to support Netanyahu in the upcoming Israeli elections, rather than to punish the Assad regime. While trying to legitimize this decision, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and U.S. ambassador to Israel David Friedman claimed that Syria refused to negotiate within the framework of the "land for peace" principle for 52 years. However, Syria participated in the peace

[386] Giorgio Cafiero, "Israel's PKK-YPG Kurdish Connections", Inside Arabia, 21 November 2019, Accessed 26 May 2021. https://insidearabia.com/israels-pkk-ypg-kurdish-connections/.
[387] David Hearst, "Exclusive: Israeli Strikes in Iraq Launched from SDF-Held Syria, Baghdad Believes", 27 August 2019, Accessed 26 May 2021. https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/exclusive-israeli-strikes-iraq-launched-sdf-bases-baghdad-believes.
[388] AP News, "Iran-Backed Militias Blame U.S. for Attacks On Bases İn Iraq", 21 August 2019, Accessed 26 May 2021. https://apnews.com/article/10911b33c35e475999ed859626b1b90f.

negotiations that started in 1991 based on this principle.[389] Even if this decision had not been taken by the Trump administration, it would not seem possible to return to the negotiations again. Throughout the civil war, the Assad regime had committed many war crimes, including the use of chemical weapons, and became an illegitimate authority. Under these conditions, it was not possible for Israel to negotiate a new peace with Syria. In previous negotiations, Syria offered the return of Golan Heights, as a precondition. However, in this environment, it was impossible for Israel to return Golan to a leader who had lost their legitimacy. In the previous peace negotiations, there were also those who talked about the legal difficulties of the return of the Golan to Syria. In order for such a territorial concession to be made, a referendum had to be held under Israeli law, or a majority vote in the Israeli parliament. Because the Golan was not officially annexed in 1981 by Israel, but Israeli laws were extended to the Golan. The relevant amendment does not contain the term "annexation", as in the law passed a year ago, which annexed East Jerusalem and declared Jerusalem the complete and united capital of Israel. However, the Trump administration ignored this nuance in March 2019 when they recognized Israel's sovereignty over Golan Heights.[390]

The Joe Biden administration, who took the office at the beginning of 2021, thought differently from the Trump administration in terms of the legal nature of the Golan Heights. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Israel had good reasons to hold the Golan Heights as long as Iran and its militia remained in Syria. However, he also stressed that the new administration has some hesitations about the legal nature of the Golan: [391]

> Look, leaving aside the legalities of that question, as a practical matter, the Golan is very important to Israel's security. […] As long as [dictator Bashar] Assad is in power in Syria, as long as Iran is present in Syria, militia groups backed by Iran, the Assad regime itself – all of these pose a significant security threat to Israel, and as a practical matter, the control of the Golan in that situation I think remains of real importance to Israel's security. […] Legal questions are something else. And over time, if the situation were to change in Syria, that's something we'd look at. But we are nowhere near as that.

[389] Rabinovich and Valensi, p.216
[390] Rabinovich, 2021.
[391] Jacob Magid, "Blinken Supports Israel Holding Golan, But Backs Off Recognizing Sovereignty", 9 February 2021, Accessed 20 May 2021. https://www.timesofisrael.com/blinken-supports-israel-holding-golan-but-backs-off-recognizing-sovereignty/.

4.3.6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the developments in Syria in the last two years have been alarming developments for Israel. The most important of these is Trump's decision to withdraw U.S. troops from Syria. Even if the U.S. troops in Syria did not play a direct role in Israel's security, the U.S. involvement in the Syrian Crisis gave Israel confidence and deterrence capability. It is not yet clear what kind of stance the Biden administration will take on the fate of the small number of American soldiers left in Syria.[392]

On the other hand, the Assad regime is now back as an influential actor and needs to be taken into account. Iran's effort to establish a significant military presence in Syria has eased but has not ceased.[393] Regarding this, IDF chief of staff General Aviv Kochavi made a statement as *"The Iranian entrenchment in Syria is in a clear slowdown as a result of IDF activity, but we still have a long way to go to complete our goals."* Indeed, Israel's attacks against Iranian targets in Syria still continue.[394]

Some of the red lines that Israel has drawn since the beginning of the Syrian Civil War remained valid in this period between 2015-2021, which are:

