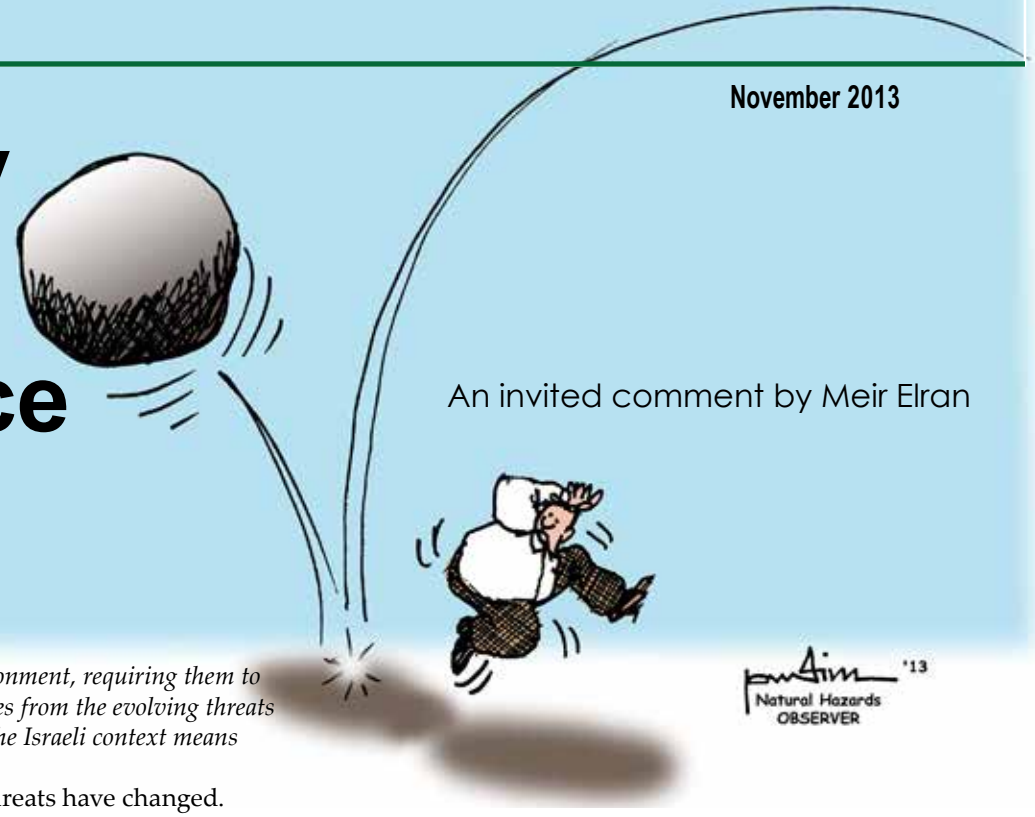
Natural Hazards Observer

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Security and resilience in Israel

An invited comment by Meir Elran



Israelis live in a volatile, hostile environment, requiring them to think in terms of defending themselves from the evolving threats from their enemies. "Resilience" in the Israeli context means "security."

Over the last two decades, the threats have changed. Originally confined primarily to the military sphere, now most threats are posed by non-state actors, directed at civilians and civilian infrastructure. Since 2000, Israel has seen four terrorist offensives. The first, labeled the Second Palestinian Intifada, lasted four agonizing years, from 2000 to 2004. It included 130 suicide bombings which, along with other terrorist attacks, caused more than 1,000 fatalities, 80 percent of whom were civilians.

The second terrorist episode erupted in July 2006 with an attack by Hezbollah. It lasted 33 days, with daily rocket attacks and missiles launched against the entire northern part of the country.

In 2008, Hamas attacked the southern portion of the country, with daily barrages of 140 rockets and missiles fired from Gaza, lasting about three weeks. Then last November, Hamas again attacked the south and central parts of Israel, including missiles launched at the major population centers of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

These circumstances have led Israelis to consider how they will deal with these threats. The issues are not simply military ones. We must also ensure the functional continuity of our civilian population and our threatened communities in the most effective way.

This is the essence of "resilience."

Resilience, in its generic sense, is a metaphor. It characterizes the flexible capacity of any system to respond to major traumatic disruption in a ductile manner—to bend, rather than break. It encompasses the ability to adapt and to cope with the challenge it faces in proportion to that challenge's severity, bouncing back to the original, or even enhanced, functionality. A resilient system—economic, infrastructural, personal, organizational, social, or even a national system—is one that can absorb the aftermath of a major challenge, resuming its designated mission.

