



**Dimensions**  
for Strategic Studies

**Situation Assessment**

# Israeli policies towards the Russian Iranian alliance

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## INTRODUCTION

With the Russian war on Ukraine is close to turning the page of its first year, it left its successive effects on the map of bilateral and international relations between its various parties; and Israel was not far from the complexities arising in the network of these relations, especially given the emergence of what has become called the "unholy alliance" between Russia and Iran, which took many fields, starting with the clear support for the invasion of Ukraine, passing through the breaking of international sanctions on Moscow and the continuation of trade and financial deals, leading to<sup>3</sup> Iranian<sup>3</sup> support<sup>2</sup> for<sup>255</sup> 4Russia 4militarily and<sup>6</sup> logistically<sup>6</sup>, and ending with the reward that Russia promised it by providing Iran with military and intelligence technologies, and perhaps in its nuclear program. All these successive developments between Moscow and Tehran have sparked red lights in Tel Aviv, making it put this alliance and its expected revelations and consequences in mind focusing on what can be done do to curb it, through its own effort on the one hand, and through its relations with the Western world on the other.

Within the framework of these considerations, this report examines the Russian-Iranian alliance by examining its dimensions, its repercussions on Israel, its policies towards it, and the future paths of its position on it.



## FIRST: HISTORICAL PRELUDE

It is no secret that relations between Russia and Iran have occupied a remarkable place in the Israeli follow-up for many years; especially as heavy deposits of centuries of fear and suspicion have been attached to them. Until the 1990s, Iran feared the possibility of Russia invading its territory to reach the Arabian Gulf region. It also feared the arrival of Soviet influence through the Iranian Communist Party "Toda". However, this concern has diminished significantly after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Russia has a common border with Iran, and in light of its ordeal in the field of arms supply during its war with Iraq, Russia has become since 1989 its largest supplier, and it has made an important contribution to its nuclear program. Russia's forced withdrawal of its forces from Afghanistan may have made another important contribution in assuaging Iran's fears about its intentions.

Since 2012, Tel Aviv has monitored further rapprochement in Tehran-Moscow relations, as evidenced by a large number of summit meetings, Russia's political support for Iran's positions, the expansion of their economic relations, and contacts to provide assistance to expand its nuclear program. Israel; however, stopped short of Russia and Iran's military rapprochement in 2015 to support the Syrian regime in the face of the opposition that almost toppled it, without Iran's and Russia's support, as they shared combat tasks. Russia contributed air strikes and advanced military techniques, while Iran took over ground fighting, especially from Hezbollah fighters, the Revolutionary Guards and the Quds Force. Furthermore, the Arab Spring contributed to their sense of danger, which encouraged both countries to expand their cooperation.

The 2015 nuclear deal, which expanded Iran's growing regional influence and earned it legitimacy from the international system, encouraged Russia to expand relations with it, and the lifting of a large part of the sanctions facilitated the expansion of their economic relations, as well as Russia's efforts to expand its influence in the Middle East. Russia clearly does not hide its fear of the strength and presence of the United States in the area.



At the same time, Israel is fully aware of several differences and contradictions between Moscow and Tehran. The first is a super power, and its considerations in the relationship with other countries, its restrictions and priorities are different from what the second one has. Iran may be in conflict with these considerations. Even before the Ukraine war, Iran was concerned about Russia's increasing weight in the Middle East, which led to its taking the lead in Syria, in light of its different view of the situation there. Iran saw a vital interest in saving the Assad regime, while Russia considered it an important interest but not vital. Russia was ready for settlement without Assad, provided that its interests in the port of Tartus and the Hmeimim base were preserved. Moreover, Russia's good relations with Israel were not to Iran's liking, until now.

This review paves the way for talking about the most important indications and dimensions of this Russian-Iranian alliance as follows:

- 1 Russia's desire to acquire combat military equipment prevents it from sinking further into the mud of Ukraine, which enjoys unlimited Western military support. In such a case, Moscow believes that Tehran's support with drones and ballistic missiles benefits it in this aspect.
- 2 Russia believes that its growing alliance with Iran benefits it from not being isolated regionally and internationally, a growing Western desire to encircle Moscow, especially from its neighbors.
- 3 The economic theme is central to this alliance, with Russia finding a party like Iran buying its oil, which is under Western blockade.
- 4 Parallel to that, Iran does not seem to benefit less from this alliance from Russia; especially as it sees its drones to have found a market in a superpower, and not only distributed to its allies in the region, or even to a neighboring country such as Armenia.
- 5 At the same time, Iran may be a beneficiary of this war, because it has contributed to creating cracks that are not easy to repair between Russia and the Western world, which will be advantageous to its nuclear program, breaking sanctions on it, and appearing as a pivotal party in this sharp vertical international polarization.



