

## **Mitvim Experts' Responses to the Israel-Iran War**

**June 2025**

**The summary was written and edited prior to the U.S. strike on Iran, but its insights remain highly relevant in its aftermath.**

*"Security is not just the tank, the airplane, and the missile boat. Security is also, and perhaps above all, the person—the Israeli citizen. Security is also the person's education, their home, their street and neighborhood, the society in which they grew up. Security is also the person's hope."*  
(Yitzhak Rabin)

### **The Limitations of Military Solutions and the Necessity of Diplomatic Action**

**Dr. Gil Murciano, CEO of The Mitvim Institute** - The military successes that Israel is achieving in its campaign against Iran, highlight the gap between Israel's capabilities in the military-kinetic sphere and its failure to act on the diplomatic level. The last-minute military campaign in Iran stems from a political failure—both Israeli and American—primarily the withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear agreement. Israel was forced into this situation because of the cumulative mistake of moving away from the diplomatic track. The focus on military achievements distracts from the critical question: What is Israel's exit strategy from this dangerous war? Israel is currently focused on degrading Iranian capabilities in the nuclear and missile arenas, not on changing Iranian motivations. This approach worked in Syria, but the Iranian nuclear project is a completely different story.

Iran's nuclear project is a national endeavor, for which the country has sacrificed a great deal over the past three decades. It is a national interest of the regime to ensure its survival, to create deterrence against Israel, and to bolster Iran's regional standing. The continuation of this project is a central narrative in Iran's concept of national honor. Therefore, halting a project of this magnitude and significance requires a shift in Iran's motivations. How do you change Iranian motivations? Either through a face-saving agreement that guarantees Iran's basic interests or through regime change.

The likelihood of regime change in the foreseeable future is low, leaving us with the option of an agreement. It seems that the Israeli attack has opened the door to a change in the Iranian leadership's cost-benefit calculations—it sharpens the realization that the nuclear project has shifted from a tool to ensure regime survival, to a threat to its stability. But the ability to change Iranian thinking—to persuade Iran to give up military nuclear development through a long-term agreement—depends on the diplomatic component. It requires a

framework that offers Iran a way to step back from the nuclear project without losing face, allowing the Iranian regime to claim victory before agreeing to abandon its military nuclear program. On the international level, the success of such an agreement would require a multilateral coalition similar to the one that convinced Iran to sign the 2015 nuclear agreement. A combination of international players would be needed—not just the U.S., but also China, with its significant influence on Iran's economy, as well as Russia and Saudi Arabia. The good news is that international actors—especially the Gulf states—have an urgent interest in promoting such a solution. The bad news is that it's unclear whether they have the tools to stop the escalation and put the genie back in the bottle.

**Eitan Ishai, Head of Middle East and North Africa Program at Mitvim** - A plausible possibility is that the Islamic regime in Iran will survive the current confrontation but emerge from it weakened, both internally and externally. In such a situation, the regime will need to reassess and reexamine fundamental assumptions that formed the basis of the strategy it cultivated and led for years. This could lead it to choose between two alternatives: adopting a more moderate approach toward nuclear and regional issues with the aim of "improving positions" and strengthening its status anew; or alternatively, adopting a rigid and aggressive approach aimed at rapid restoration of Iranian deterrence and regional status. Either way, Israel bears the responsibility to ensure that Iran cannot benefit from a vacuum created following the tectonic changes the region has experienced. Preventing Iran's renewed penetration into Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Jordan, and other arenas will not be possible through continuous military activity alone; instead, a political and diplomatic strategy is required. Israel must strengthen and restore its relations with its allies in the region and beyond, and develop partnerships with power brokers that serve its interests to ensure they do not lose their power and in turn create a vacuum that will once again be filled by hostile forces.

