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THE BEGIN-SADAT CENTER
FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES

Israel Is Not Isolated

Efraim Inbar

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Israel Is Not Isolated

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INTRODUCTION

The bad news is clear. Israel's right to exist is questioned by many and its ancient and present capital, Jerusalem, is unrecognized by all but a few states. Israeli leaders are sometimes compared to leaders of Nazi Germany, and Israeli actions against the Palestinians described as Nazi-like policies. Moreover, Israel is accused of engaging in South African apartheid policies toward the Palestinians and its Arab minority. Opponents and critics portray the Jewish state as the world's worst violator of human rights, UN resolutions, and international law.¹

As a result of these global attitudes, many Israelis feel their country to be once more alone and increasingly isolated in the international community. An August 2010 poll showed that 56 percent of Jewish Israelis subscribed to the view that "The whole world is against us." Even a larger majority, 77 percent, thought that it made no difference what Israel did and how far it might go on the Palestinian issue; the world would continue to be critical regardless of the facts.² In a December 2012 poll, 54.1 percent of Israelis believed that Israel's diplomatic situation worsened over the past four years.³ The extensive media coverage of the April 2002 "Jenin Massacre" fabrications, the infamous Goldstone Report of September 2009, and the Turkey-sponsored Gaza Freedom Flotilla of May 2010, among other things, provided evidence to Israelis of hostile international press reporting, which buttressed their perceptions that Israel is under international siege.

Israel's political leaders have repeatedly expressed their concern about the country's international status. In March 2011, for example, Defense Minister Barak warned about a "diplomatic tsunami" if the standstill in

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peace talks with the Palestinian Authority (PA) continued, adding that a massive campaign to de-legitimize Israel was underway.⁴ In June 2010 Tzipi Livni, at that point the opposition Kadima leader, suggested that “Israel is facing a difficult time right now, perhaps the most difficult in our history... This is a continuous process under which Israel is becoming

Israel’s international status has improved since the height of its isolation in the 1970s

isolated from the world.”⁵ During the 2013 election campaign she constantly warned that Israel’s international status will significantly deteriorate unless a deal with the Palestinians is reached. And the most systematic argument about Israel’s growing isolation was made in a Reut Institute 2010 report underscoring the dangerous effects of an international campaign to boycott Israeli products, disinvest from Israeli firms, and subject the Jewish state to international sanctions (BDS).⁶

Yet, the greater isolation apprehended by many is primarily impressionist. A closer look at Israel’s interactions with many powerful international states and less-powerful international organizations shows such evaluations to be wrong and provides a more nuanced and less pessimistic picture. In fact, Israel’s international status has improved since the height of its isolation in the 1970s.

THE 1970S ATTEMPT TO ISOLATE ISRAEL

For decades the Arab world has refused to accept the establishment of a Jewish state in the Land of Israel and tried to eradicate it by use of force. Parallel attempts were made to deny legitimacy to Israel and isolate it in the international community.⁷ The isolation/de-legitimization component of the anti-Israel strategy has been adopted explicitly by the Arab states since the 1964 Arab Summit, which, as its leaders put it, “called for the regulation of relations vis-à-vis foreign countries in accordance with their position regarding the Palestine question and other Arab causes.”⁸ Israel was viewed as a Western-established bastion in the Middle East, and well before oil was used as a weapon, Arab leaders aimed to insert a wedge between the West and Israel in order to weaken it. The isolation strategy, based on the “soft power” concept of manipulating cultural and monetary “currencies,”⁹ became more pronounced as it became clearer

The isolation campaign reflected Israel's success in diverting the Arab-Israeli conflict from war to the diplomatic arena to the Arab states that eliminating Israel by military means was not achievable in the near future. The non-military nature of this isolation campaign reflected to some extent Israel's success in diverting the Arab-Israeli conflict from large-scale conventional war to the diplomatic arena.

At the same time the isolation campaign has been directed to neutralize Israel's superior military power and to maximize the legal, political, and cultural constraints upon Israel's use of force.

