

## ISRAEL'S PERIPHERY DOCTRINE: PROSPECTS FOR DEFINING AND STUDYING A FOREIGN POLICY PRACTICE

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### ABSTRACT

Israeli 2010s foreign policy is marked by development of ties – in a wide range of spheres of cooperation – with various countries in Israel's neighbourhood and beyond. This policy is often compared to, and seen as, a continuation of the “periphery doctrine”, launched in the late 1950s. While some experts contest mere appropriateness of the term “periphery doctrine” in analyses of contemporary phenomena, others argue for broadening of the scope of its understanding. This article discusses several authors' stances on the main contentious issues regarding application of the term, highlighting contradictions between them and drawing conclusions on the analytical consequences of their choices. Moreover, it overviews the two existing attempts of applying international relations' theoretical approaches in studying the phenomenon and reflects on other possibly applicable explanatory frameworks. As a result, this work suggests that the issue is comprehensively approached through Copenhagen school methodology. The “periphery doctrine” seems to still be a relevant instrument for analyses of Israeli foreign relations, though the term must be used cautiously and with apt methodological rigour.

**Key words:** international cooperation, Israeli foreign policy, international relations theories, periphery doctrine

### Introduction

The modern State of Israel, since 1948 independence, suffered from regional isolation and military threats. Opposition of the Arab surroundings to the mere fact of Israel's existence, translating into refusal to negotiate for peace after the 1948 war, solidified Israeli sense of insecurity. It also led state's leaders to search for alliances enabling deterrence of another major onslaught in the short term and breaking the impasse in the long term. One direction of this search was an alliance with a great power. Israel quickly became disappointed

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24040/politickevedy.2020.23.2.219-245>

with the United Nations' (UN) power to guarantee a peaceful world system. Also, Israel's relations with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) deteriorated fast, as the Soviet regime became more anti-Semitic and started to support pan-Arab powers, countering Western influences in the Middle East. Thus, Israel abandoned its early policy of neutrality within the Cold War divide. In the mid-1950s, Israel's foreign policy orientation defined itself as pro-Western, aspiring – with a varying degree of success – to gain amity of France, the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US).

Another important direction in Israel's search for security and inclusion was the immediate neighbourhood beyond the core Arab Middle East; most profoundly, Turkey, Iran, Ethiopia, as well as minorities in neighbouring countries (Iraqi Kurds, Lebanese Maronites). This practice was called “periphery doctrine”. It was studied by various researchers as an important feature (even if it evolved together with geopolitical changes) of Israeli foreign policy since the 1950s until the end of Cold war and start of the Middle East peace process. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's policy of expansion of Israeli diplomatic activities since 2009 (and in particular following the 2011 “Arab Spring” and the ensuing tensions in the Arab world) have led to significant build up in relations with several groups of countries: Eastern part of the Mediterranean basin, post-Soviet Central Asia and Caucasus states, Sub-Saharan Africa countries, Far East emerging powers such as China and India (classified by Alpher 2017, pp. 49-50, together with Russia – as “the Eurasian powers”) and Latin American nations. This policy practice triggered experts' deliberations on the possible rebirth of periphery doctrine.

Yet despite the fact that major and substantive works emerged on the concept<sup>1</sup>, demonstrating the endurance of doctrine-framed thinking among Israel's foreign and security policymakers, several issues on which various authors present conflicting interpretations require further discussion. These are the issues of: the doctrine's definition – most profoundly, its geographical aspects – its aims and effectiveness. Building on a range of available literature – most importantly, works by Yossi Alpher, Howard Patten, Jean-Loup Samaan

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<sup>1</sup> Among the major publications dealing with the doctrine explicitly, Patten (2013), Alpher (2015) and Samaan (2018) need to be mentioned. There is also related literature dealing with Israel's relations with Third World countries in general, with particular regions subject to the doctrine or with bilateral relations between Israel and periphery doctrine countries, such as: Abadi (2004), Carol (2012), Curtis and Gitelson (1976). Noa Schonmann's book inspired by her 2009 Ph.D. thesis is expected to be published in the course of 2019 by I.B. Tauris.

and Noa Schonmann – this article poses several key questions, related to the nature of the concept as a doctrine, its relation to Israeli foreign policies on key fronts, as well as the issue of applicability of various international relations (IR) theories to the study of this phenomenon. It is meant to contribute to a more theoretically informed study of this particular direction of Israeli foreign policy. Therefore, the research subject of this article is the process of studying the periphery doctrine and the research question – to what extent the approaches adopted by scholars are appropriate. To answer this question, comparative methodology is used to characterise key international relations paradigms' understanding of and an approach towards certain elements of the doctrine and to confront these paradigms' findings with each other. Furthermore, the article suggests that the study of the periphery doctrine could be further developed within two specific theoretical approaches: studying of Israeli strategic culture; and reflection through the lenses of Copenhagen school's regional security complexes theory.

## **1 Defining doctrine**

The first tension and challenge in analysing Israeli periphery doctrine stems from the mere terminology. The term “doctrine” is generally understood as a set of beliefs and principles which are adhered to and followed. In the sphere of international relations, the term is mainly associated with the domain of the army; military doctrine refers to basic assumptions on how the army should operate bearing in mind the state's internal and external environment and capabilities. A foreign policy doctrine is a general outline of a foreign policy worldview – prioritising some issues, interests or directions. “Strategy”, in turn, in principle flows from the doctrine; it refers to defining activities matching actual capabilities with concrete aims (Zarychta 2013, pp. 66-70). State (public policy) strategies aim at fulfilling security, developmental or diplomatic aims, within a given timeframe.

However, the practice of application of these terms to Israeli periphery policy practice varies. Alpher (Cagliari 2015) refers to periphery doctrine as one of four grand strategies designed in the 1950s – blurring the distinction between the doctrine and the strategy. Moreover, the grand strategies he mentions (hooking up with great power(s); encouraging mass Jewish immigration; development of a nuclear deterrent; and periphery doctrine), although all ultimately aimed at guaranteeing state's security, also had strong diplomatic and civilian

dimensions. Samaan (2018) mainly uses the term “periphery doctrine”, but also refers to the phenomena in question as a “periphery alliance” or “periphery policy”, admitting that the periphery doctrine *has no doctrinal ramifications in the military sense ... it should better be understood as intellectual matrix* (Samaan 2018: 2). He also underlines that at the start, it was thought of as a temporary, preliminary solution only (Samaan 2018, p. 148). Schonmann (2009, p.17) uses the term “periphery pact” and locates it in the context of two major policy challenges: confrontation with the Arab states; and pursuit of a great power alliance. Patten (2013) calls the practice “the Policy of the Periphery” and confronts bilateral relations with the periphery with politics at the UN forum. Guzansky (2014, pp. 100-101) refers to “periphery partnerships”, pointing out the conceptual problems with branding those relationships as alliances. Tziarras (2016) uses the term “quasi-alliance”.

