

THE CURRENT STATE OF RUSSIAN-ISRAELI RELATIONS AND ISRAELI STANCE ON THE WAR IN UKRAINE

Author:

Mykola Zamikula

KEY INTERESTS AND FACTORS DETERMINING ISRAEL'S FOREIGN POLICY STANCE

Israel's policy is determined by the specific challenges and current threats the state faces. The key national interest is to preserve Israel's independence and protect the security of its citizens. Ensuring it, the Israeli authorities have to take into account the immediate threats to the state—the forces that exclude the very fact of its existence and seek to wipe it from the political map of the world. To counter these threats, Israel is prepared to take a wide range of measures.

Israel's foreign policy is localized around specific tasks to protect the state. Israel has no global ambitions, but rationally directs its efforts to counter current challenges to its own security. Therefore, it focuses on the Middle Eastern area, monitoring the hostile activity of Iran and its proxy groups and the operations of terrorist organizations. Other regions concern Tel Aviv in the context of strengthening its own defense capabilities and ensuring profits—Israel usually refrains from active intervention or public positioning in relation to conflicts on their territory.

In the international arena, Israel has traditionally stood as an ally of the United States. American hegemony meets Israeli interests. Support for American positions is justified by Israel's own need for American assistance. In this way, Tel Aviv seeks to prove to Washington its value as an ally. But it has no special interests of its own in many areas of international confrontation that do not directly affect its security.

Historical memory has left its mark on the security threat assessments of the Israeli government and society. The events of the Holocaust clearly demonstrated the reality of the existential threat to the Jewish people. Not wanting a recurrence of such a scenario has shaped the Israeli political elite's willingness to take radical measures while protecting the interests of the state.

That is why Israel has repeatedly committed actions of questionable character from the standpoint of international law. These include preventive military operations and the occupation of parts of its neighbors' territory (the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights) for use as a security belt; the destruction of facilities threatening Israel on the territory of other countries (the attack on the Iraqi nuclear reactor as part of Operation Opera in 1981); the resort to terrorist methods of fighting against opponents. The reputation of Tel Aviv is damaged by accusations of oppression of the Palestinian people and the annexation of territories (East Jerusalem¹, the Golan Heights²) and the establishment of settlements in the Palestinian areas³.

In combination, these policies give Israel a bad reputation among supporters of liberal views. With the consolidation of leftist political forces in the West, this is detrimental not only to its relations with Europe, but also to its traditional partnership with the United States. It is not a question of an official break in cooperation. Yet, the left wing of the Democratic Party appears to be critical of Israeli policy⁴. The presidency of Barack Obama was marked by a certain decline in relations—whereas Donald Trump's time in the White House was a period of mutual understanding between Washington and Tel Aviv. Given the significance of U.S. support for Israel's security, Israeli authorities are following the domestic political balance of power in the United States with particular interest.

THE IRANIAN FACTOR IN ISRAELI POLITICS

The key threat to Israeli security is considered to be the Islamic Republic of Iran, which is considered to be the most dangerous destructive element for the modern system of international relations. Tel Aviv perceives the policy of the fundamentalist regime in Tehran as a direct threat to the existence of the state of Israel. Iran has been one of the beneficiaries of the destabilization of the Middle East in the first decades of the 21st century. It managed to take advantage of the situation and fill the vacuum of influence created by the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq and the events of the Arab Spring. As a result, Iran has increased its influence in the region⁵, which creates additional challenges for Israel.

The following elements of Iranian regional expansion cause concern in Tel Aviv:

Iran's nuclear program. For Israel, Iran's continued capacity to develop nuclear weapons is unacceptable. Tel Aviv believes that in the hands of the Iranian leadership, nuclear weapons will not be a deterrent designed to guarantee non-interference of other states in Iran's affairs, but a direct threat to the existence of the State of Israel. Israel is confident that the problem

¹ Basic-Law: Jerusalem the Capital of Israel, 5740-1980, adopted on 30 July 1980. *Israel Knesset*. URL: <https://m.knesset.gov.il/EN/activity/documents/BasicLawsPDF/BasicLawJerusalem.pdf>

² Golan Heights Law, 5742-1981, adopted on 14 December 1981. *Israel Knesset*. URL: https://main.knesset.gov.il/EN/about/history/Documents/kns10_golan_eng.pdf

