

**ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE POSITION OF ISRAEL REGARDING
THE PROVISION OF AID TO DRUZE IN SYRIA DURING
THE CIVIL WAR IN SYRIA**

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DOI: 10.24193/subbeuropaea.2023.1.06

Published Online: 2023-06-30

Published Print: 2023-06-30

Abstract

This article examines the perceptions and attitudes towards the position of the State of Israel and Israeli Druze regarding the provision of aid to Druze in Syria during the civil war in Syria that took place between the years 2011 and 2017. The main goal of this article is to examine the perceptions and attitudes of senior officials in the Druze community and in Israel regarding the aid provided to Druze in Syria and its impact on the national and Druze identity among the Druze population in Israel.

Keywords: Druze, civil war, Israel, Syria.

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Introduction

This article is part of a Ph.D. dissertation on the topic of conflict between loyalties: the relationship between Druze in Israel and Druze in Syria during the civil war in Syria that took place between the years 2011 and 2017.

The regional upheaval, also known as the “Arab Spring” began at the end of 2010 in North Africa and proceeded to spread through other Middle Eastern countries. The volume of the protests in the Arab world took the regional countries, including Israel, as well as the Western countries, by surprise.

In light of the ongoing conflict between Israel and Syria, Israel watched the protests and uprising in the Arab world closely. Israel perceived the civil war in Syria as both a challenge and an opportunity. On the one hand, the challenge was to try and make an impact on the inner political order in Syria and remove it from the “Axis of Evil” that has been established over the years by Syria, Iran and Hezbollah. On the other hand, Israel identified a unique opportunity to weaken Iran and Hezbollah forces, located in Syria.

During the civil war, new political and sub-political actors appeared, each trying to improve their position and impose their beliefs on the rest, such as Isis, and others. The newly shaped geopolitical arrangement had a direct impact on the minority groups who depended on the regime in these countries, such as the Druze in Syria and the Coptic in Egypt.¹

In its essence, Syria is a Muslim state that also includes a Druze population. The Druze belief is largely based on neo-platonic philosophy.

One of its five main principals is “protect the brothers”, a principal expressing both commitment and solidarity among Druze across the world.

¹ Yusri Khaizran, *The Syrian Popular Uprising and the Decline of the Druze Political Role* (2022) [<https://dayan.org/content/syrian-popular-uprising-and-decline-druze-political-role>]

The civil war in Syria challenged this religious principal and even put it to a test: will Druze in Israel assist their Druze brothers in Syria, as their ethnicity is being threatened by terrorist organizations, despite the longtime animosity between the two countries²?

The Druze in Israel resorted to various means to convince the State of Israel to help them provide aid to their Druze brothers in Syria. Finally, Israel allowed the provision of by providing financial and humanitarian aid.

The goal of this article is to present the findings regarding the attitudes of Jewish and Druze politicians and military personnel towards the position of the state of Israel with regard to the aid it provided, together with the Druze in Israel, to Druze in Syria, during the civil war in Syria that took place between the years 2011 and 2017.

The Civil War in Syria

The regional upheaval, also known as the “Arab Spring” began towards the end of 2010 in Tunisia and proceeded to spread in Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria. According to Zisser, the demonstrations in Syria were part of a wave of uprisings and protests that spread across the region that began as relatively limited, local and non-violent and progressed to a violent and bloody civil war.³

In June 2021, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights published an investigative report, according to which the civil war in Syria resulted in the death of approximately half a million of Syrians, 5.5 million Syrian refugees and 6 million displaced citizens.⁴

On the eve of the civil war in Syria, the country stood at the threshold of an economic, political and social abyss. When examining the Syrian “Arab Spring”, one can point to several main factors that have affected

² Salah Zahr Ad-Din, *Tarikh al-muslimin al-muwahidin ad-Duruz (History of the Muslim, the Muwahidin and the Druze, 1994.*

³ Eyal Zisser, *Syria at War: The Rise and Fall of the Revolution in Syria*, Maarachot and Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv University, 2020.

⁴ Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (2021) [<https://www.syriahr.com>].

and potentially led to the eruption of the civil war in Syria. The Syrian regime is a totalitarian regime in which the president is the sole sovereign who heads the country's defense, military, political and legal systems.⁵

The economic policy of the Syrian regime resulted in the existence of two populations on opposite ends: a minority that rules the country's economic resources and a majority suffering from severe poverty. According to certain assessments, in 2010, approximately 34.4% of the Syrian population were beneath the poverty line.⁶

In March 2011, thousands of Syrian protestors flooded the streets in central cities, especially in the southern Daraa, calling for reform and freedom. However, the site of protests soon turned into a violent battleground between the protestors and the Syrian armed forces.⁷ The protestors further called for the abolishment of the bequeathing of power in the al-Assad family and for democratic elections of the country's presidency.⁸ As can be seen, although the factors contributing to the break of the civil war in Syria were mostly intrastate and economical, the results of the war were hundreds of thousands of fatalities and millions of refugees and displaced citizens.