It needs to be underlined that the phenomena discussed has never been formalised in an official binding document: the “doctrine” is contained in policy-makers’ correspondence and speeches.<sup>2</sup> This, however, is not an exception within the Israeli foreign and security policy practice, in which there are very few documents outlining general features of public policies in given spheres, in particular military. Alpher (2015, pp. xvii-xviii) concluded that *In many ways, it is only in retrospect that Israel’s ties with the Kurds and the Iranians, the Yemeni royalist, and Morocco emerge as a coherent strategic doctrine (...)*.

The terminology matters: calling a policy practice a doctrine creates semantic association with the sphere of high politics and even military affairs, and thus certain expectations regarding clear definition of aims, measures used, as well as measurability of achievement. The question of the extent to which Israeli periphery doctrine should be treated as a doctrine in the strict sense of the word – and by extension, also researched through relevant tools, in particular those related to military studies – can also be discussed through reflection on related issues, most profoundly the geographic scope, aims, means and effectiveness.

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<sup>2</sup> This doesn’t mean that the concept was not debated among the policymakers. In fact it was discussed on various forums and accepted by a gathering of competent members of the ruling party, Mapai, in an act which Schonmann (2009: 83) treats as a formal adoption (though not in a form of a state document).

## 2 Geographic Scope

The geographic scope of the “periphery” has never been clearly defined. The initial concept and the actual practice concentrated on two triangles of states towards which efforts were made aiming at build-up of alliances: Israel plus Turkey and Iran to the North – so called Trident concept; and Israel plus Ethiopia and Sudan to the South. However, there was much recognition of the value of contacts with other states, thus also often included in the periphery concept: most profoundly Morocco and East African countries beyond Ethiopia. In a way, periphery doctrine in practice spilled over to cover entire Sub-Saharan Africa in the early 1960s and afterwards was narrowed down to East Africa. Patten (2013, p. 28), on the other hand, sees African policy not as a part of, but as a supplement to the policy of the periphery, aimed at taming Arab world’s rejection and promoting non-aligned affiliation of Israel. Overall, authors differ in how they define the geography of the concept: Patten (2013) discusses Iran, Turkey and Ethiopia; Schonmann (2009) concentrates on Turkey, Iran, Ethiopia and Sudan; Samaan (2018) includes Turkey, Iran, Ethiopia, Sudan and minorities within the Middle Eastern Arab states. Alpher (2015, p. xviii) introduces three categories of Israel’s periphery partners: non-Arab and non-Muslim countries bordering the Israeli-Arab conflict zone; non-Arab and non-Muslim peoples living within the states engaged in the conflict; and Arab states on the fringes of the region, feeling threatened by militant Arab nationalism. Underlining the fluid nature of relations in the region, he adds Morocco, Horn of Africa, East Africa, Yemen and Oman to a broad category of periphery-related activities (Alpher 2015, p. 29).

In the contemporary context, due to globalisation and evolving nature of threats, geographical proximity of allies is not the key issue. When discussing “the new periphery”, some authors include basically all the countries which are neither Western great powers, nor Russia, nor Arab; and which develop various kinds of ties with Israel. Still some include also Sunni Arab states displaying willingness for some cooperation with Israel. Samaan (2018, p. 120) describes the contemporary doctrine as evolving towards a *catch-all concept*, which highlights the need for reflecting on a possibility for a more rigorous use of the term. Samaan himself includes within the doctrine’s spectre Greece, Azerbaijan, South Sudan; as well as China, India and Gulf monarchies – simultaneously questioning classification of ties with India and China as a legitimate part of the doctrine, for the lack of friend-to-foe balancing logic behind them (Samaan, pp.

128, 131; Samaan's theoretical framework guiding this classification is discussed below).

Alpher (2015, p. 93) states that since the Arab core is internally divided and the new threat which Israel faces – the one of militant Islamism – has broad geographical ambitions, the doctrine's scope naturally broadens. Thus, (Alpher, Cagliari 2015) the current narrative of periphery doctrine includes, besides most obvious candidates such as Cyprus and Greece, also East Africa (Horn of Africa, Uganda, Kenya), Morocco, potentially also Bulgaria and Romania<sup>3</sup>, as well as (Alpher 2015, pp. 106, 119) some of the Gulf countries, North African Berbers and possibly minorities in Syria. Yet, in Alpher's opinion, the "new periphery" space has no strategic dimension and these relations should no longer be treated as informed by the periphery doctrine. Israel now, according to Alpher, is a different, much stronger country, maintaining formal and informal relations with many Arab countries and therefore it does not need periphery doctrine. The ties with various countries, near and far, should rather be seen as a *strategic mosaic* (Alpher, Cagliari 2015), resulting from bridging the relative weakness of the peripheral partners with the relative openness of the Arab core (Alpher 2015, p. 142). Similarly, Guzansky, who (2014, p. 99) includes Greece, Cyprus, Azerbaijan and South Sudan into the doctrine's remit, concluded (2014, p. 104) that what can be observed contemporarily *is more of an ad hoc set of partnerships rather than a formal doctrine carefully planned and executed*.

Ensuing questions are: if certain partners are called periphery, consequently, what constitutes the centre; and how the definition of the periphery interplays with the definition of the centre. Alpher (2015, p. xix) characterises the original core as the Arab states engaged in fighting against Israel. Elsewhere (Cagliari 2015), Alpher defines periphery doctrine as an Israeli-centred concept, although related to the foreign policy aim of hooking up with a great power (the US). Referring to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Alpher (2016) notes that the periphery doctrine (if such a term may be used at all) changed its main reference point: away from pan-Arab hegemonic forces, now it focuses on taming radical political Islam. As mentioned, this new, Islamist core is more geographically expansive, threatening countries such as Cyprus, Bulgaria or Greece (Alpher 2015, p. xix). This characterisation opens up the possibility for inclusion of Arab states in the

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<sup>3</sup> With the emergence of the so called Craiova forum, a 2018 summit of which was attended by Prime Minister Netanyahu, this list could potentially be broadened to include Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, and Serbia.

remits of the doctrine as it defines its aims in a way that falls in line with moderate Arab states' interests. This also influences the reflections on the appropriate theoretical paradigm, as the radical Islamic forces often take shape of non-governmental entities.

