This report highlights the Mitvim Institute’s activities in 2019, which were centered on our three program areas: improving Israel’s foreign policy, promoting Israel’s regional belonging in the Middle East, Europe and the Mediterranean, and advancing Israeli-Palestinian peace.

In 2019, a year in which two general elections took place in Israel, Mitvim generated new progressive foreign policy knowledge and applied it into policy by engaging with local and international political, diplomatic, and civil society actors. It did so through policy planning, research, expert workshops and public events, regional and international policy dialogues, public opinion polls, and briefings to Members of Knesset (MKs), government officials, and foreign diplomats. In addition, Mitvim experts regularly appeared in leading media outlets to provide commentaries and spell out possible paths forward regarding a variety of foreign policy issues.

**To improve Israel's foreign policy**, Mitvim worked in 2019 to advance foreign policy alternatives around elections, monitor developments and assess trends, study Israeli public opinion, convene its third annual conference, strengthen the democracy component in Israel’s foreign policy, and empower Israeli diplomacy.

**To promote Israel's regional belonging**, Mitvim worked to leverage Israel's changing ties with Arab countries, launch an Israel-Jordan policy dialogue, monitor and assess US policies towards the Middle East, help reshape Israel's policies towards Europe, overcome challenges to EU involvement in the peace process, analyze developments in Europe and their implications, shape Israel's policies towards the Mediterranean, support Israel-Turkey relations, and analyze developments in the Eastern Mediterranean and their implications.

**To advance Israeli-Palestinian peace**, Mitvim worked to promote peacemaking in response to Trump's policies, develop a proposal for an international package of incentives for peace, and draw policy lessons from other conflicts.

This year, we are proud to have been ranked by the University of Pennsylvania among the world’s top 25 regional studies centers and think tanks with the most innovative policy proposals, and among the top 40 think tanks in the Middle East and North Africa. Mitvim was also selected as a finalist for Prospect Magazine’s 2019 Think Tank Award.
A. Improving Israel’s foreign policy

1. Advancing Foreign Policy Alternatives around Elections

2019 saw two Knesset elections, in April and September. Towards the April 2019 elections, Mitvim launched a blog in Ha’aretz, in which a series of articles introduced alternative directions to Israel’s foreign policy. The articles elaborated on various policies recommending that: the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) should be empowered; Israel’s foreign relations should include a strong democratic component; criticizing Israeli policies regarding the Palestinians is legitimate; Israel should resolve its crisis with world Jewry; Israel should improve ties with the EU, and view it as a friend rather than a foe; peace negotiations with the Palestinian Authority should be launched; Israel should acknowledge the linkage between progress in the peace process and Israel’s ties with the Arab world, and; Israel should diversify and broaden regional cooperation so that it includes civilian aspects and a focus on North Africa.

A week before Israelis went to vote for the second time in 2019, Mitvim convened a pre-elections event on Israel’s foreign policy. The event focused on paths to advance peace with the Palestinians; to deepen Israel’s regional belonging in the Middle East, Europe and the Mediterranean; and to empower Israel’s diplomacy Foreign Service. The event aimed to bring foreign policy issues to the forefront and to emphasize the resolutions for these issues. Senior politicians from six political parties spoke at the event: Minister Yuval Steinitz (Likud), MK Ofer Shelah (Blue and White), MK Merav Michaeli (Labor), MK Eli Avidar (Yisrael Beiteinu), Nitzan Horowitz (Chair of Meretz) and MK Ofer Cassif (Joint List). Each of them was interviewed by Arad Nir, foreign news editor of Channel 12 News. Dr. Nimrod Goren and Merav Kahana-Dagan of Mitvim presented at the conference recent trends in Israel’s foreign policy and findings of a special pre-elections Mitvim public opinion poll.
2. Monitoring Developments and Assessing Trends

The **Diplomatic Report** is a publication series edited by Mitvim's Director of Research Dr. Roee Kibrik. It tracks monthly developments in Israel's foreign policy, with an emphasis on Israeli-Palestinian relations, Israel's relations with the Middle East, Europe, and the Mediterranean, and the conduct of Israel's Foreign Service. It is the only publicly available tool that provides a comprehensive overview of foreign policy developments on a regular basis. Additionally, every six months Mitvim publishes a semi-annual trends assessment based on the monthly reports, which briefly outlines major trends in Israel's regional foreign policies over the previous six months. These reports are targeted to an audience of policy experts, researchers, and government officials. They collect and contextualize major events, leaving their audience better informed about the structure and trends shaping Israel's foreign relations, and more capable of engaging on these issues.

