



Israel's National Diplomatic System: a Blueprint for Reform

Asher Fredman



Av 5780 – August 2020
Policy Paper no. 63

Asher Fredman

Asher Fredman served from 2010-2019 in Israeli government positions related to international affairs and public diplomacy, including as Chief of Staff to the Minister of Strategic Affairs, as Senior Coordinator for International Affairs in the Strategic Affairs Ministry, and in the Prime Minister's Office National Information Directorate. Originally from New York, he completed his B.A. and M.A. at Harvard University in Government and Middle Eastern Studies. Today, he serves as a Fellow at the Kohelet Policy Forum, as well as a strategy and communications consultant to Israeli policy-makers.



Israel's National Diplomatic System: a Blueprint for Reform

Asher Fredman



Av 5780 – August 2020
Policy Paper no. 63

**Israel's National Diplomatic System:
a Blueprint for Reform**
Asher Fredman

Printed in Israel, August 2020

ISBN 978-965-7674-78-9



Table of Contents

Abstract.....	3
Introduction.....	5
Methodology and Sources.....	9
Global Developments Affecting Foreign Ministries World-Wide	11
What is the Israeli National Diplomatic System?.....	17
The MFA's Role in the National Diplomatic System	21
The Current Situation and Status of the MFA	23
The Current Israeli Discourse on the Conduct of Foreign Affairs	31
Detailed Recommendations.....	35
1. Redefine the MFA's Role.....	35
2. Determine Strategic Priorities Through an Inter-agency Process Led by the NSC.....	37
3. Increase Budgets for Diplomatic Activity by Significantly Reducing Administrative Costs.....	40
4. Examine Replacing Traditional Embassies with Alternatives	49
5. Adopt Professional Evaluation Methods and Work Plans to Measure Performance	52
6. Encourage a More Pro-active Internal Culture	55
7. Combat Media Leaks	58

8. Reform the MFA Public Diplomacy Directorate.....	61
a. Place Public Diplomacy on Equal Footing with Traditional Bilateral Diplomacy.....	61
b. Expand Hiring of Strategic Communications, Social Media, and Public Relations Specialists.....	61
c. Increase Emphasis on People-to-People (P2P) Diplomacy	62
d. Create Dedicated Global Networker Positions.....	62
e. Establish a Government Information Hub.....	63
9. Create a National Strategic Communications Forum.....	64
10. Prepare Public Diplomacy Envelope for Legislation and Government Decisions.....	67
11. Work in True Partnership with the Global Pro-Israel Community.....	69
12. Strengthen the Foreign Relations Departments of Relevant Ministries	72
13. Improve Economic Diplomacy by Enhancing Inter-agency Cooperation.....	73
14. Counter BDS by Facilitating and Empowering the Pro-Israel Network.....	78
15. Update Recruitment and Career Models	81
16. Enable the Foreign Minister to Make Political Appointments to the MFA HQ.....	85
Conclusion	87



Abstract

This study analyzes the State of Israel's national system for conducting foreign relations, in light of far-reaching changes in the diplomatic arena. The analysis demonstrates the necessity for wide-ranging reforms in the structure, operations and organizational culture of the governmental bodies that make up Israel's "National Diplomatic System" (NDS), including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A series of concrete recommendations for improving Israel's international relations activity is presented, with the goal of enhancing Israel's ability to advance its international interests, security and standing.

The key recommendations are as follows:

1. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) should change the way it conceives of its role, from one of gatekeeper to one of coordinator, facilitator, and integrator.
2. Israel's priorities in the international arena should be determined through an inter-agency process led by the National Security Council, rather than by the MFA, a committee of ministry directors-general, or by Finance Ministry accountants.
3. The MFA should reduce its hard costs by reducing its bloated and inefficient administrative staff, and rectifying years of human resources mismanagement. Money saved should be redirected towards the MFA's diplomatic activities.
4. The MFA should reduce hard costs and increase its activities budget by replacing, in certain cases, traditional embassies with alternative models for diplomatic representation.
5. The MFA should draft and publish professional work plans with clear goals and key performance indicators (KPIs), and adopt professional evaluation methods to measure performance. These evaluation methods should be developed by an external body with relevant expertise.
6. The MFA should change its internal culture to become less risk-adverse and less focused on maintaining quiet on the bilateral political front. It should provide greater institutional encouragement for taking initiative and out-of-the-box approaches.
7. The MFA should combat the pervasive phenomenon of leaks to the media, which undermines its ability to carry out its roles in several ways.

8. Public Diplomacy — The MFA's Public Diplomacy Directorate and activities should undergo wide-ranging reforms:
 - a. Public diplomacy should be placed on an equal, if not higher footing, than traditional political/bilateral diplomacy, in terms of resources allocated and institutional prestige.
 - b. The Public Diplomacy Directorate should include a greater number of professionals and specialists with experience in fields such as strategic communications, public relations, and social media (as opposed to career diplomats).
 - c. The Israeli Government in general, and the MFA in particular, should greatly expand its emphasis on facilitating People-to-People (P2P) connections (rather than on classic public diplomacy involving government efforts to communicate with foreign publics.)
 - d. Dedicated “Global Networker” positions responsible for facilitating P2P ties in diverse realms should be established.
 - e. Dedicated Government Information Hub positions should be established, responsible for identifying, packaging and disseminating relevant information from throughout the government and security apparatuses.
9. Israel should establish a National Strategic Communications Forum to oversee, coordinate and synergize Israel's strategic communications efforts on both the open and covert levels.
10. The PMO National Information Directorate should be given responsibility for creating a public diplomacy “envelope” for the roll-out of potentially controversial legislation and government decisions.
11. In working with the global pro-Israel community, the NDS in general, and the MFA in particular, should adopt an approach based on partnership, mutual respect and a network model of cooperation.
12. The foreign relations departments of ministries that are part of the National Diplomatic System should be strengthened.
13. Israel should greatly enhance its economic diplomacy. Among the steps that should be taken is the creation of a shared pool of officials with international economic expertise, who can move easily between relevant positions throughout the NDS.
14. The ministry responsible for the fight against BDS should be one oriented towards carrying out several roles, including convening government-wide and international consultations, empowering the pro-Israel network, and executing a broad range of public and sensitive activities.
15. The MFA's career models and conceptual approach to recruiting should be updated, in order both to adapt to the career patterns of millennials, and to recruit experts with valuable experience.
16. The 11 MFA appointments made by the Foreign Minister (the “political appointments”), which are currently limited to positions of Heads of Mission (HOM), should be expanded to positions in the MFA HQ as well. The number of such appointments should be reexamined as well, with the overall goal of enhancing the degree to which the foreign service reflects the government's positions and priorities.



Introduction

Israel's national system for conducting foreign relations is in need of reform. An extensive public and political discourse has been taking place regarding the status and functioning of Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (henceforth: the MFA). However, this discourse has been highly problematic for several reasons.

Firstly, the discourse has centered largely on the question of how to strengthen the functioning of one particular ministry, the MFA, rather than on the broader question of how to strengthen Israel's ability to carry out its foreign relations in order to best achieve its national goals. The question should be not how to save a particular institutional arrangement, but how to advance the goals of strengthening Israel's national security, strength, and standing as a Jewish and democratic state.

Unfortunately, in the current discourse, a direct correlation between strengthening the MFA bureaucracy and improving Israel's foreign relations performance is assumed, but never proven.

Secondly, in terms of the factors affecting the performance of the MFA, the discourse has focused to a very large extent on two issues: The size of the MFA's budget, and the division of authority between the MFA and other ministries. While the lack of budget and resources is a challenge to the effective functioning of the MFA, it is only one piece of the puzzle. To put it clearly: there is no doubt that the MFA needs and deserves a larger budget. The current state of affairs does a disservice to the numerous Israeli diplomats who have contributed greatly to Israel's standing and security over their careers, and whose hands are now tied due to a lack of resources.

However, both the MFA and the wider Israeli National Diplomatic System (NDS) are in need of extensive reform and restructuring. The "National Diplomatic System" (NDS) is a term developed to describe the fact that a country's apparatus for the conduct of foreign affairs should no longer be thought of as being centered on one particular agency that specializes in the "foreign". It recognizes

Israel's national system for conducting foreign relations is in need of reform.

The question should be not how to save a particular institutional arrangement, but how to advance the goals of strengthening Israel's national security, strength, and standing.

The “National Diplomatic System” (NDS) is a term developed to describe the fact that a country’s apparatus for the conduct of foreign affairs should no longer be thought of as being centered on one particular agency.

The challenges facing the Israeli MFA are not unique, and foreign ministries in many other countries are facing similar challenges and calls for reform.

that the international affairs of most countries today are carried out by a complex system of agencies, of which the MFA is one. The NDS is the appropriate unit of study in seeking to understand a country’s international relations activity.

As Brian Hocking,¹ who developed the concept, explains:

[T]he enhanced complexity of governments’ international policy agendas has resulted in a growing involvement of agencies outside the MFA. Rather than assuming that one government department has a dominant role in managing foreign affairs, the concept of the national diplomatic system sees this as involving increasingly complex networks...²

The NDS as a whole is the proper object of study in analyzing Israel’s foreign relations apparatus, and in formulating suggestions as to how to improve it.³

Without comprehensive reforms in both the MFA and the wider Israeli NDS, simply enlarging the MFA’s budget will not lead to the desired outcome of improving Israel’s effectiveness in the international arena. Therefore, the discourse must go beyond the issues of the MFA’s budget and the division of responsibilities between ministries.

Thirdly, the Israeli discourse has, somewhat provincially, failed to take into account global trends and developments that are impacting diplomacy and foreign ministries around the world. The challenges facing the Israeli MFA are not unique, and foreign ministries in many other countries are facing similar challenges and calls for reform. Nevertheless, the Israeli discourse largely examines the Israeli case in isolation (or posits it as an outlier), and places the blame for alleged problems on local political and governmental actors.

1 Professor of International Relations at Loughborough University, United Kingdom and Senior Visiting Fellow at Clingendael - the Netherlands Institute of International Relations based in The Hague.

2 Brian Hocking et al, *Futures for diplomacy: Integrative Diplomacy in the 21st Century* (The Hague: Clingendael- the Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 2012), 53. https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/20121030_research_melissen.pdf
All links in this study were last accessed on June 14, 2020.

3 In Hebrew the phrase “foreign relations” (קשרי חוץ, קשׁיח) is more common (for example, the Foreign Relations Department of the Ministry of Agriculture or Public Security), while the term “diplomacy” is generally given a narrower meaning. Therefore, in the Israeli context, it would be more natural to discuss the “National Foreign Relations System”. Nevertheless, given its acceptance in the academic literature, I adopt the term “National Diplomatic System” (NDS) in this study.

The danger of a myopic discourse is not unique to the Israeli context. As noted in a report commissioned by the Finnish Foreign Ministry:

Too often, internal debates within the MFAs regarding their organizational forms and procedures are about their place in the structures of government and their organizational survival within them and fail to address broader issues relating to the changing purposes of diplomacy.⁴

An important development in the Israeli discourse took place in May 2020, with the publication of the Israeli State Comptroller Report entitled *The Israeli Diplomatic Representation System and the Foreign Ministry's Budget Crisis*⁵ (henceforth: *May 2020 Comptroller Report*). While this report too focuses extensively on the MFA's budget, and many of its recommendations are primarily technical or bureaucratic, it nevertheless represents the first in-depth Israeli report to recognize that the increase in government bodies involved in foreign affairs is both a natural outcome of changes in the international arena, and a development with positive potential.

The *May 2020 Comptroller Report* concludes with the recommendation that “the Government of Israel and its affiliated bodies should examine an overarching reform of the Israeli foreign relations system, with the goal of advancing the system and ensuring Israel's strength and international standing.”⁶ The following sections of this study will provide concrete recommendations and guidelines for carrying out just such an overarching reform.

This study takes as its starting point the goal of improving the ability of Israel's NDS to advance Israel's priorities in the international arena, rather than the goal of strengthening a particular ministry. It proposes a series of reforms to Israel's NDS in general, and MFA in particular, in order to further this goal. While the reforms proposed are interrelated, most of them can be implemented in a modular fashion.

4 Hocking et al., *Futures for diplomacy*, 9.

5 Israel State Comptroller, “MFA: The Israeli Diplomatic Representation System and the Foreign Ministry's Budget Crisis,” in *Israel State Comptroller Annual Report 70b*, (Jerusalem: May 2020), 953-1056. <https://www.mevaker.gov.il/sites/DigitalLibrary/Pages/Reports/3285-14.aspx>. “Diplomatic Representation System” is the phrase used in the English summary of the entire *May 2020 Comptroller Report*. See <https://www.mevaker.gov.il/sites/DigitalLibrary/Documents/2020/70b/2020-70b-C-Intro-Mevaker-EN.pdf>. All other translations from the report are the author's.

6 *May 2020 Comptroller Report*, 1056.

Carrying out such reforms is urgent given global developments. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic has created both new challenges and new opportunities for Israel in the international arena.

Enacting such reforms will not be easy for several reasons. The first is the general difficulty of carrying out reforms in Israel's public sector, due to constraints such as entrenched bureaucracies, overly-powerful unions, and negative incentives for improving efficiency and productivity.

Secondly, reforming Israel's foreign relations apparatus will be particularly difficult, as it will require a redistribution of authorities and resources among government ministries. Implementing such reforms will require leadership on the part of a prime minister committed to restructuring Israel's system for conducting foreign relations, and a foreign minister willing to delve into the granular details of the ministry's functioning. The process of designing an updated model of Israel's NDS will likely have to be carried out by the National Security Council (NSC),⁷ acting under direct instructions from the prime minister.

Additionally, significant elements of the problem lie in the realm of organizational culture, particularly within the MFA. Reforming a ministry's organizational culture requires persistent and sustained effort from both the political and professional leadership.

Nevertheless, carrying out such reforms is urgent given global developments. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic has created both new challenges and new opportunities for Israel in the international arena. On the one hand, a global economic downturn and disruptions affecting Israel's start-up ecosystem may harm several of Israel's key soft power assets. At the same time, the pandemic may offer Israel opportunities to build new frameworks for cooperation,⁸ strengthen ties by providing aid, and position itself as a central player in helping the world overcome the effects of the disease. Minimizing the harm from these challenges and making the most of these opportunities will require Israel's NDS to improve its performance and operate in a synergistic, effective and efficient manner.

7 Technically, the "National Security Staff".

8 For example, the May 2020 initiative led by Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz to restart tourism and trade ties between seven countries — including EU members — who have been relatively successful in containing the coronavirus. See Bojan Pancevski "Countries That Kept a Lid on Coronavirus Look to Each Other to Revive Their Economies," *Wall Street Journal*, May 2, 2020. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/countries-that-kept-a-lid-on-coronavirus-look-to-each-other-to-revive-their-economies-11588424855>



Methodology and Sources

The analysis and recommendations in this study are based on numerous sources. These include extensive interviews with those involved in the formulation of foreign policy, and the conduct of diverse forms of diplomacy, including bilateral, economic, and public diplomacy. Interviews were conducted with former and current high and mid-ranking officials from numerous bodies involved in the conduct of Israel's foreign relations.

Additional interviews were conducted with actors from outside the governmental system who play key roles in Israel's diplomatic efforts. These include civil society bodies involved in Israel's economic diplomacy, and pro-Israel organizations involved in a range of public diplomacy activities. Interviews were conducted with foreign diplomats stationed in Israel as well.

An extensive review both of the academic literature and the publications of relevant foreign ministries was conducted. It should be noted that there are relatively few recent academic studies related to the functioning of the Israeli MFA.⁹

The recommendations in this study are also based on the author's more than ten years of experience working within the Israeli NDS, as part of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), Ministry of Strategic Affairs (MSA), and several Israeli think-tanks focused on the international arena. Some of the assertions made in the study are based on the author's personal experience or developments which he personally observed. In some cases, details of specific instances are given, while in others, the cases are described in more general terms due to sensitivities.

⁹ The reports produced by Mitvim - The Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies, and the April 2019 study by the IDC Herzliya Abba Eban Institute for International Diplomacy entitled "A Change in Conception for the Israeli Foreign Service" are notable exceptions. For the Mitvim Institute reports, see <https://www.mitvim.org.il/he/>. For the Abba Eban Institute report, see <https://www.foreignservice.org.il/>

It should be noted that most previous studies containing recommendations regarding the Israeli MFA were based largely on insights from current and former MFA officials and think-tank researchers. These are of course highly-relevant sources, but they are not sufficient. For example, actors involved in directing Israel's foreign relations and public diplomacy from within the PMO were generally not interviewed for these reports. This has frequently led to a bias in terms of the nature of the recommendations.¹⁰ The unclassified Knesset Committee hearings and legislative proposals related to the MFA have also largely adopted the discourse focused on the status of the MFA bureaucracy, rather than on the broader reforms needed to enhance the conduct of Israel's foreign relations.

¹⁰ For example, if a research institute wishes to point to an alleged over-concentration of decision-making in the Prime Minister's Office as one of the ills afflicting Israel's diplomacy, it is crucial to understand the perspective of those making the decisions around and under the Prime Minister.



Global Developments Affecting Foreign Ministries World-Wide

The 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, to which Israel is a party, defines the role of a diplomatic mission as:

- a. Representing the sending State in the receiving State;
- b. Protecting in the receiving State the interests of the sending State and of its nationals;
- c. Negotiating with the Government of the receiving State;
- d. Ascertaining by all lawful means conditions and developments in the receiving State, and reporting thereon to the Government of the sending State;
- e. Promoting friendly relations between the sending State and the receiving State, and developing their economic, cultural and scientific relations.

In this conception, the diplomatic mission, and more generally, the foreign ministry, is the gatekeeper and central conduit in relations between states.

However, numerous developments, including the rapid advance of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), the increase in international travel, and the growing importance of civil society actors and transnational networks, have disrupted this conception.

Today, government officials are able to quickly connect with their counterparts in other countries. Smartphones and messaging services allow policy-makers, civil society actors and journalists in different countries to communicate with ease. 24-hours news services, social media, and the growth of NGO networks means that diplomatic cables are now the slowest means for transmitting information regarding international developments (although they still have value for other purposes).

As two former South African ambassadors asked in a recent article: Does an elaborate, costly, old-style diplomatic service still make sense?

As two former South African ambassadors asked in a recent article:

Does an elaborate, costly, old-style diplomatic service still make sense? The advancement of modern technology leaves one wondering about the functional relevance of some embedded diplomatic traditions, rites and practices.

Modern communications have revolutionized international relations and, with it, the way effective diplomacy is practiced. Resident diplomatic missions were established when long-distance communications were primitive, unreliable and expensive...The opposite is true today. Communications are instant, reliable and cheap.¹¹

Due to globalization and the growth in international travel and study, many more government officials are capable of conducting direct relations with other international actors. In the words of one ambassador stationed in Israel, who was interviewed for this study:

In the past, if a Ministry of Agriculture attaché from my [non-English speaking] country was sent to the US or Canada, he wouldn't have the tools to operate, he wouldn't know the language or how to form relationships. Today, it's likely that he has already spent time studying or living abroad, and he can operate independently.

Given the ease of international communications, politicians who see initiatives in the international arena as a way of increasing their domestic popularity (for example, by promoting the agenda of their voter base) are incentivized to be active in this arena.

The growing role of a broad range of domestic actors in the conduct of foreign affairs is not only due to ICT. It is also due to the increasing diversity and specialization of international relations. As international ties become more specialized and technical, it is natural that issue experts, rather than generalist diplomats, should be in direct contact.