Resilience is not a static quality. It must be continually enhanced in advance to reach a higher level of effectiveness following a disaster of any kind. The problem often is that resilience in general, and societal resilience in particular, is not always an accepted operational paradigm. There is a wide gap between the popular use of the term and the abundance of academic papers written on the subject on one hand, and the minuscule scope of practical implementation of the concept,

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The mission of the Natural Hazards Center is to advance and communicate knowledge on hazards mitigation and disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. Using an all-hazards and interdisciplinary framework, the Center fosters information sharing and integration of activities among researchers, practitioners, and policy makers from around the world; supports and conducts research; and provides educational opportunities for the next generation of hazards scholars and professionals. The Natural Hazards Center is funded through a National Science Foundation grant and supplemented by contributions from a consortium of federal agencies and nonprofit organizations dedicated to reducing vulnerability to disasters.

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Observer cartoons are drawn by Rob Pudim.

Send items of interest to the Natural Hazards Center, University of Colorado at Boulder, 483 UCB, Boulder, CO 80309-0483; (303) 492-6818, (303) 492-2151 (fax); hazctr@colorado.edu. The deadline for the next *Observer* is **July 31, 2013**.

Notes

Dear friends,

It may have been a quiet week in Lake Wobegon, but in Boulder things have been jumping since the last issue of the *Observer.* The major event of course has been the severe flooding we experienced here (described in more detail on page three).

Once the roads cleared enough for us to replenish the larder at home, the Natural Hazards Center went back to work. Flooding in Boulder was a topic that especially interested NHC founder Gilbert White. He left some instructions in his *Boulder Creek Floodplain Notebook* with guidelines for a study of the disaster. You can take a look at his outline here—http://www.colorado.edu/hazards/bcfn/.

In addition to following Gilbert's instructions on this, we've awarded six Quick Response grants to researchers to study the recent flooding. The recipients are:

Tara Opsal and Tara Shelley, Colorado State University
Problems Related to the Oil and Gas Industry During a Flooding Disaster: The Nature and Extent of Citizen Complaints and Satisfaction with Government Response

Deborah Brosnan, University of California Davis
Assessing Ecological and Natural Resources Impacts of Colorado Floods to Strengthen Disaster Risk Reduction and Build Cross-Cutting Resilience

Deserai Crow, University of Colorado, and Elizabeth Albright, Duke University
Policy Learning and Political Context: Analyzing Responses to Colorado's Extreme Flood Events of 2013

Bridgette Cram, Florida International University
Women in the Face of Disaster: Incorporating Gender Perspectives into Disaster Policy

Rachael Budowle, University of Wyoming
Sustainable Food Systems: Impacts of Disasters and Relief Efforts on Resilience

Andrew Rumbach, Deborah Thomas, Carrie Makarewicz, Jeremy Nemeth, University of Colorado, Denver
Understanding Household Recovery Following the Colorado Flash Floods

We're also compiling a Web site of photos, reports, data and other relevant information about the floods that will be housed on the Hazards Center site.

—The editor

Israel ...

(Continued from page one)

on the other. While "resiliencers" are convinced that resilience is an adequate systemic approach, a worthy strategy to deal with major disruptions, their conviction is not often shared by those responsible for implementation.

This is sadly the case in Europe and in the United States, as is apparent from the overflow of repeated new initiatives, which at best indicate the lack of progress. The picture is not totally different in Israel, where the establishment is still preoccupied with developing sophisticated means of thwarting, deterrence, and protection. There is a striking accomplishment in the "protection" goal with the development of an ultra-modern anti-missile system named "Iron Dome," which intercepted nearly 90 percent of enemy rockets launched against population centers in the last encounter.

Still, with all the successes, Israel is aware that its communities and vital systems are vulnerable. Communities must be prepared for the day after. This understanding is emerging gradually to be a basic part of the Israeli approach. It is seen in the extensive exercises being continuously carried out at all levels. The focus of these exercises centers on the operational capabilities of first responders. This is important. But only a small portion of the effort is directed to the components of resilience, and particularly those of social resilience.

Vital elements

What are the most vital elements of societal resilience in the Israeli context—and arguably in any other society? Seven principle components emerge:

- An active community is a resilient community. Involvement in public life is needed on a routine basis, particularly by the stronger groups of the community, and especially by the younger generation.

