

The Impact of Israeli Think Tanks on Israel's Foreign Policy (2006-2017)

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Abstract

In the modern world, government policy makers engage in the decision making process to pursue the interests of their countries. Think tanks play a significant role in this complicated process by giving advice to decision makers. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, think tanks increasingly emerged in the world, especially in Western European countries and the United States of America (USA). Israel, since its illegal establishment, created various think tanks to serve its political and security interests in the Middle East. Making peace with Middle Eastern countries and strengthening ties with the USA are the most crucial goals of Israel's foreign policy. Nevertheless, since its establishment, Israel adopted an aggressive approach towards Palestine, Lebanon, and recently Iran. Therefore, the main questions addressed in this article are as follows: What is the impact of Israeli think tanks on its foreign policy from 2000 to 2017? The Rational Actor Model, the Poliheuristic theory and Groupthink theories have been used to explain how think tanks influence policy makers in Israel. In order to conduct the research, the authors have chosen case study method as a qualitative method. In fact, the authors have considered Israeli think tanks as a case study to examine its impact on Israeli foreign policy. The hypothesis of the article is therefore the following: In recent decades, Israeli think tanks have persuaded Israel regime to formulate its foreign policy on the basis of aggressive approach, as witnessed in the Lebanon war (2006), the Gaza war (2008-9) and (2014), and Israel's countering of Iran.

Keywords: decision making process, influence of think tanks, Israel's foreign policy, Israeli think tanks, think tanks.

Introduction

Since the illegal establishment of the Israeli regime, think tanks were progressively created to provide plans for Israeli governments to implement its policies. Israeli scholars formulated these plans in order to support the government in achieving its political economic and security aims. Among those aims, foreign policy had an exalted status. Like other governments, Israel has multiple foreign policy goals. Israel's foreign policy is greatly affected by its strategic condition. This strategic situation has two pillars: (1) The Arab-Israeli regime conflict; and (2) the recognition or rejection of Israel regime by most of the Arab states. Therefore, the aims of Israeli foreign policy are to break diplomatic isolation and to be recognized by different countries. In this article, among other goals, we focus on two goals: (1) making peace with Palestinians and Middle Eastern countries (especially Arab countries) and (2) improving relations with USA and European countries. According to the annual public opinion poll of Mitvim (The Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policy), the United States is the most important country for Israel in the world (The 2014 Israeli Foreign Policy Index, 2014). Therefore, the relations between USA and the Israel regime have a high-ranking status in Israel's foreign policy agenda. Nevertheless, Israeli officials have acknowledged that the USA was never willing to assume the role of an active broker in the Palestine- Israel conflict (Ben Ami, 2000: 35).

Regarding peace in the Middle East, on December 14, 1983, 140 countries described the Israeli regime as a member of the United Nation that is not 'peace loving' (Klieman, 1994: 97). In addition, on November 10, 1983, the Israel regime was defined as a racist regime, illegally settled in occupied Palestine; at the same time, Zionism was equated with racism (Klieman, 1994: 97). In general, international organizations have been critical of the aggressive and brutal behavior of the Israeli regime. For

example, the Security Council has adopted more than 120 resolutions about the Middle East from 1972 to 2004. Almost all of them have criticize Israel regime. Nevertheless, the United States vetoed thirty-nine resolutions related to the Palestine-Israel conflict (Gilboa, 2006: 728). As a result, the Israeli regime has incessantly tried to protect its reputation in the world public opinion by showing itself as a pro-peace actor in the Middle East.

Since the beginning of Arab Spring (Islamic Awakening) in 2011, Israeli officials have defined the security and economic interests of Israel regime in terms of three mutual goals (Magen, 2015: 122-124):

1. The tricky quest for non-involvement, avoiding conflict spillage and conflict distraction: Israel politicians have striven to prevent the spillage of violence from Syrian conflict into Israel
2. Preserving positive and negative assets: Israel regime is extremely determined to maintain peace with Egypt. Moreover, Israel regime has considered the preservation of Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the protection of the 1994 Israeli- Jordanian peace treaty as an important strategic aim
3. Searching for new friends and alliances.

Besides political factors, Israel' foreign policy has a military aspect. In other words, Israel's military defense production system has had an influence on the nature and essence of Israel's foreign policy. This factor has had an effect on the ties and contracts of the Israeli regime with different states in the international system. In general, military production has a diplomatic and defense aspect. For this reason, Moshe Dayan believes, "Israel doesn't have a foreign policy; it only has a security policy" (Mualem, 2012: 210). Given this fact, most

Israeli think tanks have recommended Israeli policy-makers to consider various security threats whenever adopting a certain foreign policy. In the past, the Israeli think tanks on the Middle East did not examine Israel as part of their agenda. However, recent geopolitical transformations in the region have encouraged them to discuss the various aspects of Israel's role in Middle Eastern affairs (Podeh, 1998: 280).

Yet, in the twenty-first century, Israel has continued to pursue these goals vigorously. In order to do the task better, the Israeli regime is taking advice from think tanks. According to this trend, our main question is as follows: what is the impact of Israeli think tanks on the country's foreign policy from 2000 to 2017? Based on this question, we can make the following hypothesis: In recent decades, Israeli think tanks have persuaded Israeli regime to formulate its foreign policy on the basis of an aggressive approach, as witnessed in the Lebanon war (2006), the Gaza war (2008-9) and (2014), and Israel's countering of Iran.