There are several obvious ways to measure isolation. The first and most obvious is the number of states that have diplomatic relations with the outcast country. A second criterion is membership in international governmental organizations and agencies. A third measure of isolation is the amount of negative attention a state receives in international forums and public opinion. In accordance with these criteria, the 1970s stand as the worst decade for Israel in diplomatic terms.

The 1973 Yom Kippur War was a military debacle for the Arab states but it was answered by the Arab-led Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) creating a global energy crisis. This placed the power of the Arab world at its zenith, and created unprecedented isolation for Israel. An avalanche of Asian and African states severed diplomatic relations with Israel. These nations joined the communist states that, with the exception of Romania, had severed relations after the June 1967 War. In the 1970s the UN and its affiliated bodies were also the setting for a tsunami of anti-Israel resolutions. The Arab bloc of over twenty states regularly garnered the support of the Third World and the Soviet blocs to endorse rabid anti-Israeli resolutions there and in other international organizations. During that period the Arab League even tried to have Israel expelled from the UN.

The worst of the UN resolutions, from Israel's point of view, was the November 1975 General Assembly resolution branding Zionism, the Jewish national movement, as racism. In spite of American heavy lobbying against it, 72 countries voted in favor of the resolution, 35 opposed it, and 32 abstained. The resolution demonstrated the decreasing

international legitimacy of the Jewish state even more profoundly than the severance of diplomatic ties.

In December 1979 the UN again denounced Zionism as a form of racism. This time the deterioration in Israel's international status was strikingly

The worst of the UN resolutions was the November 1975 General Assembly resolution branding Zionism as racism

evident. Only three countries, the US, Canada, and Australia, opposed the resolution. No western European, Latin American, Asian, or African state voted with Israel. An

overwhelming 111 nations supported the resolution; only 26 abstained. Moreover, the 1979 resolution did not even arouse the indignation of the global public as the 1975 anti-Zionist resolution had, an indignation that was one of the reasons the resolution was not resubmitted earlier.

Interestingly, the signing of the 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, a tremendous step in improving the Arab-Israeli dynamics, had no immediate impact on Israel's international status. Instead, it was Egypt that was ostracized by an Arab world that continued to oppose Israel's mere

The decline in American clout in the 1970s influenced the fortunes of its allies including Israel

existence. The UN also refused to lend its backing to the Sinai peacekeeping force designed to supervise the implementation of the demilitarization clauses of the peace treaty. Even the US had difficulties recruiting foreign contingents to the

multinational force it sponsored to perform the supervision task in the Sinai. The temporary decline in American clout in the 1970s influenced the fortunes of its allies including Israel.

ISRAEL'S CURRENT INTERNATIONAL STATUS

Since 1991, Israel's international status has greatly improved as many states decided to upgrade or to establish diplomatic relations with the Jewish state, partly due to the emergence of the US as a hegemonic global power. With Jerusalem's foremost ally the winner of the Cold War, many states were eager to potentially profit from its good links with

Washington. Beyond this, the USSR disappeared, as did the Soviet bloc, with its wide-ranging military, economic, and cultural support for the Arab states and the venomous anti-Semitism they both espoused.

In addition, Israel's diplomatic status benefitted from the disappearance of several inhibiting factors. First, changing trends in the oil market lessened the political leverage of the Arab bloc in world politics and of the oil-producing states in particular. Already by the end of the 1980s the fears of energy crises had subsided substantially, with the oil market becoming a "buyers' market," diminishing the weight of Arab objections to the enhancement of relations with Israel. Second, the Arab-Israeli peace process, reactivated by the Americans with great fanfare in the wake of the 1991 Gulf War, further marginalized the objections of Israel's regional enemies to third-party ties with Jerusalem. The October 1991 peace

Since 1991, Israel's international status has improved

conference in Madrid, a formal gathering with Israel to which almost all Arab countries sent senior diplomatic delegations, served as a convenient pretext for hitherto reluctant states to develop closer relationships with Israel.

Another important factor that pushed states to seek cooperation with Israel was the challenge of terrorism and/or radical Islam in the post-9/11 era. The Jewish state has much to offer in the area of intelligence, tactical, and doctrinal counter-terrorism. Because of the growing Islamist threat the number of states seeking security relations with Israel was on the rise. There are many countries that fall in this category and they are hardly deterred by the intractable Israeli-Palestinian conflict from useful interactions with Israel.