³ Resolution 2334 (2016) Adopted by the Security Council at its 7853rd meeting, on 23 December 2016. *United Nations*. URL: <https://www.un.org/webcast/pdfs/SRES2334-2016.pdf>

⁴ Fandos N., Edmondson C. Democrats, Growing More Skeptical of Israel, Pressure Biden. *The New York Times*, 17 May 2021. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/18/us/politics/israel-gaza-democrats-biden.html>

⁵ Gardner F. Iran's network of influence in Mid-East 'growing'. *BBC*, 7 November 2019. URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-50324912>

cannot be resolved through diplomacy⁶. At the same time, it considers the use of force against Iran (according to the so-called “Begin Doctrine,” which asserts Israel’s right to launch a preventive strike to forestall the development of weapons of mass destruction by hostile states).

The strengthening of Iranian positions in the Levant⁷. Israel perceives as a threat the Iranian presence near its borders—in Syria, Lebanon, and the Palestinian Authority territories, which could become a springboard for an attack against Israeli territory. Tel Aviv is monitoring the capacity development of Iranian formations (Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps) and proxy forces (Hezbollah) and Iranian support for Palestinian terrorist groups (Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine).

Israel has little confidence in diplomatic methods to solve the Iranian problem, insisting on the need to severely limit Iran’s potential for expansion in the region. The positioning of other problems of the international environment is seen in the context of possible consequences for Tel Aviv’s stand in confrontation with Tehran.

ISRAEL’S RELATIONS WITH THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Israel’s relations with the Russian Federation are of a specific nature. At first glance, Russia’s revisionist policy aimed at undermining the international position of the United States and Moscow’s traditionally high level of relations with Israel’s enemies make these countries natural opponents. But in practice, Tel Aviv does not show a willingness to confront the Russian Federation.

Israel relies on a rational assessment of its interests and resources. It is incapable of ensuring by military action that Russia refuses to back anti-Israeli elements in the Middle East. Tel Aviv has no means to pressure Russia or to use force against the logistical routes that supply weapons to Moscow’s Middle Eastern partners.

At the same time, Israel has to take into account the possibility of the Russian Federation increasing its support for Iran (and, through it, for terrorist organizations that threaten Tel Aviv). This refers both to deepening diplomatic cooperation and advocacy for Iranian interests in the international arena, as well as to the transfer of the latest weapons systems to Iran.

When it comes to the situation in Syria, Israel views the Russian Federation as a relatively acceptable patron of Bashar al-Assad’s regime—as compared to the alternative, which could be Iran. Moscow has no interest in destroying the State of Israel and can therefore become a

⁶ ‘Words will not stop them’: Israeli PM tells Biden to get tougher on Iran. *Politico*, 14 July 2022. URL: <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/07/14/israel-lapid-biden-iran-diplomacy-00045785>

⁷ Loft P. Iran’s influence in the Middle East. Commons Library Research Briefing, 25 August 2022. URL: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9504/CBP-9504.pdf>

stabilizing factor in the Syrian direction. At the same time, Tel Aviv considers the factor of Russian military presence in Syria when planning its air strikes against Iranian infrastructure.

A separate factor affecting bilateral relations can be regarded as protection of the rights of the Jewish population of Russia. Israel is interested in assuring that Russian authorities do not interfere with repatriation from Russian territory and do not support anti-Semitic movements within the state.

For these reasons, Tel Aviv is interested in maintaining a high level of diplomatic relations with Russia. Thus Israel is trying to show Russia that it is ready to take the Kremlin's interests into account and is therefore a constructive partner in the international arena. There is no question of alliance relations or real trust between the states—just the establishment of a level of contacts where both sides understand and respect each other's interests. In fact, through demonstrative restraint and neutrality in many international issues (including in relation to Russia's aggression against Ukraine) Israel is trying to “buy” a certain concession from Russia on issues relevant to itself.

Such a policy is paying off. For example, in the early 2010s it helped delay the sale of the Russian S-300 air defense systems to Iran⁸. To date, Russia still refrains from supplying Iran with S-400 systems. Israel also largely enjoys freedom of action in Syrian airspace. It is doubtful that Russian air defense is capable of interfering with Israeli operations—but if Moscow were to abandon its current neutrality, it could create additional risks for Israeli pilots, which the commanders would like to avoid.

