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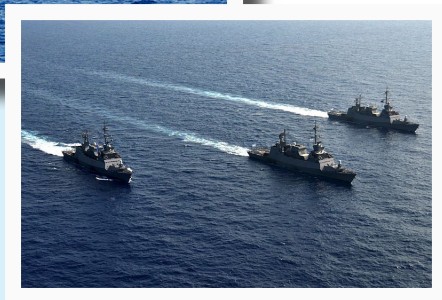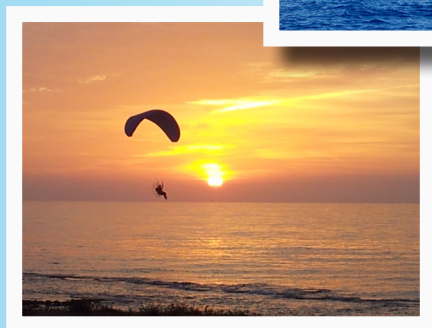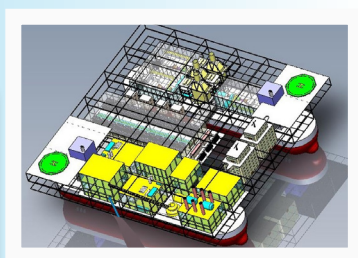Haifa Research Center for Maritime Policy & Strategy

MARITIME STRATEGIC EVALUATION FOR ISRAEL 2016

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Chapter 4: A Grand Maritime Strategy for Israel

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General

The State of Israel does not have a grand strategy, let alone a grand maritime strategy. The absence of such a strategy leads to ad hoc policy and decision-making that does not look towards the future, a policy that may create significant disparities in Israeli security, economy and sustainability in the coming decades.

For the past few decades, there has been an effort to formulate and update Israel's defense doctrine. One of the most comprehensive documents written on the subject, under the leadership of former minister Dan Meridor (in two rounds, in 1986[1] and again in 2007), was presented to defense figures and to the Israeli Government, but not officially approved as Israel's strategy document.[2] Over the past two years, there has been an additional non-institutional process led by Professor Uzi Arad, former National Security Advisor. The process's purpose is to prepare an up-to-date overall strategy document. Many entities are partners in this process, but it has not yet developed into an overall national strategy that is accepted by all of these bodies.[3]

Over the years, defense strategy documents have been written by the various branches of the military. The perspective of these documents was topical and focused on building up military force and the budget required for this. Out of all such documents, especially noteworthy is the IDF Strategy Document[4] written by Chief of Staff Gadi Eizenkot. Nonetheless, because these strategy documents were not written within an accepted and agreed-upon context at the national level, it is difficult to direct these topical strategies towards a national grand strategy.

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1   Then Member of Knesset Dan Meridor, who headed the Knesset's Defense Doctrine Committee, produced a 30-page document on the subject in 1986 and submitted it to Dan Shomron. Most of the document remains classified.

2   "The Need to Reformulate Israel's National Security Doctrine," Alex Mintz and Shaul Shay, Herzliya Conference on formulating Israel's national security doctrine [in Hebrew]. http://www.herzliyaconference.org/_Uploads/dbsAttachedFiles/Tbitachon1.pdf

3   "Overall Strategy for the State of Israel," Samuel Neaman Institute [in Hebrew] http://www.neaman.org.il/Neaman2011/Templates/ShowPage.asp?DBID=1&TMID=580&LNGID=2&FID=964&IID=1361

4   The IDF Strategy document, IDF website, https://www.idfblog.com/s/Desktop/IDF%20Strategy.pdf

It is important to emphasize that there is a substantial difference between a maritime defense strategy and a grand maritime strategy. The latter term includes the former, as well as civilian issues such as trade, ports, protecting the marine environment, marine agriculture, mining, cruises and recreation, history, heritage, and more.

One of the primary challenges in formulating a maritime strategy is deciding what is included in this grand strategy, and what remains the responsibility of the various government ministries and regulatory bodies.

World overview

Assessing the maritime strategy of other countries demonstrates a range of approaches that result from the differing geopolitical, military, and economic conditions of the different countries. In addition, the past decade has seen a wave of publications on broad, comprehensive maritime strategies, or strategies that have been updated due to the accelerating process of globalization, the growth in the volume of international trade, and technological advances that enable the exploitation of economic marine resources that were not previously available. All of these factors influence the world economy and foreign relations, and lead to changes in the maritime environment that require creating relevant strategy and policy.