As a result of these changes, a greater emphasis is being placed on the study of a country's National Diplomatic System rather than simply on its foreign affairs ministry. As Hocking et al. note:

The breakdown of the distinction between domestic and foreign policy has ended the foreign ministry's gatekeeper role and near monopoly of foreign

¹¹ Gerrit Olivier and Herbert Beukes, "Diplomats — who needs them?" *Mail & Guardian*, January 14, 2011. <https://mg.co.za/article/2011-01-14-diplomats-who-needs-them>

policy. Almost all government ministries now deal with international policy...the foreign policy of a country is no longer the product or responsibility of the foreign ministry alone, but of the National Diplomatic System of which the foreign ministry forms but a part.¹²

Similarly, in the report commissioned by the Finnish Foreign Ministry, Hocking et. al. explain:

[T]he national interests of a country now involve the 'whole of government' and therefore, the importance of coordination between government agencies. Foreign ministries should see themselves as part of this 'national diplomatic system' and consider their changing role in this light.¹³

Canada's former Ambassador to Israel, Deborah Lyons, expressed a similar sentiment:

[M]inistries of foreign affairs do not — and should not — hold a monopoly on international cooperation — both the private sector...civil society and various government departments have the means and the will to cooperate with others around the world in their respective fields of specialization. We need to accommodate this diffusion of cooperation and do what we can to facilitate partnerships and collaboration...even if this is at the expense of our role as gatekeepers to the outside world.¹⁴

As one ambassador of an economic superpower interviewed for this report noted: "Of course officials from different government bodies are going to be in touch with each other. We can't control it all or be in every meeting. In addition, the topics are often very technical. Our job is to make the match."

These global developments have led to a discourse on the need for restructuring foreign ministries and redefining their roles.

As Hocking et al. note: The breakdown of the distinction between domestic and foreign policy has ended the foreign ministry's gatekeeper role and near monopoly of foreign policy. Almost all government ministries now deal with international policy

As one ambassador of an economic superpower noted: "Of course officials from different government bodies are going to be in touch with each other. We can't control it all. Our job is to make the match."

12 Brian Hocking et al., *Whither Foreign Ministries in a Post-Western World?: Policy Brief No. 20* (The Hague: Clingendael - the Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 2013), 2. https://www.clingendael.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/20130425_policybrief20Whither%20Foreign%20Ministries%20in%20a%20Post-Western%20World.pdf

13 Hocking et al., *Futures for diplomacy*, 5.

14 Deborah Lyons, "Are Ministries of Foreign Affairs Passé?" *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2018): 153–154, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23739770.2018.1503455>

The UK parliamentary inquiry into the role of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) concluded that: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is not alone among foreign ministries in facing significant challenges to the way in which it has traditionally worked.

Moses and Knutsen note that while:

[M]ost states employ the same conceptual and organizational model of the foreign office...this institutional arrangement is both anachronistic and ineffective. Current institutional arrangements for the production and implementation of national foreign policies are relics of a time when national sovereignty was relatively, well-defined, where international interactions were mostly channeled through official and diplomatic networks...today new kinds of political actors, new types of communication, new international issues and issue areas... have come to exert pressure on this organization and conception model of the foreign office...¹⁵

Similarly, the UK parliamentary inquiry into the role of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) concluded that:

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office is not alone among foreign ministries in facing significant challenges to the way in which it has traditionally worked. Such challenges arise from changes in the nature of international government business and the international diplomatic, technological and political environment which are affecting foreign ministries throughout the developed world.¹⁶

As a result of these changes, foreign ministries around the world are facing reduced budgets, the closing of embassies, and a general sense of a loss of primacy in the foreign policy-making space. As noted by Oliver:

[T]he rise of digital communications, diminishing resources, and growing security threats all raise the question of whether the traditional embassy is still relevant.

15 It should be noted that while Moses and Knutsen's primary model was the Norwegian Foreign Ministry, their analysis corresponds to an even greater degree to the factors in Israel's operating environment. Jonathon W. Moses and Torbjorn Knutsen, "Inside out: Globalization and the Reorganization of Foreign Affairs Ministries," *Cooperation and Conflict*, Vol. 36, Issue. 4 (2001): 355-380. Reprinted with permission at https://peacepalace-library.nl/ebooks/files/Clingendael_20020500_cli_paper_dip_issue80.pdf

16 House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, *The Role of the FCO in UK Government: Seventh Report of Session 2010-12, Vol. 1*, (London: The Stationery Office Limited, 2011): 22. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmfaff/665/665.pdf>

More than half of the developed nations in the OECD have reduced their diplomatic footprint over the last decade...¹⁷

The 2016 *SAGE Handbook of Diplomacy* notes: “In most countries, foreign ministries are confronting budget cuts and manpower reductions.”¹⁸ A 2016 study by the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs found that, “Most of the Member States of the European Union share the same worry as Finland: how to maintain an extensive network of missions in times of diminishing budgets...This question is topical in all European countries.”¹⁹

In fact, the question is topical not only for all European countries. Brazil has recently closed down eight diplomatic missions around the world. In Australia, the “combined budget for diplomacy and aid has contracted from A\$8.3 billion for the 2013–14 financial year (adjusted for inflation) to A\$6.7 billion for 2019–20”²⁰ — a 19% decrease.

- 17 Alex Oliver, “The Irrelevant Diplomat: Do We Need Embassies Anymore?” *Foreign Affairs*, March 14, 2016. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/world/2016-03-14/irrelevant-diplomat>
- 18 Kishan S. Rana, “Embassies, permanent missions and special missions,” in *The SAGE Handbook of Diplomacy*, eds. Costas M. Constantinou, Pauline Kerr, Paul Sharp (London, UK: SAGE Publications Ltd., 2016), 153.
- 19 Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, *Memo- Finland's Representation Abroad: Means and Models*, (Helsinki: Lönnberg Print & Promo, 2016): 25. https://um.fi/documents/35732/48132/memo_finlands_representation_abroad_means_and_models
- 20 Mitchell Vandewerdt-Holman, “The Fix: How to Rebuild Australia's Diplomatic Capacity,” *Australia Foreign Affairs*, No. 7, October 2019. <https://www.australianforeignaffairs.com/articles/the-fix/2019/10/the-fix-how-to-re-build-australias-diplomatic-capacity/mitchell-vandewerdt>





What is the Israeli National Diplomatic System?

The Israeli NDS is diverse and multi-faceted. It includes both bodies directly involved in conducting foreign relations, and those which play key roles in shaping policies and providing information that have a critical impact on diplomatic efforts. Given the continued central presence of security-related issues in Israel's foreign relations, these bodies include those that are part of Israel's security and intelligence communities.

Among the bodies that make up Israel's National Diplomatic System are:

- Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- National Security Council (NSC)
- PMO National Information Directorate
- Government Press Office
- Additional Advisers to the Prime Minister, such as his Adviser on Foreign Affairs,²¹ Foreign Media Adviser, and Adviser on World Communities.
- Ministry of Economy (particularly the Foreign Trade Administration)²²
- Ministry of Strategic Affairs
- Ministry of Diaspora Affairs
- Ministry of Tourism
- Ministry of Regional Cooperation
- Ministry of Finance

²¹ In many cases, the Prime Minister's Adviser on Foreign Affairs has been independent of other governmental bodies (for example, Ron Dermer and Jonathan Schachter under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu). In such cases, they constituted an independent and influential hub of foreign policy advising and decision-making.

²² https://www.gov.il/en/departments/Units/foreign_trade

- Ministry of Energy
- Ministry of Justice (for example, the Department for International Agreements and International Litigation²³)
- Ministry of Aliyah (Immigration) and Integration
- National Cyber Bureau
- Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Spokesperson's Unit
- Other IDF units, such as those responsible for inter-military cooperation and information sharing, and the International Law Department of the IDF Military Advocate General's Corps.
- Ministry of Defense Political-Military Bureau²⁴
- Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT)
- Mossad (Israel's external intelligence service)²⁵
- Israeli Security Agency (Shabak, Shin Bet)- Israel's domestic intelligence service, responsible for the Palestinian arena.²⁶

Additional relevant bodies include the Foreign Affairs Departments of the Ministries of Health,²⁷ Culture and Sport, Agriculture, Education, Public Security, Science and Technology, Intelligence, Labor, Environmental Protection, Transportation, Interior, Jerusalem and Heritage, Communications, and Social Equality, the Israeli Police Foreign Media Spokesperson, Nativ (PMO Liaison Bureau to Jews in former Eastern Bloc countries), Bank of Israel, Civil Aviation Authority, Israel Innovation Authority, Water Authority, Council for Higher Education and numerous other bodies.²⁸

23 <https://www.justice.gov.il/En/Units/HumanRightsAndForeignRelations/Pages/default.aspx>

24 https://english.mod.gov.il/About/Pages/Policy_& Political-Military_Bureau.aspx#:~:text=The%20Political%2DMilitary%20Bureau%20is,and%20executing%20strategic%20defense%20policy.&text=The%20Political%2DMilitary%20bureau%20leads,General%20and%20their%20global%20counterparts.

25 The Mossad has been playing an increasingly important role in managing and expanding Israel's ties with countries in the Arab and Muslim world with which Israel has no official diplomatic relations.

26 Given the significant role played by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Israel's foreign relations, the Israeli Security Agency is often a key player in terms of providing information and executing policies that have a major impact on Israel's international activity.

27 The key importance of the Foreign Affairs Division of the Health Ministry was highlighted during Israel's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

28 The State Comptroller estimated the total budget of Israel's NDS in 2019 at 3.2 billion NIS, and the total manpower at approximately 4,500 employees in Israel and abroad. The real number is probably higher, especially if one takes into account the employees and budgets of the units within Israel's security agencies that produce information which is of central importance to the country's activities in the international arena. See *May 2020 State Comptroller Report*, 956.

As a result of the changes in the international environment, all of the bodies in Israel's NDS are increasingly involved in international affairs. The politicians who head many of these bodies are also incentivized to carry out their own international initiatives.

In the words of one senior Israeli government official centrally involved in foreign policy, interviewed for this study: "Today, everyone is doing foreign relations- the private sector, government ministries, other official bodies such as the National Cyber Bureau." Another senior Israeli official told the author: "If I want to contact a foreign official, I can go online and do it more quickly and efficiently than if I tried to contact them through the embassy."

The growing diversification of Israel's NDS can be seen, for example, in Government Resolution 1585 from June 26, 2016 on *Strengthening Economic Ties and Cooperation with the Countries of the African Continent*.²⁹ The Resolution includes initiatives in numerous fields, and instructs various ministries to carry out activities in order to realize the goal of strengthening ties with Africa. These ministries include the Ministry of Economy, Prime Minister's Office, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Public Security, along with the MFA.

An additional unique aspect of the Israeli NDS is the extensive role played by the world-wide pro-Israel network, and Jewish and Zionist organizations. These organizations are active in advancing Israel's agenda and standing on the international stage. Such groups range from organizations with official quasi-governmental status, such as the Jewish Agency, to large international organizations such as the World Jewish Congress, to country-based representative organizations such as the Jewish Federations of North America and the UK Board of Deputies of British Jews, to a seemingly endless array of NGOs of all shapes and sizes involved in pro-Israel public diplomacy and international affairs.

In the words of one senior Israeli government official centrally involved in foreign policy, "Today, everyone is doing foreign relations- the private sector, government ministries, other official bodies such as the National Cyber Bureau."

²⁹ https://www.gov.il/he/departments/policies/2016_dec1585





The MFA's Role in the National Diplomatic System

Despite the changes in the international environment, which are leading foreign ministries everywhere to reexamine their operations, the Israeli MFA appears to be focused on fighting recurrent battles to maintain its gatekeeper role. Rather than aiming to serve as a coordinator, convener and facilitator, it seems that the MFA, and particularly the MFA headquarters in Jerusalem, is trying to maintain its position as sole executor of foreign relations and conduit to foreign actors.

The MFA continues to try to minimize the foreign affairs activity of other bodies in the NDS, *inter alia* by frequently refusing to cooperate with them or share information and contacts. This has led to a great deal of animosity and mutual suspicion between officials working on related issues, and often harms Israel's ability to respond to challenges in an optimal manner.

One example is the tension that repeatedly arises between the MFA and NSC, as well as between the MFA and the Mossad. As a senior MFA official declared in an October 2019 interview, "There is a very great tension between the senior bureaucrats in the MFA and the people of the NSC, because there is a feeling that they are entering niches that belong to us." The example which the MFA official points to in the interview is the establishment of open diplomatic ties with Chad and Oman. As noted in the same interview, it is not only the NSC which was involved in these successful diplomatic efforts, but the Mossad as well.³⁰

Another example of this lack of inter-ministerial cooperation was the government's response to the decision by the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) to create a "blacklist" (database) of companies allegedly contributing to Israeli settlements over the "Green Line". For the first several years after the March 2016 UNHRC vote

Despite the changes in the international environment, the Israeli MFA appears to be focused on fighting recurrent battles to maintain its gatekeeper role.

30 Noam Barkan and Amira Lam, "Misrad HaChutza," *Yedioth Ahronoth*, October 16, 2019. <https://www.yediot.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-5608570,00.html>.

on creating the blacklist, the MFA sought to prevent other relevant actors, such as the Ministry of Economy and Ministry of Strategic Affairs, from becoming involved in Israel's response, despite the clear overlap with their areas of responsibility. Only once it became clear to the MFA that it would not be successful in preventing the blacklist from eventually being published, did it begin to convene inter-ministerial meetings on dealing with the challenge and expected fall-out.

The MFA's approach has led to an inefficient use of resources, because the MFA is unhappy with their allocation. For example, while the MFA regularly states that it lacks funds for delegations, offers by the Strategic Affairs Ministry to fund such delegations (and to allow the MFA to play the leading role in determining their content) have been refused on principle.

This approach is unfortunate. Regardless of the justness of budget allocations between ministries, when the MFA refuses to cooperate on executing projects which it would support if funded from its own resources, it is the State of Israel which loses out.

There are some exceptions to this general approach of non-cooperation. For example, the MFA is willing to cooperate, for the most part, with the PMO National Information Directorate. Additionally, there tends to be discrepancies between the MFA HQ and individual embassies. Some ambassadors take the decision to cooperate with any government agency that can contribute to advancing their diplomatic goals, regardless of the instructions received from the HQ in Jerusalem regarding inter-ministry cooperation.³¹

31 In several cases, the MFA HQ specifically instructed embassies not to cooperate with the representatives of other government ministries.



The Current Situation and Status of the MFA

There is no doubt that the MFA has been facing a budget crisis. In September 2019, the Ministry of Finance (MoF) accountant who oversees the MFA's expenditures ordered a freeze on all activities, both in Israel and abroad. Following this directive, all requests for exceptions to the spending freeze were required to be approved by the MoF, essentially giving the MoF representative authority for determining the MFA's priorities and activity.

The MFA's budget was reduced from approximately 1.623 billion NIS in 2018 to 1.385 billion NIS in 2019. While between 2000-2012, the MFA's budget was frequently above, or close to, 0.6% of the national budget, in 2019 it fell to 0.29% of the national budget. According to the *May 2020 Comptroller Report*, while the MFA's hard costs in 2018 were 1.530 billion NIS, the MFA's available budget for covering such costs in 2019 stood at only 1.276 billion NIS, thereby all but guaranteeing that the MFA would face a budget gap.³²

Additionally, as part of the negotiations over the 2019 budget, the Finance Ministry committed to transferring an additional 140 million NIS to the MFA in return for the MFA closing seven of its missions abroad. Yet while the MFA drew up the list of embassies to be closed, the Prime Minister, who was also serving then as Foreign Minister, did not approve the list. Therefore, the additional funds were not transferred. The MoF and MFA failed to arrive at an alternate arrangement, and the MFA's financial woes deepened.

The number of people applying for the MFA's Diplomatic Cadets Course has dropped from about 3,000 to about 1,400. Approximately 25% (other estimates put the number at 30% or 33%) of those who successfully complete the five-year training period leave

The MFA's budget was reduced from approximately 1.623 billion NIS in 2018 to 1.385 billion NIS in 2019.

While between 2000-2012, the MFA's budget was frequently above, or close to, 0.6% of the national budget, in 2019 it fell to 0.29%.

³² Hard costs refer to costs that are largely inflexible in the short term, such as salaries and payments for the maintenance of properties (rather than budgets for diplomatic activities and initiatives). However, rather than taking the MFA's hard costs as a given, it is essential that the MFA enact deep reforms to reduce such costs. This study provides several recommendations as to how the MFA can accomplish this.

the MFA after 10-11 years, creating a dearth of diplomats trained in the lengthy course³³ (although some of these are diplomats who were encouraged to leave due to under-performance.)

Most MFA departments are staffed by one diplomat, in addition to students, cadets or those doing National Service. For example, there is currently one person charged with combating antisemitism, one in charge of connections with world religious bodies, and one responsible for relations with global Jewish communities. More than fifty percent of Israel's embassies abroad are staffed by only one or two diplomats (along with local employees).³⁴ According to then-MFA Director General Yuval Rotem in remarks made to the Knesset Transparency Committee in February 2018,³⁵ the MFA had been unable to fill 38 diplomatic positions abroad.

The lack of budget for projects or even travel is directly impacting the ability of the MFA to carry out its activities. One foreign ambassador stationed in Israel told the author of a senior official from his home country who was invited to visit Israel. The official's home country agreed to cover all of the visit's costs, and simply asked that Israel pay for the cost of entrance to the VIP lounge at Ben Gurion Airport. The MFA responded at first that it did not have the budget, and only after a long and acrimonious process was it able to finally scrap together the necessary funds. Other delegations invited to Israel from countries such as Japan were canceled at the last minute due to lack of funds.

The MFA and Finance Ministry have engaged in recurring fights over taxation and coverage of various elements of the diplomats' income and expenses. Salaries of MFA officials stationed in Israel are relatively low, while the salaries of those abroad have also decreased in real terms.

The situation has severely hurt morale within the ministry. It is not surprising that officials who have dedicated decades of their career to the foreign service are depressed when their budgets for activities disappear. Despite their lack of resources, the diplomatic challenges they face continue to grow, and their interlocutors expect them to continue fulfilling their duties in their areas of

33 The full MFA training course includes 6-7 months of intensive instruction, followed by four and a half years of service as a "cadet", the majority of which is spent in the MFA's embassies abroad. These cadets generally serve in countries in which the living conditions are considered difficult, often in positions that combine administrative and diplomatic responsibilities.

34 In 60% of Israel's missions abroad, the 2019 activities budget was 70,000 NIS or less. *May 2020 Comptroller Report*, 1035.

35 Officially the "Special Committee for the Implementation of the Accessibility of Government Information and the Principles of Its Transparency to the Public". Transcript of the February 26, 2018 hearing on "Government Ministry Transparency Index- the MFA" available at <https://main.knesset.gov.il/Activity/committees/GovInfo/Pages/CommitteeAgenda.aspx?tab=3&ItemID=2021713>. Henceforth: February 2018 Transparency Committee Hearing.

responsibility. Diplomats posted abroad complain of not being able to take part in events and meetings outside of their home city due to an inability to cover travel expenses. Non-resident ambassadors do not have funds to travel, and are left trying to represent Israel over the phone.

Nevertheless, despite the MFA's difficult situation, the discourse in Israel regarding the MFA has often been characterized by inaccuracies and hyperbole. For example, an August 2019 Jerusalem Post op-ed claimed: "The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), whose paltry 1.3 billion shekel budget (\$367 million) is less, as a proportion of the total government budget, than in any other Western country..."³⁶

An analysis of available information shows that while the MFA's budget is comparatively low (and, as will be discussed, should be increased), it is not an extreme outlier.

It should be noted that in terms of budgets, it is difficult to compare foreign ministries because different countries include different functions — such as foreign aid, foreign trade promotion, participation in peace-keeping forces — in their foreign affairs budgets. In particular, in most Western countries, a very substantial portion of the foreign affairs budget is earmarked for development and humanitarian aid. In Israel, the proportion of the MFA budget dedicated to development and humanitarian aid is minimal,³⁷ while foreign trade is primarily the responsibility of the Economic Ministry Foreign Trade Administration. It therefore makes the most sense to compare the actual operating budgets of foreign ministries themselves, rather than operating budgets together with humanitarian aid, development, and foreign trade budgets.

In 2019, the proportion of the MFA budget as a percentage of the overall government budget was, as noted, approximately 0.29%.

In comparison, the British Foreign Policy Group in a 2019 report found that, "Since Britain joined the European Economic Community in 1973, core diplomatic spending as a percentage of public sector current expenditure has fallen from 0.5% (1972-73) to 0.1% (2018-19)," while the number of FCO staff has been cut by 18.8 percent since 2010.³⁸ A 2016 report by the Knesset Research and Information Center found that the budget of the Italian Foreign

36 Shlomo Maital, "SOD- Save our Diplomacy," *Jerusalem Post*, August 29, 2019. <https://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/SOD-Save-our-diplomacy-600077>

37 The minimal Israeli investment in foreign aid and development assistance is a separate issue that should be addressed.