## SECOND: AN ISRAELI READING IN THE DIMENSIONS OF THE ALLIANCE

Immediately after the outbreak of the Ukraine war, Iran issued supportive and pro-Russian positions, while Israel's position swung, and chose to walk on both axes. Former Prime Minister Naftali Bennett did not defend the Russian invasion, while his Foreign Minister Yair Lapid attacked it. That position was offset by a significant increase in cooperation between Russia and Iran. Israel, on its part, considered that to pose a danger to it; because it included expanding their strategic partnership, through large steps of their military cooperation. It was described as a "full defense partnership", with the flow of weapons and military experts in both directions.

From the Israeli point of view, this trend is reflected in a number of steps; the most important of which are:

### 1. Military Procedures:

Iran has supplied Russia with hundreds of Shahid-136 attack drones, trained in its operations, established a joint production line of drones in Russia with Iranian preparedness, and supplied Russia with surface-to-surface missiles. As the Ukraine war drags on, and Russia's lack of military equipment worsens, Israel expects Russia's dependence on Iran for help to grow. As a result, the compensation Moscow will be willing to give Tehran is worrying for Tel Aviv, making its options for intervening in the closer ties growing between them extremely limited. Deepening their cooperation; therefore, has the potential to improve Tehran's military capabilities and maneuverability, reinforcing threats from Iran and its allies in the region, such as Hezbollah and the Houthis, against Israel and the Gulf states.

At the technological level, Israel has the assumption that Iran may use Ukraine as a training ground to test and improve the performance of its drones, although Russia remains cautious about expanding aid in areas that could harm its strategic interests.



Despite reports of Iranian requests for assistance in the purchase of nuclear materials and the production of nuclear fuel, Russia, at least until now, at Israel's discretion, refrains from providing assistance to Tehran in the development of a military nuclear project. Russia's fear lies in the long-term strategic and security consequences, if Iran possesses nuclear weapons, develops more self-confidence, boldness; which will be damaging to arms control systems, and a nuclear arms race by Saudi Arabia, Arabia, the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt, and Turkey. All that would have destabilizing effects on the Middle East.

Israel is concerned about the consequences of the alliance between Russia and Iran in the latter's benefiting from the sale of its oil, bypassing US sanctions, thwarting resolutions against it at the United Nations. Israel also fears that Russia will help it in the future to obtain intelligence gathering capabilities, launching satellites for espionage and photography using Russian missiles, cooperating in the field of research and development and industrial production, and the improved weapons it produces in cooperation with the Russians, so that Iran will supply its branches in Lebanon, Yemen and Iraq, and making Iranian drones more immune using the Russian navigation satellite network "Glonass", and the Western satellite network GPS used by the Iranians today. The same thing applies to short- and medium-range missiles.

## 2- Political steps:

Israel believes that the establishment of a strategic axis and a growing commitment by Moscow to support Tehran's positions on the international scene, especially on the nuclear agreement; the military field; the modernization of the force, air defense systems and intelligence capabilities, up to the possibility of providing it with advanced S400 air defense systems, SU-35 fighter jets and combat helicopters, are all worrying developments.

Israel does not hide that it is one of the axes of the alliance between Russia and Iran is for the latter to demand Russia to make Israel stop targeting it in Syria.



However, Russia avoids changing its activity towards Israel for two main reasons: first, that the activity against Iranian targets serves its strategic interests to weaken Iran's presence in Syria; and second, there is an implicit understanding between Tel Aviv and Moscow that as long as the freedom of action of the air forces in Syria is maintained, Israel will not provide Ukraine with air defense systems.

It is well known that Russia has seized spoils in Ukraine, and transferred to Iran the Javelin anti-tank missiles provided by the Americans to the Ukrainians; which are known to be the most advanced shoulder missiles of its kind in the world. Such a weapon will be in turn transferred to Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Palestinian resistance; and it will target the tanks of the Israeli army, its armored personnel carriers and armored vehicles. This means that Israel will face a new challenge.

At the same time, the Israelis are monitoring Russian support for the restructuring of the Iranian manned air power; because US and international sanctions have limited its ability to buy over the past five decades. Iran finds itself forced to use old US and Russian fighter jets and helicopters from the 1970s and 1980s, which are hardly a threat or obstacle to Israeli aircraft that may attack from the air. This situation, however, is likely to change dramatically in a few years, after the Russians began training Iranian pilots to fly Sukhoi 35 fighter-bomber jets.