- Preventing the arms shipments to Hezbollah
- Preventing the spread of the Syrian Crisis to its own territory
- Preventing the humanitarian crisis
- Preventing the presence of radical elements and Iran on the Israeli border

Israel never compromised on the first three of them. It continued to target advanced weapons shipments to Hezbollah, responded when the conflict spread to its borders, and continued its humanitarian aid to Syrian civilians with Operation Good Neighbor. It has prevented the Iranian-backed militias from entrenching in the Israeli-Syrian border. Instead, Assad forces have been deployed on the Israeli-Syrian border, which is a much better option for Israel, given that the Assad regime has so far complied with the 1974 disengagement

[392] David S. Cloud, "Inside U.S. Troops' Stronghold in Syria, A Question of How Long Biden Will Keep Them There", *Los Angeles Times*, 12 March 2021, Accessed 26 May 2021. https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2021-03-12/us-troops-syria-civil-war-biden.
[393] Rabinovich and Valensi, p.226
[394] BBC, "Syria War: Suspected Israeli Strikes on Iran-Linked Targets 'Kill Dozens'", 13 January 2021. Accessed 26 May 2021. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-55646298.

agreement. However, the absence of Iranian militias on the Syrian border is not enough for Israel. It wants to completely end Iran's military presence in Syria. In this period, unlike the previous two periods (2011-2013 and 2013-2015), the increasing trend is Israel's effort to prevent Iran from establishing a military presence in Syria.

Israel's determination on this issue might be understood by the fact that it threatens Syria with military action if it officially invites Iran.[395] Unlike previous periods, Israel has now started to take responsibility for some of the attacks it carried out against Iran in Syria. Israel's reaction to Turkey's operations during this period should also be interpreted by considering the Iranian factor. Israel thinks that a blow to the PYD/YPG will serve Iran's hegemonic interests. The worsening relations with Turkey over the past decade may also have an impact on this. However, probably Israel also strategically benefits from the areas controlled by the PYD/YPG. As a result, Israel managed to maintain its red lines to a large extent during this period. It is still making efforts to achieve the goal of ending Iran's presence in Syria.

However, it is doubtful that these Israeli attacks on Iranian targets in Syria will reduce Assad's dependence on Iran. Because, although Israel has been active militarily in Syria since the beginning of the Syrian Civil War, it has been very ineffective in the diplomatic arena. Israel is absent in the Astana Talks led by Iran, Russia, and Turkey, where the political future of Syria is discussed. Highly likely, the ineffectiveness of the U.S. in this diplomatic process also plays a role in this. However, to achieve the desired result in Syria, Israel has to be active diplomatically besides implementing its "campaign between the wars" military strategy.[396] On the other hand, after the 16th Astana Talks, Russia, Iran, and Turkey condemned Israel's airstrikes in Syria. This shows that Russia has begun to feel uncomfortable with this Israeli security strategy in Syria based on military superiority. Therefore, it is debatable how sustainable this strategy is for Israel.[397]

[395] The Times of Israel, "Netanyahu Said to Warn Assad: We'll Strike If You Let Iran Set Up Bases in Syria"
[396] Danny Citrinowicz, "Diplomatic Openings Amid Israel's Syria Strikes", *Fikra Forum*, 16 October 2020, Accessed 1 Sptember 2021. https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/diplomatic-openings-amid-israels-syria-strikes.
[397] Lazar Berman, "Russia Might Be Testing Israel In Syria, But No Reason for Panic", 29 July 2021, Accessed 1 September 2021. https://www.timesofisrael.com/russia-might-be-testing-israel-in-syria-but-no-reason-for-panic/.

5. GENERAL DISCUSSION

5.1. The Significance of the Syrian Crisis in Israel-Syria Relations

Israel-Syria relations have always witnessed wars until the last quarter of the 20th century. During the first, third, and fourth Arab-Israeli wars, Syria waged war against Israel. The struggle between Israel and Syria has been shaped around the control of the DMZs until 1956, the control of water resources until 1967, and the control of the Golan after 1967. The Fourth Arab-Israeli War in 1973 was the last war the two countries faced. Thanks to the disengagement agreement signed in 1974, the land border between the two countries became a de-conflict zone. After this agreement, Lebanon was the only place where the armies of the two countries faced each other.

