

## **Israel's Policy towards the Syrian Conflict**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Israel's policy toward the Syrian conflict has been vague and it has maintained a passive stand on the Syrian conflict. Nevertheless, Israel preferred favourable outcome of the Syrian conflict. The choice of whether to intervene on the side of the regime or the opposition has been anything but obviously an alliance with Israel could potentially hurt more than help its Syrian beneficiaries. Israeli military intervention inside Syria would, however, only increase threats to its own security, with broader consequences in terms of regional peace and stability. It is fair to say that, from afar, Israel is watching closely and waiting for desired outcome from the Syrian conflict. This research paper will explore the dilemma in Israeli policy towards the Syrian conflict and will also try to highlight the regional actors who are actively involved in the arena of the Syrian conflict.

**Key Words :** Israel's policy, Syrian conflict, Regional actors, Israeli military

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Israel and the Syrian Conflict :**

The Arab Uprising reached Syria in March 2011 when Syrian intellectuals, students, and union leaders appeared on the streets to demand greater transparency, political liberalization, and economic reforms. Although they did not participate in the initial series of demonstrations, when Syrian Islamists joined the opposition, subsequently, the regime of Bashar al-Asad responded with force to the public display of dissent.<sup>1</sup> The outbreak of the Syrian conflict has sparked a rethink of Israel's policy toward its neighbour. Israel may have preferred the Asad regime to remain in power rather than take its chances with an unknown successor. Syrian conflict has complicated Israel's foreign policy priorities. If Israel or the US were to launch a military strike against Iran's nuclear facilities, a desperate Asad could conceivably seek to transform his domestic conflict into another Arab-Israeli conflict by taking the opportunity to attack Israel on Iran's behalf. Moreover, Israel would prefer regime change in Syria, but has concerns regarding what type of government would succeed Bashar al-Asad in Damascus. In the beginning, Israel hoped for a secular regime to emerge, but due to limited influence, it has maintained a passive stand towards the Syrian conflict.<sup>2</sup> It is also clear that the Syrian regime has failed in its efforts to suppress the protests, which have spread all over the country. At the same time, the Asad's regime is still there and it is still strong and can fight back. The army, including soldiers and officers who belong not only to Asad's Alawite community but also to other sects and communities, is still ready to fight for the regime. If the Syrian opposition eventually takes over and, as in the case of

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Egypt, they know that their interests lie with friendship with Western countries like the United States and not with Iran. So in the long run, a new Syrian regime might be better for Israel than this current regime.<sup>3</sup>

When the Syrian conflict reached the tipping point and the fall of Bashar al-Asad's regime seems to be a matter of time, Israel has abandoned the policy of passive stance which has been maintained since the conflict began in March 2011. Moreover, Israel is, of course, concerned with the future of the Syrian regime. It is an important neighbour, and chaos or the emergence of a radical Islamists regime would be very negative developments for a country whose geopolitical environment has already been clouded by the Arab Uprising. At the outset, the Syrian conflict has been misrepresented by two myths. One, propagated by the Asad's regime itself that this is not a genuine domestic rebellion but a conspiracy hatched by the US and Israel. The other is that Israel favours the survival of Asad's regime and has exerted its influence in Washington in order to discourage the Obama administration from severe intervention in Syria.<sup>4</sup> In Syria, a country where the demonstrations were brutally repressed by the regime, the situation quickly degenerated into a civil war, with the US, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar giving financial and military support to rebel groups. As Turkey and the US believed that the Syrian regime was about to collapse, they continued to show support to the rebel forces. But the Syrian regime did not collapse: with Iranian and Russian back-up and to some extent China, it was able to regain ground militarily and even politically, by advancing propaganda of defending the country against dangerous hard-line Islamists groups. The US, Europe and Turkey were urging Bashar al-Asad to leave power, now they are afraid of who would takeover if he actually did. The attack of Islamic State in northern Iraq has proved that the danger of hard-line extremist Islamists groups is real. As the future of the region became darker, other countries found themselves uncertain of what to do. Israel is another neighbouring country that is deeply divided concerning Syria.<sup>5</sup> Since, Israel considers Syria as an important security threat for more than four decades. Defeating Bashar al-Asad would diminish the Syrian threat and, moreover, weaken the Islamic Republic and Hezbollah, two other sworn enemies of Israel. However, as the Syrian opposition become more fragmented, with new actors engaging in the conflict, the situation grown to be more complex to Israel as well. If taking Bashar al-Asad out of the picture would be a great blow to Hezbollah, a defeated Bashar al-Asad could leave way to other groups more hostile to Israel. But as a neighbouring country, the situation is much more dangerous to Israel than to other countries involved in the Syrian conflict. As the conflict remains and surpasses the Syrian border, the threat to Israel becomes more important, pushing the country to find a more concrete policy towards the Syrian conflict. Nevertheless, in the midst of all this chaos and security threat, Israel was able to take an advantage of the Syrian conflict, as it took the spot light out of the Palestine-Israel conflict, replacing it as the centre of attention in West Asia and giving yet more room to Israel forces to act towards Palestinians as they want without having to be concerned with International pressure.<sup>6</sup>