38 Sam Goodman, *Running out of credit? The decline of the Foreign Office and the case for sustained funding* (British Foreign Policy Group, 2019), 10, 14. <https://bfpgrp.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Running-out-of-Credit-HR.pdf>

Ministry constituted 0.22% of the government budget (0.11% after international aid and payments to international organizations were deducted). In Australia the number was 0.31%.³⁹

Likewise, in terms of number of embassies, while Israel is on the low end, it is not an outlier. According to the Lowy Institute Global Diplomacy Index, when compared to OECD and G20 countries, Israel is number 34 among the list of 60 countries in terms of number of embassies.⁴⁰ This is in the bottom half, but far from the lowest.

The MoF explained the decrease in the MFA's budget from 2018 to 2019 as resulting primarily from fluctuations in the exchange rate of the US dollar. In the 2019 budget proposal presented by the MoF to the Knesset, it explained:

The budget of the MFA is influenced by fluctuations in the exchange rate of the US dollar...Approximately 73% of the MFA's 2018 budget was tied to the value of the dollar, due to the fact that the MFA's activity takes place primarily abroad. Consequently, the MFA's budget was reduced by approximately 153.5 million NIS due to the decrease in the exchange rate.⁴¹

Similarly, Rotem told the February 2018 Knesset Transparency Committee that the decline in the MFA's budget in 2019:

Derives from numerous currency adjustments which are connected to the worlds of accountants vis a vis each other. But the baseline salary budget was not supposed to be hurt in a significant manner, since there is no significant decrease in manpower or in the number of embassies. The number of embassies will decrease over 3-4 years.⁴²

The MFA Labor Unions vehemently reject the explanation that the decrease in the ministry's budget derives from technical changes to currency exchange rates that do not negatively affect the budget in real terms. They believe that the Finance Ministry (and the Prime Minister) are actively seeking to defund and weaken the MFA, and point to the steady decrease since 2012 in the percentage which the MFA budget represents within the overall government budget.

39 The percentage for most countries was indeed higher. See Rada Hassisi and Ehud Becker, *Issues related to the status and activities of the Foreign Ministry in Israel and other countries- Interim Report* (Knesset Research and Information Center, February 2016.) https://fs.knesset.gov.il/globaldocs/MMM/852d-f8c7-5672-e511-80d6-00155d0204d4/2_852df8c7-5672-e511-80d6-00155d0204d4_11_10989.pdf

40 Lowy Institute, *Global Diplomacy Index: 2019 Country Ranking*, https://globaldiplomacyindex.lowyinstitute.org/country_rank.html

41 Ministry of Finance, *2019 Budget Proposal- Ministry of Foreign Affairs* (Jerusalem, February 2018). 23.

42 February 2018 Transparency Committee Hearing.

In off-the-record conversations, Finance Ministry officials do in fact express strong criticism of the MFA's operations, arguing that the ministry operates in an inefficient and outdated manner. They claim that the MFA fails to base its operations on proper work plans with clear goals and key performance indicators (KPIs), and does not employ professional evaluation and measurement methods.

This criticism would appear to be accurate, although whether it justifies the current level of MFA funding is another matter. The MFA's work plans in the official compilation of government work plans were the shortest of any ministry in both 2018⁴³ and 2019⁴⁴ (in 2018, the plan was a mere 4 pages long, and in 2019, 5 pages.) The work plans did not include any metrics, KPIs, or quantitative goals.

In 2018 and 2019, the first two years in which the government published detailed reports on the attainment of the goals set in ministry work plans (from 2017 and 2018), the MFA did not publish a report. It thus failed to provide the public with any measurement or evaluation as to the achievement of any of the goals it had set for itself.

Similarly, the transcript of the February 2018 Knesset Transparency Committee hearing shows that the MFA Director General had a difficult time answering the chairwoman's questions about metrics used to measure success, and primarily offered various explanations as to why it would not be possible to perform such measurement (or to share the information, even if such measurements could be performed.)

In analyzing the Israeli NDS and the role of the MFA within it, it is important to note a trend taking place around the world, that is particularly salient in Israel. The increasing enmeshment of domestic and foreign policies, developments in ICT, and evolution of bodies such as National Security Councils, have led all over the world to a shift in foreign policy-making power to the head of the Executive Branch.

For example, in a study of foreign policy making in the EU, Lehne found that "Foreign ministers have lost influence in recent decades, and prime ministers have emerged as the central foreign policy actors."⁴⁵ Similarly, in the UK, the Foreign Affairs Committee inquiry on the role of the FCO heard testimony that: "There had

The MFA's work plans in the official compilation of government work plans were the shortest of any ministry in both 2018 and 2019.

In analyzing the Israeli NDS and the role of the MFA within it, it is important to note a trend taking place around the world, a shift in foreign policy-making power to the head of the Executive Branch.

43 *Compilation of Government Work Plan for 2018: MFA* (February 2018), 224-227. <https://www.gov.il/BlobFolder/news/govplans2018/he/govplans2018.pdf>

44 *Compilation of Government Work Plan for 2019: MFA* (February 2019), 198-202. http://www.plans.gov.il/gov_Yearplan2019/gov_Yearplan2019.pdf

45 Stefan Lehne, *Are Prime Ministers Taking Over EU Foreign Policy?* (Carnegie Europe, February 2015), 1. https://carnegieendowment.org/files/prime_min_for_policy.pdf

been a longer-term trend for Prime Ministers to play a more prominent international role. This was a consequence of the tendency for previously 'domestic' issues to be handled partly internationally."⁴⁶

In the US case as well, a former State Department official, writing in *Foreign Policy*, remarked: "The movement of power from the agencies to the White House, for that matter, accelerated under President Barack Obama but had been underway for decades."⁴⁷

The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy notes too that changes in the international arena, including "the heightening of the short-term political sensitivity of overseas business," have "brought the head of government into closer daily control of foreign affairs and subtracted from the foreign ministry's exclusivity."⁴⁸

Security and political factors in Israel are such that they will always tend towards a very substantial role for the prime minister in foreign policy-making, regardless of who occupies the position. In Israel, security and diplomatic issues are deeply intertwined. For the most part, they require immediate attention and have very direct consequences on national security and the public agenda. The prime minister will always be involved intimately and intensively in such issues.

Furthermore, since the Mossad and Israeli Security Agency report to the Prime Minister, he or she will always have an informational advantage over the Foreign Minister.

As a source close to PM Netanyahu told the *Yedioth Ahronoth* newspaper:

The fact that today, a large part of the diplomatic contacts are dependent on security topics...strengthened the phenomenon of special emissaries from the NSC and Mossad...Often the countries preferred that the intervention be done directly between executive offices, without another governmental actor acting as mediator...it often gives a feeling of immunity, not just from cumbersome bureaucracy but also from leaks.⁴⁹

46 House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, *The Role of the FCO in UK Government*, 44. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmfa/665/665.pdf>

47 Heather Hurlburt, "Bolton Leaves the National Security in Ruins," *Foreign Policy*, September 13, 2019. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/09/13/bolton-walks-away-from-the-national-security-councils-corpse-trump/>

48 Jeremy Greenstock, "The Bureaucracy: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Service, and Other Government Departments" in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*, eds. Andrew F. Cooper, Jorge Heine and Ramesh Thakur. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 106.

49 Barkan and Lam, "Misrad HaChutza."

In addition, in Israel's fractious political system, the foreign minister is often considered a potential or actual political rival of the prime minister. Therefore, the tendency of the prime minister will always be to place his trust in his personal advisors and in the bodies under his direct responsibility, such as the NSC and Mossad, rather than in civil servants under a political rival.⁵⁰ Several former senior advisers to the prime minister on international relations stressed to the author the overriding importance of personal trust between the prime minister and those carrying out his instructions. Given that international communications and travel is making it increasingly easy for these emissaries to conduct foreign affairs, it is likely that the prime minister will increasingly assign to them important or sensitive functions.

As Giora Eiland, former NSC Director, explained:

As opposed to the situation in most countries, where government ministers see their roles first and foremost as assisting the prime minister to manage the affairs of government, in Israel, the senior ministers, which are generally the defense, foreign and finance ministers, see themselves as political rivals of the prime minister. This creates a situation in which the last people that the prime minister trusts are the ministers...therefore he also does not involve the bureaucrats under them at the Foreign Ministry.⁵¹

50 This lack of trust would most likely exist even if one of those civil servants were to be appointed as the Prime Minister's diplomatic adviser in a professional capacity.

51 Barkan and Lam, "Misrad HaChutza





The Current Israeli Discourse on the Conduct of Foreign Affairs

There has been a surprising shortage of serious study of Israel's NDS in general, and the MFA in particular. Insofar as such a discourse has taken place, it tends to be characterized by two factors:

The first, as noted, is a focus on strengthening the MFA as a ministry, rather than on Israel's foreign relations performance and achievements as a whole. It is taken for granted that the two are correlated, without examining the relationship between them or the potential advantages of alternative arrangements.

The second is that the predominant (though not the only) actors shaping this discourse are current and former MFA diplomats, and academic think-tank researchers who for the most part lack direct experience working within the government system. This too leads to a certain bias towards suggestions aimed at the institutional empowerment of the MFA, and at times to recommendations that fail to fully take into account the structural, geopolitical, and political realities of the Israeli government system.

Two other groups that have played prominent roles in the public discourse have been Members of Knesset (MKs), largely from the Parliamentary Opposition, and journalists. This has led in some cases to an emphasis on criticizing the Prime Minister or the Government for perceived harm to the MFA bureaucracy, rather than on examining needed reforms in light of global developments.

Two of the research institutes that have focused on the MFA in an in-depth manner have been Mitvim - The Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies, and the Abba Eban Institute for International Diplomacy at IDC Herzliya. It is relevant to very briefly characterize the recommendations presented by these two bodies, in order to give a sense of the context and overarching discourse. It is recommended that the reader consult the publications of these institutions directly in order to get a fuller sense of their approaches.

There has been a surprising shortage of serious study of Israel's NDS in general, and the MFA in particular.

Mitvim has been the think-tank most visible on issues related to the standing and functioning of the MFA, in terms of research studies, participation in parliamentary committees and the media discourse (including through its blog linked to the Haaretz website). It has consistently taken the position that a central problem relating to the conduct of Israel's foreign relations is the MFA's lack of authority and policy dominance. It advocates allocating greater power to MFA officials (as opposed to elected politicians) in the determination of foreign affairs policies.

Mitvim's research and advocacy is led primarily by former senior MFA diplomats and academic researchers, and to a lesser extent by politicians and journalists identified with the political Left. For example, its January 2017 policy paper, *Recommendations for Strengthening the Israeli Foreign Relations Apparatus*,⁵² was drafted by a team consisting of five former MFA diplomats together with several of the think tank's fellows and researchers. This format has a tendency to produce recommendations geared toward strengthening the bureaucratic structure of the MFA, without fully reflecting the realities of the Israeli governmental and political system.

As a result, many of their recommendations are focused on enhancing the influence and power of the MFA civil service, such as:

- “Develop mechanisms and tools that will oversee, and/or make more difficult, government decisions to disperse responsibilities to other bodies, and that will highlight the consequences of doing so.”⁵³
- “Return the MFA to the core issues of diplomatic activity.”⁵⁴
- “Diplomats are the ones who should lead negotiation processes with foreign actors...”⁵⁵

Other recommendations in the paper, however, do call for deeper structural and conceptual reforms, such as “enhancing the process for measuring and evaluating the performance of diplomats.”⁵⁶

In April 2019, during the course of the research for this study, the Abba Eban Institute (AEI) published its detailed policy paper on reforming and changing the approach of Israel's foreign service. The AEI is headed by experienced Israeli diplomat Ron Prosor, who

52 Mitvim Institute, *Strengthening Israel's Foreign Service: Recommendations of a Mitvim Institute Task-Team*, (January 2017). <https://www.mitvim.org.il/images/Hebrew - Empowering the Israeli Foreign Service - Mitvim recommendations - January 2017.pdf>

53 Ibid. 5.

54 Ibid. 4.

55 Ibid.

56 Ibid. 7.

served as MFA Director General from 2004-2007 and as Ambassador to the UK and UN. It is led by a team with backgrounds in academia and the private sector.

The AEI paper, like most previous studies, takes at its starting point the need to rectify the decline in the MFA's influence, budgets and functioning. The paper opens with the declaration that:

The Israeli Foreign Service is collapsing. Over the past decade, the MFA has been injured and struck in a manner that has harmed its ability to provide worthy products (outputs). The ministry, which for the past four years has been without a full-time minister, and which suffers on a permanent basis from a severe lack of budgets and authority, has found itself kept out of the nexuses in which the country's important decisions are made.⁵⁷

The paper goes beyond previous studies on the subject to propose a broad series of reforms and additions to the MFA, in order to make it more effective and relevant to 21st century diplomacy. These reforms include, inter alia, integrating professional methods of measurement and analysis into the MFA's work, with an emphasis on Return on Investment, expanded and more sophisticated approaches to public and economic diplomacy, and greater flexibility in adapting the structure of Israel's embassies to the characteristics of the particular country in which it is based.

The academic and diplomatic background of the study's authors is evident in several of its recommendations. For example, the very first recommendation in the paper presents, as a solution to the problem of the MFA being kept out of decision-making circles: "Improving the quality of the materials which the MFA produces... strengthening the diplomatic research, planning and analysis bodies in the MFA with high-quality and professional manpower and budgets."⁵⁸

In reality, the quality of the research products produced by the MFA has very little to do with the question of its place around the decision-making table. None of the foreign relations policy-makers and officials with whom the author spoke mentioned the quality of materials produced by the MFA as a factor in its influence on decision-making (although one former senior MFA official did describe the work of the MFA Policy Planning Division to the author as "totally worthless".) Nor was this an issue that was ever raised in the many government meetings in which the author took part.

57 Abba Eban Institute for International Diplomacy, *A Change in Conception for the Israeli Foreign Service*, (April 2019), 8. <https://www.foreignservice.org.il/>

58 Ibid. 10.

The tendency for the discourse regarding reforming the MFA to be dominated by current and former MFA officials and academics is not new

The majority of the discourse regarding the MFA in Knesset committees and caucuses has been dominated by MKs from the Opposition, current and former MFA officials, and Mitvim. Very rarely have such discussions examined in detail issues of substance relating to the MFA's operational concepts or internal culture.

It also appears that while the AEI paper proposes wide reforms, it tends to refrain from highlighting weaknesses and problematic aspects of the MFA's activity, except in general terms. This is most likely due to the desire of the AEI to recruit the MFA civil service to support its proposed reforms, as well as to the background of the Institute's leaders.

The tendency for the discourse regarding reforming the MFA to be dominated by current and former MFA officials and academics is not new. For example, in 2006, academics at the Leonard Davis Institute for International Relations at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem published a booklet entitled *The Future of Israel's Foreign Ministry*. The booklet was based on a 2005 workshop in which the participants were 12 former MFA officials, a number of Hebrew University academics, and a representative of the MFA.

Similarly, the State Comptroller, in preparing his May 2020 report on Israel's Foreign Relations System, "held a dialogue in which former ambassadors and former senior MFA officials took part," in order to gain additional insights.⁵⁹ Former officials from other governmental bodies deeply involved in Israel's foreign relations do not seem to have been invited to this exchange, although the Comptroller did speak to numerous government ministries themselves.

Both Mitvim and the AEI have enriched the Israeli discourse on the MFA, and many of their proposals are positive and important. While this research was conducted independently, there is some overlap among the recommendations, though even where overlap exists, there is often a difference in emphasis.

As described, the majority of the discourse regarding the MFA in Knesset committees and caucuses has been dominated by MKs from the Opposition,⁶⁰ current and former MFA officials, and Mitvim. Very rarely have such discussions examined in detail issues of substance relating to the MFA's operational concepts or internal culture. Classified discussions in subcommittees of the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee have tended to delve deeper into substance, but the content of these discussions is not available to the public.

59 *May 2020 Comptroller Report*, 955.

60 The February 2018 session of the Knesset Transparency Committee, chaired by MK Stav Shaffir and attended by MK Michal Rozin and MK Leah Fadida, is a prime example of the superficial political discourse surrounding the MFA, although the MFA officials at the hearing did attempt to convey a more nuanced picture.



Detailed Recommendations

1. Redefine the MFA's Role

The MFA must change the way it conceives of its role. It must move from a self-image of gate-keeper and primary interlocutor with the international arena, to one of coordinator and facilitator in helping all ministries implement government policy. It should adopt a network mentality, and seek to empower and synergize the activities of other actors in the NDS, rather than to restrict them.

As noted above, it is becoming increasingly accepted in both the academic study of diplomacy and in the practice of other countries that the various components of the NDS will all engage in international activity. As noted in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Diplomacy*,

The exponential growth in the complexity of human exchange has led to two major developments in the protected world of the diplomat: the entry into intergovernmental business of most other government departments (and some non-governmental ones);... Professional diplomats...no longer find it possible to coordinate the total interface with other states' representatives or to claim a monopoly on the handling or interpreting of external factors in their country's set of interests.⁶¹

The MFA's role in this evolving reality is not to fight a losing battle to restrict the activity of other governmental departments, but to coordinate the efforts of the diverse range of bodies, and to facilitate new connections between various actors in Israel and abroad.

Unfortunately, today, the Israeli MFA is clinging to its outdated role as gatekeeper. It continues to see anything "foreign" as the ancient prerogative of its institution, rather than being focused on assisting all ministries in carrying out government policy. It therefore engages in innumerable turf battles, and shows a disinclina

It is becoming increasingly accepted in both the academic study of diplomacy and in the practice of other countries that the various components of the NDS will all engage in international activity.

⁶¹ Greenstock, "The Bureaucracy," 106.

If the MFA were to adopt the approach of a facilitator and constructive adviser, then, within a short time, it would find that other actors would be interested in and willing to coordinate with it.

tion towards cooperating with other bodies or involving them in strategizing responses to international challenges, unless left with no other choice.⁶²

As noted in the *May 2020 Comptroller Report*, “Various government actors told the State Comptroller that despite their attempts to cooperate with the MFA in the framework of their international activities, in certain cases they encountered difficulties and barriers put in place by the MFA...” The MFA’s response to this claim was fairly typical. As the Comptroller notes, “The MFA stated that there is a need to create a requirement for all Israeli bodies involved in foreign relations to coordinate and consult with the MFA...before those bodies carry out activity abroad.”⁶³

The MFA’s approach results in numerous negatives outcomes. The first is that other ministries increasingly choose to refrain from involving the MFA in their international activity, due to the belief that the MFA will play an obstructive rather than constructive role. Put simply, these ministries are concerned that the MFA is more likely to undermine than to enhance their activity.

Secondly, the MFA will often adopt an approach that can best be described as “If I don’t do it, no one will”. There have been several cases in which other ministries offered to fund and carry out joint activities with the MFA, but the principled opposition of senior MFA officials to the involvement of these ministries, and their anger at the division of budgets, led them to prefer that the activity not be carried out at all. This, despite the fact that the activity would be beneficial for the State of Israel as a whole.

In this author’s experience, most government bodies would be inclined to involve or at least consult with the MFA regarding their international activities, out of recognition of the MFA’s expertise, and appreciation for its role within the government system. If the MFA were to adopt the approach of a facilitator and constructive adviser, then, within a short time, it would find that other actors would be interested in and willing to coordinate with it.⁶⁴ Adopting such an approach would not change the fact that the MFA remains the only body with a network of embassies abroad (although not the only body with emissaries).

Changing its culture and approach in this manner would not only ensure that the MFA remains relevant, but would both empower the MFA within the NDS, and lead to better outcomes for Israel as a whole.

62 These turf battles have been documented in a number of State Comptroller reports, some of which will be examined in the next sections of this study.

63 *May 2020 Comptroller Report*, 994.

64 This is particularly true regarding bodies headed by politicians. Politicians tend to be concerned by the possibility of missteps in the international arena, and would prefer that MFA officials be consulted, unless they were concerned that such consultations would undermine the planned activity.

