Ludovika University of Public Service
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THESES

Zsolt CSEPREGI
**Israel's Role in the Changing Global and Regional Cooperation
Frameworks**

Ph.D. dissertation
AUTHOR'S SUMMARY

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The Research Topic and its Relevance

Israel, due to its central location and regional military power status, is a key factor in the Middle Eastern regional system. The examination of Israeli foreign and security policy is particularly relevant because the Jewish state follows a highly assertive military and national security strategy to maintain deterrence. The Jewish state, considering its active foreign and security policy behaviour, can make a significant contribution to the field of military sciences. The significance of studying Israel is further enhanced by the fact that among the region's geopolitical actors, it is the only regional military power that does not possess the possibility of achieving regional hegemony, unlike Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt. Consequently, this results in a distinctive and unique foreign policy strategy. It is also necessary to emphasize that according to international experts, based on numerous indirect sources, it can be stated that Israel possesses nuclear arms. Israel also takes on an increasing role in multiple regional cooperation frameworks, particularly with conservative Sunni Arab states, under the patronage of the United States. As a result, as Israel's foreign policy orientation becomes increasingly diverse and its partnerships become deeper (including with Hungary), its military and national security strategy, particularly its willingness to join partnership and potentially even alliances, raises important scientific questions, including the field of military sciences.

For Israel, there is currently no hostile state or coalition of states and non-state actors that could directly threaten its existence. This does not mean that serious military threats are completely absent. There are challenges primarily linked to Iran and its regional network, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as Sunni jihadist forces, particularly the Islamic State. The Jewish state conducts its assertive actions to preserve relative peace and maintain the balance of power and threats. In practical terms, Israel conducts continuous, active military and national security activities using the framework of the so-called "campaign between wars." The asymmetric threats from the north, namely from Lebanon, Syria, and to a lesser extent Iraq, and from the southern direction of Gaza, are complemented by the challenge posed by the Iranian nuclear program, which Israel wants to prevent using the covert and overt means at its disposal. Israel maximally counterbalances Iran's advancement with military and national security tools, following its own security interests. This also has regional and global implications, since Israel is part of an informal coalition with the United States and Gulf states that seek to prevent Iran from becoming a regional hegemon.

Israel's role must be evaluated within the appropriate context, as although it possesses significant military and national security capabilities, it is not a traditional regional power. The Jewish state is capable of extensively destroying enemy forces near its borders, primarily relying on its air force, artillery, special operations capabilities, and missile arsenal. However, it is less capable of large territorial conquests and maintaining distant deployment of its troops, considering its relatively small population and lack of strategic depth. The Jewish state's behaviour is further determined by its heavily militarized society and highly sensitive security perception, which limit its freedom of action. In light of this, Israel can only be one element of a coalition promoting Middle Eastern regional balance, it can provide indirect military support and can help its regional and global partners with precision strikes and intelligence sharing and operations. An important question is whether Israel would intervene on the side of the Gulf states in case of potential Iranian aggression? It can be stated that the threat of Israeli intervention itself represents a serious passive deterrent factor in the Middle Eastern system, creating "conventional ambiguity," which greatly contributes to the creation of the Middle Eastern balance of threat examined in the research. The topic goes beyond a balance of threat and power, and the main question is whether a regional security architecture, a lasting cooperation that could guarantee the region's security, can emerge or is emerging? According to my assumption, the answer to these questions is positive, and Israel taking a role in effective and sustainable security cooperation in the Middle East is inevitable due to its special characteristics.

The regional armed conflict that began as a result of the October 7, 2023, terrorist attack, however, changed the assumptions regarding Israeli potential regional involvement. The intensive military operations provide important case studies regarding the application possibilities of Israeli armed capabilities, the level of strikes delivered against the enemy, and the durability of existing cooperations. It is important for me to emphasize that the intensive armed conflict lasting more than a year and a half following October 2023 did not make the dissertation topic obsolete; on the contrary, it gained further relevance, and a significant part of the theoretical propositions could receive practical validation, at least in their elements. The key, however, is that by the time of the dissertation's completion, all of Israel's peace treaties withstood the test of war, and although disruptions and partial setbacks occurred in certain cooperations, the general trend did not break, at most it appears to be paused. I will present the war's impact on regional power relations and within this, on Israeli cooperation logic, however, the detailed processing of the course of the fighting

itself does not constitute the subject of this dissertation, only insofar as it is relevant from the perspective of regional relations.