3. Studying Israeli Public Opinion

In 2019, Mitvim carried out two public opinion polls. In August, a short pre-election poll was carried out. Respondents were asked to assess the outgoing government's performance on a range of foreign policy issues, and to identify who they would like to see as Israel's next foreign minister. In October, the seventh **Israeli Foreign Policy Index** of the Mitvim Institute was published. Based on a public opinion poll among Israel's Jewish and Arab adult population, it provided insights into views on Israel's foreign relations, Israel's Foreign Service, Israel and its surrounding regions, and Israel and the Palestinians. The index generated specific findings on foreign policy priorities for Israel's next government, including insights on: relations between Israel and Arab countries, the image of the EU and how it can be improved, international mediation towards Israeli-Palestinian peace, ways to prevent another war in Gaza, the status of Israel's Foreign Service, Israel-US relations, the most important countries for Israel, Israel-Turkey relations, the role of democracy in Israel's foreign policy, and more. The poll garnered extensive media coverage in Israel and the region, and its findings were presented and discussed at Mitvim's annual conference and at the MFA.
4. Convening Mitvim’s Third Annual Conference

Towards the end of the year, Mitvim convened its third annual conference, providing an annual assessment of Israel’s regional foreign policies. The 150-strong audience included foreign Ambassadors and diplomats, to whom Mitvim experts presented insights and findings from their research and policy work throughout the year. The conference was held in cooperation with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. It included panels on Israel’s relations with its adjacent regions (Europe, the Middle East and the Mediterranean) and on the quest for Israeli-Palestinian peace and its place in Israeli statesmanship. It also included keynote addresses from MK Yair Lapid (Blue and White) and Susanna Terstal, EU Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process.

MK Lapid focused his speech on the polarized discourse within Israeli society and its inability to agree on a vision for Israel for the next ten to twenty years. He emphasized the need to tackle the Israeli-Palestinian issue and to strengthen Israel’s Foreign Service. Ms. Terstal elaborated on the EU’s readiness to support a final-status agreement between Israel and the Palestinians, including the proposal of a Special Privileged Partnership with the EU. Like MK Lapid, she underlined the necessity for a vision of the region’s future, emphasizing that nothing would lead to greater stability than bilateral steps towards peace.
5. Strengthening the Democracy Component in Israel’s Foreign Policy

Mitvim and the Leonard Davis Institute for International Relations held a special conference at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in June 2019 to explore how the erosion of Israeli democracy impacts Israel’s standing in the world and its array of international alliances. The conference explored the interface between domestic and foreign policies, not only in the Israeli context but also as a global issue. It dealt with the place of democracy in Israel’s past and current foreign policy, and examined how issues such as the Nationality Law, Israel’s struggle against the boycott movement (BDS) and the delegitimization of civil society organizations affect its foreign relations. The significance of democracy for Israel’s regional ties with the Middle East, Europe and the Mediterranean was also discussed. Speakers at the conference included politicians, former ambassadors, scholars and journalists.