Israel has also emerged as an economic success story in the post-Cold War era, augmenting the political and military attraction of pursuing good relations with her. This is due to its beneficial economic policies and effective adaptation to a globalized economy. Moreover, its high-tech sector has turned Israel into a global actor.¹⁰ Beyond its well-established reputation for producing first-rate military equipment, Israel has also excelled in agriculture, medicine, communications, and a variety of other fields. All of these accomplishments have created international admiration and keen interest in bilateral exchanges and trade relations.

Isolation of a state is intended to prevent it from interacting with other members of the world community. Different indices for measuring integration show, however, that Israel is rather well integrated globally. The general aggregated 2012 KOF Globalization Index ranks Israel as

Israel's integration in the world community has been little affected by its regional conflict

number 30 out of 166 states.¹¹ When Israel's economic performance is measured it ranks 23rd in the world, reflecting its growing economic successes. When its social interactions are measured Israel ranks 32nd. Israel's lowest measure is political, where it ranks only 58 out of 166 states. This is measured by the number of embassies in the country, membership in international organizations, participation in UN National Security missions and ratification of international treaties. Yet even the lower score puts Israel ahead of almost two thirds of the states in the world. Moreover, the KOF Index shows steady increase in Israel's globalization performance since 1993,¹² indicating that its integration in the world community has been little affected by its regional conflict.

Indeed, there is no justification whatsoever for concluding that Israel is isolated in the international system. At the end of 2012, Israel had diplomatic relations with 156 states out of 193 UN members. Considering that most Arab states and additional Muslim countries do not have diplomatic relations with the Jewish state, Israel's diplomatic

At the end of 2012, Israel had diplomatic relations with 156 states

network is quite impressive. Taking into account that Israel cannot benefit from association with a big international bloc, such as the developing countries, Muslim bloc, or with regional blocs such as Latin America or Asia, the Jewish state is doing quite well on the international scene. It is definitely not isolated more now than it had been in the past. Data collected by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicates that it hosted 201 official visits by foreign dignitaries during 2012 – a slight 7 percent increase from the previous year. The data collected for the two previous years is similar to the 2005-9 period that preceded the Likud-led government. The stream of foreign VIPs has continued unabated and there is no deterioration in that respect.¹³

IMPROVEMENTS SINCE THE END OF THE COLD WAR

Israel has clearly benefited from the international systemic changes. Measuring the number of states that have diplomatic relations with Israel indicates an improvement in the country's international status. For example, after the end of the Cold War all former states of the Soviet bloc and most Afro-Asian states have opted for diplomatic relations, and have maintained them ever since.

The stream of foreign VIPs to Israel has continued unabated

Significantly, major international players such as Russia, India, and China, as well as pivotal regional states, such as Turkey and Nigeria, also capitalized on the changes in the oil market and the better Middle Eastern atmosphere to establish full diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992 without facing too much Arab furor. Similarly, other Asian states, such as Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam, renewed their diplomatic ties with Jerusalem in that period. The upgrading of relations with Israel was therefore part of a larger post-Cold War international phenomenon, characterized by the desire to normalize relations with an important emerging international actor, and was intended to both tap advanced Israeli technologies and its influence in Washington.

There also exists a high level of friendship for Israel and the Jewish people with the two most populous and dynamic states on the world scene: India and China, rising powers in every sense of the word. Both

The two most populous and dynamic states on the world scene, India and China, show friendship

are old civilizations that have not been by burdened by anti-Semitic baggage like Europe. They treat the Jewish State with reverence as they see in it a similar old civilization that reached remarkable achievements. Israel was successful in forging a strategic partnership with India.¹⁴ Most Asian states, even if they vote against Israel in international forums, have a similar attitude.

Similarly, countries on the Pacific Rim, the emerging focal point for international action, are usually pro-Israeli. South Korea and Australia are prime examples. Sub-Saharan African countries also contain very pro-Israeli circles for a variety of reasons. Some of them fear radical

Islam and all welcome Israeli expertise in the area of agriculture, medical services, and communications.