Considering the above factors, overall, the development of Israeli foreign and security policy is an important question for Hungary and Europe, which are deeply interested in Middle Eastern stability. The analysis, evaluation, and forecasting of Israeli and, parallel to that, Middle Eastern relations is a key factor in examining threats coming from Hungary's southern strategic direction, to which the research aims to contribute as outlined below. Israel's growing military and technological capabilities, as well as the Abraham Accords concluded in 2020, which opened the way for new Middle Eastern cooperation systems, contribute to the contemporary relevance of this doctoral research. Finally, the intensive military conflict that erupted in 2023 between Israel and the Iranian-led "resistance front" proved that Israel still possesses extraordinary military capabilities to this day and does not hesitate to deploy them against its enemies, which on one hand can serve stability as a counterbalancing factor and can be a prominent pillar of the security architecture, but also contains serious potential for escalation.

The Scientific Problem

Overall, the doctoral research aims to examine whether the State of Israel, which pursues an assertive military and national security strategy, is capable of and willing to effectively contribute to the stability of the Middle Eastern region through cooperation and serve as one of the main pillars of a regional security architecture. Beyond this, I divide the research problem into three units, which are as follows (1) the factors determining Israel's role that are in conflict with each other based on initial examination, since it is simultaneously a military power, yet continuously refers to existential threats, furthermore, it prioritizes offensive operations, while also having constant aspirations for cooperation; (2) the description of the complex Middle Eastern power struggle; (3) and overall, connecting the two research problems, how the Jewish state fits into Middle Eastern power dynamics as a unique military power.

Regarding the first problem, Israel's dual nature represents the analytical task, since we can simultaneously speak of one of the Middle East's military powers, which nevertheless cannot become a regional hegemon, unlike the other regional powers that may be less potent in the present era. The Jewish state built up its military and national security capabilities in response to its extraordinary vulnerability, in order to cope with challenges reaching the level of existential threats and thereby became a military power. How can this

complex military power, which appears contradictory on the surface and is one of the most important shapers of regional dynamics, be described and analysed? An important element of the research problem is the Jewish state's militarized social and political system, which thus requires specific analytical tools. The extremely sensitive security perception resulting from historical and geopolitical reasons is in close interaction with the intertwining of political, military, and national security leadership and the extensively informal structures characterising the country. As a result of these factors, Israeli decision-making regarding security issues and the application of military procedures raises a specific analytical and evaluation problem, to which the research aims to provide an answer.

The second research problem provides the broader framework for the dissertation's main question, since without presenting the Middle East's regional relations and their integration into the global system, it is not possible to analyse and evaluate the region's processes, including Israel's activities. Even during the time of this research, processes acting in opposite directions are taking place in the region; on one hand, a struggle between regional powers, fought largely through proxies and for zones of influence, while in parallel, erosion is ongoing due to sub-state tensions. However, alongside the power struggle and asymmetric threats, forward-looking regional cooperations does exist in the areas of social relations, economic development, green and technological revolution, and security, although a stable regional security architecture is missing.

Finally, the regional relations, Israeli capabilities, and the principles of their application determine the main research problem, namely that Israel is simultaneously an assertive military power, yet it is also interested in broadening and deepening regional cooperation. The Jewish state, while always shaping its responses depending on the specific conflict, raises the problem of whether a general "pattern" regarding the Israeli regional role can be determined. Overall, how does Israeli military and national security activity affect Middle Eastern regional relations and through them the neighbouring regions, as well as the global balance of power? The research examines this impact particularly in terms of the influence exerted on various existing and emerging cooperation systems, returning to the initial main research problem formulation.

Research Objectives

The research has a total of four objectives, one main and three closely interrelated sub-objectives during the examination of the main research problem and three sub-problems described above. The primary and comprehensive objective of the dissertation work is to analyse what role can Israel play in regional cooperation systems and what security architecture can it establish. I break down the main objective into the following three sub-objectives for the purpose of analysis:

Within this main objective, the research aims to determine Israel's fundamental characteristics as a military power, including the main factors of its military strategy, its applied military and national security procedures and their relationship to each other.

Following this, the research aims to present the Middle Eastern power blocs, the relationship between individual blocs, and attempts to create a regional security architecture.

Combining the above two factors, the research aims to examine Israel's relations with regional and global actors and derive from this the systemic impact of Israeli foreign and security policy on Middle Eastern power dynamics.

Hypotheses

Following the above research structure, I have established a total of four hypotheses according to the above research problems and objectives.

Hypothesis 1: The first hypothesis of the research is that **Israel, precisely because of its assertive foreign and security policy, has become a valuable partner in cooperations as a military power incapable of regional hegemony, while perceiving constant existential threats, and positions itself, and is positioned by its partners, as one of the main pillars of the emerging regional security architecture.**

By breaking down the elements of the research's first hypothesis, it aims to prove three additional hypotheses.

Hypothesis 2: Regarding the regional framework, I assume that **in Middle Eastern power dynamics we can identify an emerging regional security architecture that acts as a stabilizing factor in the region, and of which Israel is a defining member.**

Hypothesis 3: Israeli foreign and security policy contributes to avoiding open war between regional powers in the Middle East through a deterrence system and, by creating a deterrent counterweight in power dynamics, provides space for cooperation.