#### **Old enemies :**

Hostility between Syria and Israel goes back to the creation of the Jewish State of Israel in May 1948, driven by Syria's support for the Palestinian resistance against the Jewish State. Soon after, Syria and Israel went to war in 1948, 1967 and 1973, which ended with Israeli occupation of Syria's Golan Heights region. Retrieving the lost territory was the central tenet of Syrian foreign policy under Hafez al-Asad (1970-2000), who became Israel's most implacable Arab enemy. However, after failing to win back the Golan Heights in the October War of 1973, the ruthless but pragmatic and patient Hafez al-Asad decided to avoid direct confrontation with Israel. Instead, he built his deterrent capacity by striking an alliance with the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979.<sup>7</sup> Following the Syrian intervention in Lebanon, President Hafez al-Asad maintained pressure on Israel by supporting militant groups such as Hezbollah in southern Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine. This was the strategic set-up inherited by

Hafez al-Asad and followed by his son Bashar al-Asad since 2000 onwards. For Israel, Bashar al-Asad was an enemy, but an enemy it knew how to deal with. The border in the Golan Heights had been kept safe for decades.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Security of Golan Heights :**

The 40 year cold peace between the two countries could now be jeopardised by the spill over from the Syrian conflict. In particular, the stability and security of the Golan Heights, which was taken over by Israel from Syria during the Six-Day War of 1967, is in question. Since November 2012, a series of cross-border exchanges of fire between the Israel and Syrian armies have occurred across the cease-fire line in the Golan Heights. In contrast to Syria's other neighbours, Israel, which is technically in a state of war with Syria, has no open-door policy regarding Syrian refugees. Nevertheless, since the Syrian conflict, hundreds of Syrians have tried to enter the Golan Heights.<sup>9</sup> The Golan Heights is of great strategic importance to Israel for security, economic and settlement reasons. It provides a "buffer zone" against Syria and secures access to water resources. Israel fears that the Golan Heights could function as a launching pad for armed Islamist groups that dominate Syrian opposition forces. In response to heightened instability, Israel and Syria have strengthened their border security and military capacity in the Golan Heights. Israel has erected and reinforced a dividing wall over 5 meters tall and around 250 kilometres in length along the Israel–Syrian border to prevent any attempt by Islamist groups to cross the border and attack Israel. The major Israeli fear concerns the security of the Syrian regime's advanced missile systems and chemical and biological weapons. The Syrian conflict has accelerated the fear that Hezbollah or al-Qaeda-affiliated Islamist groups would try to seize Syria's chemical weapons. While the Israeli government has remained largely mute about its interest in the Syrian conflict, it has been doing a great deal to pressure the US into direct involvement in Syria.<sup>10</sup> The Israeli perception that the US is increasingly unlikely to undertake any new military involvement in West Asia which reinforces Netanyahu's much-preached doctrine that Israeli must look after itself. Moreover, the US has warned that Israel should respect the UN's chemical arms resolution and attempts to seek a political arrangement with the opposition in Syria. In turn, Israel's series of targeted unilateral attacks sent a message to Syria, Iran and the US that Israel is ready to act alone if necessary. So far, Syria has not retaliated against Israeli attacks. The Syrian regime is unlikely to open a second front at this stage, because it is too concerned with the capacity to consider a conflict with Israel. For Israel, a prolonged conflict in Syria might prove the best way to ensure its security of the Golan Heights.<sup>11</sup>