Significantly, relations with the Muslim world have improved. Israel has peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan, as well as informal dealings

Relations with the Muslim world have improved

with several Arab states in the Gulf and in the Maghreb. Most of the Arab world still adheres to the 2002 Arab League Peace Initiative. While this peace plan is not reasonable from an Israeli perspective, the Arabs are talking peace, not war. This implies a de facto recognition of Israel, which would be a historic change in their positions. Israel conducts extensive, if quiet, trade relations with a number of Arab states,¹⁵ and the Arab economic boycott

The Iranian nuclear threat puts Sunni Arab states' differences with Israel on the Palestinian issue on the back burner

has lost much of its impact. The Iranian nuclear threat puts Sunni Arab states' differences with Israel on the Palestinian issue on the back burner, while the recent regional upheavals have kept the Arab regimes preoccupied with their domestic affairs, with the same effect.

Israel has also established cordial and fruitful relations with Muslim states that emerged from the dissolution of the Soviet empire in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Israeli presence is felt in states such as Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. The Muslim identity of their populations does not hinder relations with Jerusalem in areas important to their national interests. Their sensitivity to the imagined or real misfortunes of the Palestinians is very low.

The rise of Islamists in the Muslim world is problematic for Israel, as they usually view the Jewish state as a religious aberration. The 1979

The "cold peace" with Egypt might become even cooler

Islamic revolution in Iran turned the country into an archenemy of Israel. Turkey's fall under the spell of the Islamist AKP since 2002 has generated an anti-Israeli change as well. The growing Hamas influence in Palestinian politics is not enhancing the already slim chances of reaching the coveted historical compromise with the Palestinian national movement. Indeed,

the greater political clout by Islamists in the Arab world as a result of the recent upheavals, particularly in Egypt, jeopardizes the historic regional peace process, which constituted an acceptance, however reluctant, of Israel as a *fait accompli* in the region. The “cold peace” with Egypt might become even cooler, but the initial behavior of the Cairo Islamists has revealed some caution on their part. The need for economic support from the US may have a moderating effect, although religious zeal may in the final account trump rational considerations. The Islamist surge may also quietly improve the perceptions of Israel by still moderate states.

It must be emphasized that ties with the most important country of the world, the US, have greatly improved since 1973, and that increasingly institutionalized strategic relationship is still very strong, despite the misguided Mid-Eastern policies of the Obama administration. The US

Ties with the most important country of the world, the US, have greatly improved since 1973

will continue to be the leading global power for some time to come,¹⁶ which is good for its small ally Israel. It is noteworthy that the level of the American public support for Israel has remained remarkably stable for the past four decades, at around 65 percent.¹⁷ This also translates, of course, into congressional support. Israel is still popular in the US primarily because of how it is perceived and not because of any Jewish lobby. Even its use of force, which is criticized in many parts of the world, is well accepted as seen similar to the American way of war.¹⁸ We have seen even President Barack Obama bow to this popular sentiment and adopt a friendlier posture toward the Netanyahu government even before the 2012 re-election campaign. Moreover, during his presidency the strategic cooperation intensified and became closer. The events of the “Arab Spring” strengthened Israel’s status as a stable and reliable ally in a region fraught with uncertainty.

Yet, there is a clear danger that part of the international discourse demonizing Israel has entered mainstream America. Jimmy Carter, a former US President, has loosely used the word “apartheid” when referring to Israel,¹⁹ while professors at elite American universities questioned Israel democratic credentials.²⁰ While Israel seems to be more criticized on American campuses than in the past, an October 2012 study showed that 97 percent of US and Canadian college campuses report no

anti-Israel or anti-Semitic events, proving that the BDS movement has failed there. No major American university has divested from Israel; in fact, in almost every college that held a vote on divestment, the pro-Israel camp was successful.²¹

European governments have supported Israel's right for self-defense

“Old” Europe’s relationship to Israel is an entirely different matter. Since the end of the Cold War, it has a naïve strategic culture, with no threat perception and where the use of force is seen as anachronistic. This makes Israel a difficult case to swallow. Israel’s intermittent use of force to achieve a modicum of deterrence and quiet along its borders attracts criticism. Nevertheless, European governments have supported Israel’s right for self-defense as long as its exercise does not cause large collateral damage.