There is an Israeli assumption conveyed by Israeli military expert Ron Ben Yishai in [his article](#) published in the Yedioth Ahronoth newspaper on December 12, 2022 that the Russians will sell the Iranians advanced and long-range air-to-air missiles, air-to-surface missiles of their production, attack helicopters, combat helicopters and advanced air defense systems that make it very difficult to attack Iran from the air.





### 3- Economic Transactions

Russia and Iran are trying to unify their banking systems to reduce the impact of the dollar, and avoid Western sanctions; as they are the two most sanctioned countries in the world. This led to the isolation of Tehran from the "swift" interbank system, which is repeated with Russia after the invasion of Ukraine. For this reason, the two countries took the relevant steps to start linking their banking systems, and worked on completing the agreement to strengthen their trade exchange by ten billion dollars annually, and discussed the development of measures to counter the dominance of the dollar. Moreover, the governors of the central banks of Iran and Russia discussed the use of national currencies, as part of a joint plan to abandon the dollar and the euro, and the development of a national exchange system between their banks. They have pushed forward with an alternative financial messaging system for the swift system, and tried to expand it to include their partners in BRICS and their Asian allies, the Eurasian Economic Union and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.



## THIRD: THE REPERCUSSIONS OF THE COALITION ON ISRAEL

The Israelis are observing what they say are the features of the “unholy” Russian-Iranian alliance that is taking up areas of aid in precise aircrafts and missiles; and perhaps even in nuclear areas; especially in light of the Russian sinking into the Ukrainian mud; which prompted Russia to cooperate with Iran in a way that has been a source of concern for Israel. This is being done through utilizing Iranian suicide drones, that Moscow will improve. These drones may end up in the hands of Hezbollah. Add to that Russia's transfer to Iran of American anti-tank missiles obtained from within the territory of Ukraine; which will be reverse-engineered.

The biggest Israeli concern lies in the event that Russia provides nuclear assistance to Iran. Though it seems unlikely, at least for now, it depends on the outcome of the field war. No Russian with a sound mind wants an Islamic and nuclear state on the southern border of "Mother Russia", as stated in a report [published by](#) Maariv newspaper on November 4, 2022. What shouldn't [be](#) forgotten; however, is an Israeli hypothesis quoted by Israeli military expert Ron Ben Yishai from intelligence forums in Tel Aviv that the current regime in Iran may be overthrown and replaced by a pro-Western regime.

Although this estimate is modest, but Israeli circles have claimed that Putin-desperate because of drowning in the Ukrainian mud, may ask Israel to limit its preemptive strikes in Syria. Although this has not happened so far, and the talk is about the strategy of "battle between wars" against Iranian bases and their envoys and against the precision missile factory in Lebanon, the Kremlin knows well that the Israeli freedom of flight in the airspace of Syria and Lebanon is considered by Israel as a vital interest for its national security. Therefore, Israel will work on preserving that by all possible means and ways. Moreover, if diplomacy fails, Israel may have no choice but to use military means, including direct and destructive confrontation with Russian forces on Syrian soil, claiming that Putin cannot now, and in the foreseeable future, tolerate a violent military conflict, in addition to the conflict in which he is engaged with Ukraine. In such a conflict, it is clear that he will lose militarily and economically.



At the same time, with all the flaws and dangers facing Israel inherent in the Russian-Iranian alliance, its forums are monitoring, and unusually, what they consider to be the benefits and advantages that may accrue to them from this alliance; the most important of which are:

- 1 The awakening of most Western countries and their realisation that Iran poses a real, tangible and dangerous threat to world peace, and not only to the stability of Middle Eastern countries, and an existential threat to Israel. This is the case; and Iran's military and industrial capabilities are still traditional. It is easy for the west to imagine the situation when Iran acquires nuclear power.
- 2 The simultaneity of Iran's assistance to Russia in its war against Ukraine and Iran's suppression of internal protests have helped ease the rush of the Biden administration and the European Union to sign a nuclear deal.
- 3 For Israel, these developments mean that Iran will continue to bear the burden of sanctions; and it may be subject to additional ones. Such acts will deprive Iran of many free resources to invest in its nuclear project and other military activities. The impact of all of this will be clear on the economic situation inside Iran, which in itself is a danger to the regime as a whole.