Schonmann (2015) interprets Israeli activities as a process of self-aggrandisement meant for appreciation mainly by the Western audience, which thus becomes the main reference point (centre, core) of periphery activities. Samaan, in turn, characterises periphery alliance as something *beyond the Arab states* (Samaan 2018, title), implying that the Arab states constitute the central reference point. Samaan's understanding of the centre is thus mostly informed by geography and also, defines periphery through the enemy; Alpher's is more abstract and defines the periphery through the evolving architecture of Israeli alliances and enmities; Schonmann's approach centres on Israeli self-identification with the Western world. This divergence, as it is shown below, has logical implications for studying the doctrine through IR theories.

The discussion of the geographical extent of the periphery doctrine now clearly needs to be re-connected to the issue of goals' definition. If the doctrine is meant to be a tool for build-up of military alliances, it requires a very strict definition of its geography, taking account of the possible military forces' movements, weapons' ranges or defence capabilities. But was it and should it be expected to be such a tool?

### 3 Aims, Content and Effectiveness

The discussion on the aims of the periphery doctrine stretches along a continuum from a very narrow, security-oriented vision, up to a broad, multi-dimensional one, affecting an entire spectrum of Israeli international relations.

Samaan (2018) seems to adhere to a presumption that the doctrine was expected to provide Israel with a network of alliances which would grant it security in the face of the Arab threat. Alpher (2015, title, pp. xvii, 5, 60) characterises periphery doctrine as a grand strategy searching for Middle East allies, aimed for establishment of "alliance-type relations", which would not necessarily be formal and public, but would be able to contain regional Soviet expansion enabled by strengthening Egypt of Nasser. This process would also be supportive to other foreign policy aims: ingathering Middle Eastern Jews; and developing ties with the US, to which well-positioned Israel could be an important asset in the context of the confrontation with the USSR. For

Schonmann (2009, Abstract, pp. 8-9, 39-43, 79-80, 89), what she calls a Periphery Pact was a comprehensive foreign policy doctrine, which did not count on receiving military assistance in a case of a conflict, but rather was aimed to change the way the US perceived the Middle East; and – by implication – to change the regional distribution of power, anchoring Israel in a new regional system. Most particularly, the aim was to switch American perception of Israel: from a liability to an asset – after a series of setbacks which American foreign policy in the region suffered in 1958. Israelis communicated the idea of a new Middle Eastern alliance to the Americans before overtures were made towards the potential regional partners; only after a rebuke, Israel decided to pursue contacts with periphery countries (which actually happened at partners' initiatives, except for Turkey), in order to eventually convince the US of Israel's utility. Schonmann cites Ben Gurion's speeches in which he projects this process to happen also with relation to a broader circle of Western countries; and points to Golda Meir's statement on lack of expectation that the pact would protect Israel against Arab hostility, but rather that it will serve breaking Israel's isolation. What was needed in fact was a "phantom of a pact" – probable enough to convince the Western audience to invest in Israeli security.

From the perception of doctrine's aims follow categorisations of doctrine's content, or instruments. To Samaan (2018) these were limited to security and intelligence cooperation. Other authors have a broader vision of measures, or – from the historical perspective – of the actual content of the relationships developed within the periphery doctrine. Patten (2013, p. 7) underlines that the key which opened the door to military cooperation with Iran was an earlier agricultural and technology cooperation. Also, Alpher (2015, p. 7) highlights the importance of agricultural cooperation, medical assistance and humanitarian aid in relations with states and minorities; he furthermore attributes these activities to humanitarian motives of the engaged professionals. Schonmann (2009, pp. 253-267), on the example of cooperation with Turkey, presents the doctrine in practice as including manifold activities beyond intelligence, military or even diplomacy, such as social (tourism, sports, culture, science, higher education, labour unions' and technical cooperation) and economic (trade, agriculture, aviation) spheres. In her analyses the impact of development of cooperation in one field on progress in other fields is mostly one-directional, which – as can be highlighted already here – falls in line with the liberal IR theory assumptions.

The ultimate aim was a general move out of the state of isolation, thus allowing Israel to fully and equally participate in global international relations. On



the other hand, it has to be admitted that the security establishment and interests were the driving force behind relations. Even in the case of Sub-Saharan Africa, which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) saw as its domain and where it sought to build enduring relations based on development cooperation, with preference for ties with democratic countries, the initiative was taken over by the Ministry of Defence (MoD), willing to concentrate on East Africa and build relations even with autocratic regimes (Levey 2004, pp. 74, 81). For Samaan, it was the intelligence, rather than the MoD, that was running the ties held within the original doctrine; both the ministries were scarcely informed on these secret dealings and the very nature of these dealings affected Ministries' policymaking (Samaan 2018, pp. 29-30, 35). Similarly, Apher (2015, p. 7) highlights the leading role of the Mossad. In that sense, periphery doctrine can be seen as a factor pushing overall policy towards the realist paradigm, represented by the security establishment, in confrontation with more idealist policies of the diplomats. This assertion however needs to be confronted with Schonmann's research (2009, pp. 93-97, 102-103) showing that the beginnings of the process were characterised by a balanced cooperation between the MFA (the actual initiator of contacts as well as the propagator of the periphery alliance in the West) and the security and intelligence establishments. Eventual Mossad domination was highlighted by Schonmann in the case of ties with Iran, while MFA remained largely responsible for contacts with Turkey.