European guilt over its colonialist past facilitates the acceptance of the Palestinian narrative that the Palestinians are victims of colonialist-imperialist schemes. Furthermore, Israel, an American ally, is disliked due to widespread anti-American sentiments in western European elites. All this is reinforced by latent traditional anti-Semitism that singles out the Jews as responsible for the problems of the world.²² More than any time in recent history, European Jews feel harassed and physically threatened. In several European states Jews are afraid to wear religious symbols. Belgium, Ireland, Norway, and Sweden, in particular, display anti-Israeli positions bordering on anti-Semitism. Fortunately none are core European states.

European universities have become unpleasant places for Israelis and Jews

Some European universities have become unpleasant places for Israelis (and Jews) and a large portion of the European intelligentsia is intuitively anti-Israeli and even denies Israel’s right to exist. It is also true that much of the elite European media is hysterically biased against Israel and has helped shape negative perceptions of Israel and Israelis.²³

At the same time France, Germany, and Italy, the EU’s power centers, have been ruled in recent years by leaders (Nicolas Sarkozy, Angela

Merkel, and Silvio Berlusconi, respectively) who have a soft spot for Israel. The bilateral relations of these states with Israel are flourishing. In 2011 the EU was Israel's largest trading partner, with annual trade amounting to 29.4 billion euros – an increase of 45 percent from 2009 – and this came during the midst of an unprecedented financial crisis in Europe.

The EU itself decided to upgrade its relationship with Israel in September 2008

2012 the European Parliament ratified the ACAA agreement (Agreement on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of Industrial Products) that recognizes Israel's industrial standards as equivalent to those in Europe, especially in healthcare. This will facilitate imports of high-quality, low-cost Israeli products into the EU.

Significantly, the EU itself decided to upgrade its relationship with Israel in September 2008. In July 2012 the EU and Israel signed a memorandum of understanding to deepen their scientific cooperation in the fields of energy and water desalination. In October

A few Europeans even view Israel's struggle as a vanguard of their own beleaguered Western civilization.

growing fears of Muslim immigration in the Old Continent provide an important corrective on the prism toward Israel.

Influential pockets of strong pro-Israeli sentiment are still present in all western European states. A few Europeans even view Israel's struggle as a vanguard of their own beleaguered Western civilization, threatened by moral relativism and Islamic fanaticism.²⁴ The

Another factor working in Israel's favor is the expansion of the European Union. "New" Europe, the eastern European states, is very different from its western counterpart. Its strategic culture is still dominated by a historic threat perception of Russia and as result is more understanding of the dilemmas associated with the necessary use of force by Israel. The Czech Republic stands out as one of Israel's best European friends, as does Poland.

Generally, most states are not ready to have their relations with Jerusalem hostage to the vicissitudes of the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue. One can

also detect the beginning of weariness with the Arab-Israeli conflict and an attitude embedded in “a plague on both your houses.” Some even begin to realize that the Palestinians have a vest interest in not ending the conflict and propagating the victim image as a means for continued financial support from gullible Western donors.²⁵

ISRAEL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

Most international forums remain rabidly anti-Israeli and Israel continues to be singled out as the culprit for a variety of “sins.” For example, among the resolutions adopted by UN General Assembly 67th session (2012) that criticize states, 21 focus on Israel, while only four resolutions issue criticism of other states.²⁶

Most international forums remain rabidly anti-Israeli

But since no real change has taken place in the anti-Israeli atmosphere in the past decades, it is difficult to conclude that the Jewish state’s position has worsened in such international organizations.

Nevertheless, Israeli diplomats feel that the UN has become less hostile and is therefore an arena where Israel has greater leeway than before.²⁷ Attempts to eject Israel from the UN during the 1970s and 1980s ceased in the post-Cold War era. It is worth mentioning that in December 1991 the UN rescinded the 1975 UN General Assembly resolution condemning Zionism as racism. Israeli diplomacy adopted an exit strategy for the 2006

In December 1991 the UN rescinded the resolution condemning Zionism as racism

Lebanese war that envisioned a UN Security Council resolution and a UN peacekeeping force in south Lebanon. Although a faulty strategic choice, it reflected to some extent a new Israeli evaluation of the morally bankrupt UN institution.