Research Methodology

In order to conduct this research, the authors have chosen case study method as a qualitative method. In fact, the authors have considered Israeli think tanks as a case study, examining its impact on the Israeli foreign policy. Therefore, the research has both an independent variable and a dependent variable as follow:

Independent Variable: Israeli Think Tanks (governmental, non-government and academic think tanks)

Dependent Variable: Israel's Foreign Policy (2006-2017) (Lebanon war (2006), Gaza war (2008-9) and (2014) and countering of Iran)

In order to answer our research question, we first have to understand the notion of think tanks and the way they work. In doing so, decision-making theories help explain the performance of think tanks. We will then demonstrate how Israeli think tanks conduct their research, and how they could influence Israeli's policy-makers.

Theoretical Framework

Human beings are forced to make decisions in daily life. Perhaps, in primitive communities, extensive decision-making was not necessary; however, decision-making is an inseparable part of everyone's life in modern societies. On the other hand, once individuals become a member of a group, at times, they face making collective decisions, which could highlight the complexity of decision making. Meanwhile, every wrong decision could result in grave consequences for decision makers. Moreover, every organization (as a group of people) has to make correct and sometimes difficult decision in order to survive and to achieve its goals. Decision-making is defined as the act of choosing among available alternatives about which uncertainty exists. However, it is necessary to mention that policy alternatives are rarely explicitly given in foreign policy as opposed to domestic politics (Dougherty & Pfaltzgraff, 2001: 553). In addition, scholars explain the behavior of think tanks based on four theories: elite theory, pluralist theory, statist paradigm and institution theory. In the article, we consider think tanks as "elite organization[s] that depend on their expertise and close ties to policy makers to advance political and economic interest corporate and philanthropic sponsors" (Abelson, 2006: 97). According to Keskin and Halpern (2005: 104), think tanks perform "as an institution that brings together business leader, government officials, policy experts, lawyers, journalists as a means to reach an agreement and resolve differences concerning specific policy proposals as they relate to ruling class elites."

Moreover, Savage (2015: 37) defines think tanks as “the intellectual machinery of a closed network of corporate, financial and political elites.” Think tanks, as an elite organization, have resources and capabilities to exert an influence on public policy making.

In general, there are certain similarities between the performance of think tanks and the performance of other organizations. One similarity is the process of decision-making in the think tanks. Therefore, in order to familiarize ourselves with the notion of think tanks, we first need to understand the procedure of decision-making within these organizations. In fact, understanding think tanks can help identify a causal relationship between policy decision-making resources in public and private domains as well as the policy's influence (Zhu, 2013: 8). Moreover, think tanks scholars could fulfill more informed knowledge based policy process, and consequently, could enlighten the decision making process (Stone, 2006: 155).

Think tanks, typically established and funded by businesses or governments, are nonprofit, tax exempt institutions that conduct research and perform advocacy regarding topics such as social policy, political strategy, economic, military, technology, and culture. These organizations differ fundamentally in ideology, policy interest, level of professionalism, academic disciplinary affiliation, size, wealth and more (Katz, 2016: 158). Rich (2004: 11) defines think tanks as “independent, non-interest-based, non-profit organization that produces and principally rely on expertise and ideas to obtain support and to influence the policymaking process.” Various theories could be used to explain how think tanks influence policy makers effectively. Every decision-making theory could illustrate part of how think tanks work. Among various decision-making theories, we will focus on three: Rational Actor Model, Poliheuristic Theory and Groupthink.

1. Rational Actor Model

Rational decision-making is defined as the process in which individuals have to choose. In general, people who engage in a rational decision-making process have to behave logically and orderly. Their preferences have to be ranked in such a way that if they prefer A to B, and B to C, then they prefer A to C. For instance, if they prefer peace to all-out war, and prefer all-out war to low-level conflict, then they would prefer peace to conflict (Gross Stein, 2012: 131). In order to make a rational decision, Mintz and Derouen (2010: 58) provide several useful steps:

1. Identify the problem
2. Identify and rank goals
3. Collect information
4. Identify options for achieving goals
5. Scrutinize alternatives by considering consequences and effectiveness (costs and benefits) of each alternative and probabilities related to success
6. Choosing alternative that maximizes the chances of choosing best alternative
7. Implement a decision
8. Monitor and assess.

Nevertheless, political scholars have sharply criticized the Rational Actor Model for its shortcomings. They believe that public policy makers would be confronted with three problems regarding the Rational Actor Model including uncertainty, information overload and complexity (Hill, 2016: 120).

2. Poliheuristic Theory

As an alternative to the Rational Actor Model, Alex Mintz proposes the Poliheuristic Decision Model. The model combines the cognitive and rational models and consists of two phases. In the first phase, the decision makers reduce the collection of alternatives while using cognitive shortcuts. In the second phase, the decision makers use the rational model to choose from the remaining alternatives. In other words, decision makers reject policies that are unacceptable to them on critical aspects in the first phase, and choose an alternative from the subset of remaining alternatives while maximizing benefits and minimizing costs (Mintz & Derouen, 2010: 78-79).

3. Groupthink

Groupthink phenomena occurs in small and cohesive decision-making groups and drives from the social- psychological needs of group members. A group is described as cohesive when its members value membership in the group and constantly affiliate with it. Scholars, such as Irving Janis, argue that there are three kinds of social rewards that result from increased group cohesiveness including friendship, the prestige of being part of an elite group, and improved competence from being part of a group. Beach (2012: 125) believe, “all these factors would force members to preserve consensus in order to maintain amiable relations within the group. Consequently, it would result in premature or artificial consensus and faulty decision making.”