As for effectiveness, the way the aims of the doctrine are defined impacts the assessment of the results. At the same time, the acceptance of an assumption that the activities discussed were largely improvised complicates the evaluation process (Alpher 2015, p. 9). For Samaan (2018), the doctrine basically could not and in fact did not bring any significant, tangible long-term positive impact for Israeli security, since (despite a degree of institutionalisation of contacts within the Trident pact with Turkey and Iran) it failed to bring in mutual defence alliances. For Alpher (2015, p.11), however, the Trident was a *strategic and intelligence alliance of sorts* and a significant achievement, although (Alpher, Cagliari 2015) the 1973 war clearly showed doctrine's failure. Alpher sees also other positive and meaningful results. For example, supplies transported by Israel to Yemeni rebels prolonged Egyptian engagement in fight against them, thus weakening Egyptian army's capabilities during the 1967 war. Moreover, Egyptians have developed a sort of obsession, lasting until today, about presumed Israeli presence and influence at the Nile tributaries. Relations with Morocco, in turn, were instrumental in gaining Morocco's engagement in

mediation between Israel and Egypt, facilitating the talks that ultimately led to achievement of the 1979 peace treaty. Moreover, the policy was a helpful instrument for smoothing the process of immigration of those Middle Eastern Jews who did not come to Israel during the major wave of immigration in the early 1950s. Still, the aim of gaining American involvement has been achieved to a limited extent only (Alpher 2015, p. 60). Patten (2013, p. 164) calls the alliances with Turkey, Iran and Ethiopia *some of the most important strategic developments to originate in the Middle East in the twentieth century*. Schonmann (2009, Abstract) underlines that although an assumed grand change in the region did not happen, the doctrine was instrumental in approximation between Israel and the US (which, according to her, was the main aim) as well as in developing more or less lasting ties with certain partners in the region.

In the contemporary context, evaluation is even more difficult not only because of the novelty of the phenomenon. Relations with countries most commonly discussed under the framework of the new periphery doctrine are very diversified. They include much more than military cooperation (which in many cases was not the starting point of fruitful relations) and in some instances, military cooperation is largely absent (for example, Israeli military cooperation with China is vetoed by the US). The fields that should be mentioned aside from security-related ones include: agriculture, health, energy, counterterrorism, telecommunication technologies, humanitarian relief.<sup>4</sup> Imports of Israeli technologies beneficial for development is an important benefit for the partner countries. Profits for Israel are often less direct and mainly related to economy. Build-up of some kind of formal alliances is not the aim (Alpher 2015, p. 120). Political goals of Israel, pertaining mostly to change of diplomatic behaviours and the UN voting patterns of its partners as regards the Palestinian issue, are hard to achieve, yet some limited advance is noted, in particular as regards Sub-Saharan Africa countries (Zielińska). Of importance – bearing in mind the changed nature of the core threat – many of the Sub-Saharan Africa and post-Soviet countries discussed have significant Muslim populations and are members of the Organisation of Islamic Conference.

Relations are developed out in the open, which can be explained by a relative decline of the power of the Arab states' (which traditionally worked

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<sup>4</sup> See for example: Guzanjsky 2014; Tziarras 2016; Feiler & Lim 2014; Bashirova & Sozen 2017; Bishku 2017; "Israel-Morocco..." 2018.

against relations of these countries with Israel), and their growingly ambiguous relations with the Palestinian leadership; as well as by amelioration of periphery partner countries' attitudes towards Israel and relative decline in their interest in the Palestinian cause. The civilian substance of relations also bodes well for their depth and durability.

## 4 Related considerations

### 4.1 Relations with the US

Among related themes, which are discussed here in passing only due to space limits of this article, the role of the US in shaping the geography and the content of the doctrine requires attention. The US displayed a distanced support for development of intelligence and military ties between Israel and Iran and Turkey and even less interest in other developments within the doctrine (Samaan 2018, p. 85). In particular, aside from a one-time donation, it refused to financially support Israeli development aid programme in Sub-Saharan Africa (Levey 2004, p. 79). It can be observed that an analyses of periphery doctrine from the American interests' point of view, or through the prism of Israeli interest in American amity only, can easily limit the doctrine's spectrum of analyses to two major regional powers, Turkey and Iran, and to activities within the military and intelligence spectrums. Thus it can also lead to underestimations of the importance of ties with other partners, in particular Ethiopia, and to marginalisation of the impacts achieved through civilian cooperation.

### 4.2 Multilateral level

On the multilateral front, the original doctrine was an expression of Israel's disappointment with the UN's capabilities; with time, the UN General Assembly as well as the majority of its political bodies were taken over by Soviet and Arab countries' allies, hostile to Israel, further limiting the UN's importance for Israel. In a way, this process can be characterised as a move away from international diplomacy towards hard power politics of alliances. Patten (2013, pp. 155-160) even concludes that the UN was a forum for Israel's partners to placate Arab discontent caused by their covert cooperation with Israel with anti-Israeli declarations and votes; and where they could loudly express their supposed adherence to ideological or religious predispositions that stood in their way of open cooperation with Israel. However, the 2000s saw increase in attention

attached by the Israeli government to the UN, mainly as a response to a Palestinian campaign for unilateral recognition of their statehood launched due to the failure of the peace process. Contemporary build-up of relations with various developing countries and emerging powers is clearly linked by the Israeli establishment with the expectation that in return for bilateral cooperation, these countries will with time reciprocate with at least more neutral, or even pro-Israeli voting in the UN.

### **4.3 Pursuit of regional peace**

As for the doctrine's relation to the pursuit of peace, Alpher (2015, pp. 6, 88, 92, 120) questions the claim that the periphery doctrine was a zero-sum game which distracted Israeli elites from pursuit of peace with the Arabs. In his opinion, the doctrine rather served the search for access to the Arabs and build-up of their respect; Israel never ceased to look for contact with pragmatic Arab states and the doctrine would not abandon this outreach perspective. It appears to be justified to claim that the original periphery doctrine, beyond the aspect of containment and deterrence of Israel's Arab neighbours, also had an idealistic (if not utopian) dimension: it was hoped that in some way or another, it can serve the quest for Israel's recognition and peace. Actual, though indirect contribution of the doctrine to the achievement of peace with Egypt has already been mentioned. More generally, Ben Gurion believed that having stable, open relations with periphery states will convince the Arabs that Israel cannot be destroyed (Schonmann 2009, p. 74). In the context of relations with Sub-Saharan countries, it was assumed that they could serve as fair mediators between Israel and the Arabs (Decalo 1998, p. 50). The notion that perception of Israel as a constructive partner can nurture regional peace reverberates contemporarily. For example, Israel, willing to create such a perception, approached the 1994 and 1995 regional (Middle East and North Africa) economic conferences, launched within the framework of the Israeli-Arab peace process, with great hopes (and to a bitter disappointment; Alpher 2015, p. 94). Nowadays, it can be assumed that part of Israeli motivation is that meaningful cooperation, in particular successful application of Israeli solutions in other countries, could be an argument for more pragmatic Arab rulers to seek cooperation with Israel as a contributor to their development and security. Arab interests in accommodating Israel are not only linked to the joint enmity towards Iran, but also to the potential of economic cooperation and joint solving of

regional problems with the use of Israeli technologies (Yaalon & Friedman 2018; Feldman, Wittes Cofman 2018).