Israel extensively applies limited military and national security operations precisely in order to avoid the necessity of war-level operations and the narrowing of its freedom of action (this is called the "campaign between wars" in Israeli terminology). At the same time, it also represents a passive deterrent force through the concept of "war for survival." This threatens its enemies that in case of endangering its fundamental security, Israel would make its enemies pay an unbearable price through the deployment of its full conventional and presumed nuclear military capabilities.

Hypothesis 4: In response to the problem of participation in cooperation systems, the fourth hypothesis is that **Israel, contrary to its preferences, is forced by its characteristics and geopolitical situation into increasingly stronger but also flexibility-ensuring participation in external allied cooperation systems**. While proving the hypothesis, the specific Israeli security perception will be presented, including its fundamental distrust toward external actors, and the prominent role of self-help. This also provides an answer to why the Jewish state is reluctant about increasing dependence on others, especially regarding formal military alliances. However, through the presentation of contemporary examples, the research highlights why Israel's participation is strengthening in regional and global cooperation maintaining the balance of power and threat, going against the fundamental features of Israeli foreign and security policy thinking, even if these do not reach the level of formal military alliances, but are sufficient for creating a regional security architecture and provide the desired flexibility not only for Israel, but for all participating states.

Research Questions

For the processing of the research problem, the realization of the research objectives, and the verification of the hypotheses, I examine one main and three sub-questions. The main question, connected to the main research problem, is what role Israel can play in emerging regional cooperation and whether it can be a pillar of regional security architecture. Beyond this, I examine the original research question divided into three larger units, namely, what power dynamics characterize the Middle East, according to what comprehensive guidelines do Israeli leaders apply their state's military and national security capabilities, and overall, what impact does Israeli foreign and security policy have on the power relations of its region?

The second research question reflects the broader framework of the dissertation's main question. I analyse the description of the Middle East's regional relations and their

integration into the global system through the operation of balance of power balance and threat. The examination of this sub-point is particularly timely, considering that parallel to the assertive Israeli military and national security activities, constructive cooperation with the Arab states which signed the Abraham Accords became increasingly stronger in 2020. In the period preceding the writing of the dissertation, until autumn 2023, the question of Israeli-Saudi normalization negotiated through the mediation of the United States increased the topic's relevance. Parallel to this, the Israel-Hamas war that broke out on October 7, 2023, and the subsequent regional conflict, proves that constantly present armed conflicts continuously interrupt cooperation efforts and the challenges facing the creation of a new, stable security architecture remain significant. On the other hand, the war highlighted the importance of cooperation between the individual actors and the blocs they form, as well as the dangers of revealed deficiencies. The examination of complex Middle Eastern relations can therefore be considered an important and rapidly transforming sub-problem from the research perspective, however, the processes can be analysed with the applied security theories in terms of main trends and fault lines, cooperation possibilities.

Regarding the third question, I present Israel's military and national security activities, the capabilities that serve as their foundation and the possibilities of their application, as well as their equally important limitations. Among capabilities, we van recognise material capacities, such as available weapon systems and manpower, but also non-material elements, such as strategy, which determine the application of tools. The decisive majority of capabilities naturally exert their effect as a result of these two factors, so the research simultaneously examines the military and national security tools available to Israel and the military procedures that enable or limit their application. The latter are closely related to the principles of Israeli foreign and security policy decision-making and military strategy, which, however, cannot be evaluated without considering the militarized Israeli social and political system and the prevailing security perception.

Finally, the fourth sub-question is whether, amid regional relations, as a result of Israeli capabilities and the principles of their application, through its activities maintaining power and threat balance and participation in constructive cooperation, does Israel contribute to strengthening regional stability? Naturally, it is possible that the answer is not a simple yes or no. In certain cases and issues, the Jewish state contributes to stability, while in other areas it has significant escalatory potential. All Middle Eastern and external partners must prepare for this eventuality, and it is advisable to minimize threats and maximize possible advantages.

Research Methodology and Applied Theories

According to the general theory used during the research, I processed the answers to the described research problems with theories belonging to the realist school of security theories. For describing the Middle East's power relations system, I applied the theories of balance of power, the balance of threat and the security dilemma. The theoretical concept of security dilemma to be used in examining dynamics between regional actors was introduced in John H. Herz's work entitled "Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma." It is particularly relevant in situations like the sharp struggle between Israel and Iran, in which the military strength increase of one party immediately appears as a security threat from the other party's perspective. I analysed the "rules" of balance of power theory following the work of Morton Kaplan and Kenneth Waltz. In Kaplan's work, he states that a state would rather fight than give up an opportunity to increase its capacities. Waltz's insight that during coalition formation, states preferably join the weaker side for the purpose of power balancing, explains Israel's role in regional cooperation systems and underlines its significance. The Jewish state's "weakness" is relative and should be interpreted in the dissertation as a regional military power that does not possess hegemonic potential.