Prior to May 2000, Israel was the only UN member state excluded from a UN regional grouping. Consequently, it could not sit on any UN body where membership in a regional group was required, and could not be elected to leadership positions on most UN bodies. However, as a result of intense efforts, Israel became a temporary member of the Western

European and Others States Group (WEOG) in May 2000. Israel's admission to WEOG marked a step toward its full integration into the UN system. For whatever it is worth, in recent years Israel has become more intensively involved in the work of UN agencies. It even promoted UN General Assembly resolutions over the past few years and hosted UN sponsored conferences. Israel's international aid agency, Mashav, is supported by the UN and other international agencies. The Korean diplomat Ban Ki-moon, the UN Secretary General since 2007, is seen in Israel as more sensitive to Israel's diplomatic predicament than his predecessors.

In May 2010, Israel was also admitted to the exclusive club of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which brings together the 33 most developed countries in the world that are committed to democracy and the market economy. Despite intensive lobbying by the Palestinians to prevent admission of Israel, even not friendly countries like Turkey, Norway, Spain, and Ireland voted in favor. Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu emphasized that, beyond the considerable economic significance of Israel's admission, the move was diplomatically important because it showed that regardless of the political process, Israel had a "place among the nations due to its economic and technological prowess."²⁸

Similarly, Israel has become an associate member of the prestigious European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) in September 2011. Israeli Ambassador to the UN in Geneva, Aharon Leshno-Yaar, who signed the agreement, said that "The agreement is testimony to

Membership in CERN was an additional building block in Israel's involvement in scientific projects in Europe

Europe's recognition of Israel's scientific and technological capabilities, of the quality of its scientists, and of its contribution throughout many years to the research activities of CERN."²⁹

Membership in CERN was an additional building block in Israel's involvement in scientific projects in Europe. Here too Israel's enhanced position is based again on European perceptions of its own self-interest rather than ideological alignment.

Similarly, we have seen greater cooperation between NATO, the Western military alliance, and Israel during the last decade. Israel

participated in seminars, workshops and exercises held by NATO. This happens primarily because what Israel has to offer to NATO. Generally, military establishments all over the world display keen interest in interacting with the IDF, a highly sophisticated military machine. For NATO's southern flank, the eastern Mediterranean is a theater where Israel's military input is indispensable. A NATO official admitted that his organization has many common interests with Jerusalem, pointing out to the country's expertise in counterterrorism, cyber security, missile defense and more. Indeed, despite Turkish objections NATO included Israel in its planned activities for 2013.³⁰

We have seen greater cooperation between NATO and Israel

THE DURBAN STRATEGY AND LAWFARE AGAINST ISRAEL

Nevertheless, the Palestinians and their political allies have been successful in maintaining a de-legitimization campaign against Israel, particularly since the UN-sponsored World Conference against Racism that took place in September 2001 in Durban South Africa. The Durban conference crystallized the "Red-Green" alliance between radical leftist and Islamist groups that share tremendous hostility toward Israel. This alliance is the spearhead of de-legitimizing Israel as "an apartheid regime" through international isolation. This approach, dubbed the Durban strategy, made use of a myriad of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), which generally use the rhetoric of human rights, humanitarian relief, and international law. The disproportionate emphasis placed by the NGOs on the Israeli-Palestinian arena, and specifically their numerous condemnations of Israel, has been central in the disproportionate attention of the media to alleged Israeli misconduct.³¹ While certainly effective in often creating an anti-Israeli atmosphere, the Durban strategy has had only very limited success to impose official sanctions via boycott and divestment campaigns. More recent efforts to have goods manufactured in Israeli communities in the West Bank either specially labeled or banned have gained greater force.

The Durban conference crystallized the "Red-Green" alliance

Obviously, normative considerations are not prominent for the dictatorships that condemn automatically Israel's "violations" of human rights in international fora. The UN Committee for Human Rights is excelling in its virulent anti-Israeli behavior. The Goldstone Report is a typical product of the de-legitimization campaign by the worst human rights violators on earth.