Historical Background and Characteristics of the Druze Ethnicity

Many historians point to the 11th century A.D., as the beginning of the Druze religion in Egypt, during the reign of the sixth Fatimid Khalif, al-Mansur, also known by his regnal name of al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah, who ruled Egypt between the years 996 and 1021.⁹

⁵ Elkatebe, Ibtesam, Saleh, "Where Do Arabs Go, the Vision of 30 Researchers Regarding the Future of Arab revolution" in *Elmoasse Elarabiah Ldar Elnasher*, 2012.

⁶ Jamal Parrot, *The Past Decade in Syria – the Dialectic of Stagnation and Reform* (2013) [https://www.dohainstitute.org/en/ResearchAndStudies/Pages/The_past_decade_in_Syria_the_dialectic_of_stagnation_and_reform_Part_1_of_5.aspx]

⁷ Mahmood Kheraldeen, *Factors Involved in Outbreak of Civil War in Syria-in March 2011* (2022) [http://www.studia.ubbcluj.ro/download/pdf/europa/2022_1/11.pdf].

⁸ Kamal Abo-Shawesh, *The January 25th Revolution in Egypt: Causes and Implications for the Palestinian Issue*. Thesis. MA dissertation. Al-Azhar University, Palestine, 2013, p. 105

⁹ Salah Shakieb, *History of the Druze*, Bar-Ilan University publishing, Ministry of Defense, 1989.

In 1023, the Khalif disappeared under mysterious circumstances. According to the Druze belief, the Khalif did not die but is in hiding and will reveal himself once again on judgement day. In the same year, the missionary Hamza ibn Ali and all of his assistants also disappeared, and the role of missionary was then cast on Baha al-Din who moved the center of his activities from Egypt to Syria and Lebanon.¹⁰

As aforementioned, the Druze religion is based on non-ritual neo-platonic philosophy that has five main principals that need to be followed:

1. "Sedak Alelsan" – Tell the truth.
2. "Haft Al-Ehuan" – Protect the brothers.
3. Refraining from idolatry; confiscation and banishment of "Almortdin", those who have accepted the faith and then turned back on it.¹¹
4. Believing in the uniqueness of God, at all times and everywhere.
5. "Alreza and Al-Taslim" – acceptance and submission to the rule of God, with no conditions.¹²

Another key characteristic of the Druze religion is its secrecy; the Druze are allowed to be perceived from the outside as belonging to a different religion so long as they maintain the Druze belief inside their hearts.¹³ This behavior of "Thakia" left a mark on behaviors of Druze for many generations, allowing them to blend in more easily in their countries of residence.¹⁴

¹⁰ Nissim Dana, *The Druze*, Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, 1998.

¹¹ Amin Talia, *Assal Almouhadin Alduruz ad-Asulhum (History of the Druze)*, Alandelu, 1967.

¹² Salah Zahr Ad-Din, *Tarikh al-muslimin al-muwahidin ad-Duruz (History of the Muslim, the Muwahidin and the Druze)*, Beirut, 1994.

¹³ Kais Firro, *The Druzes in the Jewish State: A Brief History*, Brill, 1999.

¹⁴ Salman Falah, *The Druze in the Middle East: Historical Background*. The Ministry of Defense, 2000.

It can therefore be seen that the formation of the Druze ethnicity is a result of a mutual religious and historical legacy and a process of heredity of the Druze religion. This process leaned on the following foundations¹⁵:

1. The cease of preaching of the religion approximately 25 years after its establishment and the prohibition on mixed marriages. As a result, the Druze married amongst themselves for hundreds of years and became a kind of one large family.
2. The fierce belief in reincarnation, according to which the soul of a Druze family member is carried on to the body of another Druze family member who was just born, resulting in close ties between many families.
3. The existence of various social orders that contributed to the preservation of the ethical frame, prevented political and social conflicts and rifts over theology. These arrangements include the cultivation of the loyalty to the Druze ethnic group and its establishment as a key value, leading to a commitment of mutual help among all the members of the group.

Throughout their history, the Druze have almost always lived under foreign rule and have never obtained complete political independence. Nevertheless, until the 19th century, the Druze enjoyed autonomy in Lebanon. In 1921, the Druze residing in Jabal al-Druze in Syria gained its independence under the French mandate, which was cancelled in 1944, when the Jabal al-Druze Druze returned to the control of the independent Syrian State. It is acceptable to believe that the Druze strived for political independence due to their separatist nature and deterrence from carrying the burden of a central government. However, the political, economic and social conditions in which the Druze lived over the years, could not serve as a basis for a full governmental independence.

¹⁵ Shimon Avivi, *Copper Plate: Israeli Policy towards the Druze, 1948-1967*, Yad Ben-Zvi, 2007.