I apply the theory of balance of threat following Stephen M. Walt's theoretical framework, according to which states do not react to the extent of other countries' power alone, but to the threat potential that their power represents when paired with their (probable) intentions. For understanding the Israeli military and national security strategy, I applied the offensive realism approach developed by John J. Mearsheimer. Through describing the systemic impact of Israeli military actions, I examined how the parties strive to achieve relative superiority of power compared to their opponents in order to increase their own security. I interpreted security cooperation within the framework of alliance theories, which point to both the factors enabling cooperation and those limiting them, which I examined in the context of the Middle Eastern conditions. In Glen H. Snyder's approach, the theory can be used to analyse differences between formal alliances and cooperations that does not reach this intensity within the realist approach, particularly regarding the issue of preserving decision-making freedom.

Finally, for the scientific examination and categorization of the specific Israeli security perception, I applied Arnold Wolfers' approach regarding the dual, objective and subjective nature of security. According to Wolfers, the content understood under the

concept of national security and its desired level differs for individual states, which is explained by the different characteristics of states. In my opinion, the theoretical framework explains how the specific geopolitical and Jewish historical memory-derived causes (i.e., the totality of objective and subjective factors) could lead to the particularly sensitive Israeli security perception, the direct consequence of which is the defensively-aimed, yet extremely assertive and seemingly offensive Israeli military and national security conduct.

Regarding the research methodology, it is important to emphasize that during the dissertation, in analysing Israeli regional power status and Middle Eastern power relations, I place emphasis on the military aspect of power from the quartet of diplomacy, information, military, and economy, according to NATO's DIME definition (an acronym formed from the English names of power tools: Diplomatic, Information, Military, Economic). Starting from the dissertation's hypotheses, Israel's military power capabilities form the basis of its role in regional cooperation systems, so I focus on this question. This does not mean that the Jewish state's diplomatic, informational, and economic power are not significant, however, I discuss these as functions of its military power. Its economic power provides the foundation for maintaining the military force of a state that is highly militarized relative to the country's small size, with its mobilization capability and sophisticated defence industry. Its information capacity is able to direct the destructive force available to the military, predict attacks, and generally navigate complex Middle Eastern relations. The diplomatic tool appears, among other things, in regional normalization and the special strategic partnership maintained with the United States. However, I examine and analyse these factors overall through the lens of military tools, since in my interpretation, this is the main driving force of Israeli power and Israel's regional power role in its region and beyond.

Structure of the Dissertation

The structure of the dissertation and the sequence of its chapters fit the interconnected logic of research objectives, questions, and hypotheses. I used part of my previously published publications on the topic during the preparation of the dissertation, which I indicated in separate footnotes in every case. Following the introduction, I present the nature of power balance and dynamics in the Middle East. In the third chapter of the dissertation, I focus on Israel and present the country's Jewish, democratic, and militaristic

character, the transformation of Israel's security environment, and the development of Israeli military strategy, from which we can draw conclusions about its regional policy. In the fourth chapter, I present the policies of Middle Eastern regional actors and their relationships with Israel. In the fifth chapter, I examine the interests and strategies of the most important external great powers, as well as the relations these global actors have developed with Israel. Finally, with the joint consideration of all previously examined factors and theoretical tools, I present Israel's regional policy, which answers the dissertation's main research question.

Research Limitations

Given that the dissertation seeks to review the power structure of an entire region and analyse the role of one state within it, it necessarily employs simplifications. When describing a complex system, every simplification by definition causes information loss and will not fully reflect the functioning of the complex system's elements. The dissertation therefore makes a compromise in describing the most important characteristics of individual actors and in their use as factors of the analysis. Israel, as the examined subject of the dissertation, is discussed by the text in the greatest possible detail; however, similar detail is not possible for every state and non-state actor. In light of this, I have reduced the intentions of the other regional actors, whether they are internal states or external great powers, to their most determining motivations.

I applied the theories of balance of power, threat and deterrence, and fundamentally the theoretical frameworks of the realist school during the examination of Middle Eastern processes. I avoided the application of the other two major theoretical families, the liberal and constructivist (critical) theories. I avoided liberal theories due to the conflictual nature of the Middle Eastern region, its zero-sum power dynamics, and the problem of a "region without regionalism." The question of international cooperation is important in the Middle East; however, according to my argument, this is also fundamentally realized for reasons and in ways dictated by realist theories. Constructivist theories, particularly the Copenhagen School's theory of sectoral and regional security complexes, could have provided an important alternative interpretive framework for the present investigation. Numerous excellent analyses have been produced that demonstrate the applicability of these theories in the analysis of Middle Eastern power relations. In the dissertation, I utilized the knowledge and conclusions generated through the application of constructivist theories. However, in the dissertation's argumentation, the proving of the hypotheses, and the description of the region's power

dynamics, I apply the theories of the realist foreign policy school, considering that the Israeli balancing role which I intended to prove can best be described in this way.