### **Israel and Saudi Arabia :**

A long-term conflict will strain the resources of the Syrian regime and its Shi'a allies Iran and Hezbollah; therefore it is weakening Israel's enemies. It will also give Israel time to utilise anti-Shi'a sentiment in the region to forge new strategic alliances with Sunni Arab states and Iran's neighbouring countries. Israel and Saudi Arabia's recent talks about security cooperation have grown out of mutual dissatisfaction with the new US approach to Iran.<sup>12</sup> In other words, the central issue between Saudi and USA on the one hand and the US and Israel on the other hand, is not the nuclear deal itself, it is the place which Iran would have in the future and the US officials are unwilling to outline what strategies might curb Iran's regional influence. The US strategy in Iraq, Syria and Yemen has caused Saudi Arabia and Israel great anxiety. To this anxiety has added the 'fear' of the US playing a double role in the regional politics. Saudi Arabia has made a reassessment of the possible threats and challenges Iran can and is causing in the region. Saudi Arabia, as such, now sees Iran's involvement in Arab countries, particularly its backing of the Syrian regime, its support for Iraqi Shi'a militias and its ties with the Houthi in northern Yemen, as a more urgent problem, resolution of which requires a "grand alliance" in the region. However, the significance of forging anti-Iran alliance, Saudi Arabia is not

hesitating in forging much closer relationship with Israel. In February 2015, Saudi Arabia reportedly agreed to let Israel use its airspace to attack Iran if necessary, in exchange for “some kind of progress” on the Palestinian issue. The move will reportedly allow Israel to bomb targets in Iran by offering a shortcut, which will save fuel and time. On the other hand, Israeli behaviour also confirms some “abnormal” policy changes taking place. The ‘unholy’ alliance taking shape between Saudi and Israel can decisively alter the region’s geo-political landscape because of its potential to serve as the platform for many a state to practice what is otherwise known as “enemy of enemy is my friend”.<sup>13</sup>

#### **Iran :**

The Islamic Republic of Iran is a crucial player in the Syrian conflict. Iran is the Syrian regime’s biggest supporter, even more so than Russia. Tehran’s ties with Damascus have historically been based on shared strategic interests, including thwarting US and Israeli power in the West Asian region. Both countries have also relied on each other to balance unfriendly Arab states. Tehran views Syria as a strategic gateway to the Arab world, a bulwark against American and Israeli power, and perhaps most importantly, a crucial link to Lebanese Hezbollah. Syria is also a buffer against internal instability in Iran. Iran’s policy towards Syria is straightforward: It will do its best to keep Bashar al-Asad in power. But Tehran is smart enough to realize the Syrian regime could be overthrown sooner or later. Hence, Iran has stepped up its support of Alawite and other minority militias, not only to preserve some influence in Syria but also to maintain a physical connection to Hezbollah if Asad is overthrown. The close ties between Iran and Syria are based on geopolitics rather than religion.<sup>14</sup> Iran has long viewed Syria as a counterweight to the United States, Israel, and its Arab rivals like Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Iran’s war with Iraq (1980-88) cemented the Syria-Iran partnership. It is not surprising that Iran and its Revolutionary Guards have played a large role in fighting insurgents seeking to overthrow Bashar al-Asad. The Islamic Republic has been isolated internationally and regionally due to its nuclear pursuits and cannot afford to lose Syria as a strategic ally. The fall of the Asad regime would not only affect Tehran’s ability to maintain influence in the Arab world, but it would also degrade its ability to sustain Hezbollah militarily. The elimination of the Syrian routes to Hezbollah could prevent Iran from resupplying Hezbollah in a future conflict with Israel. Such a scenario could make Israel more willing to attack not only Hezbollah but also Iran’s nuclear facilities. Iran’s Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei believes the Syrian regime to be a crucial part of the “axis of resistance” against Israel and a frontline in Iran’s struggle with the United States.<sup>15</sup>