Israel seems also to have weathered the BDS campaign initiated by the Palestinians in July 2005. They organized a global movement for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel. This campaign met only limited success. A number of artists have refused to exhibit or play in

The BDS campaign is an irritant for Israel, but failed in making a real impact on Israel's flourishing economy

Israel. When Israeli musical groups travel abroad, they meet hostility, demonstrations, and aggressive efforts to cancel their performances. Economic boycott campaigns urge companies to stop doing business with Israel. Boycott activists typically call, write, and picket corporate offices and stores with anti-Israel slogans, such as those accusing companies of aiding "Israeli baby killers." Some Belgian, Basque, and Norwegian trade unions approved the boycotting of Israel and divesting their pension funds from Israeli firms or from companies that do business with Israel. The Presbyterian Church in the US debated resolutions to divest from companies doing business with Israel. Divestment activists also lobby other churches. So far, the BDS campaign is an irritant for Israel, but failed in making a real impact on Israel's flourishing economy or cultural life.

Another growing and real problem for Israel is the phenomenon of "lawfare." Anti-Israeli groups exploit the legal system of Western states to criminalize Israel, Israeli government officials, and senior IDF officers in these states and in international forums through "universal jurisdiction" statutes and local lawsuits alleging human rights abuses and "war crimes."³² Several states have been sensitized to this issue and have taken legislative actions to remediate the situation. This is particularly true of states operating military forces beyond their borders, such as the US, UK, or France that could face similar challenges.³³ Others, such as Spain, have not.

Israel international fortunes are linked to American international status Isolation in the international community is more often than not connected to the international power configuration. To a large extent Israel international fortunes are linked to American international status. Indeed, the growing weakness of the US, particularly since the advent of President Obama, has exposed its small ally Israel to somewhat harder times. For example, Israel was excluded from the Global Counterterrorism Forum in the summer of 2012. Reports suggest that the Obama administration again acquiesced in Israel's exclusion at the behest of Turkey and Arab members of the Forum.³⁴ America's diminishing clout has not even been able to overcome Turkish objections to Israeli participation in NATO exercises.

WHY IS THERE AN ISOLATION DISCOURSE IN ISRAEL?

Obviously Israel is not a normal country in terms of its international relations. Moreover, Jews are historically conditioned to sense isolation and de-legitimization: Already in the Bible, the prophet Bilam called the Jewish nation "a people that dwells alone." The Jewish prism on international relations could amplify the sense of isolation, although Israelis seem to have developed certain immunity to UN hostility and negative media coverage.

Although the Arab-Israeli conflict has gradually become less central to regional and global dynamics it still carries weight that interferes with Israel's quest for equality and recognition in the world community. This

Israelis are bewildered by the world's tolerance toward a genocidal Iranian discourse

generates a certain measure of isolation which the Jewish state has been successful in overcoming in its way to becoming a strong and prosperous nation.

Nevertheless, the sense of normalcy and becoming a nation just like the others, which has been the Zionist dream, has been denied to the Israelis. Many circles in the Arab and Muslim world, as well as radical leftist groups in the West still question Israel's legitimacy. And they are not bashful

about eliminating the Jewish state. Isolation discourse, and, as noted above, concrete efforts to isolate Israel internationally, are real and deeply troubling, even if the evidence shows they have been progressively less successful since the 1970s.

The confrontation between Israel and Iran also strengthens feelings of insecurity and isolation. Many Israelis are bewildered by the world's tolerance toward a genocidal Iranian discourse. After all, with the exception of Canada that severed relations with Iran,³⁵ the international community is reacting slowly primarily to the Iranian nuclear progress, usually ignoring the threats by Iranian officials to erase Israel from the map.

Israeli concerns are reinforced by Jews in the Diaspora who display political awareness and care about Israel's image. A poll among Diaspora Jews would probably reveal acute feeling of isolation since as a minority

Israeli radicals provide much of the ammunition for the de-legitimization campaign

they are more sensitive to anti-Semitic and anti-Israel attitudes. Taking into consideration the many examples of the negative media coverage of Israel, such

feelings in the Diaspora are understandable. Many Jewish organizations in the Diaspora and Israel's non-Jewish friends therefore give priority to battling the BDS campaign.