The period from 2020 to 2025 has also proven that dramatic turns can occur extremely rapidly amid the turbulent conditions of the Middle Eastern region. From the perspective of the dissertation work, this means that following the initial topic designation, numerous events unfolded, to name the most important ones, the Abraham Accords were concluded, the October 7, 2023, terrorist attack occurred, the Gaza offensive took place, the autumn 2024 campaign between Hezbollah and Israel unfolded, direct military operations between Iran and Israel occurred, and then the fall of the Syrian Assad regime happened. All this means that the analysis examined a "moving target," in which it was necessary to designate an analytical endpoint, March 1, 2025, in order for the dissertation work to be concluded. Nevertheless, I assume and believe I have proven during the demonstration that in the main trends, both Israel and the other state actors and the Middle Eastern power order can be understood, analysed, and evaluated, even if I cannot engage in predicting specific events. Regardless, in the third chapter of the dissertation, I provide a brief outlook on the June 2025 Israeli-Iranian war that occurred following the conclusion of the thesis.

Continuing the previous line of thought, it is ultimately necessary to emphasize that the dissertation, according to its topic designation, examines Israel's role in regional security cooperation systems—based on its position in the Middle Eastern power system—and not directly the foreign policy decision-making of Israel or other Middle Eastern states. The dynamics presented in the dissertation play a fundamental role in real-world decisions; however, the precise prediction of specific concrete decisions cannot be the dissertation's objective. It presents trends, but it is not capable of predicting whether there will be war in the Middle East between Iran and Israel or exactly how Israel will support the Gulf states balancing against Iran in the future. The contents of the dissertation provide an interpretive framework and tools for practical analysis, with the conviction that despite the simplifications outlined above, it is possible not only to establish theories provable with knowledge of the past and present, but also to make them applicable in the future.

Summary Table – Research Objectives, Research Questions, Hypotheses

	Research Objective	Hypotheses	Research Questions
I	To analyse what role Israel can play in regional cooperation systems and what security architecture it can establish.	Israel, precisely because of its assertive foreign and security policy, is incapable of regional hegemony but has become a valuable cooperative partner as a regional military power perceiving constant existential threat, and positions itself, and is positioned by its partners, as one of the main pillars of the emerging regional security architecture.	What role Israel can play in emerging regional cooperation and whether it can be a pillar of regional security architecture?
II	To determine Israel's fundamental characteristics as a regional military power, including the main factors of military strategy and military and national security procedures and their relationship to each other.	In Middle Eastern power dynamics, we can identify an emerging regional security architecture that acts as a stabilizing factor in the region and of which Israel is a defining member.	What power dynamics characterize the Middle East?
III	To present the Middle Eastern power blocs, the relationship system between individual blocs, and attempts aimed at creating a regional security architecture.	Israeli foreign and security policy contributes to avoiding open war between regional powers in the Middle East through its deterrent instrument system and, by forming a deterrent leverage in power dynamics, provides space for cooperations.	According to what guidelines do Israeli leaders apply the country's military and national security capabilities.

IV	To examine Israel's relations with regional and global actors and derive from this the systemic effect of Israeli foreign and security policy on Middle Eastern power dynamics.	Israel, contrary to its preferences, is compelled by its endowments and geopolitical situation to increasingly stronger but also flexibility-ensuring participation in external alliance cooperation systems.	What effect does the Israeli foreign and security policy have on the power structure of its region.

Summary of the Theses

In the complex geopolitical environment of the Middle East, Israel occupies a unique position that simultaneously reflects the character of a regional military power and the state of continuous existential threat. This duality fundamentally determines the system of the country's regional relationships and the possibilities of its contribution to regional stability. My doctoral research aimed at a deeper understanding of this paradox, with particular regard to whether Israel – despite the assertive nature of its military and national security strategy – is capable of and willing to undertake a constructive role in shaping the region's security architecture. Below I present in detail the answers to my research objectives, which help reveal the main objective, namely *1. What role Israel can play in regional cooperation systems and what security architecture it can establish.* I defined the main research objective by breaking it down into three constituent elements.

2. The first sub-objective of the research was to present the Middle Eastern power blocs, the relationship system between individual blocs, and attempts aimed at creating a regional security architecture.