In 2009, the U.S., as the leading superpower, published a document on its maritime-military strategy, and another document in 2015.[5] Both documents place an emphasis on military issues, and they focus on the power structure and range of deployment necessary in order to secure sea lanes and American national interests. Other U.S. government ministries have also published various policy documents on additional subjects related to maritime issues.

Portugal has published[6] a maritime strategy document that encompasses many topics in addition to military strategy, because Portugal – as a member of both the European Union and NATO – can "afford" to carry out long-term planning, to shorten this section of its strategy, and to expand on the topic of trade and economy as central components of maritime strategy.

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5   US navy website: http://www.navy.mil/local/maritime/

6   Directorate–General for Maritime Policy of the Ministry of Agriculture and the Sea; National Ocean Strategy 2013–2020; http://www.dgpm.mam.gov.pt/Documents/ENM_Final_EN_V2.pdf

The Netherlands has also published[7] a comprehensive document that encompasses various maritime issues. The document emphasizes the cooperation necessary among various fields in order to create synergy to assist in leveraging the Dutch economy while maintaining military response capability and Dutch interests even in areas that are geographically distant from the Netherlands (This can be seen as a remnant of the Netherlands' colonial history).

In France too, a comprehensive document ("The Blue Book")[8] on France's grand maritime strategy has been published. This document places a strong emphasis on freedom of navigation and maintaining French interests outside of Europe. In addition, the French document emphasizes strengthening trade and economic influence while utilizing the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of each of France's maritime regions. France sees itself as connecting between oceans and seas (the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean) and as an influential player in these arenas, and considers planning the buildup of naval power and soft power as part of its maritime strategy.

China has developed a different approach to its maritime strategy, focusing on military strategy. China's approach is a preventative strategy: creating influence by preventing the capabilities of others. There is no doubt that this is a more aggressive approach that does not tend to rely on "soft power." Such an approach requires China to go out into the oceans and create a blue-water navy. In light of this strategy, the Chinese navy must transform from a navy whose role is to protect China and its coastal waters, to one with the capability to influence China's interests in all arenas including in the oceans, in the China Sea and in critical passages such as the Andaman Sea region, the Red Sea and the Port of Djibouti.

By examining the various strategies, we can see that there are essential elements that appear in each country's maritime strategy, but the relative weight of the different elements changes in accordance with the country's challenges, geographical location, standing, and geopolitical aspirations, as can be expected in this kind of long-term thinking.

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7   The Dutch Maritime Strategy 2015 – 2025; A comprehensive framework for the government–wide policy for the maritime cluster. https://www.government.nl/binaries/government/documents/reports/2015/07/07/the–dutch–maritime–strategy–2015–2025/150604–maritieme–strategie–uk–lr–2.pdf

8   National Strategy for the Security of Maritime Areas http://www.gouvernement.fr/sites/default/files/contenu/piece–jointe/2016/01/strategie_nationale_de_surete_des_espaces_maritimes_en_national_strategy_for_the_security_of_maritime_areas.pdf

Finding an appropriate model for developing Israel's grand maritime strategy

The Israeli model must deal with many challenges, some of them general and some of them unique to Israel's geopolitical environment. Some of these challenges are internal, while others are external.

The internal challenges include Israel's demography and the distribution of its population along the coast; the lively public debate and involvement in issues related to the maritime ecological environment; the scarcity of land in general, and along the waterfront in particular; the issue of cultural and heritage sites; and the geographical location of energy and gas fields.

The external challenges include of course the maritime element as part of the overall threat to Israel, including the shared maritime border with enemy entities (Lebanon and Hezbollah in the North and Hamas in the South); the international legal environment (Israel is not a signatory to the Convention on the Law of the Sea, although it has declared that it sees itself as committed to its principles.[9] In addition, the Convention has customary significance that is binding upon Israel in any case); as well as the environmental challenges resulting from Israel's location at the closed eastern end of the Mediterranean, in a region that is very active economically, including shipping and energy production.

Israel's maritime environment borders with the Palestinian Authority and three countries (Lebanon, Egypt and Cyprus) in the Mediterranean, and with Jordan and Egypt in the Gulf of Eilat. Each of these areas has its own unique threats that must be addressed accordingly.