Israel and Syria, which supported the opposing sides during the Lebanese Civil War that lasted from 1975 to 1990, carried the struggle over the DMZs, water resources, and Golan Heights to control Lebanon. Although there was a minor conflict between the Israeli army and the Syrian army during the "Operation Peace for Galilee" launched by Israel in 1982, the Israeli-Syrian struggle manifested itself more as a proxy war during this period. As a matter of fact, this period of proxy wars continued since Syria kept supporting Hezbollah and Hamas.[398]

From the 90s to the Arab Spring, it is seen that there was a period of softening in relations and -albeit discontinuously- negotiations. The dialogue between Israel and the Palestinians that developed after the Madrid Conference and Oslo Process also had a positive impact on Israeli-Syrian relations. In addition, the fact that Iran was not a major threat to Israel at the beginning of the 90s may have had an impact on the start of these peace negotiations. However, the preconditions of Israeli-Syrian peace negotiations have changed over time. The "peace for peace" principle was abandoned with Yitzhak Rabin's coming to power in 1992, and the "land for peace" principle was accepted. This principle was updated as "land for strategic realignment and peace" in the negotiations under Turkish mediation in 2008. In the secret talks under the mediation of the USA in 2010, they continued to negotiate

[398] Serhat Erkmen, ""Bildiği şeytan"dan kırmızı çizgilere: İsrail'in Suriye politikası", *Fikir Turu*, 2 June 2021, Accessed 1 September 2021. https://fikirturu.com/jeo-strateji/bildigi-seytandan-kirmizi-cizgilere-israilin-suriye-politikasi/.

within the framework of this principle. Israel's desire to get rid of Syria's partnership with Iran showed that peace with Syria was not enough for Israel anymore. The reason for this change in preconditions of peace negotiations may be the fact that Iran took place on top of Israel's threat list after the beginning of the 2000s. From this point of view, it can be said that the Palestinian conflict and factor of Iran play a decisive role in the course of Israel-Syria relations.

It is possible to divide Israel-Syria relations into periods of wars, proxy wars, and negotiations. What about the place of the Syrian Crisis in Israeli-Syrian relations? After the Arab Spring, there can be seen no war, no proxy war, and no negotiation attempt between Israel and Syria. Although Israel supported some opposition groups, it neither made any effort to overthrow the Assad regime nor made any attempt to support the Assad regime. On the other hand, a new peace process with the Assad regime does not seem possible. Because the Assad regime has largely lost its legitimacy due to the war crimes it committed in the Syrian Civil War. Moreover, starting a new peace process in accordance with the "strategic realignment for peace" precondition put forward by Israel in the pre-2011 negotiations is a much more remote possibility now, since Iran has obtained significant concessions in Syria because it prevented the collapse of the Assad regime. On the other hand, Israel's withdrawal from the Golan Heights, which is Syria's precondition for peace, is also a remote possibility. In an environment where the legitimacy of the Assad regime is questioned, it does not seem possible for Israel to discuss returning the Golan Heights to Syria.

Ariel Sharon used the term "devil we know" for the Assad regime in 2005, despite Syria's strategic cooperation with Iran and its support for Hamas and Hezbollah.[399] The Assad regime continued to be the devil that Israel knows after 2011. However, what is different from 2005 is the increased risks arising from the alliance of which Syria is a member. Iran has become more active than ever before on Israel's borders after the Syrian Crisis. Thus, Israel's Syria policy has not changed as the Assad regime remains the "devil that Israel knows." However, Iran, which is one of the factors playing a role in Israel-Syria relations, is a larger threat to Israel today than ever before. This development alone may indicate that Israel-Syria relations have entered a new phase. In fact, the Assad regime may even cease to be a "lesser evil" for Israel due to Iran's growing influence in Syria. As a result,

[399] Daniel Freedman, "The Devil We Know: Why Assad Will Survive?", Forbes, 22 November 2011, Accessed 10 August 2021. https://www.forbes.com/sites/danielfreedman/2011/11/22/thedevilweknow/?sh=328d3fd1443f.

the Arab Spring, or the Syrian Crisis, can be regarded as a breaking point in Israeli-Syrian relations. In order to understand exactly when and how this occurred, it is necessary to analyze Israel's Syria policy after 2011.

