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## Book Reviews

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**Charles D. Freilich**, *Israeli National Security: A New Strategy for an Era of Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 496 pp. Hardback, \$39.95. Kindle, \$14.57.

Charles Freilich's extraordinary new book is a unique contribution to the growing literature on Israeli security affairs. Its importance lies as well in the premise that security issues have been paramount and highly impactful on the general Israeli agenda—politically, socially, and culturally. A more sophisticated understanding of the Israeli security context, as provided in this work, necessarily implies a deeper comprehension of its overall development.

Among this study's many virtues, including being extremely comprehensive, articulate, and thoroughly researched, is that it clearly represents the special qualities of the author. Freilich has dedicated many years of his life to service in the Israeli defense establishment, the last chapter of which was as deputy director of the National Security Council. Since then, he has spent an even longer period in the academic world in Israel and the US, further refining his grasp of the intricacies of the volatile Israeli national security realm.

This rather rare convergence of a long security career with academic analytical experience not only has added to his authority and deep understanding of the central issues discussed in this volume, but also is what makes this work so special. It goes well beyond a profound narration of the challenges facing Israel's security. Rather, primarily, it is a well-constructed platform for Freilich's observations and strategic recommendations on how Israel can best meet its challenges and enhance its all-embracing security posture. In this respect, the book is bound to serve as an excellent, rigorously constructed, and thoughtfully presented foundation for any serious discussion on the multiple questions challenging Israel's national security.

Freilich constructed his book in a rather singular way in order to enable him to concentrate on the contemporary issues of Israel's security challenges and responses. Consequently, he chose, perhaps with good reason,

not to delve into the pre-state era, which was characterized by the preliminary (and significant) stages of the conflict with the Palestinians, and also to minimize the discussion on the first decades of independence, typified mostly by the defining wars with the Arab states. This period (the 'strategic nightmare') shaped the pillars of the 'classical' Israeli defense doctrine and practices, but Freilich's legitimate decision to de-emphasize it opened the way for a broad and detailed scrutiny of current issues, which constitute the main part of the book. In it, the author astutely explores the military, diplomatic, political, and social components that comprise Israel's evolving response to its changing strategic environment.

Still, it could be argued that the rather concise reference to the earlier periods does not sufficiently serve the need to fully explain some basic features of the current Israeli military approach. For example, there is the clear preference for the offensive principal posture in general, and the particular priority given to the air force in particular.

The other singular and commendable achievement of this book is its concluding part, "A National Security Strategy for an Era of Change," which contains the author's basic observations and interpretations that, in turn, serve as a basis for his exhaustive and analytically structured policy recommendations. They are designed to "comprise a proposal for a coherent and comprehensive new Israeli national security strategy" (340). To what extent such a fully defined official strategy is needed, or even possible, given Israel's unique circumstances, is another question. Nonetheless, the author is clearly in favor of promoting one, and his submission of his policy recommendations in the last chapter, "Primary Conclusions," are indeed exceedingly valuable. Each of them deserves serious scrutiny and could be the basis for a deep discussion. I shall address here only a few that seem to be of particular interest.

The first relates to the need to solve the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is rightly viewed by the author as a supreme Israeli interest. Freilich proposes the adoption of a "proactive and dynamic peace policy ... rather than seeking to preserve the status quo, or just reacting to events" (346–347). This is a worthwhile proposal. However, the reality is that the more robust Israel feels about its security standing, the more it tends to preserve the status quo and its reactive strategy, especially with reference to the occupied West Bank, which is widely regarded, certainly by the coalition parties, as part of Eretz Israel. In chapter 4, "Nonmilitary Threats," Freilich raises serious diplomatic and demographic reasons why change is necessary in order to move toward peace, with or without separation from the Palestinians. Yet his discussion does not grant sufficient weight to the severe danger of another Palestinian uprising, on the scale of what Israel faced during the Second Intifada (2000–2004). What emerged in those

horrific years of extreme terrorist attacks on the Jewish population—one of the most challenging periods for Israeli national security—should serve as a lesson that the Palestinians will hardly accept the Occupation and the indefinite continuation of the status quo. The last decade's experience with the threat from Gaza is just a small reminder of this fact.