Since this policy toward Russia is based on rational assessments, only a change in Russia's status in Israel's perception could alter it. This could be facilitated by the Russian Federation losing leverage over Israel (weakening Russian presence in Syria to the point where the Kremlin can no longer play the role of deterrent to Iranian influence or threaten Israeli operations), expanding military and technical cooperation and arms supplies to Israel's enemies (i.e. practical actions which the Israeli neutrality towards Russia is intended to avert).

The Russian authorities' demonstration of an anti-Semitic stance in domestic and foreign policy can tarnish Moscow's reputation in Israel. For example, historical memory has provoked harsh rejection of statements made by the Russian authorities, which in fact accused Israel of supporting neo-Nazism⁹, and echoed conspiracy theories that can be interpreted as shifting the blame for the Holocaust to the Jews (the remarks of Sergei Lavrov about Hitler's Jewish roots¹⁰). Pressure on the leaders of the Jewish religious community¹¹ and the Jewish Agency for Israel (Sokhnut, which organizes the repatriation of Jews) in Russia and an

⁸ Кречетников А., Маловерьян Ю. Россия задерживает поставку ракет Ирану. *BBC*, 18 February 2010. URL: https://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2010/02/100217_russia_iran_s300

⁹ Russia Says Israel Supports Ukraine 'Neo-Nazis' as Row Escalates. *Al Jazeera*, 3 May 2022. URL: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/3/russia-says-israel-supports-neo-nazis-in-row-over-ukraine>

¹⁰ Петренко Р. Лавров порівняв Зеленського з Гітлером, бо той "теж мав єврейську кров". *Українська Правда*, 2 May 2022. URL: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2022/05/2/7343451/>

¹¹ Лебедева О. Главный раввин Москвы покинул Россию. *Deutsche Welle*, 8 June 2022. URL: <https://www.dw.com/ru/glavnyj-ravvin-moskvy-pokinul-rf-posle-otkaza-podderzhat-voynu-protiv-ukrainy/a-62065214>

initiative to ban the work of the latter structure on Russian territory by judicial order¹² also cause concern in Israel. Such incidents may create demand in Israeli society for a stricter policy toward Russia.

ISRAEL'S POSITION ON THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

On the official level, Israel maintains neutrality on the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia. This position is motivated by an unwillingness to confront Russia. The existence of certain contradictions in Ukrainian-Israeli relations does not have a significant impact on Tel Aviv's stance.

Publicly, Israel supports diplomatic measures aimed at condemning Russia's actions in multilateral international forums. It supported the UN GA resolution on condemnation of the Russian invasion (March 2, 2022¹³), on the humanitarian consequences of the aggression against Ukraine (March 24, 2022¹⁴), and on expelling the Russian Federation from the UN Human Rights Council (April 7, 2022¹⁵). But at the same time, it refrains from excessively criticizing the actions of Russian forces in Ukraine, or placing personalized responsibility for the war on the top Russian leadership. In fact, Israel demonstrates commitment to generally accepted principles of inter-state relations—but as long as it does not lead to an outright severance of relations with the Russian Federation.

Amid the active phase of the conflict, the key challenge for Israel is the safety of the Jewish population of Ukraine. The state concentrates on the humanitarian aspects of providing aid to Ukraine. Apart from sending necessary supplies, an Israeli field hospital worked in the Lviv region of Ukraine in the spring¹⁶. Israel accepts refugees from Ukraine (including an allocated quota for people without Israeli relatives).

The implementation of the humanitarian aspects of Israel's assistance has caused mixed reviews. Criticisms include complicated entry of refugees and the unsystematic position of the Israeli authorities regarding the initiative to treat wounded Ukrainian military personnel¹⁷. One should keep in mind that these problems are partly caused by the traditional Israeli bureaucracy and the ongoing internal political crisis, which undermines the ability of the state apparatus to act swiftly. It also should be accepted that the Russian-Ukrainian war is not a priority issue for Israeli politicians in any case.