2. Determine Strategic Priorities Through an Inter-agency Process Led by the NSC

Given the growing importance of the National Diplomatic System as a whole, it is neither desirable nor possible for the MFA to determine on a strategic level the government's priorities in the international arena. This effort can only be led by the National Security Council (under direction from the Prime Minister and Security Cabinet), which must bring together all relevant members of the NDS to determine Israel's goals and priorities in the realm of foreign relations. At the same time, the NSC must be careful to ensure that its inclination towards a security lens (given that the majority of its senior leadership has intelligence or military backgrounds) does not distort the degree of importance that it attaches to other issues such as economic ties.

As described, in September 2009, following the MFA's budget woes, the MoF accountant overseeing the MFA's finances directed the MFA to halt all activities, except in cases where doing so would result in a violation of a signed contract. All exceptions to this directive needed to be approved by the accountant, essentially giving him and the MoF control over the MFA's activities.

Such a situation, in which the MoF representative in the MFA is making decisions on substance, and determining which activities should be prioritized and funded, is untenable. While the MoF has an important role to play in insisting that the MFA carry out reforms to increase efficiency and ROI, and while it is an increasingly important player in the world of financial diplomacy, it should not be the one making decisions of substance regarding the MFA's daily activities. The Finance Ministry accountant should not be the one deciding whether to fund a delegation, a seminar or a diplomatic ceremony.

To date, the process of determining the government's priority areas in the international sphere has been carried out in piecemeal fashion, through a series of independent government resolutions. These include resolutions on enhancing ties with China, India, Japan, Latin America and Africa, and in the realm of international development. While these resolutions are important in that they signal the government's policy of diversifying its diplomatic and economic relations, they are not the result of an overall strategic roadmap.⁶⁵ The resolutions tend to set up committees of various government ministries to further their goals, but in most cases, these committees only rarely meet, and the decisions are implemented partially, if at all.

⁶⁵ In addition, in most cases they call for the relevant ministries to divert resources from their existing budgets to the prioritized areas, rather than adding dedicated budgets for such activities. This leaves open the possibility that the ministry will claim that it does not have available funds in its current budget.

The National Security Council (under direction from the Prime Minister and Security Cabinet), must bring together all relevant members of the NDS to determine Israel's goals and priorities in the realm of foreign relations.

Contrary to the Comptroller's recommendation, the task of setting the government's overall strategy should be carried out not by a "committee of director generals" but by the NSC.

To rectify this situation, the NSC should be tasked with leading an inter-agency process to determine priorities and resource allocation in the international arena, and to ensure that the various ministries act in accordance with priorities set by the Government and Security Cabinet. The MFA should play a key role in this NSC-led process, in terms of both inputs and execution. In the execution phase, its roles would include assisting each ministry in carrying out the activities for which it is responsible, and ensuring coordination of international relations activities both between ministries, and between ministries and embassies.

The *May 2020 Comptroller Report* includes the recommendation that, "In order to manage Israel's diffuse Foreign Relations System, it is recommended that a governmental actor be designated as responsible for coordinating the activity of all the actors in the system, and for creating mechanisms for coordination, cooperation and mutual updates." The Comptroller avoids recommending which government body this should be, likely due to inter-ministry sensitivities.

However, in terms of setting the government's overall strategy, the Comptroller recommends, "convening a committee of ministry director generals in order to set shared national strategic goals for the governmental Foreign Relations System..."⁶⁶

Contrary to the Comptroller's recommendation, the task of setting the government's overall strategy should be carried out not by a "committee of director generals" but by the NSC, with the guidance of the Prime Minister and Security Cabinet. In this author's experience, governmental committees of director generals are not an effective means of decision-making or of carrying out a systematic, strategic process. At best, they can serve as a forum for mutual updates.

Similarly, the NSC is the body that should be responsible for managing Israel's diverse NDS, creating mechanisms for coordination, and ensuring whole-of-government implementation of strategic decisions. Only the NSC, as the body directly under the prime minister, has the institutional weight to bring together competing NDS bodies (such as defense, intelligence, diplomatic and economic bodies), and to arbitrate disagreements between them. When these disagreements persist, the NSC is able to turn directly to the prime minister for a decision.

An example of an issue in which Israel seems to have lacked whole-of-government coordination and execution is in its relations with China, especially within the context of growing US-China

⁶⁶ *May 2020 Comptroller Report*, 957.

competition. The US, Israel's primary and irreplaceable strategic ally, has been putting growing pressure on Israel to limit its ties with China, which is viewed in Washington as an increasingly aggressive threat. Israel's approach in the face of these tensions appears to have been somewhat disjointed and lacking in clarity. The problem with such a disjointed or inconsistent approach is not only that it eventually leads to unnecessary friction, but that it also prevents Israel from receiving maximum benefits from taking the ultimately unavoidable decision to side with the US in the international tug of war.

Whether or not the clear strategic decision to side with the US has been made at the top (as it likely has), this decision has been slow to trickle down to all of the various government departments. Only in November 2019 did the Israeli Government set up an advisory committee to examine national security issues as part of the approval process for foreign investments in potentially sensitive projects. While the committee is charged with examining such issues with regards to projects requiring government regulation, its remit does not extend to Chinese investments in private sector hi-tech companies, which are also likely to raise concerns in the US about access to advanced dual-use technologies.

Despite the creation of the advisory committee, a Hong Kong-based Chinese company was still one of the leading bidders to build the Sorek 2 desalination plant, which is not only planned to be the largest desalination plant of its type in the world, but will also be located in a sensitive area of the country. Apparently due to a lack of strategic governmental oversight, the announcement of the selection of an Israeli company over the Chinese company came only after public intervention and expressions of concern by the US, including a May 2020 visit to Israel by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. Such a need for public intervention created avoidable embarrassment and friction vis a vis China.

Devising a successful strategy to balance interests and tensions regarding relations with China, and leveraging that strategy to upgrade the US-Israel relationship, is a process that requires careful balancing between security, diplomatic and economic considerations. Once the strategy is selected, it must be implemented throughout the entire government. This is the type of strategic process that only the NSC can lead. It is necessary that on this issue and similar critical whole-of-government issues, the NSC pro-actively work to shape and coordinate the approach of the entire NDS.

The MFA should reduce its hard costs by reducing its bloated and inefficient administrative staff, and by rectifying years of human resources mismanagement.

3. Increase Budgets for Diplomatic Activity by Significantly Reducing Administrative Costs

The MFA should reduce its hard costs by reducing its bloated and inefficient administrative staff, particularly what is known as the Administrative Foreign Service, and by rectifying years of human resources mismanagement. Money saved should be redirected towards the MFA's diplomatic activities.

The MFA, in terms of human resources, is divided into three divisions: The Diplomatic Foreign Service Division (diplomats who have completed the Diplomatic Cadets Course), the Administrative Foreign Service Division (which includes “employees who deal with human and physical resources, communications, finances and consular issues,”⁶⁷) and the Administrative Division (which includes logistical and maintenance staff, administrative assistants, lawyers in the MFA Legal Department and analysts in the Research Department).

The issue of the swollen administrative staff is an open secret within the MFA, but is almost never discussed publically or in the media. For decades, the MFA has engaged in the practice of transferring unqualified individuals from the Administrative Division into the Administrative Foreign Service Division (which brings with it higher pay and benefits), and from the Administrative Foreign Service Division into the Diplomatic Foreign Service Division. As a result, individuals lacking training and even high school matriculation diplomas have been moved into senior positions in both the HQ and missions abroad, with the accompanying increase in expenses.

In addition, new senior-level positions have been created within the MFA organizational structure, in order to provide employees with higher salaries. The result is an expensive and inflexible employee payroll, and administrative divisions whose numbers are out of proportion to those of the Diplomatic Foreign Service Division.

This decades-long pattern of mismanagement has not only increased the MFA's hard expenses, but it has also reduced the number of people recruited to courses created to ensure that Administrative Foreign Service employees sent abroad are properly qualified and trained for their tasks.

Correcting decades of costly human resources mismanagement in a short period of time will require far-reaching steps. If done correctly, such a correction could free up significant budgets for MFA activities, and improve the overall functioning of the MFA.

⁶⁷ State Comptroller, *Oversight Report on Aspects of the Activity of the MFA*, (Jerusalem: June 2006), 11. <https://www.mevaker.gov.il/he/Reports/Pages/213.aspx>

One former MFA diplomat told the author that in his view, half of the administrative staff in the MFA HQ could be cut with no negative effect on the functioning of the ministry. A current diplomat told the author that the number of administrative staff has become so disproportionate that when an administrative employee retires, he or she is not replaced. Several former MFA officials described a phenomenon of administrative workers who do little more in the ministry than swipe in and out.

State Comptroller reports, as well as several of the interviewees for this research, pointed to former MFA Director General Nissim Ben Shitrit as the person who contributed significantly to the disproportionate swelling of the MFA's administrative staff. To be fair, while according to Comptroller reports, Ben Shitrit was a central figure in the MFA's human resources mismanagement, the MFA's problematic behavior continued during the period Ben Shitrit left the HQ to become Ambassador to Japan.

While a lack of publicly available information makes it difficult to analyze in detail the human resources situation on a year-by-year basis, from conversations with former and current officials it appears that efforts to correct these problems were not undertaken in a significant manner until Yuval Rotem's term as MFA Director General from October 2016 to June 2020. Despite several fledgling steps by Rotem (which aroused the anger of the Administrative Foreign Service Labor Union), it appears that these efforts were far from sufficient to rapidly correct the damage wrought.

Nissim Ben Shitrit entered the MFA in a junior logistical support staff position. By 1993, he had moved up through the administrative ranks to become Assistant Director General for Administration. In 2005, while still retaining his position as head of the Administration Directorate, he was promoted by then-Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom to the number 2 position in the ministry, that of Deputy Director General (despite having no diplomatic experience, and despite the fact that the number 2 position had historically been reserved for an employee from the Diplomatic Foreign Service).

In December 2006 (following a highly-critical State Comptroller report in June 2006), he was nominated to the position of Ambassador to Japan. A short time after his return from Japan in 2013, he was appointed acting Director General and in 2014, then-Foreign Minister Avigdor Liberman appointed him permanent Director General. He retained this position until he was fired by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in May 2015.

Correcting decades of costly human resources mismanagement in a short period of time will require far-reaching steps.

To get a sense of the mismanagement which characterized the MFA's human resources and appointments processes for many years (and again, as will be seen, continued even after Ben Shitrit's tenure as Head of the Administration Directorate), it will be useful to present several quotes from the State Comptroller's June 2006 Report, entitled *Oversight Report on Aspects of the Activity of the MFA* (henceforth: *June 2006 Comptroller Report*)⁶⁸:

Regarding the MFA appointments process, the report states:

Mr. Ben Shitrit usually presented to the Committee only some of the candidates, those who he believed were worthy of being appointed to the position under discussion. For the most part, the ensuing discussion focused only on those candidates...Many of the candidates which Ben Shitrit supported were indeed appointed...it appears that Mr. Ben Shitrit sorted the candidates, in practice, without heed to open and transparent standards. It follows, therefore, that he had a degree of influence over the process that has no basis in the MFA's regulations.⁶⁹

Mr. Nissim Ben Shitrit has been in his position as Assistant Director General for Administration for more than 12 years, and all of the units related to administration and human resources are under him. During that entire time, he remained a member of the Appointments Committees, while all the other members of the Committees turned over.⁷⁰

Clear standards for evaluating the appropriateness of a candidate for a position were not defined...This created an opening to favor candidates based on non-substantive considerations.⁷¹

Regarding the movement of unqualified employees from the Administrative Division to the Administrative Foreign Service Division, and from the Administrative Foreign Service Division to the Diplomatic Foreign Service Division, the report notes critically:

68 State Comptroller, *Oversight Report on Aspects of the Activity of the MFA*, (Jerusalem: June 2006). <https://www.mevaker.gov.il/he/Reports/Pages/213.aspx>

69 Ibid. 20.

70 Ibid. 17.

71 Ibid. 20.

Among the workers who were appointed to positions of Administrative Foreign Service Officers⁷² or to a combined position of Administrative Foreign Service Officer and Consul, were dozens of workers without a high school matriculation diploma, who had begun their work in the ministry in low-level administrative positions. Many of them had no experience in the main areas of work of an Administrative Foreign Service Officer...⁷³

In violation of the MFA's Regulations, employees in the Administrative Division were appointed to positions in the Administrative Foreign Service Division, and employees in the Administrative Foreign Service Division were appointed to positions in the Diplomatic Foreign Service Division. Not only were such workers not disqualified at the outset... but from 1999 until the end of 2005, 255 workers in the Administrative Division and the Administrative Foreign Service Division were appointed to positions in Israel and abroad that were part of a different division...without there being even an examination as to whether they met the minimal required conditions in the MFA Regulations for moving from division to division.⁷⁴ It was found that approximately 43% (35 out of 82) Heads of Missions who served in HOM positions in May 2005 never took part in the Diplomatic Cadets Course.⁷⁵ Among them were long-time MFA employees who began their work in the MFA in low-level administrative positions.⁷⁶

Regarding the creation of expensive and unnecessary positions for MFA employees (thereby increasing the MFA's expenses), the report explains:

Although in the years 2000-2005, the overall number of employees in the MFA decreased by 15%, the MFA added a branch, 3 divisions, and 35 departments. A Director was appointed to every new unit. The number of departments grew by 47%, however in 8

72 The senior administrative position at Israel's embassies abroad, responsible for the administrative aspects of the embassy's functioning. The Administrative Foreign Service Officers enjoy benefits, such as subsidized housing and education, similar to that of senior-level diplomats.

73 Ibid. 70.

74 Ibid. 29. It should be noted that while some flexibility in appointments processes is doubtless positive, it appears from the *June 2006 Comptroller Report* that the MFA appointments process was plagued by repeated, far-reaching irregularities.

75 This number does not include the HOMs who were political appointees

76 Ibid. 13.

of these departments, there was only 1 worker, and in 34 of them, there were only 2-3 workers.⁷⁷

In the view of the State Comptroller...the growth in the number of MFA units from 2000-2005, with the concurrent growth in the number of Directors... creates a suspicion that the changes...were not meant only to meet the organizational and operational needs of the Ministry, but rather the personal needs of the workers and their promotion.⁷⁸

The same problems were noted in the 2005 workshop at Hebrew University on the future of the MFA, which was led by 12 former senior MFA officials. According to the participants:

The recruitment and human resources management policy of the MFA is characterized by severe distortions...some of the anomalies can be attributed to... the efforts since the middle of the 90s to combine as much as possible the Administrative Foreign Service and the Diplomatic Foreign Service...the first problem which has existed during the past years is the appointment of employees from the Administrative Division to the Administrative Foreign Service Division, without their having undergone the relevant Administrative Foreign Service Cadets Course. These appointments derive in most cases from a desire to provide benefits to the employee, but it must be understood that not every employee is qualified for service abroad...⁷⁹

The participants also appear to strongly criticize Ben Shitrit (although he is not mentioned by name.) They stated that:

In order to overcome the [human resources] problems, the MFA should adhere to the following principles: Firstly...the Assistant Director General for Administration...must be a diplomat with rich and diverse experience; Secondly, the MFA should ensure that the principle of rotation should be applied every 3-4 years to all members of the MFA's management, including to the Assistant Director General for Administration...Likewise, a situation in which a person serves in the same position for more than twelve years should be avoided.⁸⁰

77 Ibid. 12.

78 Ibid.

79 Oren Barak and Chanan Cohen, *The Future of Israel's Foreign Ministry* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem Leonard Davis Institute for International Relations, 2006), 20-21.

80 Ibid. 20.

Six months following the State Comptroller report, Ben Shitrit was appointed Israel's Ambassador to Japan. It should be noted that when Liberman announced his intention to appoint Ben Shitrit as permanent Director General in 2014, the watchdog group Movement for Quality Government in Israel submitted an objection to the appointment based on the June 2006 Comptroller report. Its objections were brushed aside.

However, despite Shitrit's departure for Japan in 2007, a 2015 State Comptroller report revealed that many of the problematic behaviors continued in the ensuing years. Between 2008-2012, the MFA did undertake an elaborate and expensive effort to draw up a plan for the reform of its structure and human resources management, but central elements of the plan were never implemented.

State Comptroller Annual Report 65c⁸¹ published May 2015 (one and a half years after Ben Shitrit was named Acting Director General), entitled *The Planning and Management of Human Resources in the MFA* (henceforth: *May 2015 Comptroller Report*), found that:

Despite the explicit instructions of a special regulation which set a limit of 210 employees permitted to be transferred from the Administrative Division to the Foreign Service Divisions between 2008-2011, the MFA exceeded this limit by 24%. The transfer of workers from the Administrative Division to the Administrative Foreign Service Division led to an over-staffing of positions, and as a result, the MFA stopped recruiting cadets to the Administrative Foreign Service Cadets Course.⁸²

In November 2014, approximately 26% of Administrative Foreign Service employees and over 13% of all Foreign Service employees were not qualified to staff Foreign Service positions in the embassies abroad...Additionally, 15 workers with no diplomatic training filled positions that were defined as "Combined-Diplomatic" (i.e. combining diplomatic, consular and administrative roles)...Additionally, 5 positions in the Administrative Foreign Service were staffed by people from the Administrative Division.⁸³

81 State Comptroller Annual Report 65c for 2014, *The Planning and Management of Human Resources in the MFA* (May 2015), 767-803. <https://www.mevaker.gov.il/sites/DigitalLibrary/Pages/Reports/297-19.aspx?AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1>

82 Ibid. 768.

83 Ibid.

The May 2015 Comptroller Report also found that while the MFA had invested substantial resources in developing a wide-ranging plan for organizational reform, key elements of this plan were not implemented. There are thus significantly more “administrative” employees in the MFA than actual diplomats (533 versus 451.)

The May 2015 Comptroller Report also found that while the MFA had invested substantial resources in developing, together with external consultants, a wide-ranging plan for organizational reform, particularly in the field of human resources, key elements of this plan were not implemented. The Comptroller stated:

Between 2008-2012, the Ministry invested substantial resources and inputs in a process of planning, formation and attempted execution of a wide-ranging organizational reform, which included significant changes in the field of human resources management...At the end of the day, the collective agreement signed between the MFA employees and management does not include important elements of the reform plan, including those elements related to setting minimum requirements for applying to foreign service positions, the transfer of employees, limitations on the periods in which people can serve in HQ management positions, and changing the methods for evaluating the performance of workers.⁸⁴

As of the beginning of 2020, there are 451 members of the Diplomatic Foreign Service, and 370 members of the Administrative Foreign Service. These 370 members of the Administrative Foreign Service Division are in addition to the 163 members of the regular Administrative Division. There are thus significantly more “administrative” employees in the MFA than actual diplomats (533 versus 451.)

The number of Administrative Foreign Service employees, whom, as noted, receive higher compensation than regular administrative employees, is rendered even more questionable by the fact that 75% of them (277 out of 370) are based in Israel rather than in Israel's missions abroad. It is not at all clear why the MFA needs so many Administrative Foreign Service employees in its HQ in Jerusalem. In fact, a significant percentage of these (although there is no way from the outside to determine precisely how many) are not even qualified to go abroad because they lack matriculation diplomas, language skills or training.

The *May 2020 State Comptroller Report*, in explaining the source of the MFA's budget crisis, notes that while the MFA's hard costs in 2018 were 1.530 billion NIS, the MFA's available budget for covering such costs in 2019 stood at only 1.276 billion NIS. However, these hard costs should not be taken as a given. They can and should be reduced.

84 Ibid. 769.

The MFA should immediately undertake a major initiative to reduce the number of administrative staff, and use the resources that become available both for diplomatic activities and to recruit a greater numbers of cadets to the Diplomatic Cadets Course. One possible model for such a reform is the IDF's multi-year Gideon Plan, which saw an aggressive reduction in manpower through the provision of incentives for early retirement to employees in areas considered non-essential, and to those who failed to advance at a designated pace.

Implementing such a reform will be a complex process due to inflexible civil service regulations and powerful labor unions. Nevertheless, the government must take the necessary steps to correct the MFA's human resources situation, reduce its hard costs, and rectify decades of mismanagement. Administrative Foreign Service staff that are not qualified for foreign service should not be on the foreign service payroll.