Regarding the Middle Eastern power structure, I revealed during the dissertation that the dynamics are determined by the confrontation between, on one side, the revisionist group formed by the Iranian "resistance front," and on the other side, the status quo group based on the limited cooperation of countries supported by the United States, including Israel. Additionally, Turkey, as a NATO member but with existing revisionist intentions, forms a third, pseudo-bloc in an intermediate position. Alongside state actors, the influence of non-state actors is significant, including terrorist organizations, which also embody the dangers of state structure disintegration. I emphasized that the revisionist and status quo labels can only be applied within appropriate frameworks; fundamentally, every state seeks to maximize its own security (balancing between regime security and military security considerations) while minimizing its costs.

I found that the conflict is not between rigid blocs, but rather that beyond fundamental geopolitical conflicts, continuous balancing and at least periodic reconciliations also occur, thus it is a dynamic system. External powers mainly play an indirect role; no external power strives for direct dominance, however, Iran is supported by the Russian Federation and China, while Israel is supported by the United States. At the same time, it is visible that a struggle is ongoing for the partnership of Sunni Arab states, which also follow a benefit-maximizing and cost-minimizing strategy in their relations with external partners. The power dynamics justify the applicability of the realist approach to analysing individual actors. Regarding the

intentions of the United States, I determined that the primary consideration is minimizing its costs through creating a security architecture, without abandoning the assertion of its regional and global interests.

3. I formulated Israel's fundamental characteristics as a regional military power, including the main factors of military strategy and military and national security procedures and their relationship to each other.

In the third chapter presenting Israel in detail, I described the main principles of Israeli military strategy and foreign and security policy, as well as the main factors of the applied military and national security procedures, along the lines of the country's triple character as Jewish, democratic, and militaristic. I determined that it is coded into the country's structure that confronting existential threats represents the main strategic objective. Additionally, Israel, similarly to other Middle Eastern states, follows a benefit-maximizing and cost-minimizing policy, with the caveat that it values the importance of self-help extremely highly due to distrust traceable to historical reasons. Simultaneously, however, they strive to draw the greatest possible external support, up to the point where they do not have to undertake compromises that limit decision-making freedom in exchange in a way that they perceive as an existential threat in any manner. The difference compared to other states is that the Israeli elite sees the path leading to the realization of existential threats as extremely short for both objective and subjective reasons. Consequently, Israel has developed over recent decades into a regional military power conducting an extremely assertive foreign and security policy, building on offensive operations, in both nuclear and conventional spheres, which nevertheless cannot hope to achieve hegemony. I described the transformation of Israel's security environment, the military threats of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as the campaign between wars procedure and the hypothetical scenario of war for survival, which embody Israel's main deterrent and offensive force.

4. I analysed Israel's relations with regional and global actors and derived from this the systemic effect of Israeli foreign and security policy on Middle Eastern power dynamics.

Finally, I revealed the systemic effect of Israeli military and national security activities (conducted alone and through cooperation on Middle Eastern stability and balance of power. I pointed out that only the United States is capable of providing the security guarantees that the Jewish state needs in light of its own and its environment's circumstances. The Russian Federation, China, and European states are not primary partners for Israel not only due to the lack of support, but the first two actively cooperate with Iran and its allies, thereby contributing to the persistence and strengthening of the existential threat affecting Israel.

Everything that weakens the regional influence of the United States also appears as a threat to Israel and vice versa, creating a symbiotic relationship between the global and regional power. A condition for the persistence of United States' global hegemony is that no other power can achieve regional hegemony in the Middle East, which would necessarily endanger Israel, which itself, however, cannot be a regional hegemon. Moreover, the emergence of a multipolar Middle Eastern order supported by the Russian Federation and China would be unfavourable for the United States; instead, it is interested in the emergence and dominance of a security structure formed by its own partners.

The currently heavily limited and tension-filled cooperation with Middle Eastern states is relevant for Israel in light of this external great power struggle. This is the most effective tool for channelling the United States' support, with which it can neutralize threats and gain partners for balancing against Iran, which poses an existential threat, and in light of December 2024 developments, Turkey. Within the framework of cooperations, Israel also provides its own resources and capabilities to its partners, deterring, threatening, and weakening revisionist forces. Israel is an important partner on three levels for both the United States and the Middle Eastern status quo states. On one hand, it cannot achieve hegemony itself, thus it represents a limited and specific military threat, in contrast to other potential hegemonic regional powers. On the other hand, due to its threatened state, through its assertive military strategy, it keeps revisionist forces in check and degrades them without its partners having to "spend" on this, which Israel proved between 2023-2025. Thirdly, Israel's capabilities in security projection capabilities should not be underestimated, such as border control, air defence, guaranteeing maritime security, counterterrorism, and crisis management. The realization of these factors can be most effectively ensured within a mature security architecture.