- A resilient system is an aware, informed system. People need to know in advance what to expect as far it is knowable. They also must be ready for the unexpected, and prepared to act in different scenarios. Knowledge is a powerful asset that has to be cultivated and disseminated continuously.

- A resilient community enjoys an open discourse and inclusive relations between leaders and constituency. Leadership, formal and informal, local even more than the national, is a central feature around which the system revolves. Trust is a major component affecting the attitudes and conduct of the members of the community, especially in time of crisis.

- Communities must position themselves in a continuous state of high preparedness for the relevant disasters, based on a periodic assessment of the relevant threats.

- A common sense of purpose shared by the community is a major contributor to societal resilience. Common mindset and joint beliefs promote a sense of solidarity and connectedness. Bonding and networking are valuable tools to promote social capital—essential for societal resilience.

- A community which feels socially and economically secure, whose members are more optimistic about their private and collective future, tends to be more resilient. The spirit of the community affects its resilience in a direct manner.

- And of course first responders must be professionally proficient. Beyond that, they must exercise their missions in a spirit of close cooperation.



Israeli society is considered quite resilient, based mostly on its experience of disruption throughout the years of conflict with its neighbors, as well as the long history of persecution of the Jewish people in the Diaspora. Several studies have confirmed this impression, including a study of the rate of Israeli societal resilience in the period of the Second Intifada. But even if this is the case, the security circumstances and challenges unique to Israel require the maintenance of a high state of alert—and a higher state of resilience. Complacency is not an option.

Several specific programs have been carried out in many Israeli communities since the early 1980s. They are designed to enhance the capacity of the population to stand up to terrorist attacks and to keep up, as much as possible the functional continuity of community life. Many of the programs were centered around three main themes: empowerment of local leadership; enhancement of local services to the public; and upgrading the personal life skills of elementary school students to help them function as normally as possible in a crisis. Evaluations have shown the programs to have a mostly positive outcome of the communities' resilience and conduct in ensuing emergencies.

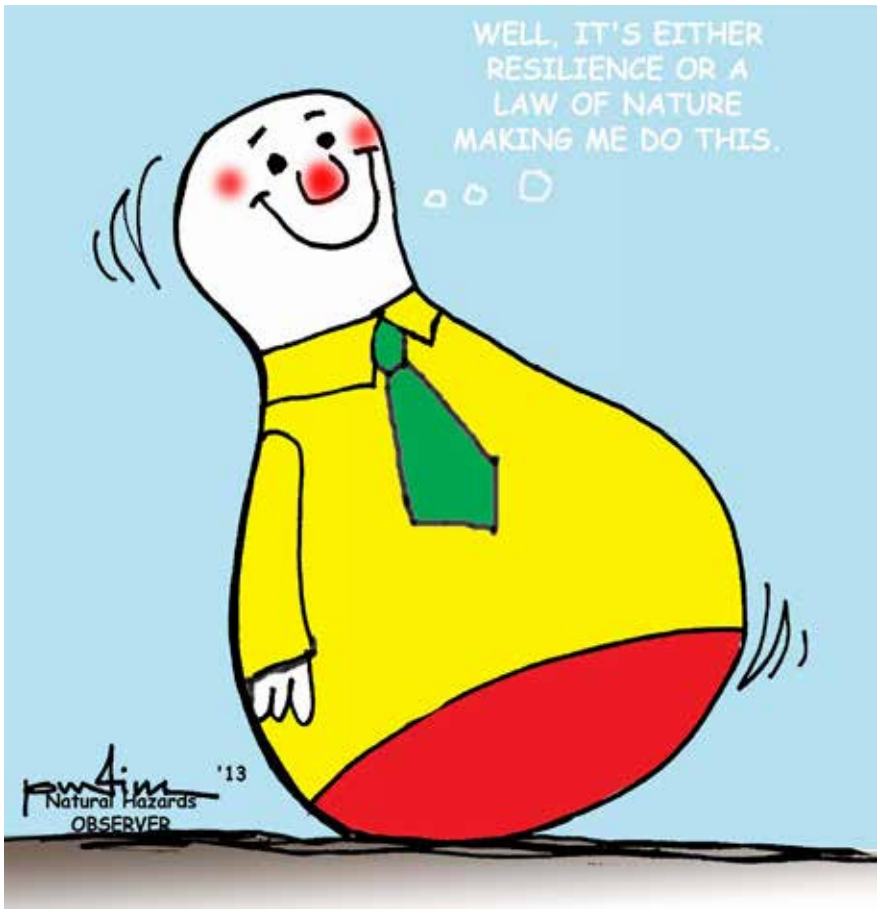
There are, however, pitfalls to be addressed. Their "top down" approach must be supplemented by "bottom up" programs. Many of the programs are not sustainable, primarily because of budget cuts. And too many communities did not participate, a fact which relates to the issues of inequality. Stronger communities are more often

exposed to resilience programs, while weaker communities—those most in need of the programs—participate less.