Moreover, the “Thakia” principal instilled among the Druze has resulted in two main forms: an internal form which is steady and rooted, and an external form, which changes in accordance with the dominance of the region. The lack of a clear and unified identity of the Druze is a meaningful factor that prevents the achievement of independence.¹⁶

In 1043, with the closing of the gates to new Druze converts, the Druze were spread over a wide region, from North Africa in the west to India in the East. As a minority, they were often persecuted by other rulers and nations and many were extinct or forced to abandon their belief and become assimilated in other societies, mainly among Sunni Muslims.¹⁷

While the Druze made an effort to maintain their religious and cultural uniqueness among the dominant majority groups, they were unable to secure a status equivalent to that of Muslims, Christians or Jews in Israel during the Uthmanic period and the British Mandate, each with their own religious-oriented legislative institutions and family courts, and were considered to be Muslims.¹⁸

A prior study examining Druze adolescents regarding their ethnic self-definition during the Second Lebanon War in 2006, found there to be a combination between Israeli and Druze identities. The study found that Druze adolescents expressed significant nationalism and commitment to the State of Israel, likely due to factors such as integration in combatting units and the need for self-defense.¹⁹

According to the Study of Amrani (2010), 87% of the Druze include in their identity the ethnic-Druze component and 66% integrate the words “Israeli” or “Arab” into this component. It was further found that

¹⁶ Salah Shakieb, *History of the Druze*, Bar-Ilan University publishing, Ministry of Defense, 1989.

¹⁷ Nagala Abu Az Aldin, *Aldruz Fi Al-Tarikh (the Druze in History)*, Million Science House, Beirut, 1985.

¹⁸ Kais Firro, “Zehut hadruzim–hebet histori [Druze identity: a historical view]” in *Hadruzim Beyisrael, Sidrat Iyunim Becheker Hamizrach Hatikhon*, 1984.

¹⁹ Inbal Esther Cicurel; Tal Litvak Hirsch, “Between identity and loyalty- The case of Druze adolescents” in *Panim: Histadrut Hamorim in Israel*, 46, 16-30, 2009.

adolescents exhibit a clear tendency to include the Druze component in their self-definitions.²⁰ Moreover, in most prior studies, Druze in Israel were found to have three main sub-identities: the Druze identity that includes the religion and culture components; the Arab identity that includes the language and ethnicity components; and the Israeli identity that includes the geographical identity component.²¹

The study by Abbas, Kurt & Walters (2012), examined the extent of social-cultural integration as part of the identity components and the desire to maintain Druze identity, while comparing between two generations in the Druze society. The study found that 38% of adult Druze identify themselves as Israeli Druze and perceive the homeland as an inseparable part of their identities, while 43% of the youth perceive religion and the homeland as main components of their identities. Furthermore, 32% of the adults identified themselves first and foremost as Druze based on their ethnic and religious identities, compared to just 20% of the youth.

Additionally, 30% of the adults identified themselves as Arab-Israeli Druze compared to 36% of the youth. Therefore, the study indicates that the Druze adults and youth identify themselves in three main ways: Israeli Druze; Druze; and Arab-Israeli Druze.²²

As can be derived, majority of the studies examining Druze identity, indicate that the Druze have developed unique identity and ethnicity characteristics as a result of their formation as a religious group and a persecuted minority for over hundreds of years. It is further evident that the identity of the Druze in Israel is complicated and has three sub-identities: A Druze identity; an Israeli Identity; and an Arab identity.

²⁰ Shuki Amrani, *The Druze between Nation and State*, Haifa: Chaikin Chair for Geostrategy: University of Haifa, 2010.

²¹ Rabah Halabi, Ezrachim Shevi Chovot ("Citizens of Equal Duties: Druze Identity and the Jewish State"), *Tel-Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz ha-Meuchad*, 2006.

²² Randa Abbas; Deborah Kurt; Joel Walters, "Identity patterns and educational aspirations in Druze adults and young people: Intergenerational research on attitudes and perceptions", *Ministry of Education*, 2012.

The Identity of the Druze in Syria

As of the early 19th century, the Druze had a significant impact on the shaping of Syria as a modern country. The Syrian revolution that took place between the years 1925 and 1927, led by the Druze leader, Sultan Pasha al-Atrash, contributed greatly to Syria's modern history and played a key role in establishing the stance of Jabal al-Druze. According to Philip Khoury, the revolution was a wide and national anti-imperialist uprising with clear national orientation.²³ The Jabal al-Druze was an autonomous entity that maintained its position with the central government in Damascus. Adib Shishakli was the first Syrian president (1951-1954) to subordinate Jabal al-Druze to the central government in Damascus.

After the revolution of the Baath Party in Syria and its rise to power in 1963, the Druze, similarly to other minorities in Syria, became more involved in the Syrian domestic politics by holding significant roles, including in the military. The Druze officers attempted and failed, on several occasions, to take over the reins of Damascus during the 1960's, including an attempted and failed coup in 1966, led by Salim Hatum, a high-ranking Druze officer in the Syrian military.