### **Israel's relations with the world depends on ending the war on Gaza, not on the outcomes of its fight with Iran**

**Dr. Nimrod Goren, President and Founder of Mitvim Institute; Executive Board Member at Diplomeds - The Council for Mediterranean Diplomacy** - The initial days of fighting with Iran brought significant damage to Israeli citizens - loss of life, property damage and a blow to personal security. Alongside the essential public discourse surrounding this, the discussion in Israel about physical disconnect from the world is prominent. The closure of the airport, prohibition on leaving the country, difficulties of Israelis returning from abroad and inequality that allows those with means or connections to circumvent prohibitions – all make headlines. This also happened during previous national crises, such as COVID-19, and once again emphasizes how much Israeli society — despite the common belief that "the whole world is against us" — yearns for connection and belonging to the international community. Such a connection is not just measured in the technical aspect of incoming and outgoing flights from Ben Gurion Airport, but in deeper layers related to policy, mindsets, perceptions, and even international law. In these regards, Israel remains in a state of

ongoing estrangement from the international community—not because of the war with Iran, but due to the never-ending war in Gaza. Until recently, it seemed the world had grown weary of the conflict, but Israel's cancellation of the ceasefire and obstruction of humanitarian aid have brought it back to the top of the global agenda.

Even as governments continue to promote relations with Israel – openly or secretly, based on shared interests, and sometimes alongside criticism of Israeli policies – the public in many countries are distancing themselves. In culture, academia, sports, economy, and tourism, the decline in Israel's standing is evident, and the difficulty of being part of the global family – is increasing. In Israel, there is concern about traveling to western cities – from presenting an Israeli passport at the airport, taking a taxi with a potentially hostile driver, the service one might receive at a hotel or restaurant, and the terrifying moment in small talk when a foreign interlocutor asks the Israeli, "Where are you from?" A good connection with the world is necessary for Israeli foreign policy, but is also an integral part of national security and in the ability of Israeli citizens to thrive, enjoy, and fulfill their talents. The reopening of Ben Gurion Airport after a few more days of fighting in Iran will, of course, be positive, but it will not eradicate the deep-seated problems, which must be solved via leadership change in Israel. Improvement will only be felt once Israel has a prime minister that chooses to end the war on Gaza, strive for peace, and emphasize a commitment to liberal and democratic values.

**Dr. Omer Zanany, Head of the Joint Unit for Peace and Security of The Mitvim Institute and the Berl Katznelson foundation** - For the first time since the launch of "Iron Swords," the war against Iran has shifted the Gaza front—and the broader Palestinian arena—into a secondary arena. As the war with Iran continues, the deepening of negative trends is expected in the following ways. **Furthering the possibility of a political initiative:** The Israeli attack has already succeeded in leading to the postponement of the French-Arab declaration regarding the Palestinian state. The involved countries, led by France and Britain, are now forced to direct attention to dealing with Iran and stopping the war in the Middle East. **Neglecting the hostages:** The public debate regarding the necessity of a hostage deal and of ending the war on Gaza has been erased from public discourse, along with the attention and the political actions to advance this. Finally, the attention given to the war in Iran allows **the Israeli government to continue advancing extreme measures in the Palestinian arena**, including, among other things, furthering annexation, Palestinian population expulsion within the West Bank, and continuing initiatives for long-term Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip.

Against the backdrop of these dangers, the democratic camp must underscore the crucial importance of returning the hostages and ending the war on Gaza, while also stressing the urgent need to draw lessons from the illusions of managing the Gaza war—emphasizing the importance of shortening wars and advancing a political initiative for "the day after." The central challenge is to highlight the strong linkage between ending the war on Gaza and ending the war with Iran as a platform for advancing a **new regional architecture in the**

**Middle East.** This parallels the essence of "[The Israeli Initiative](#)" that promotes Israel's national interests, leading to a stable regional solution.