¹² Барановская М. Почему власти РФ решили закрыть представительство "Сохнута". *Deutsche Welle*, 13 August 2022. URL: <https://www.dw.com/ru/pochemu-vlasti-rossii-reshili-zakryt-predstavitelstvo-sohnuta/a-62785192>

¹³ Aggression against Ukraine: resolution / adopted by the General Assembly. *United Nations*, 2 March 2022. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3965290?ln=ru>

¹⁴ Humanitarian consequences of the aggression against Ukraine : resolution / adopted by the General Assembly. *United Nations*, 24 March 2022. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3966630?ln=en>

¹⁵ UN General Assembly votes to suspend Russia from the Human Rights Council. *United Nations*, 7 April 2022. URL: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/04/1115782>

¹⁶ Israeli field hospital ends Ukraine operations after six weeks. *The Jerusalem Post*, 29 April 2022. URL: <https://www.jpost.com/health-and-wellness/article-705492>

¹⁷ Ukraine's embassy slams Israel for not treating wounded Ukrainian troops. *The Jerusalem Post*, 19 June 2022. URL: <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-709848>

Israel is extremely cautious when it comes to providing military assistance to Ukraine. Tel Aviv does not openly supply weapons to our state and is against the transfer of Israeli-made weapons by third countries¹⁸. Known shipments of supplies that can be used by the Ukrainian army have started late, are limited in scope, and consist of protective equipment. They are sent to Ukrainian rescue structures¹⁹. This allows the Israeli authorities to avoid accusations from the Russian Federation of arming Ukraine.

At the same time, representatives of the Ministry of Defense of Israel participate in the work of the Ukraine Defense Consultative Group (Ramstein format)²⁰. In this case, Israel's position corresponds to its status as a U.S. ally and is grounded in the need to advocate its own interests in the West. Excessive neutrality over the Russia-Ukraine war could damage Israel's image. This does not meet the interests of Tel Aviv in the context of the growing concern about Iran's nuclear program, which requires the search for international support. Hence, it would be beneficial for Israel to show solidarity with the position of the Euro-Atlantic community.

Israel has a rich tradition of arms exports. At the same time, this may also be a matter of non-public deals. For Tel Aviv, it is a profit-making issue rather than demonstrative support to one of the parties to the conflict. For Ukraine, this aspect is especially relevant because of Israel's reluctance to confront the Russian Federation.

At the same time, one should take into account the limited capacity of the Israeli military-industrial complex to produce certain types of weapons which are of interest to Ukraine. Even if Tel Aviv disregarded the Russian factor, it would be unlikely that it could promptly deliver Iron Dome air defense systems to our state. It is also necessary to rationally analyze the prospects for the use of certain types of weapons in Ukraine. Despite their high reputation, one should not view them as a wonder-weapon that can a priori change the course of the conflict amid high-intensity hostilities.

POSITIONS OF ISRAEL'S POLITICAL ELITE TOWARD THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AND THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

The moderate rhetoric of Israeli politicians with regard to the Russian Federation creates an image of Tel Aviv being pro-Russian. However, in practice most Israeli political parties base their policy towards the Russian Federation on their own assessments of Israel's national interests (especially in the context of adversarial relationship with Iran) or their personal political goals and ambitions.

The key political force in Israel, the center-right Likud party, has demonstrated a high level of relations with Moscow during its time in power. Its leader, Benjamin Netanyahu, was engaged in an active dialogue with the Kremlin, focusing especially on his public contacts

¹⁸ Ravid B. Scoop: Israel rejects U.S. request to approve missile transfer to Ukraine. *Axios*, 25 May 2022. URL: <https://www.axios.com/2022/05/25/israel-rejects-spike-missile-ukraine-germany-russia>

¹⁹ Israel to provide Ukraine with protective gear – Gantz. *The Jerusalem Post*, 20 April 2022. URL: <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-704711>

²⁰ Israel attends US-led summit on sending more arms to Ukraine. *The Times of Israel*, 26 April 2022. URL: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-attending-us-led-summit-on-supplying-ukraine-with-more-arms/>

with the Putin regime. Among other things, he participated in Russian propaganda events during his visits to Moscow (a visit on May 9 and participation in the “Immortal Regiment” rally²¹); he used illustrative materials designed to manifest friendly relations with Putin in his election campaign²². But such actions were mainly aimed at expanding electoral support in the face of the ongoing political crisis in Israel. The demonstration of contacts with Putin was designed to prove the importance of Netanyahu himself on the international stage as a politician who maintains a high level of relations with key players in the global domain. They do not indicate that the Likud leader is ideologically pro-Russian.