In addition, the need today for career MFA employees to fill Administrative Foreign Service Officer and Consular positions should be examined, particularly given the fact that these positions have frequently been filled in the past by employees without qualifications. As noted, career administrative foreign service employees posted abroad enjoy many of the perks of diplomats, such as housing and school subsidies.

The MFA should first examine what administrative and consular roles could be carried out virtually, from the MFA HQ, given advances in ICT. Secondly, it should examine where the overall number of Administrative Foreign Service Officers can be reduced by operating from regional hubs.⁸⁵ Thirdly, it should examine the possibility of hiring administrative and consular officers on a contract basis, rather than using career employees. These officers could undergo a course of several months and then be sent abroad to perform their duties.

Other foreign ministries are looking to save costs in a similar manner. The U.S. Department of State, for example, is "trialing lateral recruiting options for limited non-career consular employees with existing language skills. These offer cost savings both in reducing short-term posting costs (like language training) and lowering the longer-term investment in permanent employees."⁸⁶ Finland has moved to a model in which "each mission arranges its own technical support locally and individually. The number of personnel sent

The MFA should immediately undertake a major initiative to reduce the number of administrative staff, and use the resources that become available both for diplomatic activities and to recruit a greater numbers of cadets to the Diplomatic Cadets Course.

85 The intent, of course, is to examine placing Administrative Foreign Service Officers in regional hubs, *in place of* officers in each country, not in addition to them.

86 Alex Oliver, *Consular Conundrum: The Rising Demand and Diminishing Means for Assisting Australians Overseas*, (Lowy Institute Policy Briefs, March 2013). <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/consular-conundrum-rising-demands-and-diminishing-means-assisting-australians-overseas>

Another well-known but little-discussed challenge facing the MFA is that its hierarchal structure means that there are fewer positions available the more senior one becomes.

from Finland for these duties has been reduced due to the high costs.”⁸⁷ Due to shrinking budgets, “The UK and a few others have also resorted to sending from home an ambassador unsupported by any home-based staff, relying on the services of locally recruited personnel for support.”⁸⁸

In a 2019 document, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade declared its intention to reduce operating costs by changing its operating model, including, “creating regional hubs for smaller posts, streamlining embassies’ banking operations...and moving towards greater automation of back office functions like human resources, finance and information technology...” It’s overall aim is to “minimise duplication, exploit technology, standardise and streamline work practices and processes, and reduce our corporate footprint (including overseas) as much as possible.”⁸⁹

As noted, the MFA under Director General Rotem, began taking fledgling steps to rectify some of these problems. For example, the Administrative Foreign Service Division had invented the position of “Regional Administrative Foreign Service Officer”, who was posted to a regional hub *in addition* to the country-based officers, in order to oversee their work. Rotem did away with this position, much to the chagrin of the Administrative Foreign Service Division and its labor union. However, much more far-reaching steps are needed.

Another well-known but little-discussed challenge facing the MFA is that its hierarchal structure means that there are fewer positions available the more senior one becomes. Often a diplomat will return from an HOM posting abroad only to find that there is no position available that is appropriate to his or her seniority. In some cases, new senior positions are created. In others, the diplomat is given a project to manage or placed in a temporary position, essentially pushing paper until an appropriate position becomes available. These diplomats continue to receive relatively high salaries and benefits, but are not able to contribute greatly to the work of the MFA.

To address this issue, the MFA could incentivize these diplomats to retire early, create opportunities for them to transfer for a set period to other government ministries, or allow them to take a leave of absence from the MFA to pursue other career opportunities. Several of the recommendations in the following sections of this study are meant to address this challenge as well.

87 Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, *Memo - Finland's Representation Abroad*, 39.

88 Rana, “Embassies, permanent missions and special missions,” 153.

89 Andrew Tillett, “Foreign affairs budget cut sparks warning from diplomats.” *Financial Review*, November 13, 2019. <https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/foreign-affairs-budget-cut-sparks-warning-from-diplomats-20191112-p539qj>

4. Examine Replacing Traditional Embassies with Alternatives

The MFA should look to reduce costs and increase its activities budget by examining the possibility of replacing, in certain cases, expensive traditional embassies with alternate arrangements. Such a step, while being examined by foreign ministries around the world, would be particularly relevant for the Israeli MFA, given the high costs of providing physical security to Israel's missions. Security for the MFA's missions represented the second largest item in the MFA's budget for 2018, which at 243 million NIS, constituted 14% of the MFA's costs.

Advances in ICT and the increasingly diverse network of connections between various elements of each country's NDS, are raising questions about the future of traditional diplomatic missions. These trends, together with decreasing budgets and increasing demands for cost efficiency, are leading numerous foreign ministries to experiment with alternative models to traditional embassies. As described in *The SAGE Handbook of Diplomacy*, due to cuts to foreign affairs budgets in many countries around the world:

Networks of overseas missions are often, but not always, shrinking. At the same time...they look for different kinds of representation options... One method is a 'non-resident ambassador'...A variation of the above, used especially by Scandinavian countries, is the 'laptop ambassador' who visits the country of assignment for a few weeks at a time...On occasion they embed an ambassador in a fellow-Scandinavian embassy, sharing some services, usually without any direct staff support.⁹⁰

Australia is experimenting with a model of a "pop-up embassy", which operates in the host country for several months a year and maintains a virtual presence for the remainder of the time. Indeed, foreign ministries are increasingly examining the possibilities of virtual embassies. For example, the US State Department has been experimenting with "Virtual Presence Posts" (VPPs), which:

[H]ave no resident U.S. employees, either U.S. citizens or Local Employee staff. VPPs allow established posts to provide remote diplomatic engagement with important cities or regions. Generally, they entail regular, targeted visits from mission personnel, ongoing public affairs activities, and "virtual" engagement by means of websites...⁹¹

Advances in ICT and the increasingly diverse network of connections between various elements of each country's NDS, are raising questions about the future of traditional diplomatic missions.

90 Rana, "Embassies, permanent missions and special missions," 153.

91 US Department of State, 2 *Foreign Affairs Manual*, 131: *Post Types of Diplomatic and Consular Posts* (2020), sec. m.
<https://fam.state.gov/FAM/02FAM/02FAM0130.html>

The issue of reducing the number of embassies has been the subject of repeated acrimonious disputes between the MFA and MoF.

While the precise costs of maintaining the MFA's missions are difficult to ascertain, the MFA representatives at the February 2018 Knesset Transparency Committee hearing stated that opening a properly-functioning embassy costs 8-10 million NIS, and that the hard operating costs (not counting activities budgets) are about 4-5 million NIS. According to another report, the Finance Ministry estimated the cost of an embassy at between 8-15 million NIS.⁹² As noted, the MFA spent 243 million NIS on securing its missions in 2018.

Given the advances in communications and technology, the MFA should examine whether it is necessary to maintain all of its diplomatic posts in their traditional form. For example, is it necessary to maintain 8 consulates in the United States, in addition to the Washington DC Embassy? Have economic ties developed to the point where it is justified for Israel to continue to maintain four consulates in China, in addition to the Embassy in Beijing? Can consulate functions such as citizen services or business promotion be made virtual, or even be privatized in certain cases?

In cases where embassies in different countries are only a few travel hours apart, the MFA could consider combining them. In regions such as Eurasia, the MFA could examine models such as the pop-up embassy. In cases where the primary focus of a diplomatic post is on one particular area (for example, energy or trade), the government could examine stationing a representative of the relevant ministry in the region, without maintaining an official mission.

The issue of reducing the number of embassies has been the subject of repeated acrimonious disputes between the MFA and MoF, with the MFA insisting on the importance of maintaining physical embassies. An August 2015 Government Resolution (No. 402) instructed the MFA to close 7 diplomatic posts. 4 were eventually closed. A January 2018 Government Resolution (No. 3400) instructed the MFA to close an additional 7 missions (the MoF had originally suggested closing 22 embassies as part of its 2019 budget proposal, but the sides eventually agreed on 7.) The Government Resolution stated explicitly that: "All savings that will be generated within the MFA budget, including in terms of staff positions, as a result of the closing of the missions, will be directed towards diplomatic activity and the MFA's international aid."⁹³

92 Omri Milman, "Slowly and Surely: This is How the Foreign Ministry's Stature was Diminished." Calcalist, September 12, 2019. <https://www.calcalist.co.il/local/articles/0,7340,L-3770187,00.html>

93 Government Resolution 3400, *Formulating a Regional Strategy for the Activity of the Government Abroad*, January 11, 2018. https://www.gov.il/he/departments/policies/dec_3400_2018

As noted, the MoF agreed to transfer 140 million shekels to the MFA in return for closing the 7 missions, as per the January 2018 Government Resolution. The MFA drew up the list of missions to be closed, but the list was never approved by the political echelon.

The MFA, like its counterparts around the world, should examine alternate models of diplomatic representation which are both more cost-efficient and which take into account the changing nature of diplomacy. This will not be an easy task, as the MFA has a vested bureaucratic interest in maintaining and growing the number of its missions abroad. Nevertheless, money saved could be reinvested in activities such as international development and public diplomacy.

Such an examination is particularly relevant in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. While it is difficult to know how the pandemic will affect diplomacy over the long-term, it has already made virtual and online diplomacy more acceptable and commonplace. If it is assumed that COVID-19 counter-measures will reduce the number of diplomatic in-person meetings and events in the coming years, this could be a good opportunity to reduce costs by reducing the amount of personnel stationed overseas. Virtual meetings and conferences can be conducted from Jerusalem (although COVID-19 barriers to air travel could provide an argument for the importance of maintaining representatives on the ground, if in-country in-person meetings are possible.)

Of course, the diplomatic consequences of closing an embassy must be taken into account. In some cases, such a closure might alienate the host government. However, even in such cases, such 'embassies' need not necessarily be staffed full-time. Reductions in the presence and activity of MFA diplomats in a host country could also be carried out in response to repeated hostile stances taken by that country against Israel in the international arena.

5. Adopt Professional Evaluation Methods and Work Plans to Measure Performance

Two interrelated problems plaguing the MFA are that, for the most part, it does not employ professional measurement methods to evaluate performance, and that it generally fails to formulate detailed work plans based on defined goals and KPIs. The plans that are formulated on the level of the embassy do not receive high-level oversight within the MFA, and embassy staff are rarely measured by the degree to which they fulfill them.

As a result, advancement is not tied to performance, nor is there any way to truly evaluate the cost-effectiveness of specific initiatives. A saying among MFA employees is that a rock that enters the cadets course will leave the MFA thirty years later as an ambassador. In the slightly more diplomatic phrasing of the former MFA officials who took part in the 2005 Hebrew University workshop: “One of the problems which the MFA suffers from today is that it has no system for rewarding excellence and weeding out mediocrity. Its employees join as cadets and nearly all leave as ambassadors.”⁹⁴

As noted, the MFA's work plans were the shortest of any ministry in the official government compilation of work plans in both 2018 and 2019. They presented a number of general aims and aspirations, but did not contain any quantifiable goals or metrics against which performance could be measured. (Apparently for this reason, the MFA, unlike most other ministries, did not publish follow-up reports on the degree to which it had achieved its goals.)

The MFA's approach has generally been that diplomacy is not something that can be quantifiably measured or evaluated. When asked about the ministry's methods for measuring performance in the February 2018 Knesset Transparency Committee hearing, then-MFA Director General Rotem responded that while there are certain types of activities that he knows how to measure, particularly in the realm of public diplomacy (for example, social media reach or the number of delegations), most achievements are the result of multi-year processes and therefore defy measurement. With regards to the publication of the achievement of goals or fulfillment of work plans, Rotem stated that in many cases, foreign countries are opposed to the publication of such information.

However even in the realm of public diplomacy, the State Comptroller's 2016 report on *The Activity of the Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Directorate in the MFA* found an absence of metrics, and gaps in evaluation and oversight.⁹⁵

94 Barak and Cohen, *The Future of Israel's Foreign Ministry*, 21.

95 State Comptroller Annual Report 66c for 2015, *The Activity of the Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs Directorate in the MFA* (May 2016). 819-860. <https://www.mevaker.gov.il/sites/DigitalLibrary/Documents/2016-66C-217-Hasbara.pdf>

For example, the Comptroller found that the MFA's Division for Cultural and Scientific Affairs, "did not define any metrics for evaluating the potential for success of Israeli cultural events in various countries which could serve the embassies in determining which artists to invite."⁹⁶ Regarding another expensive public diplomacy initiative, the Comptroller found that:

Only two years after the initiative was launched did the Public Diplomacy Directorate recommend to the initiative's directors that they define clear goals, metrics of success, and a mechanism for deciding on content, method and evaluation. Despite the fact that it was clear to the MFA...when it began to execute the project that the initiative was missing all of these elements, the ministry continued to fund the project.⁹⁷

It should be noted that other government ministries dealing with international affairs did publish much more concrete work plans with clear KPIs in the governmental compilation of work plans. For example, the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs provided clear performance indicators for previous years, and clear goals for the coming years in its 2019 work plan.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, enhancing professional measurement and evaluation of international initiatives should be a goal undertaken by all of the government bodies involved in Israel's foreign relations.

It is true that diplomatic activity and a nation's international standing and relations are more difficult to quantify than the number of incoming tourists or the growth of foreign trade. It is also true that Israel's missions abroad should not be evaluated by a uniform standard, as their primary goals differ (with some focusing more on political relations, others on economic ties, and others on civil society and Jewish communities), as does the environment in which they operate.

However, these factors need not be a barrier to the adoption of professional evaluation and measurement methods. Evaluation and measurement tools have been developed in numerous fields that are characterized by multiple actors, long-term processes, diverse environments and outcomes not based on hard statistics but on changes in sentiment.⁹⁹ Such tools could be developed for the MFA as well.

Enhancing professional measurement and evaluation of international initiatives should be a goal undertaken by all of the government bodies involved in Israel's foreign relations.

96 Ibid. 821.

97 Ibid.

98 *Compilation of Government Work Plans for 2019: Ministry of Diaspora Affairs* (February 2019). 711-719. http://www.plans.gov.il/gov_Yearplan2019/gov_Yearplan2019.pdf

99 These include fields such as branding, reputation and issue management, and political consulting.

A consulting firm with experience in devising methods for measuring performance in complex and amorphous fields should be engaged to devise such a method for the MFA.

The ability to advance within the MFA hierarchy should then be tied to performance.

According to several interviewees, MFA officials in the HQ are disincentivized to develop such evaluation tools and performance metrics, because they know that they themselves will likely be posted abroad in the coming years, and are not interested in being tracked in this manner. As a result, the development of such strategies and metrics will likely need to be carried out by an external body with relevant expertise.

A consulting firm with experience in devising methods for measuring performance in complex and amorphous fields should be engaged to devise such a method for the MFA. This method should include the drafting of work plans by each embassy and department with clear KPIs, in order to enable the MFA's leadership to track performance against goals. This evaluation should take place not only on the level of Division Directors, but on the level of senior management, in a centralized and institutionalized manner.

Heads of Missions should be given tools and guidance for measuring the impact of specific activities, whether a cultural event or initiative to enhance ties in a defined area. The ability to advance within the MFA hierarchy should then be tied to performance, thereby incentivizing excellence and weeding out mediocrity.

The adoption of professional evaluation and measurement tools would have the additional advantage of decreasing the number of diplomatic cables and increasing the quality of those sent. Today, there is a common saying among MFA diplomats that, "If you did something, and didn't report it in a cable, it's as if you didn't do it. If you don't do something, and report in a cable that you did, it's as if you did it." MFA diplomats also told the author that this reality affects the content of cables, as there is an incentive to describe activities in favorable terms.

By adopting more sophisticated tools to measure performance on a regular basis, there would no longer be a need to report back to the HQ on every activity, and the incentive to spruce up descriptions of activities would be reduced (as these would be measured by defined metrics rather than subjective descriptions).

6. Encourage a More Pro-active Internal Culture

The MFA should develop an internal culture that is less risk-averse and less focused on maintaining quiet on the bilateral political front. It should provide greater institutional encouragement for pro-active and out-of-the-box approaches.

The MFA today is characterized by an internal culture of risk aversion. Its officials tend to focus on the potential costs of actions, and therefore often prefer inaction to the possibility of confrontation. It is not surprising that MFA legal advisers are a ubiquitous presence at inter-ministerial meetings, even when the issue under discussion is not primarily legal.

There are several contributing factors to this culture of risk aversion. As one senior official involved in Israel's foreign relations told the author, "The MFA, like other bodies responsible for a certain sector (such as the Israeli Security Agency or Israel Prison Service), tends to prefer quiet and stability in its sector, rather than disruption." In the MFA's case, the primary consideration tends to be quiet in the field of bilateral political relations.

Diplomats also tend to be internationalist and non-confrontational in their training and orientation. As one diplomat explained: "This is our role in the government system."

This attitude was expressed by former MFA Director General Alon Liel in a 2019 interview:

Lieberman and Netanyahu led a new diplomatic approach, one in which...it will not be the aspiration for peace that will build Israel's international standing. Rather Israel's international standing will be built from its strength, its deterrent capability, its ability to provide weapons and intelligence. This is a message that diplomacy has a very hard time living with, since the DNA of diplomacy is to leave no stone unturned to prevent war...to advance agreements...¹⁰⁰

It appears that this disinclination towards bold approaches, and particularly to the formulation of position papers that make unconventional suggestions, stems also, in part, from fears that such positions will be leaked to the press, causing the MFA to be portrayed as critical of the Prime Minister or Government (although the MFA itself frequently uses media leaks to advance its agenda, as will be discussed in the next section.)

¹⁰⁰ Barkan and Lam, "Misrad HaChutza."

The need to increase risk tolerance is particularly acute in cases where inaction does not lead to a maintenance of the status quo, but to its creeping deterioration.

In light of both the far-reaching challenges and opportunities facing Israel in the international arena, the MFA must become less risk-averse and more pro-active. It is true that at times taking action carries potential costs. However, it is a basic tenet of game theory that signaling a willingness to incur short-term costs is a necessary element in successfully advancing one's long-term agenda. Imposing costs on the other side is almost always costly to oneself, especially in contexts where there are benefits to cooperation. But without a willingness to impose such bilateral costs, the option set of retaliatory responses to unwelcome actions becomes quite thin.

The need to increase risk tolerance is particularly acute in cases where inaction does not lead to a maintenance of the status quo, but to its creeping deterioration. An example of such a case is Israel's response to the EU's policy of "differentiation", including steps like labeling Israeli products from Judea & Samaria.¹⁰¹ Conventional diplomatic protestations have failed to stop the creeping expansion of this EU policy. Yet the MFA has consistently resisted responding with more confrontational steps, for fear of intensifying conflict with the EU.¹⁰² It is likely that only more far-ranging (and potentially risky) steps may deter the EU from expanding this policy, which in certain scenarios, could deteriorate into a de facto European boycott of major Israeli entities.¹⁰³ The need to examine Israel's (and the MFA's) strategic approach to dealing with this challenge will become increasingly acute if the EU chooses to react to an Israeli decision to apply its sovereignty in Judea and Samaria by expanding differentiation-related policies.

101 The EU policy of differentiation is based on the principle of distinguishing in its relations with Israel between the two sides of the Green Line. This principle lends itself to a very broad range of interpretations and implications, ranging from the minor to the severe. For example, some of differentiation's most extreme advocates have called for cutting off the Israeli banking system from its European counterparts (due to the fact that Israeli banks provide services to Israeli citizens living on both sides of the Green Line), which is one of the key goals of the anti-Israel BDS movement. It should be noted that this principle and policy are rarely applied to other cases of territories considered by international bodies to be occupied or in dispute.

102 This is true even when the confrontational steps are relatively minor. For example, in November 2015, Israel announced that it would be suspending discussions with the EU related to the Palestinians, in response to the EU's decision to label Israeli products produced over the Green Line. However, this Israeli response was reversed after several months.