The disputed question remains: what comes first – Israeli peace with the Palestinians, or open Arab cooperation with Israel; would the Arab countries, recognising the vitality of joint interests with Israel, be able to enforce peace on the Palestinians? This would require Arabs to ignore Palestinian opposition and in fact, abandon their long-held policy of refusing any steps that could lead to peaceful relations with Israel before a comprehensive deal is reached (Alpher 2015, pp. 97-100). Moreover, would Israel still crave for peace with the Palestinians once it had stable relations with other Arabs? A realistic quest for a Israeli-Palestinian peace might well require resumption of a broader, regional peace process. In the meantime, energy – seabed natural gas infrastructure – becomes a platform for development of a regional cooperation with Israel involving Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinians, besides existing Israeli periphery partners Cyprus and Greece (Guzansky 2014, p. 106).

## **5 Periphery Doctrine and International Relations Theory**

Samaan (2018) and Schonmann (2015, 2018) were apparently the first to undertake analysis of the periphery doctrine from the point of view of IR theory, although very limited one and informed by their main points of interest within the doctrine's phenomenon. The issue deserves attention since differing choices of theoretical paradigm led these two scholars, working on a similar research material, to contradictory conclusions.

### **5.1 Realism**

Samann (2018, pp. 12, 19, 23-24) understands Israeli foreign- and security-policymaking as ideologically derived from European the 19<sup>th</sup> Century realism (rather than liberalism or idealism) and from the works of revisionist Zionist Jabotinsky, who excluded possibility for friendly relations with Arab neighbourhood. As Samaan argues, periphery doctrine was designed as a zero-sum game based on a clear distinction between enemies and friends and on balancing of the latter against the former, with the use of hard power tools of foreign and security policy (military, intelligence, clandestine diplomacy). Thus, Samaan analysis the periphery doctrine from the point of view of realist theory of IR – although, admittedly, his analyses refers only to a broad category of

realism and does not delve into any particular strand of it.<sup>5</sup> Attachment to realism narrows the spectre of phenomena which he takes into account under the periphery doctrine umbrella and leads him to a mostly negative assessment of the results achieved. Samaan acknowledges how in a contemporary set-up, economic and technology exchanges propel some of the relationships; and how these relations constitute rather a *diplomatic scenery than fundamental strategic moves* (Samaan 2018, p. 104). Nevertheless, he asserts that the realist intellectual matrix behind the doctrine (zero-sum-game, secrecy, reliance on military and intelligence, power balancing) has been upheld (Samaan 2018, p. 107). This assertion should be debated on the grounds of: diversity of these relations in terms of interests pursued and types of cooperation employed; the strength of their economic dimension; their often un-straightforward relation to the Middle East affairs; and lastly, the limits of hard power of those of the new partners which actually border the Middle East and could be thought of as a counterbalance to any of Israel's enemies.

Samaan (2018, p. 33) confronts clandestine nature of relations built under the initial periphery doctrine through characterising them as directly opposed to public diplomacy; he puts the blame on Israeli establishment which supposedly disregarded the importance of public relations. This follows the line of thinking which does not take much account of the idealistic hopes behind the periphery doctrine and concentrates (back to the discussion of geography) on the major powers – partners in the early doctrine, that is Iran and Turkey, with scarce attention devoted to North- and Sub-Saharan Africa countries. The assertion takes realistic account of the weight of non-governmental actors, in particular, public opinion, in international relations in the 1950s and 1960s. Clandestine nature of contacts also undermined idealistic aims of the doctrine by creating an image of back-stage influence and therefore exacerbating Arab hatred (Samaan 2018, p. 36). Still, the assumption seems to underestimate Israeli craving to make these relations actually more in the open. Samaan himself (2018, p. 73) gives an example of a 1961 trip to Iran, which Ben Gurion hoped would be publicised, but which remained a secret due to the decision of his Iranian hosts. Similarly Ethiopia, under severe pressure from the Arabs, refused to openly embrace Israel (Samaan 2018, pp. 87-88; Erlich 1994, pp. 171-172).

It can be observed that a strictly realist, or simplistically realist approach can

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<sup>5</sup> Realism has also been adopted by Tziarras 2006, in his analyses of Israel's relations with Cyprus and Greece.

be understood as leading to paradoxes. On the one hand it states that clandestine ties are not what Israel needs; on the other hand it dismisses the contemporary version of the doctrine for moving away from the assumptions of the original one, in particular, for not paying enough attention to the military and intelligence aspects (Samaan 2018, pp. 140, 148). Paradoxically and interestingly, the contemporary relations with developing countries and new powers other than the Arab states are out in the open and diversified beyond military and intelligence contacts. Thus, they seem not to fit well into the realist definition that was probably more appropriate for the periphery doctrine activities launched in the late 1950s. On the other hand, secrecy and concentration on security characterise contacts between Israel and Arab Sunni states with which Israel does not have peace treaties; relations between Israel and Saudi Arabia fit this frame perfectly. So while these contacts' content is in line with the realist outlook on what periphery doctrine is, analysing them in itself falls outside of the realist definition of the periphery doctrine, as realism prefers to see this doctrine as something limited to the "external ring" and directed against the Arab countries.

The fact that current relations built with developing countries and emerging powers are frequently referred to by the Israeli establishment, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in particular, in his speeches demonstrating Israel's positive international role<sup>6</sup>, implies a new approach, which takes much more account of the need for a global publicity of Israeli contacts with other countries. The civilian nature of these contacts is in particular highlighted. So, even if the new periphery in several cases started from military cooperation, the largely civilian content of these relationships today and their diplomatic significance as well as publicity given to them (in particular the way in which they serve the projection of Israel's positive international role) constitute factors that signal a new paradigm in thinking about the doctrine. This paradigm seems to be moving away from the assumption (Samaan 2018, p. 38) that the contemporary version of the periphery policy is still run along the principles of military and intelligence dominance, secrecy and zero-sum-game.

