

MARITIME STRATEGIC EVALUATION FOR ISRAEL 2017/18

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Conclusion

Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

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The sea became an increasingly important component of Israel's resilience in 2017, in view of the growing use of natural gas as Israel's main energy source; the continuing development of the desalination facilities which are now supplying the majority of Israel's drinking water; the expansion of maritime trade with additional partners around the world; and the recognition of the importance of the sea as a component in the country's strategic depth. In the area of seaborne trade in a period of emergency, there was no progress made this year. On the contrary, although the golden share in the Zim company—which is held by the State and gives it access to shipping capacity in order to bring essential goods to Israel in an emergency and is meant to prevent hostile parties from having an influence on the management of the company—remained in the hands of the government, the ships that are included under the golden share are becoming antiquated and it is unclear whether they will provide a solution in scenarios where they will have to transport goods in emergency situations.

The Eastern Mediterranean and nearby regions continued to suffer from a lack of stability in 2017. The civil war in Syria has become a regional war in which a number of countries are involved and it is now directly connected to the war in Iraq and indirectly to the wars in Libya, Yemen, Somalia and the Sinai Peninsula.

Iran—which supports the Assad regime in Syria—participates in the war alongside Russia and has exploited the situation in order to upgrade its status in the region to almost that of a regional superpower. Indeed, it is on the verge of reaching the Mediterranean, including the use of Syrian ports by the Iranian navy. The Iranians who signed a nuclear agreement with the superpowers in 2015 have invested energy in the preservation of their capabilities at the time of the signing and have exploited the legitimacy they achieved by the agreement in order to strengthen the status of Iran as a controlling stakeholder with geopolitical influence from the Persian Gulf to the shores of the Mediterranean.

The US and Saudi Arabia, together with the pragmatic Sunni camp, view the containment of Iran and non-state players such as Hezbollah and the Houthis in Yemen as a primary goal. The joint Sunni Arab attack in Yemen led by Saudi Arabia—which included a naval component—constitutes a historic turning point in the efforts of the Sunni countries to deal with Iran's expansionism.

With respect to the superpowers, US involvement in the Eastern Mediterranean is continuing to decline and accordingly it has assigned priority to other theaters with respect to the deployment of naval forces and in particular the South China Sea and the Korean Peninsula. The diminishing involvement of the US has led to its weakened status in the region.

The deep structural crisis in the EU is affecting the global status of the organization, including in the Eastern Mediterranean. In contrast, the Russian Federation continues to deepen its involvement in the region, which is also reflected in the document signed by President Putin in July 2017 entitled: "Fundamentals of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Field of Naval Operations for the Period Until 2030". The document dictates that the operations of the Russian navy will be focused on the Mediterranean and the Black Sea and that the majority of the resources and the main Russian naval activity will be concentrated in that theater. President Putin, who has correctly read the geopolitical map in the Middle East, is deepening Russia's involvement in the region and is filling the vacuum left by the US. Israel must therefore coordinate its activity on the diplomatic and military levels with the Russians.

The Chinese navy is becoming increasingly powerful and is acquiring the capability of a "blue water" navy. It continued to be active in the Mediterranean on an occasional basis as part of its effort to protect the shipping lanes connecting China to markets in Europe.

The flow of refugees from Syria by way of the sea to Europe has been reduced following the agreement between the EU and Turkey. According to the agreement, Turkey detains the refugees in its territory in exchange for the financing of their stay there by the EU. Nonetheless, the flow of refugees from the coast of Northern Africa to the shores of Southern Europe is increasing. Many of the refugees on this route have drowned on the way and this has required NATO to step up its activity near the shores of North Africa in order to assist the Libyan navy in stopping the departure of the refugees from Libya.

The Southern Red Sea and the area of the Horn of Africa have in recent years constituted a focus for maritime piracy. The taskforces from various countries that are operating in the region have managed to reduce the scope of piracy to isolated incidents. On the other hand, the increased intensity of fighting in the region between the Houthis who are supported by Iran and the central government in Yemen, which includes among other things the mining of the approaches to the port of Mocha and the firing of coast-to-sea missiles against Saudi vessels, has made this area dangerous for shipping, especially in the vicinity of the Strait of Bab el Mandeb. Israel whose exports to East Asia use this shipping lane also needs to formulate a maritime strategy to meet this challenge.