103 One example of such a potentially-costly course of action would be to challenge EU trade restrictions at the World Trade Organization. For such a proposal, see Eugene Kontorovich and Avi Bell, *Challenging the EU's Illegal Restrictions on Israeli Products in the World Trade Organization*, Kohelet Policy Forum Policy Paper No. 18 (October 2015). https://euiha41fnsb2lyeld3vkc37i-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/KPF35_challenge-EU_141015PublicElectronic-november20151.pdf

As a consequence of this failure to take initiative, and due to its preference for avoiding responses that are not costless, Israeli diplomacy is often caught flat-footed, warding off repeated hostile initiatives. The MFA must become more open to the fact that there are times when quiet on the bilateral political front should not be the top priority, and other national interests should be deemed of greater importance, even at the expense of creating tensions in the bilateral sphere.

Of course, increasing risk tolerance does not mean acting irresponsibly. There are cases where the potential fall-out from a risky action is greater than the hoped-for benefit. However, the default should not be the path of inaction and non-confrontation. Rather, open and constructive inter-agency consultations should be used to determine the right balance on a case-by-case basis.

The MFA should encourage an internal culture of out-of-the-box thinking, and should provide greater backing to employees who take calculated risks. It is wrong for the media to portray every attempt by MFA employees to suggest policy changes as an attack by the diplomatic corps on the political leadership. It is legitimate, within reason, for diplomats to make professional suggestions, and it is legitimate for political leaders, who are responsible for weighing competing national interests, to accept or reject those suggestions. In such cases, the shallow media discourse which frames such suggestions as an attack on politicians is counter-productive and ultimately weakens the MFA professional staff.

It is wrong for the media to portray every attempt by MFA employees to suggest policy changes as an attack by the diplomatic corps on the political leadership.

There is an urgent need to counter the phenomenon of leaks from within the MFA, which harms its work in numerous ways.

7. Combat Media Leaks

There is an urgent need to counter the phenomenon of leaks from within the MFA, which harms its work in numerous ways.

The pervasive phenomenon of leaks of sensitive information from the MFA to the media is well-known (although rarely discussed by members of the media). A May 2012 State Comptroller Report on the MFA Policy Planning Bureau recorded that, “the IDF Policy Planning Bureau stated that it is not increasing its cooperation with the MFA Policy Planning Bureau in order to avoid the ‘phenomenon of leaks’ in the MFA, which may compromise the security of information transferred between the bodies.”¹⁰⁴

The report quotes the summary of a 2009 meeting between the MFA Director General and the Head of the IDF Policy Planning Bureau, in which the latter stated that, “the issue of leaks to the media prevents a proper working relationship.”¹⁰⁵ The report also quotes an internal MFA document from 2011 which stated, “in inter-agency contacts, outside organizations are unwilling to share sensitive information with MFA representatives” [due to leaks].¹⁰⁶

This phenomenon continues to plague the MFA. One former senior MFA official told the author that in his view, “the main purpose of the papers produced by the Policy Planning Bureau was to be leaked to the press.” A former senior intelligence official related how he had been asked to come to a meeting at the MFA on a new and sensitive foreign ministry initiative related to Iran. He was reluctant to take part but was ensured repeatedly by the MFA that the initiative would be kept confidential. He related how, a day after taking part in the meeting to launch the project, a detailed account of the initiative appeared on the front page of a leading newspaper. Upon inquiry, he learned that the MFA spokesperson had provided the information.

In the author's own experience as well, representatives of the intelligence agencies were less willing to share particularly sensitive information with the MFA, although they were willing to share it with representatives of the MSA and other government bodies.

This phenomenon of leaks is harmful to Israel's foreign relations in general, and to the MFA's ability to effectively carry out its work in particular, for several reasons.

¹⁰⁴ State Comptroller Annual Report 62 for 2011, *Policy Planning in the Foreign Ministry* (May 2012), 511-542. https://www.mevaker.gov.il/he/Reports/Report_117/6f6d708c-2cb3-47d5-965b-dc9bc66ff85a/7543.pdf

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 539.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* 540.

Firstly, and most obviously, the leaking of sensitive information can hurt national security and undermine Israeli initiatives and efforts in the international arena.

Secondly, as noted, this phenomenon leads other members of Israel's NDS to refuse to cooperate and share sensitive information with the MFA. This barrier to full cooperation and information exchange hurts all actors involved, and has a detrimental effect on the overall performance of Israel's NDS. As it is the nature of deliberations about sensitive diplomatic matters that they cannot be effective if held publicly, one potential effect of leaks from the MFA may be to stifle discussions within the NDS, in a manner that may be calculated to advance the positions favored by the MFA.

Thirdly, as described earlier, the pervasiveness of such leaks leads to an atmosphere within the MFA which discourages the proposal of unconventional ideas, and particularly their formulation in policy papers. This weakens the MFA's ability to provide innovative policy proposals to Israel's political leadership.

Lastly, these leaks can harm Israel's non-governmental allies and interlocutors. For example, there were cases in which the MFA leaked information regarding contacts between other government ministries and pro-Israel actors abroad, as part of its efforts to undermine ministries it felt were encroaching on its turf. These leaks were carried out apparently without regard to the harm that they could cause to the pro-Israel and Jewish organizations. Such leaks not only potentially compromise Israel's supporters, but make those supporters wary of cooperating with any of Israel's official representatives, including the local embassy.

The MFA must take a number of steps to counter this phenomenon. As it is often possible to determine the source of the leak, the MFA should create substantial consequences for those responsible, in terms of employment and career advancement. In cases where the source of the leak is not clear, polygraphs and other investigatory tools should be used. In many cases, the source of the leak is the MFA spokesperson or embassy spokespeople, acting on instructions from senior MFA officials. The senior leadership of the MFA must give clear and unambiguous instructions to all levels that leaks will not be tolerated.

These leaks can harm Israel's non-governmental allies and interlocutors.

The MFA is certainly not the only sources of leaks. The potential sources of leaks are many, including politicians and officials from all government and security bodies.

The number of intelligence officers on loan to the MFA from the intelligence bodies should be increased, as they tend to be both trusted by their peers in the intelligence community, and bring with them an organizational culture which sees such leaks as anathema. In addition to currently-serving intelligence officers on loan, the MFA should actively seek to recruit former intelligence officials to its ranks, particularly (but not exclusively) to the policy planning and research bureaus.

It should be emphasized that the MFA is certainly not the only sources of leaks. The 2016 Amidror Commission Report on the operation of the Security Cabinet noted the damaging phenomenon of Security Cabinet leaks. The potential sources of leaks are many, including politicians and officials from all government and security bodies. Nevertheless, the phenomenon is particularly pervasive in the MFA.

One former diplomatic correspondent opined to the author that the MFA used leaks to the media as a way to make its voice heard, given the perception that its positions are not otherwise given weight in government and public discourse. If this is accurate, it certainly does not justify the phenomenon nor mitigate its harmful effects. Nevertheless, it can be hoped that the implementation of the reforms recommended in this report will improve the MFA's standing within the NDS, thereby removing one of the potential impetuses for leaking.

8. Reform the MFA Public Diplomacy Directorate

a. Place Public Diplomacy on Equal Footing with Traditional Bilateral Diplomacy

The standing of public diplomacy within the Israeli MFA has known highs and lows. According to former MFA officials, during the period in which Shimon Peres served as Foreign Minister and Uri Savir as Director General, public diplomacy was significantly downgraded, as Peres believed that if there was good policy, there was little need for good public diplomacy.

Today, according to current and former MFA officials, public diplomacy has been relegated to a lower status within the ministry than traditional bilateral and multilateral diplomacy. As a result, resources and the most promising cadets are directed to the bilateral (geographic) and multilateral divisions.¹⁰⁷

This situation should be changed. Public diplomacy should be seen as a leading, if not the leading, function of the MFA, particularly as the global trends described earlier continue to shift the nexus of diplomatic policy-making to the head of the Executive Branch. The MFA must be Israel's most talented and effective public face, spokesperson, and advocate.

b. Expand Hiring of Strategic Communications, Social Media, and Public Relations Specialists

In addition to placing Israel's most talented diplomats in public diplomacy-related positions, the MFA should expand its recruitment of leading professionals and specialists from the fields of strategic communications, branding, public relations and social media to the Public Diplomacy Directorate. These professionals should be brought on not as career MFA employees, but on the basis of individual contracts for a set number of years. It is important, of course, that the Public Diplomacy Directorate also include experienced diplomats among its staff, but the proportions should change.

Public diplomacy has been relegated to a lower status within the ministry than traditional bilateral and multilateral diplomacy.

The MFA should expand its recruitment of leading professionals and specialists from the fields of strategic communications, branding, public relations and social media.

¹⁰⁷ The MFA goes through relatively frequent formal and informal restructuring. According to several current and former diplomats interviewed for this study, today what is known as the Diplomatic-Strategic Directorate holds a higher institutional status and prestige than the Public Diplomacy Directorate. It should be noted, however, that the current Senior Assistant Director General for Public Diplomacy has been appointed Deputy Director General of the MFA, making him, at least formally, the second most senior MFA official.

Israel in general and the MFA in particular should place an even greater emphasis on People-to-People (P2P) diplomacy.

The Israeli Government must invest significantly greater resources in top-quality professional public diplomacy initiatives, which should be formulated in partnership with leading communications, branding and PR agencies. Such projects will require high levels of investment, as well as bureaucratic flexibility and agility.¹⁰⁸

In the past, the Israeli Government often chose to approach pro-Israel and Jewish philanthropic sources to help fund such projects. While public-private partnerships are an important tool that should be further developed, it is also important that the State of Israel itself allocate appropriate levels of resources. Large-scale investment in other key public diplomacy initiatives, like delegations of influencers, should be made as well.

c. Increase Emphasis on People-to-People (P2P) Diplomacy

While classic public diplomacy (i.e. efforts by governments to influence foreign publics) remains important, Israel in general and the MFA in particular should place an even greater emphasis on People-to-People (P2P) diplomacy. This is especially true as many of the areas in which Israel's soft power is the greatest (such as issues related to sustainable development, climate change, public health, cyber-security, emergency response and others) are being led primarily by NGOs and the private sector.

Enhancing P2P relations is becoming an increasingly important goal for foreign ministries around the world. In the words of the "Futures for Diplomacy" project carried out for the Finnish Foreign Ministry, "Diplomats will increasingly function as facilitators and social entrepreneurs between domestic and foreign civil society groups as they operate in global policy networks".¹⁰⁹

d. Create Dedicated Global Networker Positions

Israel's diplomats should see as one of their main goals creating connections between individuals, NGOs and private sector actors in Israel and their host countries. Yet while diplomats abroad can identify potential areas for cooperation, they often do not have the tools to identify all of the potential partners among Israel's diverse and dynamic civil society and private sector.

108 Several past attempts by the MFA to engage PR firms did not produce the hoped-for outcomes. The reasons for these disappointing outcomes varied, and included a lack of MFA experience in working with such firms, differences in approach between the MFA HQ and embassies, insufficient oversight, and the absence of guaranteed multi-year funding. All of these issues must be resolved for such efforts to be successful in the future.

109 Hocking et al., *Futures for diplomacy*, 6.

Therefore, the MFA should create new positions within its HQ, whose role is to serve as networkers, matchmakers and social entrepreneurs. These global networkers would be responsible for assisting Israel's diplomats abroad in identifying relevant fields, issues or challenges in their host countries. They then would be responsible for surveying and researching Israel's civil society and private sector to identify potential partners. Where possible, these MFA networkers would also assist in obtaining funding, either from the government, public-private partnerships or other sources, to help facilitate the matchmaking process and the creation of ties.

Expanding the connections between Israeli and foreign actors in the fields that are most important and pressing in each country would greatly contribute to Israel's standing, soft power, and economic relations.

e. Establish a Government Information Hub

An additional new role that should be added to the MFA Public Diplomacy Directorate is that of Government Information Hub. In this author's experience, information and materials that are of high potential benefit for Israel's public diplomacy efforts (either for use directly by government officials or by the pro-Israel network), often exist within the vast government bureaucracy, but are not easily accessible. It can take great effort to locate and gain access to statistics, information or reports located within the multitude of governmental departments, ministries and security bodies.

At times, access to this information is denied on information security grounds. In other cases, the problem lies in more general institutional resistance to information-sharing, bureaucratic laziness, or the significant investment needed to transform raw information into useable material.

Those filling the role of Government Information Hubs would specialize in identifying, analyzing, packaging and disseminating governmental information for public diplomacy purposes. They should have a government-approved mandate and authority that requires official bodies to cooperate with them. In order to quickly overcome issues related to information security, they should have a close and institutionalized working relationship with relevant security officials.

Every embassy, MFA department, and member of the Israeli NDS should be able to turn to the Government Information Hub unit for assistance, for example in countering claims made by anti-Israel actors in their arena. At the same time, this unit should pro-actively seek out, package, and distribute information relevant to upcoming challenges and opportunities (for example, negative NGO or UN reports, or International Days around which Israel can share its own experience and accomplishments).

The MFA should create new positions within its HQ, whose role is to serve as networkers, matchmakers and social entrepreneurs.

9. Create a National Strategic Communications Forum

Advancing Israel's influence, legitimacy and positions in the international arena requires leveraging all of Israel's capabilities in the fields of public diplomacy, soft power, and influence operations. These capabilities are diverse and exist both on the level of public bodies and on the level of the intelligence and security communities. They should be managed in a coordinated and synergistic manner in order to maximize outcomes.

While Israel's communications efforts still have distinct target audiences and arenas — the international arena, the regional arena, the domestic arena, the enemy — developments in ICT are making it increasingly difficult to deliver distinct messages to each. Since a message spread in one arena will be picked up in other arenas as well, there is a need to strategically weigh the broader advantages and disadvantages of each message and communications campaign, and make decisions regarding prioritization and emphasis.

In addition, Israel's public diplomacy and media efforts are often dependent on the provision of declassified intelligence information. However, intelligence bodies are generally reluctant to declassify information, even when the value of its declassification on the level of public diplomacy outweighs the costs on the level of intelligence gathering. There is a need for a qualified body, external to the intelligence community, to determine when the public diplomacy value is such that it is worth both the effort and the potential costs of publicly sharing the information.

Another dilemma facing Israel is when to respond to accusations or critical reports regarding its actions and policies. There is, unfortunately, a global network of anti-Israel actors who are constantly producing reports, media and social media content delegitimizing and demonizing Israel. Today, these accusations often do not receive a detailed response from official bodies for several reasons.

One reason is a lack of the manpower and resources necessary to put together an official response, which often requires significant investment in synthesizing materials from numerous bodies and ensuring their accuracy.

A second reason why official responses are often not provided is a belief that responding to a particular report or accusation may give it unnecessary credence or publicity. While this consideration is not without basis and should be weighed, the result of this tendency not to respond is the build-up of a mass of unanswered claims against Israel. In the public diplomacy battle, quantity can become quality, and the repeated false claims and accusations become accepted as true over the long run.

Israel should therefore establish a National Strategic Communications Forum, led by the National Security Council, the one body that has the ability to coordinate between the intelligence and security apparatuses on the one hand, and government ministries such as the MFA on the other. The goal of this forum should be to coordinate Israel's diverse public and covert activities related to communications, PR and influence efforts, in order to maximize synergies between them. By ensuring that these diverse efforts support and complement each other, Israel will be able to enhance its overall impact in the realm of strategic communications.

This forum would be responsible, among other things, for determining priorities, including among target audiences and arenas, ensuring the flow of information between bodies in cases where there are tensions between declassifying materials and public diplomacy efforts, and determining in which cases Israel should be pro-active in responding to false accusations (either officially or by providing information to non-governmental actors).

A proposal for such a forum was developed in 2013 in a joint effort between the author and the National Security Council, and was approved by then-National Security Advisor Yaakov Amidror. However, the establishment of the forum was undermined by the MFA. After an invitation to the first meeting of the forum was disseminated to all relevant bodies, including the MFA, the MFA announced that it would establish and head its own Strategic Communications Forum, and sent a parallel invitation to the same bodies. In an effort to avoid duplication and conflict, the NSC-led forum was put on hold. The MFA then canceled the opening meeting of its forum, and never rescheduled. At the end of the day, such a forum was never established under any body.

This was an unfortunate example of the MFA's tendency to prefer inaction to the perceived encroachment of other bodies on its turf. However, given the need to coordinate between the intelligence and security communities on the one hand, and government ministries on the other, it is only the NSC that can successfully head such an initiative.

Israel should therefore establish a National Strategic Communications Forum, The goal of this forum should be to coordinate Israel's diverse public and covert activities related to communications, PR and influence efforts.

The PMO National Information Directorate should remain directly under the prime minister (rather than being moved to the MFA, as some have suggested.)

It should be noted that, as is often the case, while such a forum has not yet been established on the level of the civilian ministries, the IDF has been experimenting with different models for such a forum for many years. In setting up the National Strategic Communications Forum, lessons should be learned from the IDF's accumulated experience.

On the level of public relations and media efforts, the PMO National Information Directorate (NID) should retain its role as government coordinator. The NID should remain directly under the prime minister (rather than being moved to the MFA, as some have suggested). Being positioned under the prime minister assists the NID in performing its role of balancing between different organizational tendencies,¹¹⁰ and enables it to quickly gain access to the prime minister when there is a need to decide between competing approaches to major PR challenges.

¹¹⁰ For example, during military conflicts, the IDF Spokesperson's Unit often wishes to emphasize Israel's accomplishments on the battlefield, while the MFA often wishes to highlight the suffering of Israel's home front.

10. Prepare Public Diplomacy Envelope for Legislation and Government Decisions.

In many cases of potentially controversial Israeli government decisions or legislation, Israel could reduce the extent and severity of criticism by preparing a proper public diplomacy envelope ahead of time. Unfortunately, Israeli policy-makers and legislators often focus on domestic public relations consequences, without carefully preparing for the impact in the international arena.

To be clear, the recommendation here is not that the advancement of legislation or government decisions should be determined by the way in which they will be interpreted in the international arena. The degree to which international considerations should impact decisions regarding domestic legislation is a separate issue which will not be addressed here.

Instead, the recommendation is that the advancement of measures or bills that are likely to provoke international debate should be accompanied by a professionally-executed public diplomacy envelope, in order to encourage accurate understandings of their content and context.

One good example of this gap in preparation was the roll-out of the Nation-State Law¹¹¹ in July 2018. While the law's supporters from within the government expended significant effort to make their case in the Israeli arena during the build-up to the law's passage, a similar effort was not made in the international arena. This gap contributed to the spread of inaccurate claims regarding the content and consequences of the law, and to criticism even from actors normally supportive of Israel. Advocates of the law, including from outside the government, were forced to invest substantial effort in countering inaccurate claims after the fact.

A function should be added to the PMO National Information Directorate, with responsibility for preparing the public diplomacy envelope for upcoming governmental decisions and legislation. All ministries should be required to update the NID when advancing decisions which can reasonably be expected to stir debate in the international arena. Furthermore, the NID should track legislative proposals, both those tabled in the Knesset and particularly those which reach the Ministerial Committee on Legislation.

The advancement of measures or bills that are likely to provoke international debate should be accompanied by a professionally-executed public diplomacy envelope.

111 The Basic Law: Israel as the Nation-State of the Jewish People, known informally as the Nation-State Law.

In the initial stage, the NID may present, in an advisory capacity, its analysis of the potential public diplomacy challenges related to a particular decision or piece of legislation (as it does currently within the framework of Security Cabinet discussions). Once it has been decided by the relevant decision-maker to advance a certain decision or bill, the role of the NID would be to work with all the relevant actors to prepare the proper envelope for the roll-out of the measure.

Such an envelope would include preparing information and materials, devising a media plan, and engaging with relevant opinion-leaders ahead of time. The NID should be given the necessary resources for carrying out this responsibility successfully. While such efforts will not eliminate criticism on the part of Israel's detractors, they can help increase support and mitigate opposition on the part of generally positive or neutral audiences.

11. Work in True Partnership with the Global Pro-Israel Community

The Israeli NDS has a unique component — the global network of Jewish communities and pro-Israel organizations and allies. These actors, which range from international NGOs to regional and national organizations, to research bodies, social media groups, and grassroots activists, work to defend Israel against international delegitimization, promote pro-Israel public diplomacy, and advance Israel's political, economic, cultural and academic ties.