The History of Think Tanks

Almost every country uses think tanks in some form or the other; the United States and European countries have established more than half of the world's estimated 6000 think tanks (Abelson, 2014: 131). The first think tank, knowledgeable in international relations, was the Royal United Services Institution (today the Royal United Services Institute for Defense and

Security Studies), founded in 1831 by the Duke Wellington to study military and strategic studies (Roberts, 2015: 2). The development of think tanks could be divided into five stages (Abdulkareem Hussain, 2016: 6-8):

1. (1910-1930): The first think tanks were established in the United States including the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Institute (1910), the Brookings Institute (1916), Hoover Institute (1918) and Century Foundation (1919).
2. (1903-1951): The American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research was established in 1943. Following the end of World War II and foundation of United Nations, the Institute of Middle Eastern Studies in America and Rand Corporation were both founded in 1948.
3. (1950-1960): Nearly all think tanks in Europe and United States were founded in 1950s. For instance, International Institute for Strategic Studies (London, 1958), the Conflict Resolution Research Center at the University of Michigan (1959) and the Institute of the Stockholm Peace Research Institute (Sweden, 1966) were founded.
4. (1989-2000): By the end of the Cold War and the beginning of globalization, a new wave of think tanks emerged.
5. (2000- 2016): In 2001, United States declared that it would wage a global war against terrorism. Following this, many think tanks were established on the basis of issues of national security.

The 306 think tanks founded throughout the twentieth century are illustrated in Figure 1.

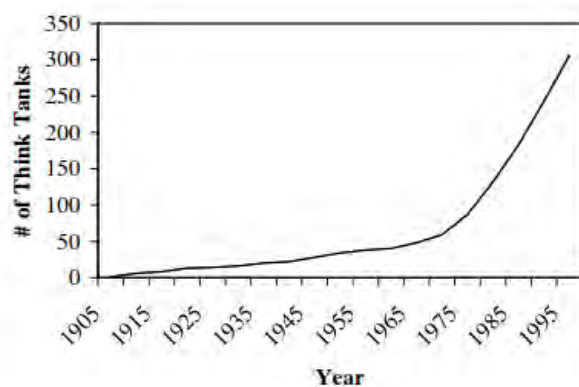


Figure 1. Pattern by which think tanks existing in the twentieth century (Rich, 2004: 15)

Think tanks are typically funded by governments, foundations and private donors. US think tanks enjoy a more prosperous annual budget than their counterparts around the world do. For example, the American think tanks, located in Washington D.C, spend over \$400 million a year to influence national policymaking (Weidenbaum, 2009: 87). In recent years, the number of think tanks has significantly increased because of democratization, globalization, modernization (McGann, 2011: 10), specialization, speed of events, and promotion of human science in the world. Numerous countries have therefore decided to found and use think tanks in various fields. Table 1 illustrates the twenty-five countries with the largest number of think tanks.

According to Table 1, the Israeli regime, compared to its population, has a significant number of think tanks (58 think tanks).

Think Tanks of Israel

Like all other political systems, the Israeli regime has to make important decisions to advance its interests. To achieve this goal, the Zionist regime needs to benefit from the full potential

Table 1. The number of think tanks in different countries (McGann, 2015: 31)

Rank	Country	Number of Think Tanks
1	United States	1835
2	China	435
3	United Kingdom	288
4	India	280
5	Germany	195
6	France	180
7	Argentina	138
8	Russia	122
9	Japan	109
10	Canada	99
11	Italy	97
12	Brazil	89
13	South Africa	86
14	Sweden	77
15	Switzerland	73
16	Australia	63
17	Mexico	61
18	Iran	59
19	Bolivia	59
20	Israel	58
21	Netherlands	58
22	Spain	55
23	Romania	54
24	Kenya	53
25	Belgium	53

of its academic and political elites in order to make decisive decisions in times of crisis. For this reason, numerous think tanks have been established in various fields to support this regime in its decision-makings. These think tanks act as a channel of communication between the government and the academic community, and they seek to bring the two fields of opinion and action closer together. Israeli think tanks could be classified into four main categories (Gamal El Din, 2016: 188):

1. Academic think tanks that belong to government universities.
2. Government think tanks that belong to ministries and information and research centers of Knesset.
3. Think tanks of political parties that provide the party

leaders with the analysis of internal and external conditions and developments.

4. Non-governmental think tanks that deal with issues in the Arab-Israel regime conflict and developments in the Middle East.

In this section, academic, governmental and non-governmental think tanks, and their issues of interest will be discussed. Almost all of these think tanks have identified foreign and security policies as their main priority. Moreover, Israeli think tanks receive funds from inside and outside of Israel to guarantee their national survival. In fact, these high quality research centers could help to ensure that the Israeli policymakers make the correct policy decision to secure the country's survival against its enemies (McGann & Johnson, 2005: 249).

Israeli think tanks have prioritized Israel's security threats and study Israel's neighboring countries and great powers according to their importance to its national security. Figure 2 illustrates countries in order of their priority to Israel.

According to the above figure, Gaza Strip and Lebanon are in the first loop. Israel strongly fears Hamas and Hezbollah who seek to permanently destroy the country. In the second loop, Islamic Republic of Iran is the main threat to Israel's existence due to its military presence in the Middle East and its financial and military aids to Hamas and Hezbollah. Several countries and groups in the first and the second loops have established the 'Resistance Axis' including Hamas (Gaza Strip), Hezbollah (Lebanon), Iran and Syria. Therefore, Israeli think tanks consider the threat posed by them to Israel as a serious threat.