These coup attempts by the Druze led the regime in Damascus to carry out a wide purification of the Druze from key positions in the military and the Baath Party, which ended the prominence of the Druze in the political and military leadership of the country.²⁴

After Hafez al-Assad assumed power in Syria in 1970, the Druze continued to support the Damascus regime that perceived them and the other minorities in Syria as the basis for its rein. Prior to the breakout of the civil war in March 2011, during the reign of Hafez al-Assad, and his son, Bashar al-Assad, who succeeded his father in 2000, the Druze enjoyed budgetary privileges and held military positions. Moreover, majority of the

²³ Philip Khoury, *Syria and the French mandate: the politics of Arab nationalism, 1920-1945* (Vol. 487), Princeton University Press, 2014.

²⁴ Yusri Khaizran, *The Syrian Popular Uprising and the Decline of the Druze Political Role* (2022) [<https://dayan.org/content/syrian-popular-uprising-and-decline-druze-political-role>]

Druze who resided in Syria at that time identified their national identity as Arab and their religion as Druze.²⁵

The “Arab spring” is one of the main events that took place in the modern history of the Middle East, as the uprisings in Egypt, Iraq and Syria had a direct effect on the various ethnic minorities who resided in these countries.²⁶

Upon the beginning of the uprising in Syria, the Druze remained loyal to the Damascus regime and the leaders of the uprising faced difficulties in enlisting young Druze to join their ranks, as most of them served as soldiers in the Syrian military. Moreover, the uprising of Jihadist organizations led many Druze to join the existing Syrian regime.²⁷

In June 2015, dozens of Druze were massacred in a Druze village adjacent to Idlib in Syria by activists of Jabhat al-Nusra organization (the al-Nusra front, or the support front, is a Salafist jihadist terrorist organization established in 2012, part of the al-Qaeda organization that plays a significant role among Syrian rebels, striving to take down the Assad regime). In July 2018, ISIS led another gruesome attack against Druze villages in the Hauran region, leading to the death of 260 Druze and the abduction of 30 Druze women and their children.²⁸

Since 2015 and in light of the repeated defeats of the Syrian regime and significant losses incurred among the Druze population, the Druze experienced a severe loss of confidence in the Syrian regime, peaking with the Druze’s refusal to enlist to the military, leading to collective punishment by the regime.²⁹

²⁵ Salah Shakieb, *History of the Druze*, Bar-Ilan University publishing, Ministry of Defense (1989).

²⁶ Yusri Khaizran, *The Syrian Popular Uprising and the Decline of the Druze Political Role* (2022) [<https://dayan.org/content/syrian-popular-uprising-and-decline-druze-political-role>]

²⁷ Gare Gambill, *Syrian Druze: Toward Defiant Neutrality* (2013) [https://www.fpri.org/docs/Gambill_-_Syrian_Druze.pdf]

²⁸ Yusri Khaizran, *The Syrian Popular Uprising and the Decline of the Druze Political Role* (2022) [<https://dayan.org/content/syrian-popular-uprising-and-decline-druze-political-role>]

²⁹ Eyal Zisser, *Syria-Protest, Revolution and Civil War*, Tel Aviv: Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv University, 2014.

The Relationship between the Druze in Israel and the Druze in Syria

Over the years, the relationship between the various Druze communities in the Middle East (Israel, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan) has been impacted by the security situations and regional wars that took place, as well as by transport and communications barriers.

During the British Mandate and as a result of an improvement in national security, the relationship between Druze and Israel and Druze in Syria, Lebanon and Jordan, improved. The relationship included commercial and personal connections, including by marriages.

Simultaneously, World War Two and the political changes that took place in the region disrupted the relationships between the four main Druze populations in the Middle East. The establishment of countries in the Middle East instead of the British and French mandates also led to a partial severance of the relationships between the Druze communities, reaching a peak with the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, which led to a complete severance of the relationships between the Druze in Israel and the Druze in the other Middle Eastern countries.³⁰

Over the years, the Druze population in Israel experienced severance and rekindling of relationships with other Druze in the adjacent countries.

The Six-Day War in 1967 led to the disconnection of the Druze settlements in the Golan Heights region in Israel from the other Druze settlement in Syria but also to the reconnection to the Druze in Israel.

The First Lebanon War, also known as Operation Peace for Galilee, that took place in 1982, led to a partial severance of the relationships between the Druze settlements in Southern Lebanon from other Druze settlements in Lebanon but also to a reconnection with the Druze residing in Israel and the Golan Heights region in Israel.

³⁰ Yusef Hasan, "Druze between geography and society: A Look From Inside", *Haifa: Rewven Chaikin Chair in Geostrategy*, 2011.

The peace agreement with Jordan in 1994, rekindled the relationships between Druze in Israel and Druze in Jordan that has been severed since the establishment of Israel in 1948. Despite the closed state borders of Israel and periodic wars with its neighboring countries, the three largest Druze communities in the Middle East still maintained limited social relationships.