Many Israeli politicians (especially right-wing ones) adhere to this position. For example, Naftali Bennett, the former leader of Ha-Yamin ha-Hadash (the New Right), while serving as Prime Minister of Israel from 2021 to 2022, demonstrated a muted reaction to the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine and refrained from directly condemning the Russian military crimes in Ukraine²³. This gave Tel Aviv an opportunity to play the role of mediator between Moscow and Kyiv.

Among the ruling coalition, the harshest statements towards Russia were made by Yair Lapid²⁴, the leader of the centrist Yesh Atid (There is a Future) party, who is the current Israeli prime minister and who also headed Israel’s foreign ministry until July 1, 2022. It cannot be ruled out, however, that this was partly due to Lapid’s post and standing. As foreign minister and the second in command of the coalition he thus balanced Bennett’s moderate position.

Pro-Russian orientation among Israeli political actors is demonstrated by the right-wing Yisrael Beiteinu (Israel Our Home) party led by Avigdor Lieberman²⁵. It targets the electorate of Russian-speaking immigrants from the territories of the former Soviet Union, a large part of whom are mentally vulnerable to Russian propaganda and are traditionally oriented to perceiving Moscow as the leader of the so-called post-Soviet space.

The leftist and Arab parties in Israel perceive the Russian Federation positively²⁶. This is determined by the traditional orientation of this political flank toward Moscow and its critical attitude toward the United States and NATO.

²¹ Беляев И. За деда или за Путина? Социальные сети спорят о шествии "Бессмертного полка". *Радио Свобода*, 10 May 2018. URL: <https://www.svoboda.org/a/29218756.html>

²² Woolf R. Netanyahu Touts Friendship with Putin in New Billboard. *The Times of Israel*, 28 July 2019. URL: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/in-another-league-netanyahu-touts-friendship-with-putin-in-new-billboard/>

²³ Israel's Lapid Accuses Russia of War Crimes in Bucha as Bennett Avoids Casting Blame. *Haaretz*, 5 April 2022. URL: <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2022-04-05/ty-article/.premium/lapid-accuses-russia-of-war-crimes-in-bucha-as-bennett-avoids-casting-blame/00000180-5ba8-d718-afd9-dfbc8f830000>

²⁴ Israeli foreign minister condemns Russian attack on Ukraine. *Al-Monitor*, 24 February 2022. URL: <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/02/israeli-foreign-minister-condemns-russian-attack-ukraine#ixzz7e11YdHOR>

²⁵ Russia-Ukraine Conflict: Israel's Lieberman Condemns War Crimes but Says There Are 'Mutual Accusations', *Haaretz*, 4 April 2022. URL: <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2022-04-04/ty-article/lieberman-condemns-war-crimes-says-russia-ukraine-exchanging-mutual-accusations/00000180-5bb3-d718-afd9-dfbf65df0000>

²⁶ Boxerman A. Arab Israeli MKs skip Zelensky’s Knesset speech: ‘NATO imposed this war’. *The Times of Israel*, 20 March 2022. URL: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/arab-israeli-mks-skip-zelenskys-knesset-speech-nato-imposed-this-war/>

The balance of power in Israeli politics remains highly complex. As a result, the political crisis that has been simmering since 2019 continues. It is caused by the division of society into supporters and opponents of Likud party leader Benjamin Netanyahu and the dispersion of the electoral preferences of the population. The specifics of Israel's party system do not yet allow for a one-party government and require compromises and coalition agreements from various political powers.

The snap elections scheduled for November 1, 2022 are unlikely to change the situation. The collapse of the broad coalition that was in power in 2021-2022 opens up space for the return to office of Netanyahu, who remains the most powerful figure in Israeli politics. It is the Likud under his leadership that claims first place in the electoral race. The Yesh Atid party of incumbent Prime Minister Yair Lapid is in second place—but his opponents reproach him for having less experience in public service and political activity than the other contenders (Lapid entered politics in 2012, having previously worked as a journalist). The third strongest force is probably the Ha-Mahane Ha-Mamlakhti (State Camp) alliance formed by Benjamin “Benny” Gantz (former Chief of Staff of the Israeli army, a key opponent of Netanyahu at the beginning of the political crisis) and Gideon Sa’ar (a Likud leadership contender who lost the intra-party struggle to Netanyahu and founded his own party in 2020). But Gantz, who leads the bloc, has a reputation as a traitor, since he agreed to form a national unity government with Netanyahu in 2020.