In 2017, the Israeli Navy continued to build up its forces in order to fulfill all of its missions. In 2015, an agreement was signed for the procurement of defensive vessels to protect Israel's assets in its Exclusive Economic Zone, including four patrol boats from the ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems (TKMS) shipyard in Germany. In October 2017, a joint memorandum of understanding was signed between the governments of Germany and Israel to build three advanced submarines that will be supplied to the Israeli navy in the mid-2020s. On the margins of this activity, ethically questionable practices have come to light which are beyond the scope of this essay, as well as issues regarding the choice of contractor which have provided evidence of inappropriate processes within the defense

establishment (i.e. modification of the Navy's professional position regarding the issuing of an international tender and the process of choosing the model of the vessel).¹ These findings obligate the defense establishment to establish mechanisms that will include additional professional entities in the process of analyzing proposed alternatives and will prevent the repetition of such incidents in the future.

With the increasing role of the sea in Israel's resilience and the accelerating economic development of the maritime environment—including the construction of coastal installations such as ports and gas intake facilities—as well as the increasing security needs related to the sea, the need to include the public as much as possible in the public discussion of this issue is becoming more acute since this discourse will determine the balance between various needs that exist alongside economic development, such as the protection of the ecosystem and the maritime heritage.

Some of the strategic changes taking place in the region involve risks to Israel and in particular the increasing power of the Iran-Syria axis, as mentioned above, while others are creating opportunities that did not previously exist for Israel. The relations that are developing with Egypt and Saudi Arabia are one of those opportunities, even if both countries condition further improvement in relations on the solution of the Palestinian problem.² Nonetheless, it is worth emphasizing that Israel's military position remains secure and there does not appear to be any military threat to its existence in the near future, including in the maritime domain.

According to this assessment, which was carried out by the Haifa Research Center for Maritime Policy and Strategy, the report presents recommendations for maritime policy and strategy. The order in which they are presented does not necessarily reflect their importance or their level of urgency.

First recommendation – Formulation of a maritime policy and strategy for Israel

A formal process should be carried out which will begin with the identification of the State's maritime interests and the formulation of a policy towards all aspects of the maritime domain. Once this is done, it will be possible to formulate a maritime strategy that will include defined targets and the methods for achieving them.

- 1 Brigadier General (res.) Shmuel Tsuker, former head of the Procurement and Production Authority in the Ministry of Defense, in an interview with Ilana Dayan on Galei Tsahal on September 7th 2017: "I would still like to believe that they acted honestly."
- 2 Speech by Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi at Asyut: "If we could solve the issues of our Palestinian brothers, peace would be warmer...I have asked the Israeli leaders to allow the broadcast of this speech once or twice since it is a genuine opportunity," Walla News, May 17th 2016, <http://news.walla.co.il/item/2962078>.

The status of this issue: In April 2017, the Haifa Research Center for Maritime Policy and Strategy completed a comprehensive examination of the model best-suited to the State of Israel in order to formulate a maritime strategy and to choose the methodology to carry out the process. These recommendations were published as part of a booklet entitled "A Model and Methodology for a Maritime Strategy for the State of Israel". Since the previous report and following the publication of the booklet, initial contact was made with the National Security Council and a response was submitted to a call by the National Council for Economics and Society within the Prime Minister's Office to carry out an assessment for the 35th government, which will begin its activities at the beginning of 2020. At a later stage, the Center presented its recommendations to a forum organized by the National Security Council, which included representatives of various government ministries. It has not yet been decided whether the issue will be chosen by the Council when it comes to prepare its assessment for the 35th government of Israel.

Second recommendation – Maintaining commercial shipping to Israel and the port infrastructure

Israel's geostrategic situation requires an infrastructure of ships and seamen for both civilian and defense purposes. Some of the issues that require discussion in this context are the necessity of having ships belonging to the Zim shipping company that are designated for transporting goods in an emergency, the physical condition of these ships and also the ways in which they will be put to use in an emergency.

A policy should be formulated to operate the ports in an emergency, under the threat of rockets and precise missiles, and it should be determined which capabilities are required in order to accomplish this.

With respect to the operation of the ports as the gateway for Israeli exports and imports, the process to improve service, reduce the costs to exporters and importers and shorten the waiting time of goods in the ports should continue. After the expected introduction of new operators in the ports, users should be given flexibility to choose between them.

A master plan is needed for port development, as part of the examination of the various alternatives, including: the establishment of ports on artificial islands, the development of existing ports and the development of new ports in a different location, including an examination of the flow of cargo in order to formulate a plan for the development of capabilities for loading and unloading cargo in the ports.

It is necessary to formulate a long-term plan for the training and nurturing of Israeli manpower that will serve as a reserve for the operation of essential shipping in an emergency and as a reserve to fill positions (which require maritime experience) in the port institutions and organizations and in the shipyards.