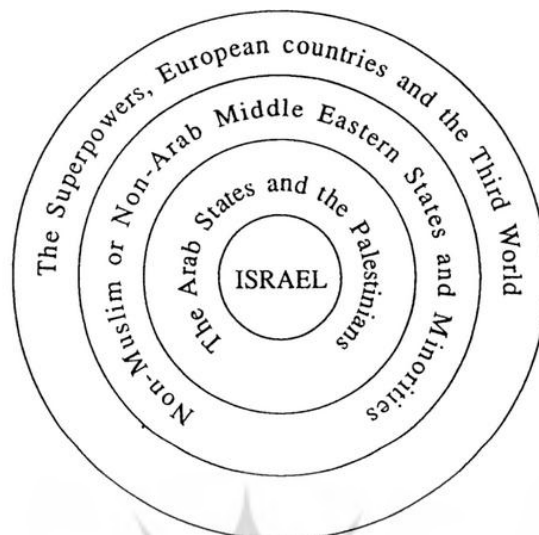


Figure 2. Countries in order of their priority to Israel (Podeh, 1998: 281)

Israeli Academic Think Tanks

The Israeli regime has six governmental universities. However, only five of them (Tel Aviv University, The Hebrew University, Bar-Ilan University, the University of Haifa and Ben-Gurion University) have think tanks. These think tanks are explained in more details in the following section:

Think Tanks of Tel Aviv University

Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies: Moshe Dayan Center, according to its claim, is a non-partisan and interdisciplinary institute whose main task is to conduct research on cultures, people, languages, religions, and the history of Middle Eastern countries. Their researchers are skilled in different languages such as English, Hebrew, Arabic, Turkish, Kurdish and Persian (About the Moshe Dayan Center, 2017). The Moshe Dayan Center produces several periodical publications including:

1. Tel Aviv notes: it is a bi-monthly analytical update on current regional developments in the Middle East. It is distributed on the 10th and 26th of each month (Tel Aviv Notes - Contemporary Middle East Analysis, 2017),
2. Middle East Crossroads: A Hebrew-language analytical Publication,
3. Bayan: it enhances the knowledge of public about Israel's Arab society (Bayan - The Arabs in Israel, 2017),
4. Beehive: it examines the trends in Arab, Turkish and Iranian social media (Beehive: Middle East Social Media, 2017), and
5. Ifriqiya: it studies the issues related to historical and contemporary Africa (Ifriqiya - Africa Research and Analysis, 2017).

As far as Iran is concerned, 'Uzi Rabi', one of the experts at the BESA Center (see below) has argued that Israel has three options to counter Iran regarding its nuclear program: (1) hoping for a breakthrough through international negotiations and sanctions, (2) taking military actions to demolish its nuclear facilities and (3) accept a nuclear-armed Iran (Rabi, 2012). Such articles suggest that Moshe Dayan Center has tried to advise Israeli government on how to counter Iran. B. The Institute for National Security Studies (INSS): Following 1973 Yom Kippur War, Tel Aviv University decided to found an institute for security studies. INSS is an Israeli research institute that carries out research in the fields of national security, military and strategic affairs, terrorism and conflict, military balance in the Middle East, cyber warfare, Israeli society, public opinion, Palestinian- Israel relations and arms control (Institute for National Security Studies, 2017). *Amos Yadlin CV* (2017) is the executive director of INSS. He served as the IDF's chief of Military Intelligence. He advocates Israel's unilateral

withdrawal from 85% of the West Bank if it fails to reach an agreement with the Palestinians (Cohen, 2014). Gordon (2017), an expert in INSS, believes that the direct negotiations with Palestinians will be doomed to failure and consequently the Israeli regime has to cultivate its relations with a wider Arab world. Regarding Lebanon, INSS's analysts believe that Hezbollah has posed a direct military threat to Israel and recommend the Israeli government to be prepared for scenarios of escalation on the northern front. Meanwhile, they assert that if Israel targets arms convoys, transferring arms to Hezbollah, in Syria, Hezbollah will not respond immediately. However, if Israel attacks such a convoy on Lebanese soil, Hezbollah will certainly launch a counterattack on Israeli targets (Dekel & Orion, 2017: 132). Gabi Siboni, a retired Israel Defense Forces (IDF), wrote on the institute's website, "with the outbreak of hostilities the IDF will need to act immediately, decisively and with force that is disproportionate to the enemy's actions and the threat it poses." Moreover, Giora Eiland, a retired general, wrote in the Strategic Assessment Journal, published by the institute, about the future likeliness of war between the Israeli regime and Hezbollah (Kaussler & Hastedt, 2017: 54):

There is one way to prevent the Third Lebanon War and win it if it does break out. The next war will be between Israel and Lebanon and not between Israel and Hezbollah. Such a war will lead to the elimination of the Lebanese military, the destruction of the national infrastructure, and the intense suffering among the population.