5.2. Analysis of Israel's Syria Policy After the Arab Spring

Table 5.1. *The Framework of Analysis*

Israeli Foreign Policy	**Period 1 (2011-2013)**	**Period 2 (2013-2015)**	**Period 3 (2015-2021)**
Aims	Preventing arms shipments to Hezbollah	Preventing arms shipments to Hezbollah	Preventing arms shipments to Hezbollah
	Preventing the Syrian Crisis to spread its own territory	Preventing the Syrian Crisis to spread its own territory	Preventing the Syrian Crisis to spread its own territory
	Preventing radical elements on its border	Preventing radical elements on its border	Preventing radical elements on its border
Tools	Military airstrikes	Military airstrikes	Military airstrikes
	Humanitarian aids	Humanitarian aids	Humanitarian aids
		Direct proxy support(FSA)	Indirect proxy support(YPG)
Ends	Avoiding regional isolation	Avoiding regional isolation	Avoiding regional isolation
	Balancing hegemonic ambitions of Iran	Balancing hegemonic ambitions of Iran	Balancing hegemonic ambitions of Iran and Turkey

Israel has set certain goals regarding Syria in the post-Arab Spring period. It used some tools to achieve these goals. These determined goals and tools are directly related to Israel's grand strategy. Some of these goals, which can also be described as Israel's red lines, have remained unchanged since the beginning of the Syrian Crisis. These red lines are to prevent arms shipments to Hezbollah, to prevent the Syrian Crisis from spreading to Israel's territory, and to prevent radical elements from controlling the border. Israel has used tools

such as military airstrikes and humanitarian aids since the beginning of the Syrian Crisis to achieve these goals. In addition to these tools, direct proxy support given to FSA from 2013 to 2015 and indirect proxy support given to YPG since 2015 can be included. The main reasons behind Israel's determination of these goals are to break its regional isolation and to limit Iran's hegemonic ambitions in the region. From 2015, limiting Turkey's hegemonic ambitions can be included in these ends, due to Israel's strategic cooperation with the PYD/YPG.

Table 5.2. *Actors*

Israel's Attitude	**Assad Regime**	**Opposition**	**PYD/YPG**	**Shiite militias and Iran**	**ISIS and other radicals**
Period 1 (2011-2013)	Conflictive	Neutral/Hesitant	Neutral	Hostile	Hostile
Period 2 (2013-2015)	Conflictive	Covertly Supportive	Supportive	Hostile	Hostile
Period 3 (2015-2021)	Conflictive, (until March 2017), then Directly Conflictive	Covertly Supportive, (until mid-2018) then Neutral	Supportive	Extremely Hostile	Hostile

When Israel's relations with the Assad regime and non-state actors playing a role in the Syrian Civil War are examined, such a picture is seen: Although Israel did not make an effort to overthrow the Assad regime, its interests have been conflicting with it since the beginning of the Syrian Crisis. The main reason for this conflict of interest is the support of the Assad regime to Hezbollah and its strategic cooperation with Iran. However, 2017 can be considered a milestone as the Assad regime retaliated against the Israeli airstrike on 17 March 2017. Moreover, at the end of 2017, Prime Minister Netanyahu threatened the Assad

regime with military action if they officially invite Iran like Russia. For this reason, Israel-Assad regime relations can be regarded as conflictive from 2011 to 2017, and directly conflictive after 2017.

It can be said that Israel acted cautiously and hesitantly towards the Syrian opposition from 2011 to 2013. During this period, it sent only humanitarian aid and provided the treatment of the wounded rebels. However, since 2013, Israel has started to covertly provide arms to the Syrian opposition. But this support did not aim to overthrow the Assad regime, only aimed to secure Israeli-Syrian borders. That arms support ended when the Assad regime began recapturing the Israeli-Syrian border areas in mid-2018.

On the other hand, although the PYD/YPG was a neutral actor for Israel since 2011, it has gained Israel's support after 2013 due to its struggle against ISIS. In addition to its struggle against ISIS, the PYD/YPG is also seen by Israel as an actor to balance Iran. The Israeli drone attacks launched from PYD/YPG-controlled areas show that Israel is also taking advantage of the PYD/YPG.