Moreover, it seems that there is a need for furthering the discussion on what is seen as the intellectual (or even identity-related) point of departure guiding the choice of a realist paradigm. A deep rift between Jabotinsky and the early

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<sup>6</sup> See for example "Full Text: Netanyahu's Address" 2017; "Israel's Prime Minister..." 2017; "PM Netanyahu's Speech" 2017.

Israeli ruling elites has to be remembered. Israeli governments until mid-1970 were dominated by the left, deeply influenced by the Socialist Zionist thinking and ideals, championing equality between individuals and between the nations. Additionally, within foreign policy spectrum these elites displayed a sense of idealism and belief in negotiations, concessions and peaceful solutions. The above-mentioned hopes related to the periphery doctrine – that the Third World allies would exert diplomatic pressure on Arabs to enter peace talks, or that Israel's cooperation with developing countries would cause Arab interest in entering such cooperation as well – confirm existence of a certain dose of idealism behind the doctrine. Israeli policy towards the developing countries at the time can in fact be interpreted as a result of a constant struggle between the idealistic approach to international relations and the “Iron wall mentality”, with the latter systematically taking ground as this idealism clashed with sober reality of Arab rejectionism and hostility. The end of idealism in Israeli foreign policy could be observed only in the 1970s, when the honeymoon in relations with Sub-Saharan Africa ended abruptly and, subsequently, the right-wing (and thus the actual heirs of Jabotinsky's thinking) came to power for the first time in Israel's history.

The realist approach also leads back to the question of diversion between the language used and the actual content of policy practice, including expected results as well as means used. Bearing in mind the widening of this practice much beyond military aims and means, the militarised term “doctrine” diverges from the actual scope of the practice in question.

## 5.2 Constructivism

Schonmann (2015, 2018), in turn, sees the periphery doctrine through constructivist lenses. In her opinion, Israeli elites considered themselves realists, undertaking activities informed by *realpolitik* considerations; they largely denied that there were very strong currents of ideological motives and mythological substantiations of their dealings. They also defined themselves through an opposition to idealism: the left-wing accused the right-wing of having messianic visions which undermine peace prospects, while the right-wing accused the left-wing of believing in illusions of peace-making with the Arabs. However, discussion of whether Israeli policies were realist or idealist is a misconceived one, according to Schonmann. Since Israel's size and resources at its disposal were meagre and since the actual aim of Israeli activities was to



create an image of Israel as a regional power with broad relations and influence, the attitude of Israeli elites was in fact constructivist. Creation of a status, based on perceptions and discourse, was the essence of this conscious policy, the ultimate aim of which was to guarantee state's survival.

A constructivist approach provides for a consistent analytical platform which explains the importance of build-up of relations with the US and instruments used to achieve this aim by a state with limited material resources. It furthermore allows for an analysis of the full diversity of relations pursued and for making in-depth and revealing insights into the decision-making processes. The explanation of Israeli activities through elite's self-perception as realists and elite's actual practice of projecting preferred reality avoids the logical rift to which the realism-based approach leads (that is, complaining either on the doctrine's unrealistic hard-power expectations or on soft-power measures which do not fit a "real doctrine").

On the other hand, such a constructivist approach can also be seen as reductionist, as it seems to underestimate the actual material dimensions and results of cooperation. These include increase or diversification in trade, in particular exports (and thus economic integration of Israel with the world, increase in wealth of Israeli companies and overall growth of Israeli economy), as well as immaterial consequences of this cooperation beyond the Western world, for example, growing respect for Israel as a source of innovations, strengthened political cooperation, moderated rhetoric of partner countries' leaders as regards Arab-Israeli conflict.

### 5.3 Possibilities for application of other and related theoretical frameworks

Close to the constructivist realm, yet accepted by all major paradigms (although slightly differently defined) is the concept of an **international role**. The international role can be understood as a particular self-image (rooted in identity) of a country willing to be perceived through a given role it supposedly plays in international relations. Periphery doctrine can be discussed in this framework. The foreign policy role that Israel saw for itself at the time of the original periphery doctrine was deconstructed by Decalo (1994, p. 5) as composed of two elements: *being a model socialist society based upon social justice, cooperation, progressive values and ideals and obligation to help promote the emancipation and development*. Nowadays, the content of

speeches of Prime Minister Netanyahu suggests that contemporary activities towards the periphery (and towards the related interests) are assisted by a projection of a vision of Israel as a country, the international role of which is to contribute to the solution of the world's greatest problems through its technological innovations.

A dimension on which no separate in-depth study has been done (although Schonmann's work made a great contribution to furthering the study of it) is the connection between periphery doctrine and Israeli **strategic culture**; it seems that such a study could ameliorate the search for a theoretical framework for the analyses of periphery doctrine as a constant feature of Israeli policy.<sup>7</sup> When defining national identity factors influencing Israeli foreign policy orientations, Zionism, the Holocaust, the Jewish State, the principle of self-reliance and identification with the West are most frequently mentioned (Del Sarto 2003). As for the ensuing strategic culture, the following elements are highlighted: essentiality of the State of Israel for the survival of the Jewish nation; Jewish values of warfare; threat perception centred on the encirclement by large hostile populations; importance of deterrence, pursuit of defence outside own territory; importance of quality and quantity manpower; self-reliance; but also great power alliance and regional partnership with non-Arab states and populations. (Rodman 2010; Giles 2006, pp. 1-2, 12-14). Hence, a periphery approach can be seen as already embedded in the thinking of Israeli strategic culture and located side by side with the notion of great power alliance.<sup>8</sup>

Furthermore, an important connection can be made between Israeli Jewish identity, the ensuing self-perception of Jews as having a legitimate place in the region – and periphery doctrine, in particular the way it was substantiated. From the beginning, Israelis perceived themselves and their partners – Turks, Persians, Christians – as the actual Middle Eastern natives, inhabiting the region millennia before the Arab-Islamic conquest (Alpher 2016). Periphery alliance was meant to be a visible prove of the fact that the Middle East was not limited

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<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, Samaan (2018: 25) points out that the explanatory value of the realist paradigm towards the periphery doctrine is restricted since this paradigm doesn't take enough account of internalities: nature of threat perception and impacts of national strategic culture. Adhering to this paradigm, this author limits his analyses of identity-related issues to revoking the Israeli fear of isolation.