Following the conference, Dr. Nimrod Goren spoke at the J Street conference in Washington DC on democracy and foreign policy in Israel. Throughout the year, Mitvim engaged with pro-democracy organizations in other countries, in order to foster like-minded partnerships.
6. Empowering Israeli Diplomacy

Mitvim convened a series of policy workshops and roundtable discussions in order to promote more effective policymaking and discourse on diplomacy. In Israel, former diplomats do not tend to play a significant public role. However, they have the potential to help improve the public and political discourse on foreign policy. In February, we convened a group of former ambassadors (including former Director-Generals of the MFA) to discuss how this potential can be fulfilled. Mitvim also helped MKs identify the parliamentary tools that they can use in order to make an impact on foreign policy issues. Mitvim held a workshop at the Interdisciplinary Institute Herzliya on how to improve public and parliamentary oversight of Israel's foreign service, in cooperation with the Abba Eban Center for International Diplomacy; a roundtable with the Reut Institute on the crisis in Israel's relations with world Jewry and on ways to overcome it; a roundtable on climate change and Israel's responses to it, which included a presentation by the MFA's special envoy to the climate issue, Amb. Gideon Behar, and; a roundtable with Women Wage Peace on their initiative to advance legislation that requires the Cabinet to discuss diplomatic alternatives before deciding to launch military offensives.

B. Promoting Israel’s regional belonging

Israel and the Middle East

1. Leveraging Israel’s Changing Ties with Arab countries

In light of new opportunities and developments in Israel's relations in the Middle East, Mitvim continued to publish a series of research papers on Israel's current and potential relations with key Arab countries. The papers, a product of a Mitvim task-team, also included assessments on the linkage between the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Israel's ability to fulfill the potential of regional cooperation. By the end of 2019, the series included papers on Israel's relations with Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Morocco and Tunisia. Mitvim also published a research on the role of Gulf states in the Palestinian issue.
Mitvim’s task-team also mapped **emerging opportunities** for Israel in the Middle East. Along with the list of opportunities identified, the task-team created a new quantitative index that ranks **existing and potential cooperations** between Israel and key Arab states, differentiating between security, diplomatic, economic and civil relations. Mitvim experts presented **conclusions and recommendations** at a joint conference of Mitvim and the Yezeel Valley College, and also at conferences on the peace agreements with Egypt (Tel Aviv University) and Jordan (Western Galilee College), at a public panel in Washington DC (convened by the Center for American Progress) and at a workshop in Brussels (convened by the European Council on Foreign Relations).

2. **Launching an Israel-Jordan Policy Dialogue**

Towards the 25th anniversary of the peace treaty with Jordan and in light of mounting tensions in Israel-Jordan relations, Mitvim experts **visited Amman** for an inaugural policy dialogue, which included a series of meetings with diverse policy-relevant stakeholders there. The **policy dialogue** generated significant media interest, and its recommendations were presented to the Israeli MFA and the Jordanian Embassy to Israel. Mitvim is calling for a **reboot in the Israel-Jordan relations** and for Israel’s next government to invest more in promoting these relations, which are a strategic asset for Israel and are full of potential to grow and expand.

3. **Monitoring and Analyzing US Policies towards the Middle East**

**US Policies towards Israel and the Middle East** is a monthly publication series that tracks important **developments in US Middle East policy**. The report, edited by Amb. (ret.) Barukh Binah, focuses on events related to the bilateral US-Israel relationship, US policies towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the broader Middle East, and the Iran deal and its aftermath. The report is targeted towards an Israeli, American, and international audience of policy experts, researchers, government officials, diplomats, and researchers. In addition to the publication of the monthly reports, and in light of **US disengagement from the Middle East**, Mitvim convened a roundtable discussion on the Middle East after ISIS, including a presentation by Seth Frantzman on his book on the topic.
Israel and Europe

1. Helping Reshape Israel’s Policies towards Europe

The Israeli government and its supportive media outlets have been stepping up their criticism on the EU, portraying it as a foe to Israel, rather than a friend. This, despite the wide-range cooperation between Israel and the EU, and the strategic importance of these relations for Israel. Moreover, the Israeli government fostered closer ties with a-liberal leaders and parties in Europe. To counter these phenomena, a Mitvim task-team formulated recommendations for an improved Israeli foreign policy towards the EU. The publication process of the recommendations began in 2019, in order to prepare the ground for a recalibration of ties under the next Israeli government.