Israel's handling of these consequences lies in intensifying contacts with the US administration and the European Union to spread the image of Iran as a threat to regional and international security. It also lies in widening the existing cracks between Tehran and major capitals through a major Israeli diplomatic effort. At the same time, Israel can intensify its strikes on Iranian targets in Syria, namely, weapons convoys destined for Hezbollah, in addition to increasing its attacks in the Iranian depth with assassinations of nuclear scientists and Revolutionary Guards officers. Israel can also be confident that there will be no international condemnation for its actions.



## FOURTH: ISRAELI POLICIES TOWARDS THE ALLIANCE

Israeli forums claim that Tehran, in its alliance with Russia, has positioned itself within the "evil camp" against its arch-enemy the United States, BECAUSE their conflict is expanding today in the global system on the Ukrainian front. In this situation Israel and the United States stand on the same side of the fence towards Iran; and there is an opportunity to establish a bilateral dialogue on this issue, on the basis of a strategic partnership to achieve the declared goal that it will never possess nuclear weapons.

Knowing that the Ukraine war has the highest priority for the United States and Europe, and with Iran being considered a threat to their security and the world order; taking a position towards these issues is a test of belonging to the right camp. Israel's position in this equation is seen as neutral; although they expected it to be more committed to their positions, to provide Ukraine with defensive weapons against Iranian drones and missiles, to increase security assistance to European countries, and to strengthen their defense, and to allow them to transfer defensive weapons to Ukraine. This has not happened so far; which raised unmistakable Ukrainian-Israeli tension and reached the point of Kiev's vote in favor of a resolution at the United Nations in favor of the Palestinians in defiance of Tel Aviv, which led the Israeli Foreign [Ministry](#) to summon the Ukrainian ambassador to it Yevgen Kronichuk to reprimand him. This was revealed by the political correspondent of the newspaper Makor Rishon Hodia Hazony on November 15, 2022.

While the Israeli security and military circles are following the growth of what they describe as the "Iran-Russia axis", which began to take wider ranges, they considered that it requires them to take a number of steps required to prevent the threat to their regional and international interests.

The most important of these steps, as mentioned by [General](#) Amos Yadlin, former head of the Israeli Military Intelligence Service - Aman, in an article published by Channel 12 on December 15, 2022: - changing its position on the Ukraine war, - strengthening relations with the United States as the most important ally, and sometimes the only one; as relations with the US constitute the pillars of its national security, and - increasing intelligence work and operational and strategic cooperation necessary for Israel.



Standing by Ukraine against the Russian attack enjoys broad bipartisan support in the United States, [said](#) Karen Donfried, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Asian Affairs, at a press conference on November 9, 2022. At the same time, Israel does not hide its incitement to the countries of the region, especially the Gulf ones, by claiming that the strengthening of military cooperation between Tehran and Moscow, through drones and military technologies, confirms that the former threatens its Arab neighbors in the Gulf next to Israel, which may motivate them to adopt a counter-policy, and pressure Russia to reduce its aid to Iran, and seek to limit its influence in the region, claiming that it is a threat to regional security.

In this case, Israel finds itself called upon to maintain the momentum of the relationship with the countries normalized relations with it, bring more of them, and take advantage of the window of opportunity opened by the growing discontent in the United States and Europe towards Iran; because of its assistance to the Russian war effort abroad, and the ongoing suppression of internal protests.

Along with all that, Israel should maintain relations with Russia at the political and security levels, take a cautious approach to Ukrainian requests, and avoid crossing Russia's red lines, with a focus on supplying air defense systems. This; however, could undermine the system of relations with Moscow and push it to retaliate on its part; which would harm Israel's freedom to act against Iranian targets in Syria and the region.



## FIFTH: ISRAELI PATHS AND ALTERNATIVES FROM THE ALLIANCE

Israeli data indicate that Russia and Iran are models of a common relationship; because after Biden's visit to Israel and Saudi Arabia, Putin is making an effort to show that he is also able to establish alliances with Iran. Israel believes that he has always been busy with himself, but from the moment he started his war against Ukraine, the Israeli reality has become more complicated.

Recently, Putin has begun to imagine a relationship with the Iranian axis again, although his alliance with the Iranians raises an Israeli question: will it be a one-time, or a worrying new trend, given that the efforts to bring them closer together are on several levels at the same time, without having a definitive specific answer.

In the strategic realm, the summit took place in Tehran, just days after Biden's visit to Israel and his summit in Saudi Arabia. That Tehran summit provided an opportunity for Putin to demonstrate that despite the West's efforts to turn Russia into a pariah on a personal level, he succeeded in strengthening cooperation with key countries, including Turkey, a NATO member; though some aspects of disagreement and divergence on more than one issue have continued.