#### **Islamic State :**

Islamic State in Syria has made attempts to expand the extremist group’s territory near the border with Israel. Israel has not yet responded to the incidents even as mortar shells from the battles with ISIS fighters landed across the border into Israeli territory. In the past, Israel has increased its forces in the Golan Heights near the Syrian border when shells fired by the Syrian army spilled over into Israeli territory. However, Israel has remained quiet during the rebel fighters from Syria repelled militants loyal to the Islamic State. The Islamic State has so far failed to gain foothold on the Golan Heights border which would allow the Islamic State to set up a base for operations against Israel. But their attacks have been thwarted by the Free Syrian Army (FSA), which reportedly receives Israeli humanitarian aid, in cooperation with the al-Nusra front, a Sunni Muslim branch of al-Qaeda operating in Syria and Lebanon. Israel views al-Qaeda-affiliated groups as enemies but is far more hostile with Iran and its allies.<sup>16</sup> Earlier this year, Israel opened its borders with Syria to provide medical treatment to the al-Nusra Front and al-Qaeda fighters wounded along the Golan Heights. The al-Nusra Front, which has referred to the United States and Israel as “enemies of Islam”, is fighting the Iranian-backed alliance of Syrian President Bashar al-Asad and Hezbollah. The al-Nusra Front seized the border area but has not attacked Israel. There is no doubt that Hezbollah and Iran are the major threat to Israel,

much more than the radical Sunni Islamists, who are also an enemy. Those Sunni elements that control some two-thirds to 90 percent of the border on the Golan are not attacking Israel. This gives Israel some basis to think that they understand who their real enemy is not Israel".<sup>17</sup> What should Israel do? The calculus is becoming more complicated but the strategy is obvious: wait and see. Be more and more on the alert and increase the intensity of intelligence and other operations outside of Israel.<sup>18</sup>

### **Dilemma of Israel's Policy :**

It goes without saying that Syria is pivotal in the Arab world and is also known as the "beating heart of the Arabism". The dilemma of Israel's policy regarding the possible downfall of Asad's regime has been subject to a number of different and contradictory pressures. To begin with, there are factors that would tend to make the Israelis prefer the ouster of the Syrian regime. Then, there is the Syrian alliance with Iran, Hezbollah, and several Palestinian factions; this "axis" now forms an important bulwark against Israel-American regional hegemony. The Israelis continue to view Syria as an old enemy. The Israelis can distinguish between those Arab states that have made peace with them such as Jordan and Egypt, together with those that support the peace process option e.g., Morocco, the Palestinian National Authority, Saudi Arabia, and some of the other Gulf states and those that have opposed the imposition of Israeli-American preconditions.<sup>19</sup> Despite all of this, Israel's strategic thinking continues to view Syria as an enemy; but Syria has remained a relatively calm front for the following reasons: First, the Syrian regime has adhered to the ceasefire lines along the Golan Heights, stretching back to the disengagement agreement of 1974. Not a single shot has been fired in anger by the Syrian military against the Israelis in the Golan Heights, despite the numerous campaigns waged by the Israelis against Lebanon and the Palestinian people, campaigns in which tens of thousands of innocent Lebanese and Palestinians have been killed. Second, The Syrian regime has ruthlessly and efficiently prevented the rise of any popular resistance movement in the Golan Heights. Third, At least, since the Madrid Peace Conference of 1991, the Syrian regime has abandoned any hope of achieving strategic balance *vis-à-vis* Israel, concluding that only "peaceful means" will bring back the occupied Golan Heights. Fourth, The Syrian regime took part in a series of extensive negotiations, under the US mediation, with the Israelis throughout the 1990s, followed by rounds in 2007 and 2008, with Turkish mediation. During these processes, Syria expressed its willingness to sign a peace treaty with their Israeli counterparts, thereby establishing "normal" relations with them in return of the Golan Heights. Fifth, experience has taught the Israelis that they have a chance to reach an agreement with the Syrian regime based on mutual interests.<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, Israel's policy towards the Syrian conflict has been one of its most curious aspects. Syria is surrounded by five neighbours: Turkey, Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan and Israel. The first four have all been significantly affected by the Syrian conflict or have played a significant role in it. Israel, Syria's enemy and intermittent partner in peace negotiations, has thus far been least affected by the storm raging north of its border and has had practically no impact on its course. But this could change swiftly. Israel's interests in Syria and in the Syrian conflict are manifold: Israel is interested first and foremost in peace and stability across its northern border and preventing Jihadi elements from establishing themselves north of the Golan Heights. Israel is also interested in eliminating Iran's influence in Syria and weakening Hezbollah in Lebanon and in preventing Iran from Syria. Despite the present calm, Israel's view of the Syrian conflict is in its bilateral, regional and international contexts, and its interests would be affected by possible outcomes of the current conflict.<sup>21</sup> Israel's attitude can be summarized along the following lines: First, in the beginning, Israeli decision makers had to make up their minds on whether they preferred Bashar al-Asad to stay or go. The Israeli leadership saw Bashar al-Asad as more harmful than beneficial. It was clear that a diplomatic option was off the table in the short term. They were worried about the identity of his successors, but they saw the damage to Iran that would be caused by his fall, and on the whole preferred his departure. Second, Israel had no