Contemporary approaches to diplomacy stress the importance of cooperation between governmental and non-governmental actors. As Hocking et. al. explain:

The integrative diplomacy framework...above all, stresses the importance of the growth of international policy networks and, consequently, the importance to effective diplomacy of collaboration between professional diplomats and the representatives of a variety of international actors.¹¹²

In order to optimally advance Israel's standing and relations in today's international arena, the pro-Israel community should be seen as partners in a global network. This partnership should be based on mutual respect and bi-directional communication. Of course, Israel must always be careful in its relations with the citizens of other countries, and ensure that its actions remain within the bounds of all relevant legal frameworks.

However, the MFA, in general (although there are exceptions), still often views the pro-Israel community through the old-school lens of hierarchy rather than partnership. While in practice MFA diplomats are careful not to cross the line to giving directions or “marching orders”, due to the legal and political sensitivities, this is still the primary lens through which they frequently view Israel's allies.

Israeli embassies often believe that they understand the local arena better than local pro-Israel actors. They also tend to be suspicious of the motivations of pro-Israel organizations, assuming that they are motivated primarily by internal communal power struggles, or that their goals differ from those of the State of Israel. In other cases, the MFA's risk-adverse DNA leads it to be overly concerned with potential fall-out or negative reactions, therefore preferring inaction to supporting activities by pro-Israel actors that may make too much “noise”.

The pro-Israel community should be seen as partners in a global network.

112 Hocking et al., *Futures for diplomacy*, 5.

This approach by the MFA finds expression in numerous ways. One is in the ongoing use by MFA diplomats of the phrase “to activate”¹¹³ the pro-Israel network, although again, in practice diplomats are generally careful not to do so. For example, then-MFA Director General Rotem described MFA actions *vis a vis* groups abroad, in the publically-available proceedings of the February 2018 Knesset Transparency Committee hearing, as “activation”. Rotem would assuredly be the first to explain that the MFA does not instruct or activate pro-Israel actors. Nevertheless, the use of this phrase reflects a broader attitude.

Leading pro-Israel organizations in various countries related to the author how they were called into meetings with newly-arrived Israeli ambassadors, only to be lectured at and told immediately what they were doing wrong. Other activists associated with mainstream Jewish organizations reported a sense among local members of the pro-Israel community that the MFA was not interested or appreciative of their efforts, leading to the creation of mutual antipathy.

At times, the MFA demonstrates a lack of respect for the degree to which pro-Israel organizations understand the local arenas in which they operate. As an example, during Operation Pillar of Defense in Gaza (November 2012), the author received official and unclassified information and materials from many different governmental and IDF sources. Given the intense media debate over Israel's actions, and the rapid news cycle, the author took it upon himself to quickly collect and distribute this information to the leaders of major pro-Israel organizations around the world. This provided them with resources necessary to respond to breaking stories and anti-Israel accusations in a timely manner.

The author was asked by two very senior MFA officials to stop this distribution. The reason given was that rather than allowing the information to be shared directly, the MFA wanted it transferred from the MFA HQ to the local embassies, where it could be “adapted” so as to be made “appropriate for the local context,” and only then shared with local pro-Israel actors.

In addition to the very problematic time-cost of this procedure, which often took hours, reaching the intended end-users after the news cycle had moved on, it also demonstrated a lack of confidence in the ability of the local actors to analyze the “unprocessed” (although official and unclassified) material, and extract the information needed for their activity defending Israel.

The irony of course is that it is often these local actors that understand the local context best, better than diplomats who may have been stationed there for only a short period of time with little

113 Heb. להפעיל

background in the relevant areas. Additionally, it is often these local non-governmental actors that have the greatest credibility with the local population.

The request to stop the distribution of materials reflected the MFA's desire to maintain the chain of command from Government Source to MFA HQ to Embassy to pro-Israel advocate, rather than accepting that a wide range of governmental and non-governmental actors would be in direct contact through a global network.

In general, despite occasionally playing lip-service to the idea of an international pro-Israel network, the MFA would still prefer that pro-Israel groups interface with the Israeli government only through the MFA and local embassy. In the MFA's view, pro-Israel actors should turn to the embassy, which would then interface with the MFA HQ, which would then interface with other government bodies or embassies as needed. A failure to maintain this linear chain of transmission in favor of a network model of cooperation is seen by the MFA as undermining the status of the local embassy. However, the reality is that while such a linear approach may have worked in the past, it is no longer relevant in an age of instant communications, rapid news cycles, and global anti-Israel NGO networks.

The hierarchal and unidirectional attitude of some MFA officials is reflected also in the physical way in which meetings with pro-Israel organizations are generally held. Whereas the meetings which the PMO National Information Directorate convenes with these organizations take place around a table, allowing interaction and dialogue, MFA forums generally take place in an auditorium, in which the MFA officials spend most of the time lecturing to the participants from a podium. While there is also an opportunity for the pro-Israel representatives to ask questions or make comments, this format does not encourage real dialogue.

The State of Israel in general, and the MFA in particular, should view the pro-Israel community as partners, and respect their local knowledge and expertise. They should embrace a network model of cooperation, while carefully respecting the boundaries between the government and foreign citizens. It is true that the agendas of pro-Israel organizations are at times driven by internal communal politics, just as it is true that the agendas of government ministries are at times driven by inter-ministry politics. However, this factor is relatively minor when compared to the overall goal of countering the global campaign to delegitimize Israel's existence. A bi-directional partnership between Israel and the pro-Israel community, based on communication, synergy and mutual respect, is necessary to succeed in this critical effort.

Despite occasionally playing lip-service to the idea of an international pro-Israel network, the MFA would still prefer that pro-Israel groups interface with the Israeli government only through the MFA and local embassy.

A bi-directional partnership between Israel and the pro-Israel community, based on communication, synergy and mutual respect, is necessary to succeed in this critical effort.

The Foreign Relations

Departments of each of the relevant ministries in the NDS should be strengthened.

It is therefore recommended that the MFA increase the number of ministries and government bodies in which it stations representatives.

12. Strengthen the Foreign Relations Departments of Relevant Ministries

Given the increasingly dense networks of connections between countries on myriad issues, the specialized nature of these connections, and the consequent need for subject-area expertise, it follows that the Foreign Relations Departments of each of the relevant ministries in the NDS should be strengthened.

As two former South African ambassadors aptly explained:

Increasingly we find that inter-government relations have become so specialised that they are compartmentalised with the specialist department being *primus inter pares* (the first among equals). Professional diplomats, being generalists, cannot play this role...Because of the contemporary importance of particularly international trade, agriculture, science and technology, transport and finance, it is common practice for the relevant departments to interact with their counterparts independently, with professional diplomats at best acting in a supportive “representational” capacity.¹¹⁴

At the same time, it must be recognized that there are two interconnected dangers inherent in the reality of the increasingly-diffuse NDS, and in expanding the capacity of each government department to act *vis a vis* its counterparts. The first is the potential for a lack of synergy between the agendas and programs of different ministries. The second is that Israel's diplomatic representatives in a specific country may be unaware of bilateral ties and projects taking shape. It is important for the MFA diplomats stationed in a particular country to be aware of all forms of cooperation taking place, in order to be able to leverage cooperation and investment in one area towards the achievement of the government's goals in another.

It is therefore recommended that the MFA increase the number of ministries and government bodies in which it stations representatives. At the same time, it must be made clear that the representatives' role is to assist in expanding the ministry's international activity, and to ensure cross-government coordination, rather than to attempt to constrict the ministry's activity.

While the MFA does currently have representatives in some of the relevant bodies, such as the President's Residence, Ministry of Energy, Ministry of Regional Cooperation, and IDF Planning Directorate, it does not in others, such as the Ministries of Economy, Finance, Justice, Strategic Affairs and Public Security. In other cases, previously existing positions, such as the MFA representative in the Jerusalem Mayor's Office and Ministry of Defense, have remained unfilled for an extended period.

¹¹⁴ Olivier and Beukes, “Diplomats- who needs them?”

13. Improve Economic Diplomacy by Enhancing Inter-agency Cooperation

Countries around the world are increasing the emphasis they place on economic diplomacy within their foreign relations. Already in 2010, then-British PM David Cameron declared, “we must link our economy up with the fastest-growing parts of the world, placing our commercial interests at the heart of our foreign policy.”¹¹⁵ Oliver notes that, “with the rising importance of economic diplomacy, governments are more inclined to open trade offices and innovation hubs than embassies.”¹¹⁶

Israel should significantly increase its investment and enhance its performance in the field of economic diplomacy. Today this field is characterized by a lack of coordination among the relevant actors, and a lack of prioritization on the part of the MFA.

While the subject of economic diplomacy is extremely broad and a full treatment is beyond the scope of this study, the following section will discuss several ways in which the Israeli NDS could improve its performance in the economic arena. The need to improve Israel's performance is particularly acute given that many of the countries which Israel has identified as being of growing diplomatic importance, such as India, China, Japan and a number of African countries, are more interested in the economic aspects of relations with Israel than the political aspects. In light of the economic disruption and downturn wrought by the COVID-19 pandemic, it will be especially important for Israel's NDS to ensure that the country retains its attractiveness as an international economic partner.

There are currently numerous government bodies which deal with international economic and financial issues, and which have representatives abroad. These include the MFA, Ministry of Economy (MoE), Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Energy and Bank of Israel. Another relevant entity is the Israel Export and International Cooperation Institute (IEI), a joint government-private sector enterprise dedicated to promoting Israeli trade, business and economic partnerships in the international arena. The IEI receives the majority of its budget from the government, while part of its budget comes from membership dues paid by Israeli companies. Representatives of the MoE and MoF sit on its Board.

Today, there is a lack of coordination and communication between the representatives of the various ministries, both in Israel and in its missions abroad. This harms Israel's overall economic performance. A May 2013 State Comptroller report found widespread non-cooperation, inter-agency competition, duplication and wasted

This field is characterized by a lack of coordination among the relevant actors, and a lack of prioritization on the part of the MFA.

115 David Cameron, “Speech to Lord Mayor’s Banquet,” (Lord Mayor’s Banquet, London, November 15, 2010). <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/speech-to-lord-mayors-banquet>

116 Oliver, “The Irrelevant Diplomat”.

resources in the economic diplomacy arena.¹¹⁷ From interviews with actors involved in this arena from both within and outside the government, it appears that little of substance has changed since.

The MoE has approximately 50 economic attachés stationed abroad, which report to the MoE Foreign Trade Administration (FTA). The MFA also has a number of economic diplomats posted abroad, some of whom are stationed in the same countries as the MoE's attachés. In countries where there are no dedicated economic diplomats, other diplomats are responsible for economic affairs as well. The MFA's diplomats involved in economic relations report back to the MFA Economic Affairs Division. There is no formal mechanism that ensures coordination between the network of economic attachés and diplomats, either on the level of the MFA and MoE HQs in Jerusalem, or on the level of the individual missions. At best, such coordination is dependent on personal relationships and attitudes.

The MFA continues to relegate economic diplomacy to a secondary position. In the MFA's work plans in 2018 and 2019 (as published in the government compilation of work plans), economic diplomacy appears fifth on the list of priority issues. While the MoE FTA has an easily-accessible online system for companies interested in contacting an economic attaché (which also allows for efficient tracking and measurement), the MFA Economic Affairs Division has no similar system. One government official who deals with economic issues told the author that when he asked the MFA to reach out through the relevant embassy to a foreign company, the answer he received was that, "as official representatives of Israel, we don't approach private companies."

In July 2019, then-Foreign Minister Israel Katz announced that he intended to place a greater emphasis on economic activity and achievements within the MFA. This announcement received a negative reception from several Israeli diplomats and the Mitvim Institute, which objected that, "Katz's reform, as it has been presented, continues the trend of weakening the MFA, and undermines the heart of its activity — political diplomacy."¹¹⁸

There have been several cases of disputes between the MoE and MFA regarding economic representation abroad, including regarding the formal diplomatic rank to be given to the MoE attaché. The attaché's diplomatic rank often impacts on the seniority of the people he or she is able to meet, particularly in countries that attach

117 State Comptroller Annual Report 63c for 2012, *Work Interfaces between the Foreign Ministry and the Industry, Trade and Labor Ministry in the Field of Foreign Trade Advancement* (May 2013), 259-292. <https://www.mevaker.gov.il/sites/DigitalLibrary/Documents/63c/2013-63c-105-Mimshakim.pdf>

118 Roei Kibrik and Nimrod Goren, "Katz's Reform is not the Right Approach for Fixing the Foreign Ministry," *Haaretz: Mitvim Institute Blog*, July 17, 2019. <https://www.haaretz.co.il/blogs/mitvim/BLOG-1.7534801>

great weight to protocol and hierarchy. While from an economic perspective, it would be advantageous to give the MoE attaché the most senior rank possible, the MFA has an incentive to limit the attaché's rank, so that the attaché remains dependent on the MFA Head of Mission to open doors.

An additional problem is that while the main orientation of certain Israeli missions is (or should be) economic, for example in Shanghai or San Francisco, the MFA diplomat selected to be HOM often has little economic expertise.

One important measure to reform and improve Israel's economic diplomacy would be to create a shared government pool of economic emissaries (attachés and diplomats). Those slated to deal with international economic issues in all the relevant ministries- MFA, MoE, MoF (and perhaps also the Bank of Israel, Ministry of Energy, Ministry of Agriculture and others) should undergo a shared training program, either as their primary training or in addition to ministry-specific training. They then should be able to move easily from one position or posting to the next within all of the relevant ministries. While still reporting to a specific ministry at the time of their posting, the establishment of such an economic pool would facilitate the creation of an *esprit de corps* of cooperation and communication. The members of this pool would have shared experiences, would develop cross-ministry relationships, and would understand that they could soon find themselves working under a different ministry.

This pool would use a unified reporting and tracking system for contacts with businesses, based on the system developed by the MoE FTA.¹¹⁹ Only one member of the economic pool would be posted to each mission, unless the volume of work legitimately demanded more, thereby preventing a waste of resources. The MFA would grant the highest diplomatic rank possible, given the particular circumstances in a country and mission, to the representative of the economic pool. HOM positions in missions with a clear economic orientation would be reserved for senior members of this economic pool.

The possibility of allowing members of the economic pool to rotate in and out of the IEI, without giving up their positions in the ministries, should also be examined. The MFA should be given representation on the IEI Board.

The creation of such an economic pool would require changes in the Israeli Civil Service Commission's inflexible and cumbersome human resources policies. Therefore, creating such a pool will require leadership and oversight from the senior political level.

One important measure to reform and improve Israel's economic diplomacy would be to create a shared government pool of economic emissaries (attachés and diplomats).

119 With the establishment of this economic pool, it would be possible to examine consolidating administrative functions carried out for Israel's economic representatives abroad as well.

ASHR'A - The Israel Foreign Trade Risk Insurance Corporation should become less risk-adverse and more willing to provide insurance in a wider range of developing countries.

There are numerous additional steps that Israel should take to enhance its economic diplomacy. As noted, while a full treatment of them is beyond the scope of this work, a few will briefly be mentioned.

There is a broad consensus among Israeli entrepreneurs that the government should do more to assist businesses interested in expanding their operations in Africa. For example, ASHR'A — The Israel Foreign Trade Risk Insurance Corporation should become less risk-adverse and more willing to provide insurance in a wider range of developing countries. Government Resolution 1585 from June 26, 2016 on *Strengthening Economic Ties and Cooperation with the Countries of the African Continent* should be funded, at least in part, with a special budget, rather than relying primarily on budgetary diversions within existing ministry budgets.¹²⁰

Israel should both expand its investment in international development and update its strategy for this arena. MASHAV, Israel's Agency for International Development Coordination, continues to do important (although extremely under-funded) work through the provision of training in areas such as agriculture and water management, but its model of operations is somewhat outdated and no longer sufficient.

Government Resolution 4021 from July 23, 2018 on *Advancing Israeli Activity in the Field of International Development*,¹²¹ calls to greatly expand Israel's efforts in this field. This decision is an important step in the right direction, and Israel should follow other countries in focusing its foreign aid on international development assistance which serves its economic and political interests.

While the decision calls for examining the possibility of establishing an Israeli Development Finance Institution, this is a far-off goal. At this point, Israeli financial institutions such as pension funds and banks should be encouraged and assisted in investing assets in international development banks. Increased investment in international development banks would not only improve Israel's standing with countries receiving assistance via these banks, but would also allow Israel to influence the priorities of the banks to include areas in which Israel has a relative advantage (for example, cybersecurity.)

120 See https://www.gov.il/he/departments/policies/2016_dec1585 including art. 9.

121 https://www.gov.il/he/departments/policies/dec4021_2018

While in all countries, the foreign affairs ministry is involved in economic diplomacy, in some cases (such as the UK), foreign trade promotion is led by a separate ministry, while in others (such as Australia), it is part of the foreign affairs portfolio. As opposed to the recommendations of other research institutes on this issue, it is recommended here that, at least for the present, the MoE continues to be the leading actor within the Israeli NDS in terms of foreign trade.

There are several reasons for this. The first is that while the MFA's culture is currently resistant (or at least hesitant) with regards to engaging with business actors, and lacks tracking and evaluation mechanisms, the MoE FTA has a culture which promotes such engagement, and has implemented a work plan based on KPIs, tracking and evaluation. It is therefore better positioned at this point in time to promote Israel's foreign trade.

Secondly, the MoE is currently able to be more flexible than the MFA in terms of where it stations its economic emissaries. If one region shows potential and another underperforms, it is able to relatively easily reorganize the deployment of its representatives. Due to both internal MFA personnel procedures, and the potential diplomatic consequences that could result from depleting official diplomatic representation in one country and increasing it in another, the MFA is less flexible in this regard.

In the future, if the model of an economic pool is adopted, and the MFA changes its internal culture and improves its tracking and evaluation processes, the transfer of the Foreign Trade Administration to the MFA can be considered.

It is recommended here that, at least for the present, the MoE continues to be the leading actor within the Israeli NDS in terms of foreign trade.

Since 2015, and particularly since 2018, Israel and the pro-Israel network's counter-campaign has grown increasingly sophisticated, coordinated and effective.

14. Counter BDS by Facilitating and Empowering the Pro-Israel Network

The campaign to delegitimize Israel in the international arena in general, and the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement in particular, represent a complex challenge for the State of Israel and its supporters. This campaign, which is led by a diverse and decentralized network of anti-Israel actors, finds expression in a broad range of arenas, including in the political, economic, legal, academic, cultural, civil society, media and online spheres. As BDS and delegitimization impact both the State of Israel, and Jewish and pro-Israel communities around the world, the network of actors working to counter these challenges is also extremely diverse.

To date, the practical economic impact of BDS on the State of Israel has been minimal, while the long-term effects of the delegitimization campaign on Israel's standing are more difficult to ascertain. However, the relatively limited impact of the BDS campaign to date should not be interpreted as indicating that BDS does not have the potential to transform into a strategic threat. In fact, from 2010-2015, the BDS campaign was able to achieve several significant victories, in part due to the fact that Israel and the pro-Israel network were not sufficiently prepared.

Since 2015, and particularly since 2018, Israel and the pro-Israel network's counter-campaign has grown increasingly sophisticated, coordinated and effective. It appears that the momentum of the BDS movement has been disrupted. Following revelations of its links to terror and antisemitism, and the growing number of decision-makers who understand that its true goal is the destruction of the State of Israel, it is, for the first time, on the defensive.¹²²

However, the BDS campaign has repeatedly demonstrated its ability to rapidly pivot in its strategies and tactics, and quickly take advantage of new opportunities. For example, BDS groups are currently expanding their focus on the governmental and political arenas (on both the national and municipal levels), improving their political advocacy capabilities, and building new alliances under the banner of "intersectionality". Developments such as the publication of the UN Human Right Council blacklist (database), and the International Criminal Court Prosecutor's investigation of Israel, are creating new opportunities for BDS. If the counter-BDS network does not continue to refine and strengthen its counter-campaign, BDS has the potential to evolve into a much more serious threat to Israel and its supporters in the future.

¹²² For a comprehensive treatment of Israel and the counter-BDS community's fight against BDS, see Asher Fredman, *The Battle Over BDS: Trends, Lessons, and Future Trajectories* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 2020). <https://jcpa.org/book/the-battle-over-bds-trends-lessons-and-future-trajectories/>

In order to be effective, the Israeli Government ministry responsible for countering the global BDS campaign should have a culture of serving both as a cross-network convener and as an executor of activities. Countering the BDS campaign requires coordinating between the diverse actors within the NDS responsible for the various arenas in which the campaign manifests itself (for example, the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Economy, Finance, Justice, Agriculture, Culture and Sport, IDF, COGAT and many others). An effective response also requires enhancing communication and synergy between the broad range of pro-Israel organizations and activists around the world. Therefore, the body leading the fight must be one whose organizational culture and structure promotes the role of network convener and facilitator.