Given the tentative arrangements between Lapid and Gantz, we can speak of two conditional camps in the run-up to the elections. The first includes the opposition, led by Netanyahu; the second is formed by the parties that make up the current coalition government. The latest ratings show that neither of them will have enough seats in parliament to form a new government²⁷. The “golden card” with the current balance of power is held by the alliance of Arab parties, the United Arab List. But since there will be a battle for every seat, one should expect a possible reshuffling of blocs during the formation of the government (as has already happened repeatedly in recent years). Netanyahu's camp looks more homogeneous under these conditions, since it is based on a long partnership between the Likud and the radical orthodox. The partnership between his opponents is less deep, and Netanyahu will seek to take advantage of it by trying to win over some of them to his side.

The problem of a prolonged crisis could be solved by changing the leadership of the Likud party, since it is Netanyahu's figure that is causing the division in society, not the party's policies. But this scenario is difficult to achieve, given the suppression of the inner-party opposition and Netanyahu's high approval ratings among the Likud electorate.

ISRAELI SOCIETY'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

The image of Ukraine remains controversial in Israeli society. In general, our state is perceived without too much negativity, but several factors make it impossible to form an unequivocally positive attitude toward it. Several of these factors include:

²⁷ Israel Election Polls 2022: No Block In Position to Form Next Government. *CrowdWisdom*, 5 September 2022. URL: <https://crowdwisdom.live/politics/israel-election-opinion-poll-2022/>

The problem of historical memory. The history of Jewry in Ukraine ties our states closely together. But it cannot become a full-fledged asset for deepening relations because of contradictory assessments of individual figures of Ukrainian history in Israeli society. A large number of figures of the Ukrainian national liberation movement (Bohdan Khmelnytskyi, Symon Petliura, Stepan Bandera) are associated in Israel exclusively with the pogroms of the Jewish population. Any information (whether true or falsified) about the activities of ultra-right organizations in Ukraine is a cause for concern.

Ukraine's international stance on the subject of Israel's national interests. Tel Aviv takes into account that Ukraine often takes positions that are not in Israel's interests. An example of this is the December 23, 2016 vote in the UN Security Council on Resolution No. 2334, which condemned the establishment of Israeli settlements in territories under Israeli control as a result of the 1967 war²⁸.

On the whole, the aforementioned factors are not a priority in the Israeli public's assessment of the Russian-Ukrainian war. However, they create room for the activities of Russian agents and propaganda campaigns aimed at undermining the image of Ukraine in the eyes of Israelis.

The perception of Russian aggression in Israel and assessments of the events in Ukraine are determined by the worldview of Israeli society. The problems of historical memory shape its specific character. Since the international positioning of the state is largely based on the memory of the oppression of the Jewish people, the worst manifestation of which is the Holocaust, any reference to this topic in the context of the current war is perceived as speculation and causes resentment in Israel. The concept of the uniqueness of the Jewish historical experience also dominates in Israel, so that attempts to draw parallels between it and criminal acts committed against other peoples are viewed critically in Tel Aviv²⁹.

Israeli society is used to living under constant threat (including terrorist rocket attacks). This also affects its worldview. On the one hand, Israelis better understand the threat that citizens of Ukraine will have to face in the context of ongoing rocket attacks and shelling by the Russian military. On the other hand, Israeli society is not as shocked by this escalation of the interstate conflict and active hostilities as representatives of Europe and North America. It sympathizes with the Ukrainians—yet does not perceive their suffering as something unheard of and unpredictable.

On the whole, Israeli society favors Ukraine in the war with Russia. This is illustrated by public actions to support our state on Israeli territory, as well as volunteer assistance to the Armed Forces of Ukraine by Israeli citizens. Data from sociological surveys confirm that the majority of the Israeli population supports Ukraine in the Russian-Ukrainian war. According

²⁸ Resolution 2334 (2016) Adopted by the Security Council at its 7853rd meeting, on 23 December 2016. *United Nations*. URL: <https://www.un.org/webcast/pdfs/SRES2334-2016.pdf>

²⁹ Collins L. My Word: Zelensky's misfired speech. *The Jerusalem Post*, 24 March 2022. URL: <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-702255>

to a survey conducted in early March 2022, this position is held by 76% of Israelis³⁰. Only 10% of respondents stated that they favor the Russian Federation.