Think Tanks of Hebrew University

The Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace. The Harry Truman Research Institute is the first and the largest institute in Israel. The institute was established in 1965 with the personal support of Harry Truman, the 33rd president of the United States (About The Harry Truman Research Institute,

2017). The institute has several research units including Africa, Asia, Central Asia, Latin America and Middle East (Research Units, 2017). The institute aims to examine the conflict resolutions in the Middle East. Over 70 researchers undertake the research program each year. Truman Institute supports the veteran academics along with students working on their doctoral dissertation and post-doctoral students working on new research projects (The Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace, 2013). Truman Institute is involved in several research projects including: (1) Sur Baher¹ Project: The institute cooperates closely with The Paul Baerwald School of Social Work and Social Welfare at the Hebrew University and the Jerusalem Municipality to develop a project for improving the communal and social status of Arab communities in the city, (2) Arabic Language and Culture Tutoring Project: The institute, in collaboration with Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies Department at the Hebrew University, has begun the Arabic Tutoring Project to help the students of the department to learn the Arabic language, (3) Madrassah-the Inter- Religious Beit Midrash: The program aims to bring students of different religions to understand and learn about how to see the world through a different viewpoint, (4) The Forum of Female Researchers: The Forum arranges meeting with innovative women in the academia, and (5) The Axis Group: The Axis Group, in collaboration with the Truman institute, study the current economic conditions in the Palestinian territory (Our Projects, 2017).

Think Tanks of Ben-Gurion University

1. The Chaim Herzog Center for Middle East Studies and Diplomacy. The Chaim Herzog Center, (established in 1996), carries out research on the Middle East and

1. Sur Baher is a Palestinian neighborhood on the southeastern outskirts of East Jerusalem.

encourages the progression of academic relations between Israeli researchers and their counterparts in the Middle Eastern countries and around the world. Professor Yoram Meital (2017) is the chairperson of Chaim Herzog Center (Chaim Herzog Center for Middle East Studies and Diplomacy, 2017).

2. The Ben-Gurion Research Institute for the Study of Israel and Zionism. The institute studies Israel and Zionism from historical, philosophical, political, cultural, social and geographical perspectives. The Director of Ben-Gurion Research Institute is Dr. Paula Kabalo (The Ben-Gurion Institute for the Study of Israel and Zionism, 2017). The institute publishes two Journals: (1) *Iyunim Bitkumat Israel* (Studies in Israel and Modern Jewish Society) in Hebrew language, and (2) *Israel Studies* (Journals, 2017).

Think Tank of Bar-Ilan University

The Begin Sadat Center for Strategic Studies (BESA Center). Thomas O. Hecht, a Canadian Jewish Community leader, established the Begin Sadat Center in 1993. It carries out research on the national security and foreign policy of Israel. It has produced approximately 500 original research and policy papers as well as 25 books (History, 2017). According to Global Go to Think Tanks Index, the BESA center ranks as one of the top three think tanks in the Middle East, along with Carnegie Middle East Center in Lebanon and the Gulf Research Center of Saudi Arabia (The BESA Center Ranked as One of the Three Top Middle East Think Tanks, 2015). Efraim Inbar, former director of BESA Center, believes that "controlled management" is the best way to deal with the conflict between Palestine and Israel regime. This solution includes the evacuation of the remote West Bank settlement. According to his proposal, the occupied territory would be repartitioned, with Egypt

controlling the Gaza Strip and Jordan taking control of the West Bank (Head of Right-wing Think Tank: Settlements Must Be Evacuated, 2009).

Regarding Gaza War (2014), Rubin (2015), an expert at the BESA Center, has strongly recommended the Israel government to improve its Iron Dome system. He believes that the Israeli defense system needs corrective actions including adding Iron Dome system, countering possible mortar bomb threats. As another analyst at the BESA Center, Dr. Eado Hecht (2014) has asserted that Hamas has a large offensive tunnel capability that would enable its forces to infiltrate to occupied territories or put large bombs underneath the illegal Israeli settlements, therefore, the Israeli military has to develop the technology and the tactical skills to locate, map and destroy the tunnels.

Think tanks of Haifa University

1. The Jewish Arab Center (JAC). The main ambition of the Jewish Arab Center, established in 1972, is to promote good relations between Jews and Arabs within occupied territories. The Center coordinates between different faculties of Haifa University- the humanities, education, law and social science- to conduct research. Moreover, the Center sets up research projects between Jewish and Arab students. The Jewish Arab Center makes contacts with various organization and NGO's to advocate constructive discussions between Jewish and Arab politicians. The Center is interested in different issues such as peace initiatives, human and civil rights, equality of women, education, political, social, economic, cultural and religious aspects of citizens of the occupied territory and Middle Eastern countries (About Us-The Jewish Arab Center, 2017). Rassem Khamaisi, professor at University of Haifa in geography, is the head of the Jewish Arab Center.

2. The Golan Research Institute: The institute was founded in 1983 to conduct basic and applied research on educational, industrial, economic and social development of the Golan Heights. The Ministry of Science financially supports the institute by providing the major share of the institute's budget. Moreover, the institute has seven researchers and two doctoral students to carry out research on social science, humanities, agricultural science, biological science and environmental sciences (History and Organization, 2017).

Israeli Government Think Tanks

In addition to academic think tanks, different branches of government were determined to establish think tanks to help Israeli policy makers. Among those government branches, Knesset, or the parliament of Israel, established the Knesset Research and Information Center in 2000. The Center informs the Knesset members, committees and departments about current debate, legislation and parliamentary activities (About the RIC, 2017). Avraham Burg, the 15th president of the Knesset, implemented a reform that founded an information and research center to provide Knesset members with objective and reliable information through research and comprehensive background documents (Friedberg, 2008: 227). Since 2011, the Center's 30 researchers who have an academic degree in law, economy, public policy, sociology, history, literature and environmental studies, have written 3000 documents (Avrami, 2011: 16).