The intensity of security cooperations is limited by and underscores the need for flexibility from all three parties' perspectives. Israel is distrustful and also wishes to preserve its decision-making freedom due to prioritizing self-help. The United States does not wish to tie up a significant portion of its military force in the Middle Eastern region, nor to provide unconditional security guarantees to its partners. Finally, the Arab states' need for regime security limits cooperation, in light of which, especially during times of Israeli-Palestinian conflict escalation, they cannot undertake too close and conspicuous cooperation with Israel. Within the framework of the regional security architecture, in light of the above, we cannot speak of a rigid formal military alliance that is highly threatening to revisionist powers (a "Middle Eastern NATO"), but rather of a framework of flexible security cooperations in

which the preservation of regime security, decision-making freedom, and autonomy are primary factors.

Fulfilment of the Hypotheses

In the dissertation, in accordance with the objectives, I established four hypotheses, in which I intended to prove the first, main hypothesis through the other three hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: Israel, precisely because of its assertive foreign and security policy, is incapable of regional hegemony but has become a valuable cooperative partner as a regional military power perceiving constant existential threat, and positions itself, and is positioned by its partners, as one of the main pillars of the emerging regional security architecture. I built the proof of this from the answers given to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 2: In Middle Eastern power dynamics, we can identify an emerging regional security architecture that acts as a stabilizing factor in the region and of which Israel is a defining member.

Regarding the Middle Eastern regional security architecture, I proved that it is in an initial stage, but serious milestones have already been achieved. The main constituent elements are the Egyptian-Israeli and Jordanian-Israeli peace treaties, as well as the Abraham Accords, and comprehensive support and coordinating role of the United States, in which the CENTCOM framework is of highlighted importance. The Israel-Hamas conflict and the subsequent regional conflict did not break up these relationships; the joint defensive efforts during the Iranian attacks were a particularly noteworthy milestone. However, the Israeli-Saudi normalization process stalled, and overall, we can only speak of the security structure being in an extremely initial state.

Hypothesis 3: Israeli foreign and security policy contributes to avoiding open war between the regional powers in the Middle East through its deterrent instrument system and, by forming a deterrent leverage in power dynamics, provides space for cooperation.

I proved that Israeli foreign and security policy contributes to avoiding open war between the regional powers in the Middle East through a dual, active and passive deterrent instrument system and, by forming a deterrent leverage in power dynamics, provides space for cooperation. The threat of a war for survival to be initiated by Israel prevented Iran and its allies from mounting a complete challenge against Israel during the 2023-2025 conflict, and ultimately the Iranian "resistance front" was severely, if not permanently, damaged. Israel thus fulfilled its role. Its balancing role is predictable, which is proven by the fact that it visibly designates Turkey as the next existential threat, since the Jewish state feels itself to be

under constant threat. This assertive military policy gives Israel its balancing role in the Middle Eastern system, since it has the military capabilities, ultimately the nuclear strike force, to fulfil the balancing, deterrent role. This Israeli deterrent force also provides an opportunity for smaller, more vulnerable countries to guarantee their security within the framework of a regional security architecture instead of self-abandoning alignment (bandwagoning) with other potential hegemons.

Hypothesis 4: Israel, contrary to its preferences, is compelled by its endowments and geopolitical situation to increasingly stronger but also flexibility-ensuring participation in external alliance cooperation systems.

Israel is compelled to cooperate because it cannot keep pace with other military powers solely on its own strength, but in the absence of a cooperative framework, it is willing to escalate and act unilaterally in what it presumes to be a struggle for its existence. This provides its usefulness in the region, its balancing character, its predictable assertiveness, which no power wishes to endure, not only because of direct destruction, but also because of the relative power shift against other, untouched powers. However, for Israel, the least desired scenario is when it cannot postpone the war for survival but must pre-empt it due to its prevailing security perception. The relative restraining of Israel within a cooperative framework provides an alternative to this, which enables it to minimize its costs and maximize its security, partly through the support of regional partners and partly through United States support. However, the intensity of partnerships is limited; we can only speak of sub-alliance level security cooperations, since as I demonstrated, neither party is interested in limiting its decision-making freedom and balancing options.

Overall, therefore, considering the individual elements together, I proved that (Hypothesis 1) Israel, precisely because of its assertive foreign and security policy, is incapable of regional hegemony but has become a valuable cooperative partner as a regional military power perceiving constant existential threat, and positions itself, and is positioned by its partners, as one of the main pillars of the emerging regional security architecture.

New Scientific Results

Based on the research conducted during the preparation of the dissertation, I consider the following as scientific results, that can be used in the analysis and evaluation of Middle Eastern security challenges and Israeli military and national security strategy:

1. I proved that Israel, precisely because of its assertive foreign and security policy coupled with its incapability of achieving regional hegemony, has become a valuable

cooperative partner as a regional military power perceiving constant existential threat, and positions itself, and is positioned by its partners, as one of the main pillars of the emerging regional security architecture.

2. By revealing Israel's role in Middle Eastern regional dynamics, I proved its hegemony-deterring role, which is a determining factor in the balance of power. I revealed that this role can not only be the basis of cooperation, but can also lead to serious, even nuclear escalation due to the nature of the State of Israel.