In 2003, following the death of one of the prominent Druze Sheikhs in Lebanon, a significant change occurred among the Druze community in their desire to renew visitations to Syria. The Druze in Israel requested permission from the State to attend the funeral but were denied. Following the State's refusal, the Druze formed a committee known as the "Druze Communications Committee", headed by Druze religious leaders. One of the goals of the committee was to establish encounters between the Druze communities in the Middle East, including by visiting Syria and Lebanon.

Despite the prohibition on Israeli State institutions on visitation of Druze in Syria or Lebanon, the Druze in Israel managed to visit Syria on three occasions in 2005, 2007 and 2018.

Towards the end of 2010, began a wave of protests and uprisings against regimes in Middle Eastern countries, including Syria. The uprisings began as local protests seeking governmental reforms and improvement in their daily lives. The Syrian regime reacted to the protesters forcefully, resulting in dozens of deaths and imprisonment of hundreds.

Over the years, the wave of protests turned into a bloody civil war that led to the death of hundreds of thousands of Syrians and a new reality of millions of refugees and immigrants. The civil war also contributed to the facilitation of regional extreme organizations such as ISIS and the Al-Nasra front. During the war in Syria, hundreds of Druze were massacred and the Druze began to feel threatened by extreme organizations that perceived them to be infidels.

The Druze in Israel did not remain apathetic to the difficult sights in Syria and began to take various actions, such as collection of food, to aid their brothers in Syria, based on the "Protect the Brothers" principal that obliges Druze to help their Druze brothers when facing danger.

During the civil war in Syria, many conventions that were acceptable until then were broken and many Druze in Israel used technology to rekindle relationships with Druze in Syria, with the goal of helping them. Therefore, it can be deduced that the civil war in Syria has impacted the relationship between Druze in Israel and Druze in Syria. This relationship included, but was not limited to, financial aid by Druze in Israel to Druze in Syria.³¹

The complexity of the relationship between Druze in Israel and Druze in Syria relies on the existing animosity between the two countries in which the Druze live, on one hand, and the principal of “protect the brothers” that prevails among all Druze, on the other. This complexity requires the examination of the perceptions among Druze and Israeli leaders in Israel regarding to the provision of aid to Druze in Syria during the civil war in Syria and the manner in which this aid impacted on the national identity of the Druze in Israel.

Research Methodology

This study examines the attitudes towards the position of the State of Israel with regard to the aid provided by Druze in Israel to Druze in Syria during the civil war in Syria that took place between the years 2011 and 2017. The study examined the attitudes and perceptions of senior officials in the Israeli politics and military systems regarding the aid provided to Druze in Syria.

The Goal of the Study

The main goals of the study were to examine the attitudes towards the position of the State of Israel with regard to the aid provided by Druze in Israel to Druze in Syria during the civil war in Syria that took place between the years 2011 and 2017.

³¹ Ines Gil, *Le Dilemme Des Druzes Israéliens, Minorité Arabe Et Soutien Historique D’israël* (2017) [<https://www.lesclesdumoyenorient.com/Le-dilemme-des-Druzes-israeliens-minorite-arabe-et-soutien-historique-d-Israel.html>].

The Study Population

The interviewees were elected following deep consultation with municipal and state level public officials. The interviewees were divided into two groups: a group of military personnel in Israel and a group of politicians and Druze influencers in the Israeli political system. Each group composed of three interviewees, and a total of six participants who have granted their informed consent to participate in the study. The identities of the interviewees remained anonymous.

Figure 1 – Study Population Profile

Interviewee Number	Age	Position	Education	Origin	Political Factor	Military Factor
1	67	Former Minister	Academic	Druze	+	
2	59	Former Minister	Academic	Druze	+	
3	64	Former Knesset Member	Academic	Druze	+	
4	73	Former commander in chief of the Israel Defense Forces	Academic	Jewish		+
5	72	Former Major General	Academic	Jewish		+
6	51	Former Military Officer	Academic	Jewish		+

Study Tools

The study was based on six semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted by the author of this article with the goal of establishing closeness between the interviewer and the interviewee to achieve the fullest picture possible.

The topics of the interview were as follows:

1. Information regarding the position of the State of Israel towards the civil war in Syria.
2. Position of the State of Israel towards the Druze in Israel.
3. Position of the State of Israel towards the provision of aid by the Druze in Israel to Druze in Syria.
4. Information on manners in which the State of Israel and the Druze in Israel were involve in providing aid to Druze in Syria.
5. Dilemmas regarding the provision of aid by Israel to Druze in Syria.
6. The impact of the aid provided to the Druze in Syria on the national and religious identities of the Druze in Israel.