At the same time, Israel shows that it is affected by the Russian-Iranian alliance in two batches: the first is through Moscow's "bite" without severing relations with it, by allowing Iran to continue the flow of weapons to Lebanon through Syria, although the Russians do not prevent Israeli aircraft from flying over Damascus and bombing its infrastructure, including airports and ports; and the second is through the Russians taking advantage of the alliance with the Iranians, including providing themselves with weapons, and Russia has several hundred drones, including those capable of attack.



The future Israeli course of this alliance calls for monitoring the visit of Russian delegations to Iran during the past months to test the drones, with the claim that Iran is training Russian teams to operate them, which will create a very complex reality for Tel Aviv, which was discussed at length by military expert Nitzan Sadan in an article published by the newspaper "Calcalist" on September 30, 2022. Such a situation will create challenges for Israel at the strategic and security levels; especially that the consolidation of that alliance may lead to the expansion of their relations, including security and military, the conclusion of new arms deals, cooperation in the field of intelligence and the Internet, and support of Iran in the nuclear negotiations, which are currently stalled. This may be a reality that will be difficult to change in the coming years.

In talking about Tel Aviv's future path towards strengthening the Moscow-Tehran alliance, it may reach the point of depriving the eyes of its leaders of sleep. Iran and Russia's ambitions will help them overcome the damage of sanctions against them; and they may want to add more players to them, because they are looking for support both in terms of symbolic vision and at the practical level. They look forward to bypassing economic punishment, and to cooperating effectively in the fields of oil and gas, and certainly in the military field. This will be a source worry and anxiety for Israeli leaders, because what they describe as the "alliance of outcasts" is dangerous.

A new Israeli path of a forecasting nature regarding the possible outcome of the Russian-Iranian alliance surfacing on the eve of the formation of the new right-wing government in Tel Aviv is of great importance for many considerations:

- 1 Netanyahu has a very close relationship with Putin, and in previous years he was considered the most frequent visitor to Moscow.
- 2 Growing talk of tension between Netanyahu and Biden is beginning to reverberate over the positions of Israeli ministers on the Palestinian issue.
- 3 Israel does not seem to be about to change its position on supplying Ukraine with qualitative weapons in response to Western demands, as it is careful not to strain relations with Moscow.
- 4 The same government has borderline positions on Iran's nuclear program, which are not in line with Washington's vision, which may lead it to escalate the situation against Tehran in a way that may confuse the cards of the entire region, and perhaps the whole world.

# Epilogue

This paper concludes its reading of the Israeli vision of the Iranian-Russian alliance with a number of extracts and conclusions, perhaps the most important of which are:

- 1 An Israeli anticipation of the escalation and growth of the alliance between Moscow and Tehran in the interest of both sides, which at the same time increases Israel's aspiration to try to restrain it, or limit its damage to its immediate and strategic security.
- 2 Perhaps Netanyahu's arrival in power and his assumption of the reins of power push him, through his close relationship with Putin, to restrict this alliance, if not put an end to it. This does not seem to be in the horizon, in light of the urgent Russian need for Iranian drones, at a time when Russia is witnessing a retreat on the ground in front of Ukrainian forces backed by the West with all equipment.
- 3 The Israeli position on the Iranian-Russian alliance may take on field dimensions if the confrontation between Tel Aviv and Tehran moves to another arena that is unfamiliar to them, namely Kiev, in light of the Western aspiration of Israel to work to reduce the effectiveness of Iranian drones on Ukrainian territory. This might; however, strain the relationship between Netanyahu and Putin; which is not supported by any of the facts as of this writing.

At the same time, the Israeli recommendations in this context focus on the following aspects:

- 1 Not allowing Iran to benefit from Russia in the framework of its alliance with it, which may break what Israel considers the existing balance in the region; especially Iran's possession of qualitative weapons or assistance in its nuclear program.
- 2 Intensifying the targeting of Iran's factories that produce suicide drones, whether in continuation of what Israel calls the "battle between wars," which is the elimination of Iran's unconventional military capabilities, or in fulfillment of a Western American desire to deprive Russia of these drones.
- 3 Exploiting the close relationship between Netanyahu and Putin to "trim the nails" of Iran, which benefits from its alliance with Russia, and to employ Putin's need for a less Western-biased Israeli position, which could make Putin more responsive to Israel's positions and policies on Iran.





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