In addition, Israel is at a crossroad between East and West, expressed geographically as a place that connects the Red Sea with the Mediterranean and as a country with a land bridge that enables bypassing the Suez Canal. Israel's geographical location is also expressed culturally and conceptually as a country that must deal with the Red Sea eastwards, and the Mediterranean Sea westwards to the Atlantic Ocean.

9   Explanatory notes to the memorandum on the Maritime Areas Law, 2013, p. 4 [in Hebrew]: *"Indeed, the State of Israel is not a signatory to the Convention on the Law of the Sea and has not ratified it. However, the State of Israel takes upon itself the customary provisions of the Convention, including the provisions relating to maritime areas."* See also the agreement between the Government of Israel and the Government of the Republic of Cyprus on the demarcation of the exclusive economic zone, December 17, 2010.

Another characteristic that prominently affects the maritime environment is the fact that Israel has an "island economy." Israel does not have significant trade by land with the countries it borders (except for a few years during which Israel imported natural gas from Egypt, and assistance transporting goods to Jordan via the Port of Haifa). Furthermore, some of these countries are in a state of war or ceasefire with Israel, such that their borders are of course closed.

The majority of Israel's basic existential needs are imported by sea: for example, most of Israel's grains (wheat, rice, corn etc.) as well as crude oil that serves the energy needs of the Israeli economy. As a result, Israel's economy is almost entirely dependent on open sea lanes and ports that function continuously every day of the year, in both the Mediterranean and the Red Sea.

Israel's maritime economic environment contains significant natural gas reservoirs, and presumably also oil reservoirs, thus a nationally significant amount of business activity occurs there (hundreds of billions of dollars). This fact reinforces the need for a secure and comfortable environment that guaranties the Israeli economy a cheap, reliable and continuous energy supply, and income from natural gas export royalties.

It must also be remembered that Israel is a country with a small land area that lacks strategic depth. The shortage of available space affects the ability to plan and develop national infrastructure such as airports, desalination facilities, power plants, etc. The scarcity of available land, especially along the coast, where 80% of Israel's population is concentrated, arouses strong public opposition to any land use close to the waterfront. Against this backdrop, special consideration is required when it comes to coastal and maritime assets, and the complex balancing of various interests, including security, economy, housing and recreation.

The shortage of natural fisheries requires the development of advanced and environmentally balanced marine agriculture for a diverse, protein-rich food supply.

The development of its ports as part of the overall vision of Israel's foreign relations and international alliances must be a significant element in decision-making and as part of a clear strategy. In Israel's case, the decision of who owns and manages a port is not only an economic question (as European countries can perhaps relate to such a decision), but rather requires in-depth military assessment to ensure the continuous operation of the port and its support for the Israeli economy in times

of crisis and emergencies. Noteworthy here is the U.S.'s policy of not allowing a U.A.E.-owned port operator to operate some of the ports on its west coast.

As a result, there is no doubt that for Israel in the 21st century, this must be a central part of its maritime strategy. Israel does not have the privilege of neglecting this issue. Nonetheless, Israel must provide an integrated response to additional elements that relate to the maritime environment. The challenge we are faced with is to prioritize what needs to be part of Israel's grand maritime strategy model and what will be "left out," as an issue for the various government ministries and regulatory bodies to address (though these too must be based on the overall maritime strategy).

Maritime cluster as a means for formulating and implementing strategy

In most European countries, we can see the development of "maritime economic clusters" that in various ways bring together the stakeholders and entities connected to the maritime environment, in a way that enables the creation of a unified platform for open discourse and the creation of connections between bodies that assist in developing the economy mutually and constructively. Examples for stakeholders are shipping companies and maritime insurance companies, ports, various suppliers, representatives of naval forces, cruises and recreation, etc.

The purpose of the cluster is to discuss shared issues and recommend government policy to assist the various bodies in achieving their aims. Naturally, there is friction between the different bodies, and sometimes even contradicting interests, but the existence of a platform for open discourse and shared clarification of problems reduces the chances of mutual harm.