Mitvim delivered messages on the importance of Israel-EU relations in briefings to diplomats and politicians; in articles, commentaries and opinion pieces (also as part of broader regional projects); and in workshops and conferences in both Israel and Europe. In addition, Mitvim worked to strengthen ties with leading think tanks in Europe, with the goal of expanding channels for Israel-Europe policy dialogues.

2. Overcoming Challenges to EU Involvement in the Peace Process

Growing divisions between EU member states limit the ability of the EU to play an effective role in advancing Israeli-Palestinian peace. The Netanyahu government encouraged this by fostering ties with specific EU member states that can block decisions regarding Israel in Brussels. A joint project of Mitvim, the German Institute for International and Security Affairs - SWP (Germany) and PAX (the Netherlands) mapped this process, assessed its significance, and identified recommendations for overcoming the challenges.

The concluding research paper was presented at a special event in Brussels, with participation of European diplomats, European Commission staff, and representatives of think tanks and NGOs. EU Special Representative to the Peace Process delivered a keynote at the event. Following the event, the Head of Mitvim carried out a briefing at the European External Action Service, and research findings were presented at a special workshop of human rights organizations from the Mediterranean region (including Israeli and Palestinian organizations). The recommendations were also presented to European ambassadors and diplomats in Israel.
3. Analyzing Developments in Europe and their Implications

Following the European Parliament elections Mitvim convened a conference on the results featuring the EU Ambassador to Israel and representatives of the Israeli MFA. The event was held in partnership with the Israeli Association for the Study of European Integration, the EU Studies Program at Tel Aviv University, and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. In addition, we prepared a briefing paper for Knesset members about the implications of the European elections, and published commentaries on the election results. Mitvim also published analyses on the impact that Brexit may have on Israel-Europe relations and on the negative implications of the rise of far-right and populist actors in European politics.

Israel and the Mediterranean

1. Shaping Israel’s Policies towards the Mediterranean

Mitvim, the Leonard Davis Institute at the Hebrew University, and the National Security Studies Center at Haifa University launched a policy and research group on Israel and the Mediterranean. The group convenes on a bi-monthly basis, and includes more than 40 experts from academia, business, civil society, politics and diplomacy. In 2019, the group deliberations focused on the importance of the Mediterranean for Israel, the role of superpowers and regional states in the Mediterranean, and energy and environment as catalysts for regional cooperation. Policy papers are being published following the group’s meetings. Simultaneously, Mitvim experts published a set of guiding principles and recommendations for improving Israel’s foreign policy towards the Mediterranean. In addition, Mitvim was invited to join the steering committee of a new initiative – led by Israeli and Cypriot organizations – to create an Eastern Mediterranean forum to tackle the climate crisis.
2. Supporting Israel-Turkey Relations

Relations between Israel and Turkey continued to be problematic in 2019. Mitvim carried out its annual Israel-Turkey policy dialogue, in Ankara and Istanbul, which included a series of meetings and roundtable discussions with politicians and government officials, former ambassadors, think tank leaders and journalists. The policy dialogue focused on the current crisis between Israel and Turkey and ways to assist its resolution; Israeli and Turkish regional interests, especially regarding Syria; and developments in the Eastern Mediterranean and in the Gulf. Following the municipal elections in Turkey, in which the main opposition party took over Istanbul, Mitvim hosted Dr. Kivanc Ulusoy from Turkey, for a briefing on domestic politics and foreign relations. Mitvim drew lessons for Israel’s opposition from the Istanbul elections. Mitvim experts also assisted the Turkish-Israeli Civil Society Forum in its efforts to increase cooperation between NGOs in Israel and in Turkey.