Furthermore, the research and political think tanks of Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs have 100 researchers who works on issues related to the Arabic-speaking world. They have six departments including North Africa, the Fertile Crescent, the Arab Peninsula, other geographic regions, economy, and strategic security (Gamal El Din, 2016: 189).

In addition to Ministry of Foreign Affairs think tanks and the Knesset, the Israeli Ministry of Defense has a certain think tank dealing with issues related to terrorism. The Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center (ITIC) is a conservative think tank whose offices are located in the Ministry of Defense. The center has falsely accused Hezbollah of using Lebanese civilians as human shield during 2006 Lebanon war. The unfounded allegation, using human shields, has provided a legal and moral justification for military action against Hezbollah. The center has reasoned that Hezbollah's violation served to legitimize the killing of Lebanese civilians by Israel regime military. ITIC used the same logic to justify the killing of Palestinians (Gaza War 2009-2014), and later describe it as collateral and legitimate damage (Gordon & Perugini, 2015: 83).

Israeli Non-government Think Tanks

Israeli non-government think tanks, directly or indirectly and financially supported by the government, deal with issues relating to the condition and conflicts in the Middle East. The following research centers are the most significant non-government think tanks in Israel:

1. Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem. The Van Leer institute is established to study various issues related to philosophy, society, culture and education. Van Leer Family founded the institute in 1959. The institute conducts research in four main areas: Advanced Studies (humanities and social science), Jewish Culture and Identity, Israeli Civil society and Mediterranean Neighbors (About The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, 2017).
2. Israeli Center for Democracy. The most important goal of the Center is to promote democratic values and institutions in Israel (About IDI, 2017). The institute is funded from donations, mostly from a wealthy American-Jewish donor, Bernard Markus, one of the founders of retailer Home

Depot (Avriel, 2015). In addition to the Israeli Center for Democracy, the Israel Democracy Institute was created to strengthen democratic institutions in the Israeli regime. The institute has tried to substantiate Gaza war (2014) by carrying out surveys, according to which, %95 of Israeli Jews thought the war was legitimate (Carlstrom, 2017: 53).

3. Israel Institute for Strategic Studies. The mission of this Institute is to promote the common values shared by the USA and Israel regime as mentioned in the following words of Justice Louis Brandeis. According to him, “Let no American imagine that Zionism is inconsistent with patriotism” (About Us, 2017). In reality, the institute has encouraged Israeli politicians to adopt aggressive policies towards Palestinians and provokes racial violence against residents of Gaza Strip and the West Bank. For instance, Martin Sherman, a veteran of Israel military and the founder of Israel Institute for Strategic Studies, wrote in Jerusalem Post, “The only durable solution requires dismantling Gaza, humanitarian relocation of the non-belligerent Arab populations, and the extension of Israeli sovereignty over the region” (Khalek, 2014). The institute has recommended the Israeli government to not make territorial concessions on the Golan because it would create a golden opportunity for Iran to expand its military presence in Syria (StrategicIsrael, 2017).
4. Israel Council on Foreign Relations. The council is a forum established in 1989 to study foreign policy issues. Since 2006, the council has published *The Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* (Israel Council on Foreign Relations, 2017). David Kimche was the president of the Israel Council of Foreign Relations and the publisher of its Journal. Kimche joined the Mossad in the 1950s and

served in various high-ranking positions, finally becoming the deputy head of the organization (Yegar & Levin, 2010: 11). Daniel Ayalon, deputy of Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, delivered a talk on 'challenges on Israeli foreign policy'. He argued that the only way to deal with long-range ballistic missiles fired by Hezbollah (Lebanon War, 2006) and Hamas (Gaza War, 2008) is deterrence. As far as Iran is concerned, he said that he trusted the US president who declared all options on the table to deal with Iran's nuclear program (Ayalon, 2010).

5. The Center for the Renewal of Israeli Democracy. The Center is founded in 2012 to help the Israeli regime to meet serious challenges such as international isolation, which threaten the existence of the regime (Molad: The Center for the Renewal of Israeli Democracy, 2017). The Center cooperates with the Center for American Progress in organizing the symposium on US and Israel foreign policy and regional security in the Middle East (JTA, 2014). Among other Israeli think tanks, The Center for Renewal of Israeli Democracy is considered as an anti-settlement think tank (Israel finance minister suspends settlement funds, 2014). Ben Sasson-Gordis (2016), a policy analyst at this center, believes that the withdrawal from Gaza greatly decreased security threats to Israeli and improved IDF defense capabilities. He asserted that Hamas has significantly upgraded the quality of its rockets; it uses them as a means of deterring Israel from beginning large ground operations in Gaza. In fact, if Israel launches a massive attack on Gaza Strip, it has to pay a price. Therefore, the center has suggested Israeli military to develop its Iron Dome system to intercept rockets fired by Hamas forces.
6. Adva Center. The Adva Center is founded to examine the

condition of quality and social justice in the occupied territory. The Center analyzes the public policy in the areas of budget, taxation and social services such as education, health, housing, social security, welfare and transportations (About Adva Center, 2017).

