

Strategic Survey for Israel

2016-2017

Selected Chapters

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Focused Studies

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Abstract

The present book includes translations from Hebrew of three selected chapters of the Strategic Survey for Israel (SSI) by the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), published in early 2017. The choice is based on comprehensiveness and specialization. The first chapter is an executive summary of all the abstracts concerning the current and future challenges facing the Jewish state at all levels. The second chapter discusses the special relations between the US and Israel and how they are likely to develop under President Donald Trump. The third focuses on the impact of US-Russian ties on major Arab crises, taking into consideration the Israeli interest in Moscow's military intervention in Syria.

The SSI report, as the case in previous years, investigates the impact of regional and international threats and opportunities with recommendations made to Israel's political and security leaders to set their policies and options.

The translated chapters give the Arab reader the chance to identify the Israeli mindset and thinking about the Arab world issues, especially those concerning its own future and the Palestinian cause. These renditions explain Israel's stark reality, away from exaggerations that leave no space for even thinking about resistance to its continuous aggression. The fact that it is doing so should not be underestimated because it wants to consolidate the status quo and add more Arab defeats.

The first chapter is titled Strategic Survey for Israel 2016-2017: Challenges and Responses, with the main summations offered by Amos Yadlin – Director of the Institute for National Security Studies and former chief of the Israeli Military Intelligence Agency. It is argued the national security balance in late 2016 is expected to stay the same for 2017 and beyond which indicates that the positive elements in the Israeli strategic situation remains as they are. The Jewish state has maintained military superiority, substantially reduced direct military threat, and avoided broad confrontations, especially in light of the notable decrease of risk from the Arab world and its surroundings. For instance, the nuclear agreement signing between Iran and world powers in 2015 delayed any atomic confrontation. In the region, the Sunni stand against Shiite extremism, ISIS and the Muslim Brotherhood created room for joint interests between Israel and the Sunni Arab world. The positive developments in the energy market are expected to advance Israel's national economy and boost relations with other countries.

In contrast, the strategic environment surrounding Israel is believed to have created secondary negativities such as the weakness of the US status and image in the Middle East, decline of the region on Trump's list of priorities, and the Russian military intervention have strengthened Iran and Hezbollah. All these could restrict Israeli influence on the region the SSI report states. Regarding the Palestinians, it is believed the ongoing freeze in the peace process with Israel and the rising despair and incitation among Palestinians may feed individual terror acts, knifings and run over operations that started in autumn of 2015.

The Israel reports states Israeli-European ties are likely to deteriorate further with internal Israeli cohesion weakening. Finally, attacks on Israeli legitimacy and its army leaders as well as the involvement of the military in political disputes may have declined this year.

The second translated chapter of the SSI report is titled Relationship Reset: Israel and the United States by Oded Eran, a former Israeli diplomat, and Michal Hatuel-Radoshitzky, a Research Fellow at the INSS and a Post-Doctoral Research Fellow at the Tony and Elizabeth

Comper Center for the Study of Racism and Antisemitism at the University of Haifa. Focus is laid on Trump's nomination of new officials in his administration to handle the different issues at hand, especially the Middle East. Since the US-Israeli ties constitute an integral part of the regional and global context, Obama faced a great challenge in his second term of setting policies which consider the political, economic and social changes in a turbulent Middle East. The nuclear accord with Tehran and the continuing struggle with the Palestinians were among the main topics, affecting the ties with Washington during the Obama presidency. In this chapter there is reference to the Tel Aviv connection with Jewish American groups, indicating the 1967 War played a critical role in the relations between Israel and American Jews. The instinctive understanding of the unwritten US-Israeli alliance is mentioned as another factor to account for US support to Israel to serve both parties' interests.

Under Trump, the new situation in the region, which does not always require direct Israeli intervention, will influence the Jewish's state strategic status in the future. Whether it will withdraw gradually or keep a cautious involvement, Washington will stay as a key international and regional player. Thus, the authors of the report urge Tel Aviv to launch a new chapter of relations with the new US administration.

The third chosen chapter titled Involvement of the United States and Russia in the Middle East is by Oded Eran. The US stance on Russian intervention is attributed to Washington's lack of awareness of President Vladimir Putin's motives and ideology and lack of readiness to act according to the conclusions of the initial analysis that despite Moscow's economic weakness it did not prevent Putin from "re-fixing" what he saw as the historical distortion in dismantling the Soviet Union by involving Russia in the Ukraine, Syria and in cyberspace. However, there might be some reasonable explanation of the way the US deals with Russia, rather than inferring the former is weak or not serious against challenges. To conclude, the relative significance of other world regions and subjects will indirectly put an end to the US attitude to Russia and its new imperialistic awakening.