## Israel-US Relations

**Nadav Tamir, Board Member of Mitvim and Director of J-Street Israel** - The attack on Iran could have been justified if it had been part of a broad strategy coordinated with the US to advance a US-Iran agreement. There is no military strategy that can prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons, and there is a real risk that an attack could actually drive Iran—not to settle at the nuclear threshold, but, learning from the Libyan example and in contrast to the North Korean one—to break through and pursue the bomb. Netanyahu and Trump are both responsible for the strategic error of the US withdrawal from the JCPOA, which caused Iran to reach the status of a threshold state, in terms of uranium enrichment and strategic alliance with Russia and China. The Israeli strategy should be to play a key role within the agreement and not to prevent it by increasing coordination with the US and achieving maximum collaboration and transparency.

## The War and the Home Front

**Dr. Orni Livny, COO of The Mitvim Institute** - There is a direct connection between the failure of home front preparedness and the gendered worldview. The gap between Israel's intelligence and operational capabilities and the failure to prepare for the operation's implications on the home front is incomprehensible. In the military and tactical sphere, Israel receives an excellent grade, but in the civilian sphere, the grade is very low. The same country that knows where every nuclear scientist's bedroom is in Tehran, doesn't know that there are no shelters in Tamra and that more than half of the apartments in the country lack protected rooms. This reality stems from a point that has been repeatedly raised over the past two and a half years: the exclusion of women from key decision-making roles, and the consistent neglect of issues that fall outside the narrow focus of war management. This is not just a question of how many women have a seat at the table, but a more substantial question: what topics are discussed around that table, and what values guide decision-making?

Incorporating gender perspectives into all strategic and policy decisions broadens the perspective of decision-makers, shifting their focus from military force and combat tactics to civilian issues related to personal security, national resilience, and equality. This is true for formulating Israel's foreign policy and also for the decision to start a war. The civilian aspect is an integral part of the military aspect, and one doesn't need to be a woman to adopt this conception. For so many years, intelligence personnel and air force teams prepared for the "D-Day" of attacking Iran nuclear facilities and presumably prepared for various scenarios and conducted simulations on how to deal with them. But in the civilian sphere—only after the Iranian response, did government ministries suddenly discover that protected spaces

were lacking, that there weren't enough solutions for vulnerable populations, and that thousands of Israelis stranded abroad somehow needed to be brought home.

The impression is that in all the discussions and assessments, there was no one to stand up and ask how eliminating Iran's nuclear capabilities would affect Israelis in the immediate and long term and what needs to be done so that not only the air force would be ready for the mission, but also the home front. Unfortunately, it's clear that even if one of the female ministers had joined the restricted cabinet discussion that approved the attack, the civilian aspect would still have been considered "collateral damage" (see: Miri Regev, Minister of Transportation, who only, at the end of Shabbat, began thinking about what to do with closed skies). We need more women around decision-making tables, not because of gender, but because of their professional skills. However, to adopt a gender perspective that integrates military tactics with civilian implications, we first need a leadership that prioritizes the well-being of citizens over its own political survival.

## The European Perspective

**Dr. Maya Sion-Tzidkiyahu, Director of the Israel-Europe Relations Program** - Since Iran supplied Russia with Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) and ballistic missiles—used in its ongoing war in Ukraine and potentially posing a threat to other European countries—it has effectively become a "friend of the enemy," and thus, an indirect enemy of much of Europe. Ostensibly, Europe's natural choice is to be on Israel's side, but things are somewhat more complex. The statement by the 27 EU member states expressed deep concern about the escalation between Israel and Iran, called for restraint from both sides, and emphasized the EU's commitment to Israel's and the region's security while preventing Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons. However, the EU statement refrained from recognizing Israel's right to self-defense - a notable change compared to previous confrontations with Iran or elsewhere. Prime Minister of the Republic of Estonia, Kaja Kallas, emphasized the need for diplomacy.

The EU position has several explanations: First, Israel was the one that attacked, and there is no consensus that this was a last-resort attack. Second, harsh feelings that have accumulated against the Israeli government regarding its handling of the war on Gaza. Third, as always, the EU statement is a balancing act among the 27 members, and there is no unanimity on the issue; however, Germany and France expressed clearer positions.

