The Delegitimization Challenge: Creating a Political Firewall

This report analyzes and provides a conceptual response to the erosion in Israel's diplomatic status over the past few years, which reached its peak with the Goldstone report . This attack possesses strategic significance, and may develop into a comprehensive existential threat within a few years.

Executive Summary

1. In the past year Israel has been subjected to harsh global criticism, which reached its peak with the Goldstone report that investigated Operation Cast Lead. The erosion in Israel's diplomatic status following the report has become, in some places, a call undermining its right to exist.

2. **The Reut Institute identifies a direct link between these recent events and the outcome of the Second Lebanon War and Operation Cast Lead.** We believe that recent military and political disappointments reflect a crisis in Israel's national security doctrine. There are two main generators of attacks on Israel's legitimacy. The **Resistance Network** - which operates on the basis of Islamist ideology and includes Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas; and the **Delegitimization Network** - which operates in the international arena in order to negate Israel's right to exist and includes individuals and organizations in the West, which are catalyzed by the radical left.

3. The significance of this **strategic inferiority** is that Israel lacks an effective response to the challenge it faces. It is therefore likely that Israel will continue to experience setbacks in attempts to secure itself as a democratic and Jewish state.

4. **Israel's diplomacy and foreign policy strategy requires urgent action in order to combat the challenge against Israel's legitimacy.** The implications of Israel's current strategic inferiority are manifest in Israel's reduced room to maneuver in deploying military force, increased international involvement in domestic Israeli affairs, and the use of universal jurisdiction against Israeli officials.

5. The Reut Institute contends that the erosion in Israel's status internationally is driven by the coalescence of two parallel process:

- **The Resistance Network** advancing the 'implosion strategy' that aims to precipitate Israel's internal collapse through a policy of 'overstretch': To achieve this, the Resistance Network increases the burden of the 'Occupation,' delegitimizes Israel, and develops an asymmetric use-of-force doctrine in the military arena and towards Israel's home front. These groups take their inspiration from the collapse of the former Soviet Union and apartheid South Africa.

- **The Delegitimization Network** aiming to turn Israel into a pariah state by undermining its moral legitimacy and ultimately aspiring towards eliminating the 'Zionist entity.'

6. The coalescence of these two processes is rooted in, and nourished by, Israel's entrapment in the Palestinian arena:

- The Resistance Network relies on military means to sabotage every move directed at affecting separation between Israel and the Palestinians or securing a two-state solution.

- The Delegitimization Network tarnishes Israel's reputation, ties Israel's hands in defending itself against military assaults, and advances the 'one-state solution.'

7. This attack on Israel's political and economic model is effective, possesses strategic significance, and may develop into a comprehensive existential threat within a few years.

8. A harbinger of such a threat would be the collapse of the two-state solution as an agreed framework for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the coalescence behind a 'one-state solution' as a new alternative framework.

9. There is no evidence that the above-mentioned strategy has been translated into goals, timelines, and milestones. Moreover, there is a wide difference of opinion between and within the two groups. However the Reut Institute does identify **a system of ideas that to a significant extent have evolved, ripened, and gained clarity and internal consistency.**

10. **Simultaneously, the working assumptions underlying Israel's security and foreign policy doctrine have remained more or less unchanged since 1947-48. The only existential threat facing the country is considered to be military, with the security establishment constituting the primary response mechanism. Resources are distributed accordingly.**

11. **The Resistance Network and the Delegitimization Network use the Palestinian issue to promote their aims.** However, the establishment of a Palestinian state and an 'end of conflict' would not end their activity, and they are expected to coalesce around a new 'outstanding' issue.

12. **The Reut Institute contends that the issue of Israel's Arab citizens may become the next 'outstanding' issue on these groups' agenda.** In fact, the Resistance Network has already attempted to harness this community, albeit with very limited success.

13. While in the formal policy spheres Israel's diplomatic position remains relatively stable, the threat undermining its legitimacy originates in a network of NGOs around the world whose role on the global stage is increasingly influential. **Israel lacks a response to this threat on the conceptual level, the organizational level, and in the allotment of resources.**

The foreign policy establishment operates without a 'landlord': there is no clear responsibility designated for managing central foreign policy issues, and thus no clear policy. Furthermore, the foreign policy establishment is structured according to geographic regions, is designed to operate vis-à-vis countries, and lacks the ability to wage a global campaign. **Finally, despite the dramatic change in the threats facing Israel, there has been no significant change in the scope of resources.**

Policy Options

14. **Israel's security doctrine must ensure 'Synchronized Victories'** in a number of arenas simultaneously: the military arena, the political-diplomatic arena, in the home front, and within the media. Because these arenas are interlinked in a number of contexts, they should be considered as a whole.

15. **The above threat may become existential in nature. It is imperative to treat it as such:** Israel needs to harness the intelligence establishment, to develop new

knowledge, to draw upon all the relevant bodies, and to create a relevant strategy.

16. **It takes a network to fight a network** - In order to contend with the Delegitimization Network, Israel must operate according to a network-driven logic:

- On the one hand, Israel must identify and focus its efforts on global hubs of delegitimization (such as London, Toronto, Madrid, and the Bay Area). In this context, Israel should sabotage network catalysts and drive a wedge between its component parts, primarily between soft critics of Israeli policy and delegitimizers of its existence.

- On the other hand, Israel must cultivate its own network on the basis of the diplomacy establishment and a network of 'informal Ambassadors,' comprised of individuals and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Israel must empower these catalysts and harness NGOs in order to act against those NGO that advance delegitimization. In addition, the Histadrut's international department should be invigorated.

17. **Brand Israel** - The perception of Israel as a violent country that violates international law enables delegitimizing forces to portray the country as an apartheid, pariah state. Israel's re-branding can yield strategic implications which will improve its ability to communicate its message and reduce the Delegitimization Network's ability to achieve its goals. In this context, the importance of international aid should be emphasized (in addition, of course, to its clear moral value).

18. **Relationship-based diplomacy with elites and 'influentials'** - An effective barrier against delegitimization is a network of personal relationships. Working within identified hubs, Israel should aspire to maintain thousands of personal relationships with political, financial, cultural, media, and security-related elites and influentials.

19. **Harnessing the Jewish and Israeli Diaspora communities** - There are a significant number of Israelis abroad, such as academics, business people, and students. These communities should be harnessed to Israel's cause before they embark on their international interactions. Additionally, Israel should make a concerted investment in Jewish communities, without taking their commitment for granted.

20. **Responding to the delegitimization challenge requires a reorganization of the foreign policy establishment**. It is clear that the current budget demands dramatic increases on the basis of newly emerging needs (Wishes to Budget). It is also crucial to initiate comprehensive reform within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as well as within leading bodies in the foreign policy establishment in terms of recruitment, management, and the cultivation and deployment of human resources.

The full report will be available in the coming days.