3. I proved that the Middle Eastern regional security architecture has limitations that prevent it from reaching the level of a formal alliance framework; instead, it can be interpreted as system of interconnected security cooperations.

4. I revealed and proved that the two main pillars of the emerging regional security architecture are Israel and Saudi Arabia, and I determined the interests of the United States in maintaining this.

The Applicability of the Results, Recommendations and New Research Directions

Applicability and Recommendations

1. The results of the dissertation can be used in the analysis and evaluation of Middle Eastern conflicts and power dynamics, including the factors determining the development of Israeli foreign and security policy.

2. Regarding Israel, I particularly emphasize the applicability of the dissertation's results during the examination of the Jewish state, among which I consider the patterns derived within the understating it as a non-hegemonic regional military power and the Jewish, democratic, and military state definitions (distrust, self-help, existential threat, assertive military strategy) to be the most important.

3. The analysis can be used as an example during similar analyses of other states' roles in regional power dynamics, regarding the logic, analytical focus, and theories used, both for Middle Eastern states and states located in other similar geopolitical buffer zones.

4. Finally, the results of my research can be well utilized in education, particularly in the master's degree programs of the University of Public Service's Faculty of Military Sciences and Officer Training, in the training of the Doctoral School of Military Sciences, as well as in the preparation of professionals working in the Ministry of Defence and its

institutions who deal with Israel and the Middle Eastern region. The dissertation also helps interpret the 2023-2025 Israel-Hamas war and the resulting regional conflict, including the considerations motivating Israel.

New Research Directions

Due to scope limitations and the dissertation's focus, several related research questions were not processed, which are nevertheless of strategic significance for Hungary.

1. In the dissertation, I focused on the Middle Eastern system; however, Israel's security cooperation are significant in the eastern basin of the Mediterranean Sea, particularly with Greece and Cyprus. In this context, military and national security cooperation is complemented by the issue of natural gas extraction and delivery to the EU, which thus represents an important topic, although it was pushed into the background due to the 2022 Ukrainian-Russian and then the 2023 Israel-Hamas wars.

2. Shifting the focus of analysis to the EU and NATO's European pillar, an important research question would be the potential effect of Israeli participation in cooperation and generally the effects of a security architecture created with American support on Europe's security and to what extent it would be worth investing in it, especially following the possible conclusion of the Russian-Ukrainian war and in light of the EU's strategic autonomy

3. Finally, the analysis was created based on the conditions of March 1, 2025; however, massive changes are underway both in the world and in the Middle East, regarding settlement plans for the Gaza Strip, the weakening of the Iranian "resistance front," the new Syrian leadership, Lebanese political developments, and the future of Israeli-Saudi reconciliation and American presence. In light of this, the analysis would practically be worth continuing immediately, for which, particularly for the analysis and evaluation of Israeli regional participation, I trust that I have made a usable contribution with the present dissertation as well.

List of the Author's Publications Related to the Topic

1. CSEPREGI Zsolt (2016): Érdekbarátok és érdekellenségek – A török-izraeli stratégiai kapcsolat. In BARANYI Tamás Péter – SZÁLKAI Kinga (ed.): *Újhold: A török külpolitika útkeresése a 21. század elején*. Budapest: Antall József Tudásközpont. 250-269.

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11. CSEPREGI Zsolt (2023): Izrael szerepe a közel-keleti hatalmi rendben. *Hadtudományi Szemle*, 16(4), 27-40. Online: https://doi.org/10.32563/hsz.2023.4.2

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The Author's Professional Biography

Zsolt Csepregi obtained his master's degree in international studies at Corvinus University of Budapest in 2011.

Between 2011 and 2015, he was a program organizer at the Israeli Cultural Institute in Budapest and coordinator of the Hebrew Language Center.

Between 2016 and 2021, he was an employee of the Antall József Knowledge Centre, where among other things he was responsible for the institute's Middle Eastern relations and security policy programs.

From 2022, he has been a security analyst at the American *Everbridge*, a company supporting crisis management and business continuity, and from 2025, the company's analyst responsible for the Middle Eastern region.

He began his doctoral studies in 2020 at the Doctoral School of Military Sciences of the University of Public Service.

Since beginning his doctoral studies, nine of his studies related to Israeli foreign and security policy have been published in military science journals, and he has prepared four other studies and book chapters in research projects belonging to the University of Public Service. He currently has 29 records in the Hungarian Scientific Works Repository (MTMT)

He is a member of the European Association for Israeli Studies and a regular presenter at its annual conferences.

He has appeared multiple times in Hungarian media (in the form of interviews and analyses given to radio, television, and newspapers) on issues concerning Israeli foreign and security policy and broader Middle Eastern developments.