Germany, led by Chancellor Merz, condemned the Iranian nuclear program, strengthened Israel's right to defend itself, and even correlated the attack to the defense of Israel's existence. Merz stated that "the goal must remain that Iran does not develop nuclear weapons." France expressed support for Israel's security and its readiness to participate in defending Israel, but not in attacking Iran. Israel did not make use of this readiness, perhaps due to its role in the summit advancing Palestinian statehood, which was planned to take place in New York from June 17<sup>th</sup> through 20<sup>th</sup>. Britain stood out with its noticeably restrained statements, in which the government emphasized the need for de-escalation, withheld explicit support for Israel, and made clear that it had no involvement in the operation. Israel,



for its part, did not notify Britain in advance—likely a response to Britain's suspension of trade talks with Israel on May 20, 2025—signaling a marked cooling of bilateral relations. It is possible the British government is waiting to gauge the U.S. President's approach before adopting a more defined stance, especially given internal pressures within the Labour Party that do not necessarily align with Israel's interests.

After Israel significantly weakened Iran's proxies in Lebanon and Gaza—and indirectly contributed to the fall of Assad's regime in Syria, a development welcomed by the EU—Europe sees strategic advantages. Undermining Iran also aids efforts to curb the Houthis, who continue to disrupt maritime trade through the Bab el-Mandeb Strait. European leaders are well aware that the range of Iranian ballistic missiles extends to their own borders. In the long term, diminishing the threat posed by the "head of the snake," Iran, is expected to enhance stability across the Middle East—a goal that aligns with European interests. In confronting the oppressive Ayatollah regime at home and dismantling its aggressive network of proxies abroad, Israel is the right side to support. It is carrying out tasks that many Sunni states are eager to see accomplished. The potential collapse of the Tehran regime is an outcome supported by several European governments and a significant portion of the public.

In European public opinion polls, Israel has reached a significant low, but there is one country with an even worse situation: Iran. It is important to remember that during Iran's hijab protests, which the Ayatollah regime brutally suppressed, Europe supported the protesters and defended women's and human rights. European public opinion was against the Iranian regime. Because of this, many in Europe recognize the service Israel is doing for the West in the current war. However, due to divisions within Europe, Israel seems to have only partial support there. Europeans are also afraid of being seen as openly supporting the Israeli attacks, and the context of the war in Gaza limits how much support Israel receives.

### **The Hellenic Alliance Provides Strategic Depth for Israel**

**Former Ambassador Michael Harari, Research and Policy Fellow** - The Israeli attack succeeded in surprising Iran while maintaining close and impressive coordination with Washington. A kind of division of labor is being implemented whereby Israel does the "dirty work," which aims, it seems, to return the Iranians to the negotiating table from a position of weakness. Apparently, after just a few days of attacks, it appears that the Iranians are interested in a ceasefire and returning to negotiations. Israel is not satisfied with this and seeks to continue military pressure on Iran despite the damage to the Israeli home front.

Israel enjoys regional support in silence, of course alongside lip service condemnations, and significant support in the international arena. For now, it appears that Washington is backing Israel, but this raises the question of how long the rope is. Iran's willingness to for a ceasefire, backed by threats to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, indicates an Iranian assessment that it's better at this stage to stop Israeli military attacks, even at the price of some humiliation, and return to negotiations with the US. It's unclear whether Israel has marked regime change as the current goal, and if so, this is a dangerous, pretentious move, and there is serious doubt whether it enjoys American support. The attack on Iran

also returned and highlighted the close and strategic relationship between Israel, Greece and Cyprus. Both countries impressively demonstrate their role as strategic depth for Israel from security and civilian perspectives. It's important to note, however, that in recent months there has been growing criticism in Greek and Cypriot public opinion about the continuation of the war in Gaza, particularly around the humanitarian crisis and the large number of civilian casualties in the Gaza Strip. These feelings are not reflected in the policies of both governments, which was seen during the visits of the Greek Prime Minister and Cypriot President to Israel. At the same time, the growing public criticism joined by leading opposition parties in both countries should not be taken lightly.