

CHAPTER EIGHT

Organizational Changes





8.1 Revitalizing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs



As prime minister, and at times also foreign minister and defense minister, Benjamin Netanyahu has registered a long list of diplomatic breakthroughs.

Israel's diplomatic achievements include: changes in US policy being implemented during the Trump administration with regards to Iran, Jerusalem and the Golan; Jerusalem's successful navigation of relations with Russia despite the complexities that have arisen since the outbreak of civil war in Syria; the strengthening of ties with India and Japan; strategic change in the eastern Mediterranean basin; better standing in Central and Eastern Europe; establishment of new relationships in Asia, Africa and Latin America; and diplomatic milestones with Arab and Muslim countries.

In every facet of Israeli diplomacy, Israel needs professionals who can turn diplomatic momentum into tangible outcomes.

But difficult challenges lie ahead, including in the vital American arena. The next Israeli government should have a full-time foreign minister who is dedicated to reforming the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and rebuilding its authority, in order to capitalize on recent diplomatic successes. In every facet of Israeli diplomacy, Israel needs professionals who can turn diplomatic momentum into tangible outcomes.

However, the MFA has not always been well positioned to capitalize on diplomatic breakthroughs, frequently failing to develop strategic cooperation, trade and investment agreements with countries. And today, the Israeli foreign service is at a nadir, the result of severe cuts made to the MFA's budget and the parceling-out of many MFA responsibilities to other government agencies.



A comprehensive plan of action to reverse this decline would include the following:

- » Reclaim as many as possible of the functions that once had been under the MFA's purview. One example is Israel's ongoing battle against the global BDS movement. Confronting this phenomenon requires an intimate familiarity with the state of affairs in different Western countries, which MFA professionals possess. Another example is the advancement of cultural relations, a responsibility that also has been largely farmed out to other agencies.
- » Reverse the deep budgetary cuts of recent years. Undeniably, these cuts have reduced the ability of Israeli embassies around world to operate effectively. The scope of their activities should be expanded, and embassies should be empowered to determine some of their own specific priorities.
- » Enhance the activities of and increasing the budgets to MASHAV, Israel's Agency for International Development Cooperation. The impact of this aid agency has dropped off noticeably in recent decades, despite Israel's extensive capabilities in this arena. Furthermore, MASHAV is tasked with fulfilling obligations that Israel has assumed as an OECD member state. MAHSAV is thus a diplomatic and informational mechanism of great importance to Israel.
- » Intensify cooperation with Israeli NGOs that manage a wide variety of international aid activities, including response to natural disasters and other emergency scenarios. These NGOs should be given relevant tax exemptions. Diaspora Jewish aid organizations could be better integrated with Israel's activities too, adding to the moral component of Israel-Diaspora relations.
- » Invest in public diplomacy. Israel must contend with the prospect of an armed conflict with Iran as well as the bad optics that result from warfare in densely populated areas. Israel's efforts at public diplomacy will continue to be of little benefit if its operating budget remains smaller than that of a mid-sized company's advertising budget.
- » Add and expand diplomatic missions around the world. Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and Oceania should be prioritized, since many of the countries in these regions are amenable to changing their voting patterns at international forums in support of Israel. The consular presence should also be expanded in the US, China and India. These three nations offer significant trade and development opportunities that are vital to Israel.
- » Train foreign service professionals to reach out to the populations of Arabic-speaking countries. This can advance change in the attitudes of people living in the Arab world towards Jews and ultimately towards Israel.





8.2 Jerusalem-Based National Security Policy Planning



Revitalizing the MFA should be part of a wider effort to synchronize all aspects of Israel's national security and foreign policy decision making via the Jerusalem-based National Security Staff (NSS) under the National Security Adviser (NSA).

The NSS and the NSA should also take the lead in updating and defining national security doctrines. Such an effort will include a range of carefully researched war and peace options; decision making procedures, including mandatory inter-agency consultations; and a systematic method for implementing cabinet decisions.

The NSS in Jerusalem, rather than the array of agencies centered at the Kirya in Tel Aviv (Ministry of Defense/IDF/Mossad), should be the main coordinating body for such work. The NSS should also integrate the insights and recommendations of other Jerusalem-based government agencies, including the MFA, Foreign Trade Administration, energy ministry and more. This is also symbolically important in the context of reinforcing Jerusalem as Israel's eternal capital.

“From Zion shall emerge Israel's national security doctrine.”

As such, the plan to transfer the Israel National Defense College (MABAL) to Jerusalem is a wise move for both educational and strategic reasons. Bringing MABAL and its high-ranking officers in the Israeli military and intelligence agencies to Jerusalem will transform the city into a center for strategic studies and geo-political thought.

MABAL is not tethered to current political trends, agendas and conventional wisdom. Leaders of the college can reflect on long term scenarios and interact with seasoned analysts and scholars at Jerusalem's non-governmental think tanks (like JISS).

In short, Jerusalem-based national security and foreign policy institutions can contribute to the realization of the prophetic vision, “From Zion shall go forth Torah,” (Micah 4:2); or in a modern paraphrase, “From Zion shall emerge Israel's national security doctrine.”