Israel's attitude towards Iran-backed Shiite militias has been hostile since the beginning of the Syrian Crisis. Israel sees Iran and its proxies as a threat. However, after 2015, when the ISIS threat had largely disappeared and a total civil war ended, Israel began to think that the purpose of Iran and its proxies in Syria was not against ISIS, but against itself. It can be said that since 2017, Israel has taken an extremely hostile attitude towards Iran-backed militias, as it has started to take more aggressive military measures against them.

Israel's attitude towards ISIS and other jihadist organizations has been hostile from the very beginning. However, it cannot be said that ISIS has carried out a serious attack against Israel despite uttering threats. On the other hand, Israel has never seen ISIS as a threat as much as Iran and its proxies.

Table 5.3. *Powers*

Regional/Global Power	Converging Interests	Diverging Interests	Conflicting Interests
Iran	Fight against ISIS Fate of the Assad Regime	Supporting PYD/YPG	Regional Hegemony Fight against Iran-backed militias Supporting opposition
Russia	Fight against ISIS Supporting PYD/YPG Fate of the Assad Regime	Fight against Iran-backed militias	Supporting opposition
U.S.	Fight against ISIS Supporting PYD/YPG Fight against Iran-Backed militias Supporting opposition	U.S. Pullout from Syria	Fate of the Assad regime
Turkey	Fight against ISIS Supporting opposition	U.S. Pullout from Syria	Regional Hegemony Fate of the Assad regime Supporting PYD/YPG

Israel's interests in Syria converge with Iran, Russia, the United States, and Turkey in the war against ISIS. Although there is no Israeli attempt to keep the Assad regime in power, it can be said that its interests overlap with Russia and Iran, as it sees the Assad regime as lesser of evil. On the other hand, it thinks differently than the U.S. and Turkey, which want to overthrow the Assad regime. In terms of support given to the PYD/YPG, their

interests converge with Russia and the United States, diverge with Iran, and conflict with Turkey since Turkey perceives the PYD/YPG as a branch of the PKK terrorist organization.

There has always been a "Syrian effect" in Israeli-Turkish relations. While Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu apologized to Turkey for the Mavi Marmara raid in March 2013, he attributed the reason to the developments in Syria: *"The fact that the Syrian crisis is constantly intensifying was a prime consideration, it's important that Turkey and Israel...are able to communicate with each other and this is also relevant to other regional challenges."* However, while Turkey reads the developments in the region through the Kurdish question, Israel reads it through the rising Iranian influence.[400] For this reason, Turkey's operations in Northern Syria, like other issues, stayed in the background for Israel.[401] The reason why Israel opposed the latest military operation launched by Turkey is that this operation directly targeted the PYD/YPG. Israel is concerned that any damage to the PYD/YPG will increase Iran's influence in the region.

In the war against Iran-backed Shiite militias, the interests of Israel conflict with Iran, converge with the United States and diverge with Russia. Because the U.S. is with Israel in this struggle. Russia, on the other hand, turns a blind eye to Israeli attacks on Iranian targets in Syria. In terms of supporting the Syrian opposition, Israel is on the same side with Turkey and the United States, and on the opposite side with Russia and Iran. The support meant here is not a support to overthrow the Assad regime, as Turkey and the United States did. Israel's support to the opposition was purely aimed at securing the Israeli-Syrian border. Israel competes with Iran and Turkey for regional hegemony. Israel's reactions to the Turkish operations against the PYD/YPG can be explained in this way. In connection with this, the decision of the U.S. to withdraw from Syria can also be shown as a point where Israel's interests with the U.S. and Turkey diverge.

Although the Obama Administration determined the use of chemical weapons against the Syrian civilians as a "red line" during the chemical weapons crisis in 2012, it became definite in August 2013 that the U.S. would not intervene militarily in Syria. As a matter of fact, the Obama administration has followed a policy focused on solving the problems in Syria through diplomacy rather than military intervention.[402] Despite several

[400] Ülgül, pp. 136-148
[401] Rabinovich, 2021.
[402] Faysal Itani "The Origins and Consequences of US Nonintervention in Syria." *Current History* 115, no. 785 (2016): 337-42. Accessed 2 September 2021. https://www.jstor.org/stable/48614207.

differences of opinion, both the Obama Administration and the Trump Administration agree that American power in the Middle East is limited. This limited power should be used to protect American interests in the Middle East such as the fight against terrorism, the safe flow of hydrocarbon resources, and Israel's security.[403] Indeed, Obama did not see the Assad regime as an actor that threatens Israel's existence.[404] Although the U.S. supported a government change in Syria, it did not intervene militarily. For this reason, there is a difference of opinion between the U.S. and Israel regarding the fate of the Assad regime.

