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**Societal Resilience in the “Gaza Envelope” and its Relevance for Other
Areas in Israel**

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A resolution passed by the government of Israel in early December 2018 regarding a new plan to promote resilience in the “Gaza Envelope” in the coming years follows a long line of resolutions that recognize the unique nature of the ongoing security threat from the Gaza Strip. It reflects an understanding of the significance of civilian resilience in the face of severe disruptions, and in the Israeli case, terror of various kinds. The strong societal resilience displayed in Israel’s southern communities is a success story that should be considered at the national level, and used in turn to encourage this model of building societal resilience in other high risk regions. In addition to the need to guarantee physical protection, it is equally important to integrate the “Gaza Envelope” Societal Resilience Model as an essential complementary element of “soft” security.

On December 2, 2018, the government of Israel passed Resolution 4328, regarding a new plan to promote resilience in the “Gaza Envelope” for the years 2019-2020. This follows a long line of resolutions that have been implemented since 2003, which recognize the unique nature of the ongoing security threat from the Gaza Strip. The new resolution was passed in the context of incidents since March that occasionally disrupted the daily routine in the localities adjacent to the border. These included violent demonstrations on the border fence, incendiary kites and balloons launched from the Strip, and rocket fire, anti-tank missiles, and light weapons use. The beneficiaries of this new plan are the town of Sderot and the kibbutzim and moshavim of the Eshkol, Ashkelon Coast, Sedot Negev, and Sha’ar Hanegev Regional Councils, located within 7 km of the border. The program was approved in tandem with the Cabinet resolution regarding the ceasefire with Hamas.

The plan, with a total allocation of 700 million shekels for two years, includes development and reinforcement for the following domains: (1) personal and local security; (2) emergency preparedness; (3) elements of social resilience (health, resilience centers, psychological therapy for children, formal and informal education, welfare); (4) physical development (industrial zones, subsidies for business and agriculture, planning and construction, public institutions, transportation); and (5) finance (tax benefits, special grants for local authorities, development grants).

Significance of the Plan

At the opening of the government session that adopted the resolution, the Prime Minister stated that “Residents of the ‘Envelope’ are standing strong and we support them. The resilience of ‘Gaza Envelope’ residents is an important component of national resilience. Their resilience helps...the government and the Cabinet make the right decisions at the right time.” These words reflect an understanding of the significance of civilian resilience in the face of severe disruptions, and in the Israeli case, terror of various kinds. Over the last ten years, in three rounds of fighting with Hamas (2008/9, 2012, 2014), and between them, as during the events of recent months, the “Gaza Envelope” residents have indeed demonstrated that they have amassed - with comprehensive help from the government and local authorities - an impressive degree of societal resilience. This was manifested not only in their determined stand against terror, but also in their fast recovery from the severe disruptions, and even more so in the remarkable growth in all these localities during a challenging period. Demographic, economic, and social growth in the face of such continuing threats reflects an outstanding level of societal resilience.

These vital capacities are not accidental. They are the direct result of a profound understanding on the part of the local leadership, based on lengthy practical experience, of the importance of resilience and how to enhance it over time. For them, the creation of resilience is a prolonged process comprising four main components:

- a. Reliance on robust security protection against the expected disruptions. This primarily means the defensive and offensive activities of the IDF. In addition it entails enhanced sheltering of individuals and public space, direct dialogue with the regional IDF division, and arrangements to promote what is called an “emergency routine” – orderly conduct under severe disruptions. Examples of this endeavor are the local emergency teams, the on-call squads, regional authority operation centers, and regional resilience centers.
- b. Shaping constructs of inclusive leadership at all levels, to create strong links within and between the communities, to build an ethos of resilience in face of the relevant risks, and to develop systemic tools to implement the concept of resilience in each locality, involving cooperation between them in preparing for and during emergencies.
- c. Emphasizing components of physical and social growth that contribute directly to societal resilience and consequently to the security of the localities. Beyond that, it facilitates general empowerment of the localities, making them more attractive to numerous new residents, who enrich the region and promote more prosperity.
- d. Building a strong network of connections with government and others bodies outside the immediate region, and particularly with those who can contribute to regional security and growth. The professional literature recognizes the direct contribution of this capacity (linkage) to societal resilience. The local leadership has demonstrated remarkable skills in this domain, which results in mobilizing broad and continuous government assistance for

the localities, according to their needs and in coordination with them, even in cases where the residents do not necessarily identify politically with the parties in the government coalition.

Since 2003 the government has allocated to the “Gaza Envelope” localities considerable supplementary budgets, amounting to over 6.2 billion shekels. This is in addition to the investment in regional security, including the construction of the complex barrier on the border with the Strip, at a cost of more than 3 billion shekels. This investment is worthwhile at three important levels. Strategically, it enables the localities and their residents, as well as the State of Israel, to successfully withstand the ongoing pressure from Hamas. As stated by the Prime Minister, this resilience affords the government considerable freedom to maneuver and act based on rational decisions, as shown recently by the decision to accept the ceasefire arrangement. Conceptually, it conveys to Hamas a picture of accelerated development on the Israeli side, despite the ongoing attacks on the residents, many of whom are treated in the resilience centers, in sharp contrast to the destruction within the Strip. This picture faithfully reflects the strategic balance in the dispute with Israel. In the long range, it creates a solid foundation for further development of the vital peripheral region, in spite of the security threats that it faces. For all these reasons, this is a win-win deal: the government invests resources, and the strategic, security, social, and economic yields are quick to appear in return.

Recommendations

This is a success story that should be considered at the national level, and in turn encourage the adoption of this model of building societal resilience in other high risk regions. Such a process takes time, partly for budget reasons. Nonetheless, it is necessary to find the way to implement – even gradually – the main insights presented above. Clearly the size of area and population will impact on the ability of the government to provide the same level of support to additional localities. However, it is worth insisting on implementation of critical measures in highly threatened areas. It is recommended to begin implementation in the extended “Gaza Envelope” region (including Ashkelon) and in the northern localities close to the Lebanese border. This should be launched before the next round of hostilities creates severe functional disruptions, i.e., in places where the necessary investments have not been made to ensure the needed societal resilience.

In July 2018, the government decided on the first phase (at a cost of 500 million shekels) of a long term program for sheltering the northern localities, with a total budget of five billion shekels, without direct reference to elements of promoting societal resilience. Apparently, even the budgets for the first phase have yet to be allocated. In any case, in addition to recognizing the basic need for physical protection, it is no less important to integrate the “Gaza Envelope” Societal Resilience Model as an essential complementary

element of “soft” security. At least 10 percent of every investment in strengthening the civilian front should be allocated to building resilience measures. A concrete step should include the expansion of the network of the resilience centers to the north of the country. This will be an important start in implementing the positive lessons from the “Gaza Envelope” in other threatened areas in Israel.

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