Such maritime clusters have been established with government encouragement or, alternatively, as private or public clusters (such as non-profit institutions or partnerships). The nature of the cluster also affects the funding of the various partners in the cluster. Such an cluster sometimes implements government strategy, while in other cases, or simultaneously, serves as a platform for creating understandings that in turn influence government strategy and policy. The main role of such an cluster is to serve as a strong maritime lobby vis-à-vis governmental bodies, in order to enable maximum strengthening of the economy while maintaining the security of the maritime environment and maximizing exploitation of resources, in order to achieve the country's strategic maritime objectives.

Israel has a strong, basic military need for maritime defense due to various threats, but at the same time there are a variety of other activities related to maritime trade, natural gas and energy resources, water desalination, the operation and maintenance of ports, fisheries, recreation and more. The amount of maritime activity in Israel and the number of companies, authorities and organizations involved in the maritime arena certainly enables and justifies the creation of a broad, integrated Israeli maritime cluster. In addition, as Israel borders on two seas, two maritime clusters can be established, one for the Mediterranean Sea and one for the Red Sea, and an economic network between the two clusters can be created, in which the defense element serves from the outset as the common denominator between them. Such an internal network could in the future develop and integrate into the European network of maritime clusters, and even create large-scale connections with clusters in Asia.

Another level of integration that should be examined is the government's level of involvement in such a maritime cluster. Should the government lead the creation of such an cluster in the initial stages, or is it preferable that it be established by an independent private or public body?

In order to answer this question, we must first properly define the various potential partners. It could be that the right way to create a large, inclusive maritime cluster is a gradual process that would at first be led by the government and would in time develop into a partnership with civilian bodies and leading maritime companies in Israel.

Properly integrating security needs with the economy by creating an integrated maritime cluster would allow for open, synergetic discourse that would enable public discourse on maritime-related issues in a professional, open and accessible manner; shared thought processes with policymakers; serve as a significant factor in the creation of a 21st century maritime strategy for Israel; and harness the sea as a growth engine for Israeli economy and society.

Main components of a maritime strategy for Israel

The State of Israel is in need of a grand maritime strategy derived from its national objectives and its overall strategic doctrine. Due to the many issues and components related to maritime strategy, it is necessary to focus on a limited number of issues. Some of the components are crucial and obvious, while others will be added during a process of consolidating the strategy and through discourse

with various stakeholders, and thus resources can be focused on achieving the right objectives.

The naval component continues to be the main maritime issue. Not only is it critical to Israel's physical security and existence, it is the main factor influencing the success of the rest of the components.

The economic component comprises the principle of "the sea as a growth engine," and includes **maritime trade,** which is the cornerstone of Israel's economy, and issues related to the **energy economy (which includes maritime infrastructure and artificial islands)**.

The third element is the **regulatory-planning element**, which relates to maritime law, sustainability and the environment.

The last element is the **social-public** element, which includes issues such as recreation, heritage and the public activity of the Israeli maritime cluster.

The Israeli model requires combining Israel's unique security needs and the demands of the Israeli economy, while taking into account the fact that Israel is an "island economy" and its location in the Eastern Mediterranean, a region that serves as a physical and cultural bridge between East and West.

Conclusion

The State of Israel does not have a grand maritime strategy. This situation has serious consequences for Israel's ability to coordinate policy among the various bodies involved in the maritime environment. In practice, there are clashing defense, economic, energy, and other interests. These clashes lead to a situation where each sector tries to maximize the resources for its needs, without an agreed-upon vision that guides the national maritime policy in a clear strategic direction.

The lack of a strategy is a significant stumbling block in incorporating the various interests in planning, legal, and environmental processes in maritime areas, and as such it has serious economic consequences.

Even in the absence of a grand national strategy, it is possible and necessary to create a grand maritime strategy that will serve as a strong basis for the success of the maritime environment both militarily and economically, connect different interests and prioritize among them on the basis of a long-term vision with the purpose of achieving the State of Israel's objectives for future generations.

The Haifa Center for Maritime Policy and Strategy is currently completing the formulation of a methodology that will enable the creation of a grand maritime strategy for the State of Israel.

The main issues recommended to be included in Israel's grand maritime strategy are:

1. National security: governance at sea, security and cooperation along maritime borders.
2. Shipping and ports: freedom of navigation (importing and exporting), construction of ports, and maintenance of ports.
3. Energy and infrastructure: coastal infrastructure (energy, desalination), marine infrastructure (drilling rigs, production, transport, artificial islands).
4. Regulation: planning, environmental protection and sustainability.
5. Society: recreation, heritage, manpower, academia and research.