An important voice among the calls to boycott Israel is the radical left within the Jewish state. The radicals provide much of the ammunition for the de-legitimization campaign by their arguments and deeds. They carry greater weight in the attempts to isolate Israel than other nationals.

Another important voice in the isolation discourse is the Israeli left that is sensitive to the isolation discourse. It argues vocally that the continuation of the conflict with the Palestinians and Israel's settlement policies exact a heavy price on Israel because it is becoming an isolated and less legitimate political entity. These leftists are influenced primarily by their reference groups, the Western left and its radical offshoots. Ascribing exaggerated importance to the Palestinian issue and to Israel's isolation, they advocate an urgent deal with the Palestinians, even at a heavy Israeli price.

Moreover, parts of the Israeli (and American Jewish) left, are increasingly frustrated by the fact that the Israeli electorate prefers parties to their right. Indeed, since 1977 the Israeli left ruled alone only for a short period of time. Therefore, some of them see no alternative but outside intervention to impose a solution to the conflict aimed at “saving Israel from herself.” This requires denigrating the flourishing Israeli democracy, which adds ammunition to Israel’s detractors.

CONCLUSION

The Zionist revolution and the expectations of the emergence of a “New Jew” and a “normal” nation generated the belief that Jews could be treated like anybody else. Yet Israel, the Jewish state, is on many occasions still singled out for a variety of reasons that have nothing to do with what the Jews are doing.

Realpolitik considerations dictate good relations with Israel

However, the obsessive anti-Israel behavior of international organizations and opinion makers is not the only element in Israel’s interactions with the world. A closer look at Israel’s interaction with countries near and far, as well as with international institutions, belies the claim that it is isolated. In fact, Israel is increasingly acknowledged as a world player in view of its social, economic, technological, financial, and diplomatic achievements over the past sixty-five years. Continued high Jewish fertility rates, immense new energy reserves, innovative water technologies, and a frenetic pace of cultural production are all prominent features of modern Israel. There are significant parts of the world that appreciate what Israel is doing and try to emulate its successes. Israel’s struggles against its implacable opponents also touch many responsive chords around the world. Moreover, even its use of force is largely accepted as legitimate in the West as exemplified by the support lent to Israel during the October 2012 “Pillar of Defense” operation in Gaza against the Hamas.

But the bottom line is that realpolitik considerations dictate good relations with the Jewish state in many parts of the globe. As long as Israel is an

American ally and the US plays a crucial role in world politics, the effects of isolation can be cushioned. So far Israel has weathered many challenges despite attempts to isolate it. As has been shown here, its international status has improved over the years. But its struggle to gain legitimacy is not over, and it may never end, as long as there are people that adhere to extremist ideologies, be they secular or religious.

Israel is a small state with only limited influence over shaping its international status. International isolation could be dangerous as it undermines relations with Western powers and the US in particular. Israel's foreign policy should therefore aim to nurture good relations with the US, the leading global power for some time to come.

At the same time, Jerusalem should not give up the quest for capturing the moral high-ground – a difficult task in world where hypocrisy is widespread and political correctness inhibits telling the truth. Israel must continue telling its story even when faced with great hostility from numerous quarters. While there is no assurance of winning in the high ground in the moral battlefield, an active public diplomacy couched in a normative language is required. In recent years, Israel neglected the normative discourse in its public diplomacy, trying to market itself only as being a nice place. Israel might be able even to find allies to discredit the UN, the world bastion of duplicity. Majorities are not always right. The memory of Jews advocating the belief in one God when most of the world practiced idolatry is useful in rejecting the tyranny of UN automatic majorities.

In any case, Israel should not base its foreign policy on expectations for rosy scenarios, but rather on realistic assumptions. The current upheaval in the Arab world clearly indicates the need for Israeli alertness to meet surprises and worst-case scenarios. In the past, the Jewish people twice lost their state (during the First and Second Temple eras) because its political leadership failed to read correctly the international power configuration and overestimated the power of the Jewish state to withstand pressure. Prudence, the virtue of the realist outlook on international affairs, should therefore guide Israel.

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