The second recommendation refers to US-Israel relations, wisely and systematically analyzed in chapter 10, "The 'Special Relationship.'" The proposition that the "relationship has likely passed its peak" (321) would no doubt be perceived by some readers as a somewhat strange assertion, given what is commonly portrayed as 'the best period' under the current US president, Donald Trump, whether that proves to be correct or not. Still, the more astute analysis of the long-range processes in the US, especially within the Jewish community, provides substance to Freilich's concerns regarding the future of the relationship. Indeed, in view of these somber predictions, it is not quite clear why the author advocates pursuing a defense treaty "to cement the long-term future of the 'special relationship'" (358). It is not certain that a formal alliance would necessarily stand up to the profound processes that might jeopardize mutual relations, especially when Israeli assets in the US, primarily the Jewish community, will diminish. Hence, perhaps a wiser Israeli strategy would be to rebuild the necessary natural bonds with the Jewish community, rather than pursuing a policy that might alienate it.

The third comment deals with military policy recommendations. Generally speaking, the author's aggregated proposals are very reasonable. In fact, they broadly correspond to the evolving cautious security approach designed and published as the "IDF Strategy" (118) and practiced in the field by the military in recent engagements. Actually, current policy provides that Hamas's provocations from Gaza are met with limited military response, correlating with Freilich's preference to "manage nonexistential conflicts" (362) rather than try to solve them altogether.

Deterrence, together with restraint, as investigated at length in chapter 6, "The Classic Military Response in Perspective," continues to serve as the main basis for the security management approach, which aims to prolong the lulls between unavoidable repeated rounds of wars on different fronts. In fact, deterrence, as one of the three traditional pillars of the Israeli security doctrine, along with early warnings ('harder to achieve') and military decisions ('much harder to achieve'), and the more recently added fourth (defensive) pillar ('an unwanted stepchild'), stands presently as the cornerstone of Israel's preferred (status quo) approach. The important issue here is how Israel can further its deterrence, extending significantly the lulls between the rounds of fighting vis-à-vis its non-state adversaries. The simple answer would be to exert more military pressure on the enemy

during the periods of hostilities. However, this might bring about the collapse of the foe's governing system, which is not in Israel's interest, as is the case presently with Hamas.

That said, even after being well-educated by this volume, one might still wonder why Israel, the mightiest state in the Middle East, is not capable of forcing its security demands on its much weaker non-state adversaries. There are many answers to this question, which is judiciously addressed in chapter 5, "Israeli Society and National Security," which discusses the impact of the changing Israeli society on national security, and also in the following chapter. What Freilich basically asserts is that globalization and other processes have transformed Israel into an affluent society with a liberal culture, one that "emphasizes such values as conflict avoidance, diplomacy, and the individual, not the state, as the focus of society's concerns" (120).

To that one might add that Israel's political leaders generally tend to refrain from bold and decisive strategies, which necessarily involve significant risks of exposing the civilian population to serious danger from the high-trajectory weaponry held by Hezbollah and Hamas. The Israeli leadership prefers to safeguard its constituency's welfare and prosperity rather than take the chances inherent in a large-scale military confrontation. This is the psycho-political key to the recently developed asymmetric deterrence parity, which explains the unprecedented Israeli spending on active defense following the 2006 Second Lebanon War. It also makes clear Israel's disinterest in fully exerting its military might.

This highlights the (proper) weight Freilich grants to the domestic political domain in the overall context of national security. His recommendations in this realm—particularly to strengthen societal resilience so as to enhance the capacity of the population to bounce back and move forward following a major security disruption—should resonate widely. This approach is associated with the need to strengthen social cohesion and close the socio-economic gap between the haves and have nots. Toward the end of the book, Freilich's emphasis on the vital connection between external security challenges and internal socio-political responses is a noteworthy call for reason, hope, and growth.

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