<sup>8</sup> Of the strategic sub-cultures discussed – one centred on maintenance of security, mainly through military proves; one centred on the permanent character of conflict with the Arabs; and one believing in the possibility of peace (Giles 2006: 5-8) – all three could encompass periphery doctrine.

to Arab or Islamic elements (Abadi 2004, pp. 9-10; Patten 2013, p. 2). Importantly, an element of a vision for a new regional order, which Israel projected within its diplomatic efforts, was the presence, heritage, combined power (in demographic terms, comparable to the Arab one) and overall pro-Western orientation of non-Arab populace of the Middle East, a region which shall be seen not as an Arab-only domain, but a one of a great diversity of peoples (Schonmann 2009, pp. 10, 99-100). This vision also served to reaffirm Israel's *narrative of ancient historic and religious roots with the Middle East* (Alpher 2015, p. xix). Contemporarily, Patten (2013, p. 165) called for Israeli policy-makers to pursue alliances with non-Arab / non-Muslim *indigenous elements of the region*, in line with the assumptions of the original periphery doctrine. However, the state of relations with Turkey and Iran, most profoundly, puts into question the viability of this policy direction, in an uncomfortable way challenging also the narrative that was originally behind it.

The 1960s predisposition of Israel's periphery partners to ally with the Western block was furthermore in line with Israeli pro-Western orientation, which stemmed from the fundamentals of the values on which the Jewish state was founded and which was reinforced in the course of the discussion preceding the decision on the choice of sides in the Cold War reality (Bialer 1990). This observation reinforces the assumption that the West was the central orientation point of Israeli foreign policy, including policy of periphery. Israel's contemporary periphery partners tend to be of the pro-Western orientation or aspiring to be accepted by the West. At the same time, interesting observation was made by Samaan (2018, p. 104) on how contemporarily, periphery doctrine is not necessarily aligned with American interests; in fact, it sometimes runs counter to them. Also, Alpher (2015, p. 120) sees much less connection between Israel's current regional affairs and the great power alliance, due to diminished American role in the region. Similarly, build-up of relations, most profoundly in the economic realm, as a part of a conscious endeavour aimed at diversification of target markets for Israeli exports beyond traditional American and European partners, could be seen as a sign of a weakening attachment to the West (or perception of it as a central point of reference); yet for the time being, bearing in mind the actual trade and aid flows, this seems an exaggeration.

The issue of threat perception, vitally connected to strategic culture, needs to be discussed in the contemporary context. For all the upbeat language (see for example "Full Text: Netanyahu's Address" 2017), the development of

relationships within the periphery is certainly not only caused by the emerging opportunities and demand for cooperation, but also (Samaan 2018, p. 104) by enduring sense of regional isolation at the time of collapsed peace process and turbulence following from the “Arab Spring”. Improving relations with moderate Arab countries can be seen in this context as a positive result of Israeli foreign policy, including the actual success in developing ties with periphery countries.

If a policy discussed (for the purpose of analysis, aggregated under an umbrella term “periphery doctrine”) employs a wide spectrum of measures, of which security cooperation is just a part (of varying importance, depending on the partner), while the actual thrust of relations’ build-up is in the economic and technological spheres and furthermore the aims pursued are equally diversified, also other IR theories and concepts could be potentially applied.

For example, the assumptions behind the contemporary periphery doctrine can be placed within neo-liberal theories of international relations, in particular those which are based on a constantly developing **complex interdependence** theory.<sup>9</sup> These approaches underline that – aside from the fact that the countries are guided by stable, rational preferences and that the international environment has an anarchic nature – phenomena of international cooperation and global, complex interdependencies need to be highlighted; and that what also needs to be included in the realm of analyses is the growing influence of non-governmental actors. Broadly understood contemporary periphery doctrine refers to such an understanding of the modern world: as a one which is thoroughly interconnected by global communication networks, but also by global challenges; and in which foreign policy action (cooperation) in one field can bring direct or indirect results in the other. Interestingly, a reference to interdependence was already made in the case of early Israeli foreign policies. As Samuels (1961) underlined, *Israel-Third World cooperation is based on the moral concept of the inter-dependence of all nations and mutual responsibility for the security and well-being of each and every one of them* (in: Decalo 1998, p. 20).

Last but not the least, the **Copenhagen school** of security research, building on the three main IR research traditions (realist, liberal and constructivist) provides for a wide concept of security, which recognises diversity of factors playing a role in security. There are 5 sectors of security analysed: military, political, societal, economic and environmental. Existential

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<sup>9</sup> See for example: Koehane, Nye 2011.

threats are defined in relation to the security sectors as, respectively: survival; sovereignty; identity; budgets; key natural environment (Buzan, Weaver, De Wilde 1997, pp. 22-23). This approach could serve studying Israeli periphery doctrine from a complex perspective, as a comprehensive foreign policy serving Israeli interests of:

- survival in the field of military security against the Iranian threat and against violent groups identifying themselves with political Islam;
- sovereignty as an expression of political security, in the context of the discrepancy between Israel's good bilateral relations with many countries and overall weak position on multilateral platforms of political cooperation<sup>10</sup>;
- societal security, through build-up of a national identity as a country which was able to overcome developmental challenges and external threats and now has an international role of aiding the others;
- economic security through greater internationalisation of economy and companies' engagements, increased diversification of trade partners as well higher budgetary incomes;
- environmental security against the threats to ecosystem, global warming in particular: through export of technologies taming climate change or its adverse results (innovations in the fields of water management, energy, agriculture), Israel might contribute to scaling down impacts on own environment; and on other security spheres, through prevention of economic downturns, migrant crises or rise in radicalism and violence in partner countries.

