
“No Illusions, No Despair”

At a much darker hour in Jewish history, prior to the U.N. vote in 1947, this was David Ben-Gurion’s dictum: “No illusions, no despair. For us Jews, and particularly Zionists, two things are forbidden: Easy optimism and sterile pessimism.”

Introduction

This document suggests a national security policy for Israel. It reflects insights of the 17 JISS fellows, who jointly surveyed the challenges Israel's leaders are facing and crafted a comprehensive series of diplomatic and defense policy recommendations.

The 14 main recommendations can be summarized as follows: 1. Nurture national cohesion. 2. Prepare for several war scenarios with an emphasis on Iran-related threats. 3. Counter Iran’s nuclear and regional ambitions, in cooperation with the US and regional partners. 4. Govern effectively and fairly in greater Jerusalem. 5. Manage the conflict with the Palestinians. 6. Respond positively to the US peace plan. 7. Deter Hamas in Gaza. 8. Prioritize relations with Egypt and Jordan while seeking new partnerships in the Arab world. 9. Exact a price for Erdogan’s provocations and bolster alliances in the eastern Mediterranean. 10. Preserve bipartisan support for Israel in the US. 11. Maintain active dialogue and deconfliction channels with Russia. 12. Act to find European anchors to negate hostile attitudes in Brussels. 13. Tread carefully amidst rising tensions in Asia. 14. Enhance Israel’s diplomatic toolbox.

The background to this document is the assessment that Israel is a strong country and its strategic position is better than ever. Nevertheless, Israel still faces significant security challenges.

Primary among the growing challenges are the hegemonic ambitions of Iran – which is seeking nuclear weapons, alongside attendant threats to Israel’s civilian home front from the Iranian regime and its proxies. In addition, for the foreseeable future, Israel faces a violent and intractable conflict with the Palestinians. Therefore, Israel must always be ready for war. This is the ultimate test for Israeli society, too.

The Israeli government’s top priorities must be preservation of national cohesion and building Israel’s military and diplomatic might in response to the main threats. At the same time, Israel should take advantage of strategic opportunities – such as the expected Trump Mideast peace plan – to change the rules of the game regarding relations with the Palestinians, the Arab world, and countries in the Mediterranean arena.

The Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security (JISS) was established in 2017 to express a realist strategic worldview. The institute advances pragmatic policies that keep Israel strong and will lead to stable diplomatic arrangements in the long term. It views the Jewish People’s historic connection to the Land of Israel as a central component of security and national identity, and insists on the importance of a united Jerusalem to Israel’s destiny and defense.