3. Analyzing Developments in the Eastern Mediterranean and their Implications

The Eastern Mediterranean is becoming central to Israel’s foreign policies. Key developments in this region in 2019 included the establishment of the Cairo-based Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum, which also includes Israel and the Palestinian Authority; the strengthening of the trilateral alliance between Israel, Cyprus and Greece; US attempts to mediate between Israel and Lebanon about their maritime border dispute; and tensions with Turkey. Mitvim Policy Fellows Amb. (ret.) Michael Harari and Gabriel Mitchell followed these developments, and shared knowledge and recommendations via briefings, commentaries, research, media interviews and policy papers. Mitvim experts were invited to deliver lectures on Mediterranean issues at local and regional conferences, convened by the EuroMeSCo Network, the Israel-Europe Policy Network, ELIAMEP and the Middle East and Islamic Studies Association of Israel. Also, Dr. Nimrod Goren met with officials from the Union of the Mediterranean in Barcelona.
C. Advancing Israeli-Palestinian Peace

1. Promoting Peacemaking in Response to Trump’s policies

Mitvim worked in several channels to relate to steps taken by the Trump administration on the Israeli-Palestinian issue. Mitvim’s leadership met with ambassadors and senior diplomats from key countries for consultations regarding possible responses to the Trump plan. Dr. Lior Lehrs spoke at the Middle East Institute in Washington DC comparing the Trump plan to previous peace initiatives. He also published a policy paper presenting his analysis. Following the economic workshop convened by the US in Bahrain, Mitvim experts published commentary articles presenting how the Trump approach is distancing peace, rather than bringing it closer, and how international involvement in peacemaking efforts can be carried out differently and effectively. At the EuroMeSCo Annual Conference, Dr. Nimrod Goren led – together with a Palestinian think tank director – a session on the Trump plan, participated by experts from Middle Eastern and European countries. He was also invited to meet UN Under-Secretary General for Political Affairs and Peacebuilding as part of her official visit to Israel.

In early 2019, Mitvim published a policy paper on regional opportunities to improve the situation in Gaza, following a roundtable discussion held – in cooperation with IPCRI – at the UN headquarters in Jerusalem, with participation of UN Special Coordinator to the Middle East Peace Process Nickolay Mladenov. Later in the year, Mitvim hosted a policy event on the situation in Gaza and Israel’s policies towards it, featuring the director of a Palestinian think tank, alongside Israel government officials, leaders of civil society initiatives, and foreign diplomats. Mitvim regularly took part in discussions and events of the Two-State Coalition (led by the Geneva Initiative), joined the Peace NGO Forum, briefed international pro-peace groups visiting Israel, hosted – together with J Street – Bernie Sanders’ foreign policy advisor Matthew Duss, and held its annual course to Syracuse University on the peace process.
2. Developing a Proposal for an International Package of Incentives for Peace

In recent years, the international community acknowledged the need to present Israel and the Palestinians with an international package of political and economic incentives for peace. However, no such package has been developed to date. Given the potential of incentives to promote conflict resolution and to empower pro-peace Israeli and Palestinian political actors, Mitvim convened a task-team of Israeli and Palestinian policy experts to develop a proposal for such an international package, which will later be advanced among local and international policymakers. Task-team members, together with selected international guests, held meetings to discuss the importance and relevance of the issue; map central Israeli and Palestinian needs, as well as relevant international actors; develop content for an international incentive package; and devise recommendations regarding the timing and mode of delivery of such a package. Following the deliberations, a small team of Israeli and Palestinian experts began drafting the policy paper, based on the summaries of the task-team meetings, as well as on further policy research and on engagement with additional Israeli, Palestinian and international experts for feedback and input.

3. Drawing Policy Lessons from Other Conflicts

Mitvim seeks to draw lessons from other conflicts that can help advance Israeli-Palestinian conflict resolution. Following Netanyahu’s statements in support of annexing to Israel parts of the West Bank, Dr. Dahlia Scheindlin wrote a comparative research examining what kind of reaction can Israel expect from the international community if its annexationist policies continue, based on various examples of post-World War II annexations. Dr. Roee Kibrik wrote about the lessons for Israelis and Palestinians from the recent peace process between Ethiopia and Eritrea, for which the prime minister of Ethiopia won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2019. In addition, Mitvim held an event on citizen preferences in the design of effective peace processes, featuring Israeli, Palestinian, Cypriot and British public opinion experts. Later in the year, Mitvim hosted Dr. Gary Mason who led a discussion about the Northern Ireland peace process, from the Good Friday agreement to Brexit.
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