influence inside Syria and realized that any support it would wish to extend to the Syrian opposition would be counterproductive and play into the regime's hands. Third, Syria was Iran's principal ally and increasingly its client in the region, its land bridge to Lebanon, and its partner in supporting Hamas in Gaza. The prospect of a regime change in Syria, and the emergence of a pro-American successor to Bashar al-Asad, was abhorrent to Tehran. From a zero-sum game perspective, Iran's loss was Israel's gain. Fourth, as the rebellion continued and intensified, Syria became the arena of a regional conflict between Iran and its rivals as well as between Russia and to some extent China and the US and its Western allies. Events in Syria also had specific effects on such neighbours as Turkey and Iraq. And finally, Israel drew a clear distinction between the immediate and longer term ramifications of the Syrian conflict. Rebellion, civil war, and the prospect of regime change in a hostile neighbouring country require watchfulness and close attention. The long-term ramifications for Israel of the Syrian conflict will naturally depend on the future course of events.<sup>22</sup>

Despite the ambiguity of the Israel's policy towards the Syrian conflict, a number of lessons can be drawn: First, from the beginning, the Israelis have always preferred that the Syrian regime not respond to its people's calls for greater democracy and freedom. They regard the establishment of a democratic regime in Syria as a strategic shift and in the long term and the possibility of a Syrian revival, and will give it a more prominent role in the region, which would increase its ability to confront the Israelis and challenge their policies. Second, The Israelis would prefer for the revolutionaries' aims not to be swiftly achieved, if at all, and for the rebellion to be as protracted as possible. A long-lived conflict would drain not only the Syrian regime, but the country as a whole, in addition to exhausting the Syrian people. The Israelis lump all facets of Syria - the regime, the state, and the people - together, regarding all of them as enemies. Through the prism of Israeli strategic interests, the weakening of Syria would be a good thing, and a prolonging of the revolution would serve that purpose.<sup>23</sup> Third, The Israelis also fear of the breakdown of the present chain of command in Syria; it is this centralization of power that has allowed the Syrian regime to maintain quiet on the Golan front. Any deterioration of the central authority within Syria's borders, any weakening of its ability to maintain order over significant parts of the country's territory, could be a siren-call for armed groups to converge there, making attacks against Israeli-held territory more likely. Fourth, The Israelis also fear that a weakening of the Syrian state's authority could pave the way for a transfer of unconventional weapons including biological and chemical such weapons could fall into the hands of regional forces opposed to Israel.<sup>24</sup>

### **Israel's New Policy:**

The Israeli Foreign Ministry has proposed a new policy for their government with regards to the Syrian conflict. This called for an end to official ambiguity and the adoption of a policy closer to those of the United States and the European Union, a policy which would call for the resignation of President Bashar al-Asad. The argument behind this new policy was that Israel could no longer remain silent when most countries, among them powers like the US, the EU, and the Arab League, were adopting clear positions on the way the situation in Syria was developing. The first signs of this came when Netanyahu stated: "In recent days, we have heard news which reminds us which region it is that we live in. We saw the Syrian army killing own its people".<sup>25</sup> Netanyahu's comments were the prelude to a new policy later adopted in haste by the Jewish State. Israeli officials suddenly rushed to present themselves as sympathizers of the plight of the Syrian people; they spoke of condemning the massacres of the Syrian people, seeking to present themselves as champions of humanitarian values. Clearly, this policy is intentionally deceptive: it is a fraudulent claim, dripping with crocodile tears. The Israelis, whose state was founded on the wholesale dispossession of the Palestinian people, have earned a reputation for being more than willing to massacre civilians in Palestine, Lebanon, and beyond; and theirs is not a humanitarian state. The Israelis went further, tying Iran and Hezbollah with the crimes of the Syrian regime, attempting to further isolate their own enemies as a result of a wider situation.<sup>26</sup>