5.3. Conclusion: One of the Three Scenarios

According to Rabinovich, the best scenario for Israel was the seizure of power in Syria by a secular and democratic opposition.[405] However, from the beginning of the civil war, the difficulty of this scenario has been understood. On the other hand, the worst scenario for Israel is a radical/fundamentalist takeover in Syria. In fact, in the later stages of the civil war, it was revealed that such groups were quite dominant in the Syrian opposition. On the other hand, the Assad regime can be described as a "mixed blessing" for Israel. Because this scenario has both good and bad consequences for Israel, and for this reason, it can be called a moderate scenario. Since the beginning of the Syrian Civil War, Israel has closely observed the developments and tried to develop a strategy according to the outcome of the civil war. However, it cannot be said that Israel directly intervened in the power struggle in Syria. Instead, Israel prepared itself for these three potential scenarios.

If a secular opposition had come to power, as Rabinovich mentioned, it probably would not have had much reason to side with Iran. This would be a very important development for Israel, given that Israel dictated a "strategic realignment" to the Assad regime for the peace treaty. On the other hand, a democratic and secular Syrian administration might be more willing than the Assad regime to clean the slate and make peace with Israel. Therefore, the reason why this is the best scenario for Israel is that it provides an environment for Israel to overcome its regional isolation and ensure its security.

[403] Faysal Itani and Nate Rosenblatt, "US policy in Syria: A seven-year reckoning", Atlantic Council, 10 September 2018, Accessed 3 September 2021. https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/in-depth-research-reports/issue-brief/us-policy-in-syria-a-seven-year-reckoning/.
[404] Ahmet Ateş, "Understanding the Obama administration's Syria policy." *Manas Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi* 10, no.2, (2021): 1436-1448, p. 1443. Accessed 2 September 2021. https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/1492826.
[405] Rabinovich, 2012, p.1

If this had happened, Israel-Syria relations could have entered a detente process again.

The worst scenario for Israel is the seizure of power by a radical/fundamentalist opposition, which can be explained by its concerns for regional isolation and national security. In such a case, Israel's effort to separate Syria from Iran's resistance block would have become very difficult. It is possible to say that an understanding that perceives the Arab-Israeli problem in a religio-centric way, would be more reluctant to reconcile with Israel. In such a case, Israel's geographical isolation would increase, and perhaps the Syrian border would become insecure as before. It can also be said that the replacement of the Assad regime, which has a relatively secular structure within the resistance block led by Iran, by a radical/fundamentalist government would strengthen Iran's influence in Syria. In this case, Israel would probably act aggressively against the new Syrian administration, like Iran and its proxies, and maybe even make an effort to sponsor a regime change in Syria.

As a matter of fact, it can be said that a moderate scenario for Israel has taken place in Syria at the moment since the Assad regime has taken control of most of Syria. Although the power vacuum in Syria has enabled Israel to act more freely in Syria, the instability poses a threat to Israel. Therefore, the power vacuum has largely disappeared. On the other hand, Iran continues its military entrenchment in Syria and this is an unacceptable outcome for Israel. Israel is in strategic cooperation with the PYD/YPG because it needs to balance the Iranian influence in Syria. From this point on, it seems difficult for Israel to start a new peace process with Syria and persuade it to move away from Iran. Because both Iran has gained great privileges in Syria by helping the Assad regime's victory, and the return of the Golan, which is the Assad regime's precondition for peace, does not seem possible. The coalition government that came after Benjamin Netanyahu's 12-year rule is too fragmented to manage such a peace process between Israel and Syria. Naftali Bennett, leader of The New Right party, who became prime minister on 13 June 2021, has more right-wing ideas than his predecessor Netanyahu and views the Golan as a historical part of Israel.[406]

[406] BBC, "Naftali Bennett: The rise of Israel's new PM", 13 June 2021. Accessed 10 August 2021. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-56969598.

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