At the same time, countering the decentralized BDS movement requires a sustained and concerted effort comprised of an array of actions aimed at thwarting specific boycott initiatives, exposing the true nature and goals of the movement, sharing accurate information regarding Israel, and building firewalls against BDS. These actions must utilize all of the capabilities of the Israeli government (as well as of the pro-Israel network). In addition, given the non-governmental nature of the BDS campaign, it is important that Israel act to support and empower non-governmental allies active in civil society arenas.

Therefore, the governmental body responsible for leading the counter-BDS campaign should be one that, in addition to convening the network, has the capability of both carrying out a wide-range of activities and of empowering other members of the network.

The fight against BDS is frequently highlighted as an area of responsibility that was unjustifiably taken from the MFA and given to another ministry. These critics argue that the October 2015 Security Cabinet decision giving overall responsibility for leading Israel's campaign against BDS to the Ministry of Strategic Affairs should be reversed. Yet regardless of the justness of the decision, the MSA today is better equipped and orientated toward carrying out the crucial tasks described above.

As explained earlier in this study, the MFA's self-image is one of an executor of policy and activities, not of a convener and facilitator of other bodies. While the MFA certainly does host on occasion inter-agency meetings on specific issues, it does not place an emphasis on convening ongoing governmental forums to address broad challenges.

The Israeli Government ministry responsible for countering the global BDS campaign should have a culture of serving both as a cross-network convener and as an executor of activities.

Additionally, as described, the MFA is institutionally resistant to creating a network of direct connections between governmental and non-governmental actors, for fear of undermining its embassies and their role as gatekeeper to official Israel.

Convening broad inter-governmental forums is one of the key roles of the NSC. However, the NSC does not see itself as an executor of activities and work plans. While it does occasionally carry out specific missions for the prime minister, it sees its main roles as facilitation, coordination and oversight.

The MSA does convene government-wide and network-wide forums on a regular basis. It developed the global counter-BDS network known as the Global Coalition for Israel (GC4I),¹²³ and established the Governmental Forum for Countering Delegitimization and BDS. At the same time, the MSA also sees itself as an executor of a wide-range of activities, and has established mechanisms for empowering the pro-Israel network.

The MFA and MSA have adopted two very different strategies for countering BDS. The general approach of the MFA has been to avoid drawing attention to the BDS movement by ignoring or not relating to it wherever possible, while working quietly behind the scenes to thwart individual BDS initiatives. The MSA, particularly under the leadership of Gilad Erdan from 2015-2020, adopted a strategy of moving from defense to offense and highlighting the BDS movement's true goals, its links to terror and its antisemitism. It appears that this strategy, together with the improved coordination of the pro-Israel network, has been successful in reversing BDS momentum, putting it on the defensive and rolling back some of its gains.

At present, the MSA is better suited to act as a facilitator of the pro-Israel network and as the engine of a sustained campaign against BDS. If the MFA adopts the reforms suggested in this study, the possibility of giving the MFA overall responsibility for the fight against BDS can be examined.

123 The MFA was one of the original conveners of the GC4I network, but it adopted a negative attitude and obstructive approach towards the network soon thereafter.

15. Update Recruitment and Career Models

In order to attract the most talented individuals, and enhance its ability to advance Israel's diplomatic goals, the MFA should update the career paths and options which it offers. Like foreign services around the world, the MFA must contend with the changing career patterns of millennials, who are the primary population segment joining the foreign service today.¹²⁴ In addition, in order to improve its performance, the MFA should create possibilities for experts and specialists to join the foreign service for a limited period.

Foreign service continues to be attractive to many. It provides international and public sector experience, as well as an opportunity to serve the country. However, the current model for diplomatic careers in the MFA — taking part in the lengthy five-year Cadets Course and on-the-job training period, followed by a decades-long career of moving up through the organizational hierarchy until retirement — is no longer attractive to the most talented members of the millennial generation.

The number of applicants to the MFA's Cadets Course has dropped from about 3,000 to about 1,400 (according to some reports, the number of applicants dropped to 1,000 in 2016).¹²⁵ About 25% of those who complete the lengthy and expensive Cadets Course leave the MFA after 10-11 years (other estimates put the number at as high as a third.)

MFA representatives tend to place the blame for the decrease in applicants on the decrease in salaries (in real terms). However, while salary is certainly a factor, it is only part of the story.

Survey after survey has shown that millennials are much more likely to change jobs on a frequent basis than their predecessors. One study showed that 30% of millennials do not see themselves remaining in their current position for more than a year.¹²⁶ Despite the fact that MFA employees do rotate in and out of positions and postings every few years, millennials are nevertheless less likely to be attracted to remaining in one government bureaucracy over their entire careers.

At the same time, the high number of applicants with substantial private sector experience for positions related to Israel's international affairs across all government ministries (for example,

In order to attract the most talented individuals, the MFA should update the career paths and options which it offers.

Millennials are nevertheless less likely to be attracted to remaining in one government bureaucracy over their entire careers.

124 As well as Generation Z. For a definition of these generational cohorts, see Michael Dimock, *Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins* (Pew Research Center, January 17, 2019). <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/01/17/where-millennials-end-and-generation-z-begins/>

125 Shlomo Cesana, "MFA: A Sharp Decline in Demand for the Cadets Course," *Israel Hayom*, January 23, 2017. <https://www.israelhayom.co.il/article/446197>

126 Maayan Manela, "The Reason that 30% of Workers from Generation-Y Want to Leave Within a Year," *Calcalist*, December 5, 2016. <https://www.calcalist.co.il/local/articles/0,7340,L-3703156,00.html>

for positions that opened up in the PMO National Information Directorate, MSA, and MoE economic attaché course), shows that there are many talented and experienced individuals interested in entering the public sector. Such government service is attractive, despite the lower salaries than in the private sector, due to the nature of the subject matter and activity, the Zionist ideal of contributing to the country, and the valuable experience that can be leveraged for future career advancement.

The MFA would benefit greatly from adding to its ranks talented and experienced specialists from many fields. Such external recruits would bring new perspectives, energy and creativity, which would help revitalize the MFA's internal culture, introduce best practices from other sectors, and encourage out-of-the box thinking.

Therefore, the MFA should create several new career paths, in addition to the current career-long path that begins with the Cadets Course and ends with retirement, which will still remain the core of the foreign service. People with relevant experience from the private sector, academia, the security and intelligence communities, and other government ministries, should be able to join mid-career for a limited period (perhaps 5-6 years). Before beginning their work, they could undergo an intensive several-months-long Cadets Course, in order to ensure that they are familiar with the basics of diplomatic norms and practice.

Another career path should be open to talented young individuals interested in joining the MFA at the start of their careers, but who declare from the outset that they do not see themselves as remaining within the foreign service for the long-term (this would of course affect the conditions of their employment).

Additionally, experienced MFA diplomats should be able to leave the foreign service in order to spend periods in the private sector or other public sector bodies, and then return to the MFA. Legal arrangements would have to be made in order to avoid conflicts of interest in such cases. Allowing such a rotation in and out of the MFA would also help solve the problem of the dearth of appropriate positions for senior diplomats returning from postings abroad.

Such an approach is being examined by other foreign ministries as well. For example, in a paper produced by the PeaceLab project supported by the German Foreign Office, entitled *Making the German Foreign Office Fit for Berlin's New Role in the World*, the author recommends:

It should be possible to hire employees from outside the foreign ministry on a flexible basis — not just for two years as is current practice, but for five or six years. This would also strengthen the exchange

between ministries, academia and the private sector — something that is much more common in other foreign ministries around the world.¹²⁷

Besides the need to change civil service and MFA employment regulations to accommodate varied paths, such a reform will also require a conceptual change on the part of the MFA. Today the MFA's approach is that diplomatic training in general and the Cadets Course in particular are the most important contributors to success in diplomatic postings. The MFA should adopt a conceptual approach that recognizes that relevant experience is of equal, if not greater, value than formal diplomatic training. There is little reason to believe that a generalist diplomat who has rotated in and out of positions in various countries will be more qualified to successfully fill a position in a particular field than someone with direct on-the-ground experience in that field.

For example, a former ambassador at one of Israel's largest embassies told the author of a diplomat who had arrived at his embassy to take up a position with responsibility for pro-Israel activity on campus. The diplomat had never been on a Western university campus before and had not previously served in any relevant position. It is unlikely that such a diplomat will perform the task better than someone who has not gone through the Cadets Course, but who has extensive experience in the fields of campus activism or academia.

In addition to recruiting external experts, the MFA should change its career path model to encourage a greater degree of specialization among its diplomats. Here too, the MFA is not alone in resisting such a change. The PeaceLab paper notes, regarding the German Foreign Office, that "The Foreign Office is rigidly clinging to the idea that all diplomats should be generalists and able to rotate into any post...the notion that diplomats should not have a strong specialization is simply outdated and no longer feasible in the 21st century."¹²⁸ As the global workforce moves towards a greater and a greater emphasis on specialization and expertise, the MFA must follow suit.

Another challenge related to the MFA career paths is the issue of diplomats' spouses and partners. This challenge has two interrelated aspects, one financial and the other sociological and personal. On the financial level, the spouses and partners of diplomats often give up careers in Israel in order to move between diplomatic postings. Abroad, the work that the MFA can offer is generally low-paying (and low-prestige) administrative work. Upon their return to Israel, they at times have difficulty finding employment

As the global workforce moves towards a greater and a greater emphasis on specialization and expertise, the MFA must follow suit.

127 Sarah Brockmeier, *Making the German Foreign Office Fit for Berlin's New Role in the World*, (Global Public Policy Institute, March 28, 2018). <https://www.gppi.net/2018/03/28/making-the-german-foreign-office-fit-for-berlins-new-role-in-the-world>

128 Ibid.

in their fields due to a lack of accumulated experience. Finally, as a result of the frequent moves and job changes, the spouses' retirement pensions are often negatively affected. Upon retirement, diplomats and their spouses may find themselves living on a single pension.¹²⁹

The second aspect is sociological. In the past, diplomats' wives were expected to play the role of hostess and accompany their husbands to diplomatic events, while giving up their own careers. To this day, MFA regulations limit the number of hours that ambassadors' wives can work, due to the expectation that part of their time will be taken up by their supporting diplomatic role. Today, however, diplomats' spouses (female and male) are often unwilling to put their own careers and self-actualization on hold.

One result is that it is increasingly common for diplomats to serve abroad without their spouses. One estimate puts the number of HOMs serving abroad without their spouses at 50%. Anecdotally, there are reports of a high divorce rate within the MFA.

Regarding the financial aspect, this has been a source of frequent contention between the MoF and MFA Labor Unions. As part of a broader reform of MFA human resource practices, Israel should examine models implemented by several European countries, such as the UK and the Netherlands, which provide additional compensation to diplomats' spouses for lost salaries and pensions. For example, the British FCO recognizes that, "Spouses/partners can find it very difficult to pursue a normal career with a resultant loss of income to the household" and therefore pays a Spouse/ Partner Pension Compensation to foreign service officers "in recognition of their contractual commitment to serve anywhere overseas. It recognises the impact this has on the spouse's ability to follow a career and to contribute to a UK pension scheme."¹³⁰

The sociological challenge may prove even more difficult, and will require a great deal of effort and innovation to mitigate, if not surmount. One possibility is for the MFA to invest in professional job placement services and consulting in the host country, in order to assist diplomats' spouses in finding fulfilling employment while abroad, while freeing them of any limitations as to the number of hours they can work. It may be that the increasing popularity and acceptance of distance and virtual working, particularly as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, will also assist to a degree in mitigating this challenge.

129 While in the past, retired MFA diplomats, like other civil servants, were entitled to budgetary pensions, this is no longer the case.

130 UK FCO Human Resources Directorate, *Freedom of Information Act 2000-REQUEST REF: 0078-17*, February 20, 2017. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/601008/0078-17_Letter.pdf

16. Enable the Foreign Minister to Make Political Appointments to the MFA HQ

Government Resolutions 4990 from April 1999 and 2127 from June 2002, as formulated in Directive 1.4 of the Civil Service Commission,¹³¹ allow the Government, at the recommendation of the Foreign Minister, to make 11 appointments to positions of Heads of Mission (HOM). These appointments are made without going through the regular MFA appointments process, although the appointees are still required to meet certain qualifications and standards. In the public and media discourse, these appointments are known as “political appointments”.

From time to time, there is criticism of the existence of such political appointments. However, no serious study has ever been conducted to determine whether these appointees perform more or less well than their counterparts from within the MFA bureaucracy. It appears that, just like their counterparts from the MFA civil service, some execute their HOM positions with great skill, while others are less successful.

It is recommended to change the relevant directives such that these appointments can be made both to HOM positions abroad, and to positions within the MFA HQ in Jerusalem as well.

This would have several benefits. It would allow the appointment of people with a broader range of experience and expertise (including from the private sector) to relevant positions within the MFA HQ. For example, the Foreign Minister could appoint communications experts or executives with extensive international trade experience to positions in the Public Diplomacy and Economic Divisions, thereby improving the performance of these divisions.

At the same time, by splitting the “political appointments” between the HQ and Israel's missions abroad, there would be a greater number of senior HOM positions available to be filled by career diplomats. This would help solve the problem of senior diplomats returning from abroad without there being positions appropriate to their rank available in the HQ. With less HOM spots taken up by political appointees, there could be a greater degree of rotation and more opportunities for career diplomats to fill prestigious HOM positions.

It is recommended to change the relevant directives such that these appointments can be made both to HOM positions abroad, and to positions within the MFA HQ in Jerusalem as well.

¹³¹ Civil Service Commission Directives, Directive 1.4, *Guidelines for the Appointments Committee for HOM Positions in the MFA*, (Version 3, August 27, 2018). https://www.gov.il/BlobFolder/policy/guide_line_14/he/GuideLine14.pdf

The number of so-called “political appointments” should be reexamined as well, with the goal of enhancing the degree to which the foreign service reflects the priorities and positions of the Foreign Minister and Government.¹³²

132 It should be noted that in the United States, approximately 30% of diplomatic postings abroad go to appointees made by the President from outside the professional foreign service. See Dave Seminara, “In U.S., Selling Ambassadorships to Highest Bidder Has Long History,” *The Washington Diplomat*. https://washdiplomat.com/index.php?option=com_content&id=8985:in-us-selling-ambassadorships-to-highest-bidder-has-long-history&Itemid=42

In the U.S. case as well, there appears to have been few attempts to analyze the actual performance of such political appointees *vis a vis* career diplomats, as opposed to their qualifications “on paper”.



Conclusion

There is no contradiction between the fact that the Israeli NDS and MFA are in need of extensive reforms, and the fact that the MFA should be given the resources necessary to carry out its responsibilities. Such reforms on the structural, conceptual and operational levels are critical in order to adapt to global developments, correct institutional problems and gaps, and optimize performance. Once the roles of each member of the NDS are defined, each should be given the budget needed to successfully and efficiently execute its tasks.

In truth, it appears that the MFA itself is cognizant of the need to update and reform its operations. In June 2018, the MFA completed an internal review, dubbed “Project 2025”. Over the course of the review, six teams, led by the head of the Policy Planning Division, produced a report entitled *Adapting the MFA to the Challenges of the Future*.¹³³

The report was submitted to then-MFA Director General Rotem, but its findings were not presented to the public. It may be that some of the findings were not to the liking of Rotem or to the political echelons. However, it appears that at least part of the reason that the report’s results were not communicated is the belief that highlighting proposals for reform could undermine the dominant narrative presented by MFA representatives in the media. The MFA would prefer to keep the media narrative focused on its claims of being wronged and unjustly weakened due to political considerations and the whims of the Finance Ministry. Admitting the need for reform, it may be feared, could dilute this narrative.

This is a mistake. Communicating that it is committed to becoming both more efficient and more effective would assist the MFA in gaining support for its demands. Rather than repeatedly presenting itself as the wronged and injured victim of stronger bodies (which

Once the roles of each member of the NDS are defined, each should be given the budget needed to successfully and efficiently execute its tasks.

Communicating that it is committed to becoming both more efficient and more effective would assist the MFA in gaining support for its demands.

133 Emmanuel Nahshon, Twitter (@EmmanuelNahshon), June 26, 2018. <https://twitter.com/emmanuelnahshon/status/1011533179122012160?lang=he>

It is important that in following up on Project 2025, the MFA consults with experts and practitioners outside the circles of the foreign service.

The Israeli government must enable its officials to operate with agility in countering attacks in the international arena and in seizing diplomatic opportunities.

in some cases becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy), it could position itself at the forefront of a substantive discussion regarding enhancing Israel's national security and standing.

This is not to deny that political considerations may have influenced the division of authorities or that the MoF may have taken advantage of the MFA's limited range of public levers in budget negotiations. However, narrowly focusing the conversation on political or inter-ministry disputes will not contribute to increasing the MFA's public standing (or performance) over the long run.

It is important that in following up on Project 2025, the MFA consults with experts and practitioners outside the circles of the foreign service. Otherwise, there is a danger that it will remain within an echo chamber. For example, it appears that the MFA retained retired Israeli diplomat Arthur Koll as an advisor to the 2025 project.¹³⁴ Koll also took part in drafting Mitvim's recommendations on strengthening the foreign service. While Koll's years of diplomatic experience undoubtedly qualify him to contribute to the discussion, it is important that both the MFA itself and research institutes active on these issues engage with a diverse range of viewpoints.

One issue not addressed in this study but that also has a far-reaching impact on Israel's ability to successfully meet challenges in the international arena is the need to reform the government's procedures for procurement, expenditures and contracting. Today, government regulations and procedures for such actions tend to be cumbersome, inefficient and overly-complex. While Israel's enemies in the international arena are often able to act in a quick and flexible manner, the hands of Israel's representatives are frequently tied by lengthy bureaucratic procedures requiring multiple stages of approval by legal advisors and accountants. The Israeli government must enable its officials to operate with agility in countering attacks in the international arena and in seizing diplomatic opportunities.

¹³⁴ MFA Budget, "Consulting Services in the Framework of the 2025 Process - MFA (HQ) - Arthur Koll" (last updated May 15, 2018). <https://next.obudget.org/i/contract-spending/%D7%9E%D7%A9%D7%A8%D7%93%20%D7%94%D7%97%D7%95%D7%A5/4580013695/0009510303>

While Israel's NDS in general and MFA in particular must become more efficient, this is not to say that modern diplomacy can be carried out inexpensively. Some elements of an up-to-date approach to foreign relations require substantial investment. For example, integrating tools from the worlds of big data and artificial intelligence, expanding international development assistance, executing sophisticated social media campaigns, and scaling P2P activities, all require significant resources.

Additionally, it is important to remember that Israel's diplomats represent and reflect on the state as a whole. When foreign diplomats or Israel's allies turn to MFA officials and repeatedly receive a response that the MFA is not capable of providing assistance, this reflects poorly on the state. Israel's diplomats must be given the tools to perform their roles in a dignified manner.

Strengthening Israel's international relations and national security by reforming its NDS must be a key priority of Israel's leadership. The author stands ready to assist in any way in this critical endeavor.

*Israel's diplomats must
be given the tools to
perform their roles in
a dignified manner.*





KOHELET POLICY FORUM

The Kohelet Policy Forum in Jerusalem strives to secure the future of Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish People, to strengthen Israeli democracy, expand individual liberty, and deepen free market principles in Israel. The Forum is a non-partisan entity. It relies on private donations and does not accept, directly or indirectly, public funds from any government, domestic or foreign. The Forum's legislative research, policy papers, and other research-based products are offered to Israeli decision-makers and to the public free of charge.



KOHELET POLICY FORUM

Am V'Olamot 8
Jerusalem 9546306

Tel. 02-6312720
Fax 077-318-2028

office@kohelet.org.il
www.kohelet.org.il

ISBN 978-965-7674-78-9



9 789657 674789