On the other, Israel has no interest in getting drawn into the quagmire in Syria for a variety of reasons. Israel does not believe it can shape the outcome, or if it can it will be too costly, and Israel has other things on its plate including the bigger challenge of Iran's nuclear programme. But Israel has acted and will act if it feels its national interests are directly threatened. One scenario is jihadists establishing themselves in the Golan along the Israeli- Syrian border and trying to provoke Israel.<sup>27</sup> At first, Israel wanted Syrian President Bashar al-Asad to stay in power, thinking it was "the devil we know" and fearing the spread of chaos along the border. Then Israeli leaders came to the conclusion that Asad is finished. But then they became aware of the presence of al-Qaeda elements in Syria, like the rebel al-Nusra Front. So now the real position of Israel, not the official one, is that we wish both sides good luck and that it is in the interest of Israel that they continue fighting. Essentially, we want Asad to stay in power. We want him to be strong enough to keep the border quiet but weak enough so he will not present any real threat to Israel. But clearly, everyone in Israel understands that it must not get involved in the conflict of Syria. The best thing to do is defend the border without getting into Syria.<sup>28</sup> The Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Ya'alon, made it clear that Israel "... will not tolerate any violation of our sovereignty and any attack on our soldiers and civilians, and will respond with determination and force against anyone who acts against us, in any place and at any time. The decision makers in Israel recognize that there is a slim chance that any outcome of the Syrian conflict will favour Israeli interests."<sup>29</sup>

#### **Syrian Perspective :**

The involvement of Israel in Syria has been a contentious issue since the beginning of the Syrian conflict. Pro-supporters of the Syrian regime claim that overthrowing Asad is in Israel's interest and supporting the revolutionaries, and some have even gone so far as to claim that there are Israelis operating in Syria today. Basically, the entire Syrian conflict is an Israeli plot to overthrow the bastion of resistance that is the Bashar Al-Asad of Syria. Pro-revolutionaries' response to these arguments is that overthrowing Asad is actually not in Israel's interest, because although Asad talks tough, he has in fact guaranteed Israel stability by refraining from challenging Israel's occupation of the Golan Heights. The Israeli-Syrian border has been Israel's quietest border and, therefore, Israel has an interest in maintaining the status quo in Syria.<sup>30</sup> In addition to this, there are many instances in history whereby Syria has taken a position against the Palestinian cause, including during the Lebanese Civil War where the Hafez al-Asad sided with the reactionary Lebanese Phalangist forces against the PLO and the Lebanese leftist forces. The Asad regime's alliance with Iran and Hezbollah is not out of sheer principle but a political calculation. Furthermore, normalizing relations with Israel requires a dictator, as only an unelected, unaccountable dictator like Anwar al-Sadat of Egypt can push through such an unpopular position without fear of repercussions from the people. Therefore, it is likely that normalizing relations between Israel and Syria could only have happened with a figure like Bashar al-Asad being president and forcing it through despite objections.<sup>31</sup>

#### **Conclusion :**

Israel's policy toward the Syrian conflict has been vague and it has maintained a passive stand on the Syrian conflict. Nevertheless, Israel preferred favourable outcome of the Syrian conflict. The choice of whether to intervene on the side of the regime or the opposition has been anything but obviously an alliance with Israel could potentially hurt more than help its Syrian beneficiaries. In response to the Syrian conflict and the policy dilemma, the Israeli government has essentially decided to take a backseat towards the Syrian conflict, adopting a largely timid posture both diplomatically and operationally. Publicly, Israel has largely confined its official pronouncements to refrain from direct involvement in the Syrian conflict.<sup>32</sup> It is fair to say that, from afar, Israel is watching closely and waiting for desired outcome from the Syrian conflict. Moreover, the increasing absence of central

authority, and the proliferation of non-state armed groups operating on behalf of both the government and rebel forces, Syria has become unstable, divided, and militarized. From Israel's point of view, this may represent a long term threat to its borders, especially given the increasing power of more radical groups among the anti-Asad opposition. Israeli military intervention inside Syria would, however, only increase threats to its own security, with broader consequences in terms of regional peace and stability.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, Israel's policy towards the Syrian conflict, not the official one, is that we wish both sides good luck and that it is in the interest of Israel that they continue fighting. Lord Palmerston says very rightly that "We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow".

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