The analysis of the data collected via the interviews included several stages. First, questions most suitable to the main topics of the study were selected. The interviews were recorded and transcribed thoroughly. Afterwards, a deep reading of the data arising from the different interviews was conducted, the data was mapped and downsized, including by the selection of segments directly dealing with the topics of the study; analysis units were created by data fractioning, theoretical conceptualization and category construction, re-reading, verification of the findings and writing.³²

All the participants granted their informed consent to participate in the study.

³² Yvonna S. Lincoln; Egon G. Guba, "Paradigmatic Controversies, Contradiction, and Emerging Confluences", In N.K. Denzin & S.L Lincoln (Eds), *Handbook of Qualitative Research: Second Edition*, London: Sage Publications, 2000.

Findings:

Inter- viewee Number	Position of the State of Israel towards the civil war in Syria	Position of the State of Israel to- wards the Druze in Israel	Position of the State of Israel towards the provi- sion of aid by the Druze in Israel to Druze in Syria	Methods of in- volve- ment of the State of Israel and the Druze in Israel in the pro- vision of aid to Druze in Syria	Dilem- mas Re- garding the Provi- sion of Aid of Israel to Druze in Syria	The impact of the aid provid- ed to the Druze in Syria on the national and religious iden- tities of the Druze in Israel
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	Impact on Na- tional Iden- tity	Impact on Ethnic Iden- tity
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1		The Israeli State sees us, Druze, as its partners in all aspects.	This is not the first time that Israel has helped Druze. This also happened during Peace of the Galilee war and during the war in Syria, Israel helped Druze.		Israel worried that provision of aid may be interpreted as Israeli intervention.	I have no doubt that the situation in Syria had a positive affect on the national identity of Druze in Israel.	
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2	Israel was neutral during the civil war in Syria.	_____	Israel perceived the aid as an act of good neighboring by transferring money.	Transferring humanitarian aid.	Israel supported the general opinion among Druze in Israel that Druze in Syria should be aided.	_____	The aid brought the Druze in Israel closer to the Druze in Syria.
3	Israel strived not to intervene in the war.	_____	Israel was willing to enable the aid to Druze in Syria.	The aid was financial via the Sheikh Muafek Tarif.	Israel worried that the Druze may be perceived as cooperating with Israel.	I have no doubt the aid strengthened the national identity of the Druze in Israel.	As a result of the war and the provision of aid, it became clear to the Druze that their religion is a force that brings the Druze in both countries together.

4	The State of Israel as a Jewish state, cannot morally turn away from a humanitarian crisis it can assist in.	Israel is very considerate of the needs of the Druze population and takes its appeals seriously.	_____	Israel has influenced the Syrian rebels not to harm Druze villages in Syria.	Israel has limited its ability to intervene.	I think the aid strengthened the Israeli identity.	_____
5	Israel did not hold a clear position with regard to the war	Israel sees Druze as full and equal partners contributing to its security and prosperity.	One of the main considerations for facilitating the aid to Druze in Syria is the respect and appreciation to the Druze in Israel for their contribution to the country and its security.	Provision of humanitarian and financial aid.	Israel was concerned that its involvement may indicate that the Druze in Syria are pro-Israeli	_____	The civil war in Syria and the aid provided by the Druze showed how strong the principals of solidarity and protecting the brothers are among the Druze community.
6	Israel decided not to intervene in the war in Syria because it was an internal Syrian affair that should not interest us.	_____	Israel enabled the provision of aid to Druze in Syria.	Permitted the provision of financial aid.	_____	_____	_____

1. First Theme: Position of the State of Israel Towards the Civil War in Syria

The analysis of the content of the interviews showed the interviewees' perceptions regarding the position of the State of Israel towards the Civil War in Syria. According to interviewees: *"Israel was neutral during the civil war in Syria"*. Another interviewee strengthened this opinion by stating that *"Israel did not have a clear position regarding the war"*.

A different interviewee noted that: *"the State of Israel as a Jewish state, cannot morally turn away from a humanitarian crisis it can assist in"*.

In summary, there are some disagreements among the interviewees with regard to the position of the State of Israel towards the civil war in Syria. The findings indicate that while Israel held a neutral position towards the war in Syria, it could not refrain from intervening on a humanitarian front due to the difficult position the citizens of Syria found themselves in. Meaning, according to the participants of the study, Israel maintained a bilateral position towards the war.

2. Second Theme: Position of the State of Israel towards the Druze in Israel

The analysis of the content of the interviews showed the interviewees' perceptions regarding the position of the State of Israel towards the Druze in Israel. According to the interviewees: *"the State of Israel perceives Druze as its partners in all aspects"*. Another interviewee added: *"the Druze in Israel contribute significantly to its security and prosperity"*. An additional interviewee noted that: *"Israel is very considerate of the needs of the Druze population and takes its appeals seriously"*.

In summary, as agreed by the interviewees, Israel sees the Druze population living in it as an equal partner in its everyday life and has great appreciation for their contribution to the country's security and prosperity.