7. Reut Institute. Reut is an institute whose main research focus is identifying the gaps in current policy and strategy in Israel and the Jewish world. Gidi Grinstein is the founder and president of the Reut institute. He served as the coordinator of the Israeli delegation to the negotiation with The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in the bureau of Prime Minister Ehud Barak. The Reut institute has a budget of about 2.2 million US dollars (Gidi Grinstein-CV, 2017). According to Reut Institute, Israel's traditional strategic doctrine, which considers threats to Israel's existence in mainly military terms, to be met with military response, is an obsolete strategy. Israeli think tanks believe that Israel has faced a combined threat from a resistance network, composed of the various groups of Hamas (Gaza Strip) and Hezbollah (Lebanon) that wage an asymmetrical war against Israel. Therefore, the elimination of this resistance network (called the Resistance Axis) has priority over other Israeli security goals (Abunimah, 2014: 126). Meanwhile, Reut Institute has reported that "frustration with the conduct and outcome of the second Lebanon war" led Israeli government to "initiate a thorough internal examination" about the war (Finkelstein, 2018: 20).
8. Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs. The Center, founded in 1976, has launched several programs including Defensible Border Initiatives, Jerusalem in International Diplomacy, Iran and New Threat to the West, and Combating Delegitimization. The Center examines Israeli

security, regional diplomacy, and international law. Dr. Dore Gold, Israel's former ambassador to the UN, has been the president of the Jerusalem Center since 2000 (About the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 2017). Center's researchers are composed of Israel's former ambassadors in different countries, including Alan Baker (Israel's former ambassador to Canada), Freddy Eytan (Israel's former ambassador to Mauritania), and Zvi Mazel (Israel's former ambassador to Sweden) (*Key People*, 2017). Ben Menachem, an expert at the center, worries that the cooperation between Hamas and Hezbollah would endanger the national security of Israel. He claims that Hezbollah has established direct connections with Hamas's military wing in Gaza to coordinate the transfer of arms convoys from Iran to Hamas. Moreover, he has maintained that as a serious threat to Israel, Iran plans "to put Israel between the hammer of Israel in the north and Hamas in the south with ten thousand of missiles pointed at it" (Ben Menachem, 2017). Therefore, Israel must try to sever the links among its three enemies.

9. The International Institute for Counter Terrorism. The institute, established in 1996, serves as a joint forum to study the ways of combating terrorism in the region (About ICT, 2017). Jonathan Figchel, as an analyst at the institute, believes that Hamas leaders have not yet paid a high price for their conduct according to their media statements. In his point of view, Hamas forces have no fear of death; therefore, they have been prompted to attack Israel. As a result, Israel has to eliminate their inspirations in order to change their ongoing commitments to fighting (Figchel, 2009). Amos Guiora, another expert at the institute, has asserted that Israel has to pursue four strategic goals in fighting with Hamas forces. These goals are the following: 1) completely demolishing tunnels

between Egypt and Gaza Strip used for smuggling weapons, 2) reducing Hamas's ability to produce Kassams missiles, 3) destroying the Hamas ammunition depot, and 4) keeping Hamas from firing Kassam missiles into Israel (Guiora, 2009).

10. The Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policy (MITVIM). The goal of the institute is to redefine the role of the Israeli regime in the Middle East. In order to reshape Israel's relations with other countries in the region, the institute has promoted: (1) a basic shift in Israel's foreign policy, and (2) Arab-Israeli Peace (*About Mitvim*, 2017). Gabbay (2017), an expert at MITVIM, has recommended the Israeli government to treat the Iranian threat with due severity because Iran is determined to destroy Israel. He has contended that Iran nuclear deal has to be modified to serve the security interests of Israel.

These non-governmental think tanks are inextricably intertwined with different branch of the Israeli regime and Jewish organizations in various ways. Numerous Jewish organizations have provided funds for these think tanks to improve the performance of research institutes.

The Influence of Israeli Think Tanks

In general, think tanks influence decision-making processes directly or indirectly. However, in order to exercise their influence, they need to have certain characteristics features, including the following (Gamal El Din, 2016: 199):

1. Survive over time
2. Recruit elite researchers and experts and increase the members of administrative teams
3. Have access to significant financial resources

4. Increase their presence at conferences and seminars
5. Issue scientific, peer-reviewed publications
6. Gain academic reputation at international levels, and
7. Build a prosperous and continuous relationships with media.

Moreover, think tanks should constantly implement, modify and redirect their strategies to increase their influence on policy makers. Their main strategies include: (1) having breakfast, lunches and dinners, (2) holding seminars, (3) producing their own TV and Radio programs, (4) participating in public meetings, (5) developing their expertise, (6) having access to policy makers, (7) setting advisory panels and boards, (8) making personal contacts, (9) revolving doors¹, and (10) publishing research studies and scientific publications (Wiarda, 2010: 41-44). Facilitating dialogue, advising policy makers and advocating for a policy are the other roles that think tanks play to influence decision-making processes (Faro, 2012: 13).

In addition to the specific characteristics of think tanks, mentioned above, think tank researchers need to have at least four characteristics to be influential among policy makers: (1) they have to gain credibility among policy makers, (2) they have to gain access to policy makers, (3) they have to make efforts at the right time and, (4) they have to develop their marketing (Rich, 2004: 155).

Israeli think tanks, like their counterparts in the North America and Western Europe, widely influence government decision-makings. However, it is worth mentioning that USA and Western European countries have more think tankers than

1. Many long time think tanks researchers have gone in and out of government several times in a revolving door mode that brings them into high policy position, then back to the think tank again if they are defeated in election, then often back into government at a higher level, and so on.