As long as the nation is confronted with terrorist security challenges, Israel needs a fully funded, all-encompassing national program to first achieve and then maintain a high level of social resilience. This program should include—among other items—systems and practices for dissemination of information, grass root social capital empowerment, development of social media networks, high school students' education and mobilization, local leadership promotion, and first responders' professional training. If Israel invests in these essential skills not even five percent of what it is investing in the hard resistance to hazards of different kinds, it will dramatically improve the overall capacity to respond adequately to future terrorist attacks.

What's missing?

Unfortunately Israel, like most other countries, is not there. Something is missing in the equation. Governments around the globe invest heavily in "hard" items of resistance, but seldom in "soft" ones. Why? This is presumably due in part to the longer term nature of social processes that are associated with construction of resilience. Building resilience doesn't fit neatly into the election cycle. It usually takes



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As long as the nation is confronted with terrorist security challenges, Israel needs a fully funded, all-encompassing national program to first achieve and then maintain a high level of social resilience.

too long for politicians to be responsive ("Not in my term of office").

Then there is the impact of the industries which promote the hard responses' systems for homeland security and disaster reduction.

But beyond that, it should be taken into consideration that "resiliencers" are possibly not quite convincing in their arguments about the necessity of enhancing resilience as a major part of the disasters response strategy. The outcome of all this is that most decision makers do not really comprehend what resilience really means and entails. For many of them it is, if not just a buzz-word, then an approach too complicated or politically expensive to implement in practice.

This means that there is still a long way to go to sway the decision makers. Perhaps one way to make the point would be to produce more analytical studies that would clearly show the connection between an enhanced rate of community resilience and the quick return to normal functionality following a major disruption. Several such studies have been conducted in Israel to show that communities that have been through a systemic preparedness and experienced a resilience-enhancement program have conducted themselves under emergency situations in a better fashion, and bounced back significantly faster than the others.

Studies that have been done regarding elementary schools that passed through specific preparatory educational programs show that they functioned up to 50 percent better than schools that did not experience similar programs.

Another study examined the rate of resilience of the Israeli society during the years of the Second Intifada and found that with time and with the gathering of experience in handling severe security situations, Israelis became more resilient, as measured by shortening the time it took them to recuperate following dramatic terrorist events. Furthermore, their actual conduct improved following the rebounding stage, when compared to the level of conduct before the terrorist episodes. Such quantitative studies measuring societal resilience are necessary not only for evaluating the progress and results of specific resilience programs in the community, but also as data-based marketing leverage upon those who are responsible to allocate the necessary means for the different response strategies.

Resilient communities are better able to bounce back from disasters and disruptions in a sustainable way and maintain a good quality of life for all. They are better prepared for uncertainties and able to adapt to changing conditions. This should be perceived as a universal truth, not shaped by one culture or another. When this is the case, we can learn from each other's experience and promote together the role of resilience as a cornerstone of disaster management.

Meir Elran is director of the Homeland Security Program, Institute for National Security Studies at Israel's Tel Aviv University. He can be reached at elran_m@bezeqint.net.

Ordering information for Joan Webster's books—The ***Complete Bushfire Safety Book*** and ***Essential Bushfire Safety***—was inadvertently left out of last issue's print edition. The former can be found at http://www.randomhouse.com.au/books/joan-webster/the-complete-bushfire-safety-book-9781740510349.aspx and the latter at http://www.publish.csiro.au/pid/6969.htm.

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Build the Center Endowment—Leave a charitable legacy for future generations.

Help the Gilbert F. White Endowed Graduate Research Fellowship in Hazards Mitigation—Ensure that mitigation remains a central concern of academic scholarship.

Boost the Mary Fran Myers Scholarship Fund—Enable representatives from all sectors of the hazards community to attend the Center's Annual Workshop.

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