The highest level of backing of Ukraine is demonstrated by supporters of the left wing of Israeli politics—90%. Among supporters of right-wing political forces it is somewhat lower and amounts to 68%. Of particular note is the fact that the Arab population of Israel demonstrates a different view of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Among this group of citizens our state is supported by 41% of respondents, while the Russian Federation is supported by 35%.

At the same time, more than half of the respondents stated that they approved the policy of neutrality with regard to the war, which the Israeli government adopted; 34% of those surveyed disagreed with it. This substantiates that the country's current stance is generally perceived positively by the electorate.

CONCLUSIONS

Israel is generally critical of Russian foreign policy, which traditionally supports its enemies. However, Tel Aviv has to reckon with Russia's position in the Middle East and its ability to complicate the security situation for Israel. Therefore, the Israeli authorities are trying to use diplomatic means to prevent such a scenario from happening.

Iran remains the main threat to Israeli security. Under these conditions, the Russian Federation is seen as a constructive mediator, able to moderate Tehran's ambitions, and a more acceptable alternative in terms of influence in Syria. Tel Aviv seeks to ensure Moscow's positive position on the Middle East issues by maintaining non-confrontational relations with the Russian Federation.

This factor determines Israel's restrained reaction to the events of the Russia-Ukraine war. Tel Aviv engages in formal actions to condemn Russia in international forums, but refrains from harsh criticism of the Putin regime. Israel's practical assistance to Ukraine is limited to the humanitarian dimension. The state is not ready to openly provide military aid to Ukraine.

Israel has no formal obligations to support Ukraine. Tel Aviv's foreign policy has always rested on a rational assessment of its own interests and has not been value-based. Under these conditions, Ukraine should not have inflated expectations of Israeli support. At this stage it makes sense to appreciate the amount of support that is being rendered.

Its expansion depends not so much on Ukraine's actions as on Russian policy. A radical revision of Israel's position is likely when Moscow takes an openly anti-Israeli position in the international arena, or loses influence in issues of interest to Tel Aviv.

³⁰ A majority of Israelis support Ukraine in the war with Russia – survey. *The Jerusalem Post*, 5 March 2022. URL: <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/politics-and-diplomacy/article-699374>

References

1. ‘Words will not stop them’: Israeli PM tells Biden to get tougher on Iran. *Politico*, 14 July 2022. URL: <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/07/14/israel-lapid-biden-iran-diplomacy-00045785>
2. A majority of Israelis support Ukraine in the war with Russia – survey. *The Jerusalem Post*, 5 March 2022. URL: <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/politics-and-diplomacy/article-699374>
3. Aggression against Ukraine: resolution / adopted by the General Assembly. *United Nations*, 2 March 2022. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3965290?ln=ru>
4. Basic-Law: Jerusalem the Capital of Israel, 5740-1980, adopted on 30 July 1980. *Israel Knesset*. URL: <https://m.knesset.gov.il/EN/activity/documents/BasicLawsPDF/BasicLawJerusalem.pdf>
5. Boxerman A. Arab Israeli MKs skip Zelensky’s Knesset speech: ‘NATO imposed this war’. *The Times of Israel*, 20 March 2022. URL: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/arab-israeli-mks-skip-zelenskys-knesset-speech-nato-imposed-this-war/>
6. Collins L. My Word: Zelensky’s misfired speech. *The Jerusalem Post*, 24 March 2022. URL: <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-702255>
7. Fandos N., Edmondson C. Democrats, Growing More Skeptical of Israel, Pressure Biden. *The New York Times*, 17 May 2021. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/18/us/politics/israel-gaza-democrats-biden.html>
8. Gardner F. Iran's network of influence in Mid-East 'growing'. *BBC*, 7 November 2019. URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-50324912>
9. Golan Heights Law, 5742-1981, adopted on 14 December 1981. *Israel Knesset*. URL: https://main.knesset.gov.il/EN/about/history/Documents/kns10_golan_eng.pdf
10. Humanitarian consequences of the aggression against Ukraine : resolution / adopted by the General Assembly. *United Nations*, 24 March 2022. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3966630?ln=en>
11. Israel attends US-led summit on sending more arms to Ukraine. *The Times of Israel*, 26 April 2022. URL: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-attending-us-led-summit-on-supplying-ukraine-with-more-arms/>
12. Israel Election Polls 2022: No Block In Position to Form Next Government. *CrowdWisdom*, 5 September 2022. URL: <https://crowdwisdom.live/politics/israel-election-opinion-poll-2022/>
13. Israel to provide Ukraine with protective gear – Gantz. *The Jerusalem Post*, 20 April 2022. URL: <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-704711>
14. Israeli field hospital ends Ukraine operations after six weeks. *The Jerusalem Post*, 29 April 2022. URL: <https://www.jpost.com/health-and-wellness/article-705492>
15. Israeli foreign minister condemns Russian attack on Ukraine. *Al-Monitor*, 24 February 2022. URL: <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/02/israeli-foreign-minister-condemns-russian-attack-ukraine#ixzz7e1IYdHOR>
16. Israel's Lapid Accuses Russia of War Crimes in Bucha as Bennett Avoids Casting Blame. *Haaretz*, 5 April 2022. URL: <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2022-04-05/ty-article/.premium/lapid-accuses-russia-of-war-crimes-in-bucha-as-bennett-avoids-casting-blame/00000180-5ba8-d718-afd9-dfbc8f830000>
17. Loft P. Iran's influence in the Middle East. Commons Library Research Briefing, 25 August 2022. URL: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9504/CBP-9504.pdf>