An analysis of cyber threats is needed, as well as a plan to protect the Israeli commercial fleet and the ports and their infrastructures from such threats.

Third recommendation – Integration of the Mediterranean as part of Israel's strategic depth

The State of Israel is a coastal nation and in view of the ranges of modern weaponry lacks any real strategic depth on land. Its centers of population, industry and electricity production are adjacent to the coast and are exposed to attack from the direction of the sea. Israel's "narrow waist" is densely populated and contains much of the country's infrastructure, which is vulnerable to land attack and one day will have to be extended into the sea.

Israel needs to adopt the idea that the Eastern Mediterranean provides the country with additional strategic depth. The abilities and infrastructures to develop this approach should be examined.

Projects should be initiated that were recommended by the feasibility study for the establishment of artificial islands, which was based on Government Decision 4776 of June 6th 2012 and the final feasibility report carried out in 2013 which recommended the first cluster that would be included on such a future island. This cluster includes a facility for the cleansing and handling of natural gas, a power plant, a desalinization plant and an ammonia intake facility.³ Construction on artificial islands will enable the intake of natural gas produced offshore, the production of electricity and seawater desalinization without having to use expensive land resources near the coast.

Fourth recommendation – Processes to build up the naval forces

The processes to build up the Israeli navy's forces, which came into the limelight with the submarine and patrol boat deals, were at the center of public discourse and have been investigated by the authorities. There were two main issues at the focus of the investigation:

- Alleged ethical misconduct of those involved in the process.
- The professionalism of the process to decide on the type of international tender for the patrol boats and the stance of the Navy on this issue.

The processes related to the ethics of the alleged suspects are not the subject of this report and it is worthwhile that they be examined by the authorities and that the defense establishment will arrive at the necessary conclusions.

3 BipolEnergy – final report of the project to examine the feasibility of creating artificial islands (maritime structures) which was prepared for the Director General of the Ministry of Science and Technology and the Interministerial Committee to examine the feasibility of artificial islands for infrastructure clusters, May 21st 2013.

The processes involved in defining the operational need for the patrol boats and their suitability for a specific industry revealed a process that is characteristic of a hierarchical system that is not subject to oversight and external auditing. It is worthwhile examining how this issue can be appropriately dealt with within the defense establishment including the possibility of expanding the examination process to include entities outside the defense establishment who have the relevant experience and are able to present alternative opinions. This will prevent a repetition of the decision making process that occurred in this instance.

Fifth recommendation – Development and exploitation of energy resources located in the open sea and protection of the environment

The government and the gas companies in Israel should concentrate their efforts in the development of the local and regional gas market, which will strengthen Israel's energy security, reduce the price of energy relative to the cost of imported energy and significantly reduce air pollution. The integration of natural gas in additional sectors (agriculture, transportation, municipalities and residential use) should be encouraged using incentives and primarily by making it easier for existing users to connect to the natural gas infrastructure, which can be accomplished by reducing complicated and burdensome regulation.

An analysis is needed of the strategic implications of the natural gas discoveries, as well as resources that exist with high probability (oil and others) and which will be discovered in the future in Israel's economic waters.

It should be decided how to develop offshore natural gas, including the responsible and correct use of the expected profit and royalties that will go to the State as a result of the export of natural gas, particularly after the development of the Leviathan field.

A policy should be established that will provide incentives to foreign investors to participate in the development of the gas fields and which will reduce the economic risk involved in the investment. It should be ensured that the principles of this policy are transparent to the public.

It is worthwhile formulating a proactive environmental policy in order to protect the ecosystem. This is to be accomplished by means of a plan that will identify the environmental components to be taken into account in the exploitation of offshore natural gas, including the preparedness for disasters and the means to prevent them and deal with them once they occur, as well as the organizations that should be involved in this activity.

The regulations should be amended in order to protect the ecosystem, including protection of heritage and archaeological sites. To this end, it is worthwhile taking advantage of the experience of other countries with respect to best practices to be adopted.

Sixth recommendation – Development of professional human infrastructure in order to deal with Israel's new maritime challenges

A decision should be made regarding the public resources that need to be invested in Israel's education and higher education systems in order to create an economic, social and human resources infrastructure that can deal with the challenges and opportunities in the maritime domain, including energy production, the development of energy sources, protection of the ecosystem, etc. In addition, the growth of industries that will assist and support the growth of this sector should be encouraged, as well as the establishment of a "maritime syndicate for Israel" that will provide a platform for discourse among relevant stakeholders.

Seventh recommendation – The formulation of Israel's policy in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Red Sea

The process to formulate a maritime policy for Israel (when that occurs) should decide what Israel's interests are in the Eastern Mediterranean and which is the best policy to protect those interests. To this end, allies should be identified and the opportunities and risks implicit in the growing Russian presence in the Eastern Mediterranean should be considered.