3. Third Theme: Position of the State of Israel towards the provision of aid by the Druze in Israel to Druze in Syria

The analysis of the content of the interviews showed the interviewees' perceptions regarding the position of the State of Israel towards the provision of aid by the Druze in Israel to Druze in Syria.

According to one of the interviewees, *"this is not the first time that Israel has helped the Druze. In the past, Israel has helped the Druze in Lebanon and this time it helped the Druze in Syria during the civil war in the country"*. Another interviewee added: *"Israel perceived the aid as an act of good neighboring"*. A different interviewee noted that in his opinion: *"Israel was willing to enable the aid to Druze in Syria"*.

In Summary, the findings indicate that by enabling the provision of aid to Druze in Syria, Israel expression its appreciation for the Druze in Israel. Israel also perceived the aid as a humanitarian act in light of the distress of the Druze citizens in Syria.

4. Fourth Theme: Methods of Involvement of the State of Israel and the Druze in Israel in the provision of aid to Druze in Syria

The analysis of the content of the interviews showed the interviewees' perceptions regarding the involvement of the State of Israel and the Druze in Israel in the provision of aid to Druze in Syria. According to the interviewees, *"the involvement was in military aspects, such as in the positioning of tanks towards the boarded between Israel and Syria"*. Alternatively, another interviewee noted that: *"Israel made sure to provide humanitarian aid"*. A different interviewee added: *"Israel provided only financial via the Sheikh Muafek Tarif."* Another interviewee argued that: *"Israel assisted by influencing Syrian rebels not to harm Druze in Syria."*

In summary, the data indicates that the Druze in Israel and the State of Israel aided the Druze in Syria in various means, primarily, by granting humanitarian aid that included the transfer of funds from Israel to Druze in Syria. Additionally, Israel has provided military aid to Druze in Syria, by shifting military means towards the border between Israel and Syria. The findings further indicate that Israel had significantly influenced the inner

Syrian arena by pressuring and influencing the Syrian rebels not to harm the Druze in Syria.

5. Fifth Theme: Dilemmas Regarding the Provision of Aid of Israel to Druze in Syria

The analysis of the content of the interviews showed the interviewees' perceptions on the dilemmas in Israel regarding the Provision of aid by Israel to Druze in Syria. According to the interviewees: *"Israel was concerned that the provision of aid may be perceived as Israeli intervention in the war in Syria"*. Another interviewee added: *"Israel supported the general opinion among the Druze in Israel that Druze in Syria should be aided"*. A different interviewee noted: *"Israel was concerned that the Druze in Syria may be perceived as cooperative with Israel, which may result in harm being inflicted on them"*. According to another interviewee: *"Israel was concerned that its involvement might indicate that Druze in Syria are Pro-Israeli."*

In summary, Israel faced dilemmas with regard to the provision of aid to Druze in Syria. On one hand, Israel wanted to enable the aid to Druze in Syria out of respect for the Druze population in Israel but in the same time, expressed concerns for their safety. Israel did not want Druze in Syria to be portrayed as cooperative with Israel or Pro-Israeli.

6. Sixth Theme: the impact of the aid provided to the Druze in Syria on the national and religious identities of the Druze in Israel

The analysis of the content of the interviews showed the interviewees' perceptions regarding the impact of the aid provided to the Druze in Syria on the national and religious identities of the Druze in Israel. According to one of the interviewees, *"The situation in Syria undoubtedly improved the national identity of Druze in Israel"*. Another interviewee supported this by stating: *"I have no doubt that the situation in Syria had a positive effect on the national identity of Druze in Israel"*. A different interviewee added: *"the aid contributed to the religious closeness between Druze in Israel and Druze in Syria"*. Another interviewee perceived that: *"as a result*

of the war in Syria and the aid provided to the Druze in Syria, it became clear to the Druze that their religion is a force that brings the Druze in both countries together". According to a different interviewee: "the civil war and the aid provided to the Druze emphasized the importance of the principals of solidarity and protecting the brothers in the Druze community".

In summary, there is a wide consent among the interviewees regarding the impact of the aid provided to the Druze in Syria, on the national and religious identities of the Druze in Israel. Some of the Druze in Israel perceived the position of Israel towards the provision of the aid as an action that allowed them to fulfill one of the most important commandments of the Druze religion, the principal of "protecting the brothers". According to this religious principal, a Druze must help his Druze brother when facing danger. It can therefore be seen that the aid impacted the religious principals of the Druze religion.

The findings further indicate that the provision of aid also impacted the national identity of the Druze in Israel since the country exhibited sensitivity and understanding of the protecting the brothers principal and enabled it in a numerous ways.

Discussion and Conclusions

The analysis of the findings of the interviews indicates that the position of the State of Israel towards the civil war in Syria was bilateral.

On one hand, Syria and Israel are enemy states, due to the multiple wars and longtime animosity between the two countries. Additionally, since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and to this day, there is a complete severance of formal diplomatic relationships between the two countries.³³ Nevertheless, although Israel strived not to intervene in the civil war in Syria, it could not remain neutral in light of the difficult sights in Syria and decided to provide humanitarian aid to Syrian citizens.