Israel. Usually, think tanks that work in stable and institutionalized democracies exert more influence than think tanks that are active in emerging democracies. Israeli think tanks need to meet certain criteria to succeed in influencing policy-making processes, such as the following (Abelson, 2011):

1. Organizational independence: the research institute has to avoid linking the institute to another organization,
2. Cooperation: the institute should cooperate with other parties and share information with other research institutes, as needed
3. Timely manner: the research center has to present the right idea to the right person at the right time,
4. Target audience: the research institute needs to identify its target audience and their needs,
5. Sequence of products: the institute needs to create several products such as op-eds, position papers, surveys, extensive research, and video clips,
6. Human capital: the research center has to employ researchers and experts to create new, innovative ideas and to provide regular insights about events and trends, and
7. Media exposure: the institute needs to formulate a coherent media strategy. Media exposure is necessary to promote name-recognition.

Meanwhile, there are three techniques for influencing decision-making processes, including (1) influence from within in order to influence people who work for or with the government, (2) consulting, and (3) exercising outside influence in order to disseminate the knowledge in the form of conferences and publications (Susser, 2014).

Despite the fact that Israel has several prominent think tanks,

some Israeli experts believe that Israeli think tanks could exert minor influence on policymaking in the Israeli regime. For example, Eyal Zisser, director and senior research fellow at Moshe Dayan Center, asserts the lack of real influence of Israeli think tanks, and Efraim Inbar, a political science professor at Bar-Ilan University, believes, “We should be modest in our evaluation of the impact of think tanks.” On the other hand, Barry Rubin, director of Global Research in International Affairs (GLORIA) Center at the Interdisciplinary Center, Herzliya, argues that Israeli research institutes have more political influence than in other countries (Meyers, 2009).

There are several obstacles in the way of Israeli think tanks to influence decision-making processes. First, decision makers deal with matters here and now and consequently they are not interested in the out of date academic research. Secondly, policy makers do not read long research papers and do not have time to read in-depth articles. Thirdly, policymakers are not usually available to researchers. Finally, researchers try to follow scientific truth that may result in divergence between those who are at the top and sometimes have different political opinions (Susser, 2014). Moreover, lack of funding reduces the influence of Israeli research institutes. For example, Van leer Jerusalem institute has a \$6.5 million budget per year, compared to the annual budget of its American counterparts such as Rand Corporation (\$250 million) or the Brookings Institution (\$61 million) (Meyers, 2009).

Conclusion

Decision-making has always been one of the most important parts of human life. In the modern world, states are determined to make the most relevant decisions in domestic and foreign affairs in order to ensure their security and maintain their goals and ambitions. At the international arena, every decision made by politicians has certain outcomes and consequences. If government officials make an inappropriate decision, their

country could face serious consequences. For this reason, policymakers try to take think tanks' advice in internal and external affairs in order to make pertinent decisions.

At the beginning of twentieth century, think tanks increasingly emerged in western countries especially the United States. The United States and European countries have established half of the world's estimated 6000 think tanks. Nevertheless, the number of think tanks has significantly increased because of democratization, globalization, and modernization around the world. These think tanks attempt to bridge the gap between theory and policy, and therefore, have a significant impact on the academic and practical world.

The Israeli regime, since its illegal establishment, has strove to found think tanks in various fields. Currently, foreign policy is one of the most significant areas concerned within Israeli think tanks. Due to the importance of making peace with Middle Eastern countries and the improvement of relations with the United States and European countries, Israeli think tanks have concentrated on foreign and security policy issues. Many former Israeli military officers launch a career at Israel's major think tanks to conduct research on strategy and national security issues.

Currently, the various existing Israeli think tanks, whether governmental, non-government, or academic, deal with foreign policy issues that mainly focus on Israel's security and defensive needs. In order to meet these needs, they adopt a certain approach in two phases. Firstly, they provide detailed, reliable and applicable analysis and advices to Israeli officials. Secondly, they spark off debates that enrich thinking and increase participations among Israel policymakers.

By adopting this approach, think tanks have prioritized the threats posed by various actors surrounding Israel. First, they have focused on the threats made against Israel by Hamas (Gaza

Strip) and Lebanon (Hezbollah). The capability of these groups to launch missile at a considerable distance is a major cause for Israel's security concern. Secondly, Iran, because of its military presence in Syria and its military and financial assistance to Hamas and Hezbollah, is at the top of Israeli think tanks' agendas. These countries and groups have formed what the Israeli regime refers to as the Resistance Axis, which seeks to delegitimize and ultimately wipe out Israel completely. Therefore, the study of Resistance Axis's behavior is the overriding priority of Israeli think tanks. Almost all Israeli think tanks have recommended Israeli policymakers to counter the threat of Resistance Axis by military and non-military tools. Meanwhile, think tanks help military specialists and advise representatives of government ministries to pursue an aggressive policy towards the Resistance Axis.

Certain Israeli think tanks have more influence than others do. For instance, the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) holds regular meetings on Iran, Hamas and Hezbollah, and publishes various articles about the threats posed by them to Israel's national security. The institute has always urged Israeli policymakers to pay extreme attention to security issues when adopting a certain foreign policy. The institute is designed to assist Israeli decision-makers in adopting offensive policies towards Palestine, Hezbollah and Iran. The experts of these think tanks have insisted the Israeli government to formulate and pursue an offensive foreign policy to deal with serious security problems. They primarily recommend waging war against Lebanon (2014) and Gaza Strip (2008 and 2014). Moreover, they believe that Israel has to take the necessary steps to counter Iran because of its activities in the Middle East and especially due to its nuclear program. Therefore, it is obvious that Israeli think tanks have persuaded the Israeli regime to formulate its foreign policy on the basis of an aggressive approach, as witnessed in the Lebanon war (2006), the Gaza war (2008-9) and (2014), and Israel's countering of Iran.

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