Effort should continue to persuade the two superpowers (the US and Russia) to prevent the Iranian navy from gaining a stronghold in the Syrian ports. As a counterweight to the creation of the Russia-Iran-Syria axis, consideration should be given to the tightening of relations with Egypt and Saudi Arabia in the maritime domain.

An assessment should be made of the Chinese interests that motivate their activity in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, as described in China's strategic document entitled "The Maritime Silk Route", as well as in light of China's increased maritime presence in the region. We need to ask ourselves how Israel should react to this presence, including the Chinese investments in the construction of essential infrastructures in the ports of Haifa and Ashdod and Chinese involvement in their operation.

As a result of the massive procurement program of both vessels and advanced weaponry by the Egyptian navy in recent years, a policy is needed with respect to maintaining Israel's Qualitative Military Edge (QME) and Israel needs to act on the basis of that policy in our dealings with friendly nations such as the US and Germany which supply these vessels and weapons.

Eighth recommendation – Advancement and passage of maritime law

Since the Maritime Strategic Assessment for Israel published at the end of 2016, there has been progress in advancing the proposed Law of Maritime Zones. The proposed law has been approved by the Ministerial Committee for Legislative Matters and is

expected to be discussed by the Knesset in the near future. It is important that Israeli law be applied in the maritime zones as soon as possible, since the Law for Planning and Building (which regulates the planning and building activity on land) is not suited to the character of activity in the sea and certainly not in deep water.

In addition, agreement should be sought regarding the areas of overlap between the EEZ of Israel and those of its neighbors and preparations should be made to seek a solution according to the rules of international justice if agreement is not reached.

In the context of Lebanon, Israel should respond using all of the diplomatic channels to developments in the region, such as the granting of licenses for oil and gas exploration by Lebanon in the disputed waters. Consideration should be given to the optimal method to demarcate Israel's economic waters according to accepted international practice or an alternative option for joint management of the disputed area in the absence of agreement on demarcation or the possibility of negotiations through a third party.

All of the aforementioned emphasizes the need to train professional manpower that will be capable of handling issues of maritime law within the framework of international organizations.

Ninth recommendation – Use of Israel's offshore natural gas in order to strengthen its economy and its international standing

Given the expected market conditions in Europe and the world in coming years, the government and the natural gas companies in Israel should invest maximum effort in the development of the local and regional natural gas market rather than searching for distant export markets.

Given the aforementioned, account should be taken of the array of geopolitical and geostrategic considerations (both opportunities and risks) that are related to the countries to which Israel would like to export part of its natural gas production. This is in order to strengthen its diplomatic and economic position while taking into consideration the economic considerations that motivate the commercial companies which produce natural gas in Israel.

An examination should be made of Israel's economic, security, environmental and political considerations regarding the pipeline infrastructure, the floating supply facilities and the liquid natural gas (LNG) terminals.

Tenth recommendation – Continued positioning of the Haifa Research Center for Maritime Policy and Strategy as a national knowledge center for maritime policy and strategy

The study and assessment of strategic and policy issues in the maritime domain requires unique multidisciplinary knowledge which is not to be found in Israel at the moment.

The Haifa Research Center for Maritime Policy and Strategy constitutes, among other things, a focus of multidisciplinary and independent knowledge in maritime policy and strategy, in the broadest sense of the term, with emphasis on Israel and its maritime environs in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Red Sea.

The Center has this year established collaboration with similar centers in the US and Singapore and is in the process of creating relationships with centers in Germany, India and China.

During the past year, the University made a decision to merge the Wydra Institute for Shipping and Ports with the Center and thus the Center's research activity now includes an additional component. The Center must now formulate a plan for the development of staff that will be involved in this subject from both the academic research side and the applied research side with respect to the relevant players (Israel Ports Company, Shipping and Ports Authority, etc.).

In order to train staff to deal with this subject on the strategic level, it is necessary to open a graduate degree program in Political Science with specialization in national security and maritime strategy, an initiative being promoted by the Social Science Faculty – the School for Political Science at Haifa University already in the 2018-19 academic year. This program will supplement the existing programs in the School for Marine Sciences at the University and will support the goal of Haifa University to take a leading role in the field of marine studies in Israel, as part of the Mediterranean Sea Research Center of Israel.

The goal of the Center is that this report will be distributed for the third time by the Center and will serve all of the entities involved in the maritime domain in Israel, as well as initiating and supporting policy and strategic planning processes in the maritime domain.

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