³³ Yusef Hasan, "Druze between geography and society: A Look From Inside", *Haifa: Rewven Chaikin Chair in Geostrategy*, 2011.

Moreover, Israel felt a moral obligation towards Syrian citizens who are caught in a state of an ongoing war and therefore decided to provide them with aid.

Regarding the position of the State of Israel towards the Druze in Israel, the government's recognition of the Druze as an independent ethnic group and the integration of the Druze in the everyday life in Israel has led to the emphasis of two identity components, the "Israeli and the Druze".³⁴

A prior study that was conducted found that the definition of the identity of the Druze in Israel has a combination of the Israeli identity components and a unique Druze identity component that integrate and create a Druze-Israeli identity.³⁵ The interviews clearly indicate that the State of Israel perceives the Druze population as a full partner in the country's everyday life and that its contribution to the country is evident especially with regard to the Country's security and prosperity.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that the State of Israel has enabled the Druze in Israel to provide aid to their Druze brothers in Syria.

During the civil war in Syria, the Druze felt an existential threat by extremist Islamic organizations such as the al-Nasra front and ISIS. The Druze villages were constantly threatened by these organizations and although they tried to face these threats on their own, they did not always succeed. In June 2015, dozens of Druze of one of the Druze villages located in adjacency to Idlib were massacred and others died while defending their villages.³⁶ The Druze in Israel could not ignore this new bloody reality of their Druze brothers in Syria and operated on multiple fronts with Israeli State institutions to provide aid to the Druze in Syria. The analysis of the data clearly shows that the State of Israel stood by the Druze in Israel and assisted them in providing aid to their Druze brothers in Syria. The

³⁴ Kais Firro, *The Druzes in the Jewish State: A Brief History*, Brill, 1999.

³⁵ Inbal Esther Cicurel; Tal Litvak Hirsch, "Between identity and loyalty- The case of Derus adolescents" in *Panim: Histadrut Hamorim in Israel*, 46, 16-30, 2009.

³⁶ Yusri Khaizran, *The Syrian Popular Uprising and the Decline of the Druze Political Role* (2022) [<https://dayan.org/content/syrian-popular-uprising-and-decline-druze-political-role>]

findings further indicate that Israel enabled the provision of the aid as a token of appreciation of the existing partnership between the Druze in Israel and the State of Israel and out of respect to the contribution of the Druze community to the country.

Regarding the methods of involvement of the State of Israel in providing aid to the Druze in Syria, the Druze in Israel, led by the spiritual leader of the group, have appealed to the Israeli State institutions with requests to enable them to provide aid to the Druze in Syria and assist them in doing so. The findings indicate that although Israel strived not to interfere with the civil war in Syria, it ultimately decided to help the Druze in Syria mostly via the Druze in Israel. The findings further indicate that Israel preferred to help the Druze in Syria by humanitarian means and financial aid. Furthermore, the analysis of the data shows that Israel also provided military aid by positioning military means near the border with Syria, while sending a clear message to the organizations threatening the Druze that it will not hesitate to engage in a military operation. Simultaneously, Israel attempted to influence the Syrian rebel organizations not to harm the Druze in Syria.

The findings further show that all the interviewees agreed that Israel should help the Druze in Syria as well as that Israel was concerned that the aid may also harm them, since the Druze in Syria may be perceived by Syria as cooperative with Israel. Despite the dilemma, Israel decided to manage the provision of aid in a calculated and measured manner in order to achieve the goal.

It is noteworthy that all interviewees agreed that the aid provided by the Druze in Israel to the Druze in Syria impacted the Druze identity.

According to Firro, the integration of the Druze in the everyday life in Israel has led to the emphasis of two important factors, the "Israeli and the Druze".³⁷ Some of the interviewees noted that the aid impacted the national identity of the Druze in Israel, increasing the appreciation of the

³⁷ Kais Firro, *The Druzes in the Jewish State: A Brief History*, Brill, 1999.

Druze towards the position of the State of Israel regarding the aid, which increased their sense of belonging to the country as well as their national identity. Simultaneously, some of the interviewees claimed that the aid provided by the Druze in Israel to the Druze in Syria proved the importance of the religious “protecting the brothers” commandment and the solidarity between the Druze worldwide. Thus, the aid also impacted the position of the religious identity in the Druze society in Israel and in Syria.

Conclusion and Importance of the Study

The findings of the current study indicate that a minority dispersed in two enemy states can reconnect when facing existential threat and succeed in helping one another with the help of the religious-ethnic identity and the religion principles maintained by both groups over many generations. Furthermore, when a minority succeeds in integrating widely among the majority it lives in and become a meaningful factor in the country by contribution to the economic and security fronts, it can earn a status of importance and recruit the ruling majority to help them when facing grave danger.

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