

Seizing the initiative

New report calls for assertive diplomacy from Israel

London, 10 April 2013: Israel's strategic neighbourhood is in flux but a number of trends have emerged since the start of the Arab Spring:

The Syrian conflict is pitching Bashar al-Assad's chiefly Shiite alliance against the region's moderate Sunni movers, many now led by or sympathetic to Islamist-Salafist forces.

Diffuse Jihadist factions are massing about the Levant, challenging not only Israel's borders but the stability of status quo Sunni and Shiite actors.

Erstwhile ironclad alliances have been undercut by a mixture of deposals, subtle strategic shifts and widespread ire over the Palestinian plight.

Amid all this, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu may have managed to forge a united international front against Iran's alleged nuclear ambitions, but still somehow left Israel's broader foreign standing in tatters.

In approaching the surrounding upheavals, Netanyahu's second government has eschewed initiative for reactive cautiousness. However, this swiftly changing strategic environment calls instead for more assertive diplomacy and therefore a change in Israel's current posturing.

This is the conclusion of a new report published today by the think tank Open Briefing. The report, **Seizing the initiative: Israel's strategic environment and the need for assertive diplomacy**, argues that Israel can and should:

1. Advance its interests by persistently pursuing multi-track and backchannel diplomacy – including intelligence sharing and security coordination – and rehabilitating soured relations, starting in Ankara.
2. Facilitate go-betweens with vested interests in Israeli-Palestinian peace and influence over those key Palestinian and Arab decision-makers critical to guaranteeing the implementation of future agreements.
3. Maintain a consistent and meaningful forward momentum in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, even if final-status negotiations are nowhere in sight.
4. Curb its war talk and instead allow people-to-people outreach and other forms of citizen diplomacy to run their course.
5. Open or at least encourage a secret backchannel with Tehran as the best and only face-saving way to convince Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei that he cannot have nuclear capability and animosity towards Israel, and hope to preserve his regime at the same time; only two of these objectives are possible at a time.



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The report's author, Kevjn Lim, argued:

"Israel's torrid misaffair with the Palestinians sprawls in the way of an Arab consensus, whereas a negotiated two-state endgame offers to mitigate not one but three central concerns: border insecurity, the domestic demographic cliff and the growing non-viability of a Jewish and democratic Israel."

Lim, a contributing analyst at Open Briefing, added:

"To push the envelope still further, concealed herein may also be the key to grappling with the threat of a nuclear Iran. While a sure source of disquiet, sectarian divisions have created sufficient regional conditions for shared tactical, if not strategic, interests in counterbalancing the Iran-led 'Resistance Axis' and inhibiting the onset of a more pressing transnational scourge, Jihadist extremism."

Notes to editors

1. The briefing paper is available to download from <http://www.openbriefing.org/thinktank/publications/seizing-the-initiative/>.
2. **Open Briefing** is the world's first civil society intelligence agency; a collaborative platform for insight and analysis of key defence, security and foreign policy issues. Our international network of analysts provides impartial intelligence and security briefings, so that better informed citizens and civil society organisations can more effectively engage in peace and security debates and influence positive policy developments in these areas.
3. **Kevjn Lim** is a contributing analyst at Open Briefing. From 2007 to 2011, he served as a delegate for the International Committee of the Red Cross in the Palestinian territories, Sudan, Iraq, Libya and Afghanistan, specialising in civilian protection and political and security needs analysis. Lim is a former intelligence officer in the Singapore Armed Forces and is fluent in a number of languages, including Arabic, Hebrew and Persian.
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