The approach outlined above allows for a comprehensive study of Israeli policies towards countries other than the West, Russia and the Arab world. It accepts a broad geographical definition of the periphery doctrine's content, though it asks to qualify – through the matrix of five security dimensions – given relations as less or more relevant to national security. Consequently, geographically close, regional partners would naturally come up as more relevant to solving trans-border regional problems and to answering to common threats of military nature and equally important social, economic or

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<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, Israel's position within multilateral platforms concerned with pragmatic cooperation rather than political issues is much better, which in itself seems to be to an extent a spill-over result of constructive cooperation on bilateral level (including within the periphery doctrine) and on multilateral platforms.

environmental ones. Such an analyses could lead to identification of emerging security complexes – that is, groups of states which have shared fears and, as a consequence, also lasting political, historic, cultural or economic ties (Kostecki 2012, pp. 108, 110). These complexes could possibly also include some Arab states, giving ground to analytically approaching possible spill-over effects of periphery doctrine as regards enhancing cooperation with and establishment of peaceful relations with the Arab world. Relations with more distant partners, such as India or China, would also be appreciated according to the scale of bilateral exchanges and their impact on Israeli standing, in particular in the field of economic security, although impacts on other security sectors should also be carefully examined. Eventually, the use of the Copenhagen school methodology could lead to interesting observations as regards the new geography of regional cooperation dynamics, possibly also furthering insight into the appropriateness of the use of the “periphery doctrine” terminology.

## Conclusion

While at the onset, indeed, there was a hope embedded within the periphery concept that Israel would be able to construct a solid counter-balance to the Arab states through a pact which would be supported by the Western powers willing to undermine the Soviet power in the region, the reality quickly disproved these hopes. Unwillingness of the three key partners (Turkey, Iran and Ethiopia) to publicise close relations with Israel and ambiguous attitude of the US (but also France and Great Britain) to Israel’s regional efforts, followed by subsequent geopolitical changes caused by Ethiopian civil war (1974), Israeli-Egyptian peace process (1977-79) and Islamic revolution in Iran (1979) led to decline of the periphery doctrine. Cooperation with Lebanese Maronite minority in the early 1980s was the last accord of the original policy. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Israeli foreign policy largely concentrated on the consequences of the civil war in Lebanon, negotiations with Jordanians on autonomy for the Palestinians, and then the regional and bilateral peace processes with the neighbours. Due to limited resources, Israeli diplomacy was hardly able to rip the benefits of the fact that the end of Cold War and initial successes of the peace process led to establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel by numerous new countries, opening up broad perspectives of cooperation with them.

The periphery doctrine did “come back” due to the declining hope for a

negotiated peace with the Palestinians, disturbances in the Arab world and re-evaluation of the importance of the UN; thus the causes for the doctrine's re-emergence seem similar as in the case of the original doctrine. However, the new version of the doctrine operates in a different global order, characterised by a multitude of power centres instead of bipolarity, new ways and means of power projection and increased importance of non-governmental actors in international relations. Thus, as this article demonstrated, there is a general lack of agreement even as to the viability of applying the term to the analyses of contemporary Israeli foreign policy, not to say about its geographic scope, interests pursued and a range of instruments.

If we assume that the doctrine remains a useful frame for analyses – in spite of the changes in the global and Israel's international relations since the 1950s, but in recognition of some intellectual continuity behind Israel's motivations for such affairs – it can be observed that the actual contemporary periphery doctrine is not about a search for military alliances with mutual defence clauses; Israel is militarily powerful itself while most of its new close partners are much weaker than potential attackers.<sup>11</sup> The contemporary manifestation of the doctrine is first and foremost concentrated on integrating Israel into the substance of the actual international relations, in search for political backing and development opportunities for the Israeli economy. Towards the Arab neighbours, it plays a deterrent role as it makes Israel stronger along the full spectrum of security sectors (as defined by the Copenhagen school); it also plays a persuasive role through demonstration of developmental benefits (infrastructural projects, technologies transfer, increased economic activity) of cooperation with Israel. By extension, it builds up Israel's international reputation and a role as a country capable of solving problems of sustainable development, as defined by the UN; the very problems which manifest itself particularly strongly within the Middle East and North Africa regions. Thus, it can also be said that the strategy excels in consciously aiming at achieving what was only a marginal aim or a by-product of the original doctrine. Its time-frame is furthermore a long-term one and no immediate results are expected.

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<sup>11</sup> For example, Azerbaijan would not be able to defend Israel in the case of Iranian attack, nor Greece can counterweight Turkish hostility; though according to Alpher (2015, p. 119), in the context of the Islamist nature of the threat, the relations discussed can actually work as containment.

Furthermore, if the term “periphery doctrine” is meant to serve as an analytical tool apt for consideration of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century affairs, it has to be used with caution and awareness of the need for a clearer definition of its geographical scope, aims and instruments. As for the geographical scope, this should duly consider the extent of interests and influences of far-away powers in the Middle Eastern region. As for the aims, analyses in terms of containment of Arab powers needs to be rebalanced by the analyses of the aspirations and actual progress in development of relations with these Arab countries. As for the instruments, a complex reality of contemporary international relations – in which economic inter-dependence, soft power instruments and non-governmental actors gain increasing meaning – needs to be taken into account.

Nevertheless, for such a more informed approach, more discussion is needed on the IR theories’ relevance to the study of contemporary Middle East, including the periphery doctrine. As it was demonstrated, the realist and constructivist paradigms, at least in their most basic application, while providing important explanations and insights, are not necessarily able to fully capture the complexity of Israel’s contemporary relations with periphery partners. Copenhagen school, in turn, seems to present one so far unexplored path towards a more complex analytical approach.

Intuitively, a modern definition of the periphery doctrine, allowing for a joint analyses of a broad variety of bilateral relations as well as relations with regional groupings, could describe the doctrine as a foreign policy approach essentially characterised by a manner with which Israel approaches the task of advancing foreign relations with countries with which it does not have a broad scope of ties, yet which might be relevant for its regional security predicament. This manner is embodied in a way of proceeding which maps potential openings with other countries; which recognises individual security, political, economic, social and other needs of every potential partner; and which is profoundly aware of the ways Israel can respond to those needs, while promoting own, well defined interests with certainty. While this definition embodies what informed foreign policymaking should basically be, when systematically applied to the Israeli case it could inform research on the place of periphery thinking in Israeli foreign policy, for example in relation to other strategic directions (such as relations with the West, and contemporarily – also with Russia); and help with systematisation of the periphery policy into geographically or thematically defined subgroups, thus leading to a better characterisation of specificity of interests and activities towards different regions or categories of Israel’s partners.



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