18. Ravid B. Scoop: Israel rejects U.S. request to approve missile transfer to Ukraine. *Axios*, 25 May 2022. URL: <https://www.axios.com/2022/05/25/israel-rejects-spike-missile-ukraine-germany-russia>
19. Resolution 2334 (2016) Adopted by the Security Council at its 7853rd meeting, on 23 December 2016. *United Nations*. URL: <https://www.un.org/webcast/pdfs/SRES2334-2016.pdf>
20. Russia Says Israel Supports Ukraine 'Neo-Nazis' as Row Escalates. *Al Jazeera*, 3 May 2022. URL: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/5/3/russia-says-israel-supports-neo-nazis-in-row-over-ukraine>
21. Russia-Ukraine Conflict: Israel's Lieberman Condemns War Crimes but Says There Are 'Mutual Accusations', *Haaretz*, 4 April 2022. URL: <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2022-04-04/ty-article/lieberman-condemns-war-crimes-says-russia-ukraine-exchanging-mutual-accusations/00000180-5bb3-d718-afd9-dfbf65df0000>
22. Ukraine's embassy slams Israel for not treating wounded Ukrainian troops. *The Jerusalem Post*, 19 June 2022. URL: <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-709848>
23. UN General Assembly votes to suspend Russia from the Human Rights Council. *United Nations*, 7 April 2022. URL: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/04/1115782>
24. Wootliff R. Netanyahu Touts Friendship with Putin in New Billboard. *The Times of Israel*, 28 July 2019. URL: <https://www.timesofisrael.com/in-another-league-netanyahu-touts-friendship-with-putin-in-new-billboard/>
25. Барановская М. Почему власти РФ решили закрыть представительство "Сохнута". *Deutsche Welle*, 13 августа 2022. URL: <https://www.dw.com/ru/pochemu-vlasti-rossii-reshili-zakryt-predstavitelstvo-sohnuta/a-62785192>
26. Беляев И. За деда или за Путина? Социальные сети спорят о шествии "Бессмертного полка". *Радио Свобода*, 10 мая 2018. URL: <https://www.svoboda.org/a/29218756.html>
27. Кречетников А., Малочерьян Ю. Россия задерживает поставку ракет Ирану. *BBC*, 18 февраля 2010. URL: https://www.bbc.com/russian/international/2010/02/100217_russia_iran_s300
28. Лебедева О. Главный раввин Москвы покинул Россию. *Deutsche Welle*, 8 июня 2022. URL: <https://www.dw.com/ru/glavnyj-ravvin-moskvy-pokinul-rf-posle-otkaza-podderzhat-voynu-protiv-ukrainy/a-62065214>
29. Петренко Р. Лавров порівняв Зеленського з Гітлером, бо той "теж мав єврейську кров". *Українська Правда*, 2 травня 2022. URL: <https://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2022/05/2/7343451/>

© Centre for International Security

Author:

Mykola Zamikula

The information and views set out in this study are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e.V. or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine.

Centre for International Security

Kombinatna str. 25, office 146A

Kyiv, 02002, Ukraine

Phone.: +380976566675, +380504712575

Email: cntr.bezpeky@gmail.com

<https://intsecurity.org/>

