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**Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi on War and National Resilience**

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**IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Aviv Kochavi stated in a recent public speech that “national resilience is...a positive multiplier for the IDF and a negative multiplier, when the IDF is strong and steadfast, for our enemies...When they realize that the people here understand what is expected from them...this has enormous significance...for the IDF...[and as a phenomenon] that will lessen the determination of the enemy.” The question, then, is how the State of Israel ensures that the civilian front continues to function as reasonably as possible during a war in which it can expect to suffer severe blows to the population, to property, and to critical infrastructures. Thus far the Israeli government has deliberately refrained from updating the public on its assessment regarding the potential consequences of war, wary of causing panic and lessening the public’s sense of security. Perhaps the Chief of Staff’s speech reflects a change in the military’s approach to this critical issue. This article contends that it is necessary to consider ways to gradually enhance the public’s mental preparedness for the next war by providing in advance a rational depiction of what is expected on the civilian front in a large-scale war. Sound information of this kind disseminated by the establishment has the ability to bolster national resilience.**

Senior IDF commanders do not comment frequently about the link between war and national resilience. A notable exception was the address in late December 2019 by Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Aviv Kochavi in memory of the 15<sup>th</sup> Chief of Staff, Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, at the Interdisciplinary Center in Herzliya. In his address, Kochavi stated:

War is the last resort...but when [it occurs]...we will have to act with all our might, and that involves casualties [among us]....This means that the war won’t last for one or two days....We will do everything we can to keep it short, but during that time the home front will also suffer. And here I want to call our attention to ...the issue of national resilience. We need national resilience, and we need everyone who has any influence on the national resilience of the people to do what must be done. National resilience is...a positive multiplier for the IDF and a negative multiplier, when the IDF is strong and steadfast, for our enemies...When they see that the people here understand what is needed [in face of war and its consequences], that has enormous significance...for the IDF...[and as a phenomenon] that will lessen the determination of the enemy.

“Resilience” is a frequent term in public discourse in recent years. In the Israeli context, it is usually mentioned in the framework of limited clashes, such as the rocket fire from the Gaza Strip, and only rarely in the context of wide-scale war, such as a confrontation between Israel and Iran and its proxies on the northern front. It is not clear what exactly the Chief of Staff had in mind when he referred to national resilience, although it seems that he alluded to Israeli social steadfastness in times of war. In the professional literature, resilience relates to the capacity of a system to respond flexibly in the face of severe disturbance, maintain a reasonable degree of functional continuity, and bounce back quickly afterwards and return to a normal or even improved level of functionality.

What follows is an interpretation of the remarks by the Chief of Staff and their implications for the preparedness of the Israeli civilian home front vis-à-vis a broad conflict, which from his message appears as a real and possibly imminent threat.

- a. Along with the clear emphasis in the speech on the IDF’s deterrent and offensive response to Israel’s adversaries is the prominent reference to various defensive aspects, and in this framework, the element of resilience. Thus, for example, in distinguishing between security and the population’s sense of security, the Chief of Staff in essence connects the two components of military strength and civilian strength by suggesting that “the role of the IDF is not only to provide security. Its role is also to provide a sense of security.” This assertion deviates from previous public statements of ranking military officers, and clearly suggest that Kochavi attaches great importance to the expected duration of the war and also to the potential effect of the numerous casualties and large-scale damage to critical infrastructure on the Israeli side (without providing details), and hence on the component of Israeli national resilience. Thus not only is any future war likely to involve severe civilian losses; in addition, the public should be mentally prepared in advance for such an eventuality.
- b. The Chief of Staff lent public expression to the assumption that the perception of resilience should serve as an important civilian response in the next war – both for the civilians and for the military, and as a force multiplier that can impact positively on Israel’s security stamina and the outcome of the war. Similar suggestions were made last September by Home Front Commander General Tamir Yadai, in an article published in the IDF journal *Bein Haktavim*. They represent a defining message in the Israeli discourse about the role of resilience.
- c. The Chief of Staff did not address the question what should be done to enhance national resilience, apart from his expectation that “everyone who has any influence on national resilience should contribute his share.” Studies have shown that the elements contributing to strengthening resilience are: citizens in their communities, local authorities and their leaderships, civil organizations, and

- mechanisms of the central government. These mechanisms are expected to provide the budget and physical conditions for the enhancement of resilience, and to include the support of the security establishment and first and second responders. Furthermore, in Israel the IDF has an important role in heightening resilience, through the direct involvement of the Home Front Command before and during war in providing ongoing security, and mostly through its successes (and failures) during military conflicts, which necessarily have a direct bearing on national morale and civilian functioning.
- d. For the first time, the Chief of Staff referred to the impact of Israeli resilience, both directly – in the context of war, and indirectly – in the context of reinforcing deterrence. This important statement relies on a dual understanding, that (a) upholding and demonstrating civilian resilience in wartime (in which the enemy focuses its main efforts on targeting the civilian domain) in and of itself creates a “victory picture,” both for Israeli citizens, and for Israel’s adversaries; (b) a display of Israeli resilience in the long run could possibly contribute to the enemy's sense of the hopelessness of realizing its hostile intentions toward Israel.

The Chief of Staff’s remarks reflect important progress in Israel’s perception of security, as they assign the civilian front not merely a passive role, as the element that is supposed to absorb the severe blows from the enemy, but also an active role, as a partner in the IDF’s capacity to stand up to the enemy and achieve victory. Indeed, the roots of this understanding are deeply embedded in the Israeli ethos, but much more can be understood here from the Chief of Staff’s remarks: he points to the relation between the functioning of the Israeli civilian front on the one hand and the transformation underway in the enemy's strategy, which for over a generation has clearly positioned the civilian front – what in Israel is still called the “rear” – as the primary target of its belligerent activities.

In such a case, the question arises as to what the Israeli government does to ensure that the civilian front continues to function as reasonably as possible during the predicted war in which it is expected to suffer severe and “unprecedented” casualties, property damage, and interference with the critical infrastructures, as is often described in Israeli scenarios. Over the last twenty years, a successful Israeli model has emerged in the Gaza Envelope region, which proposes a comprehensive, military and civilian integrated response to the growing security challenge. In brief, the response to the Hamas attacks is a clear expression of the implementation of a concept of resilience, one that depends on solid security support. This successful model, which is represented by the economic and communal flourishing of the localities in the Gaza area and in Sderot, notwithstanding the ongoing security challenge, is a worthy model for Israel as a whole, according to

government priorities. Israel has so far not taken this course, and has refrained from implementing the combined military-civilian concept.

This general recommendation requires the government to commit itself to profound strategic thinking and to make decisions with significant budgetary and organizational ramifications. Gradual progress in this direction can occur with bold moves to strengthen societal resilience at the national level. An example of such a change can be a government decision to share the assessments of the security establishment regarding the scope of disruptions and the consequent damage that are foreseen to the civilian home front in the future war with the civilian population. It appears that the Israeli public is not only unfamiliar with the risks inherent in future hostilities, but remains indifferent to them. Even the Chief of Staff's message concerning the severe damage to the Home Front failed to stimulate a public discussion. Concern that the public was not sufficiently attentive to the speech was expressed by President Reuven Rivlin, when INSS presented its strategic assessment on January 6, 2020.

Until now the Israeli government has deliberately refrained from updating the public on its assessments regarding war damage, for fear of creating panic and harming the public's sense of security. Perhaps the Chief of Staff's remarks reflect a change in the army's approach to this subject. There are indeed good reasons to consider ways of gradually improving the public's mental preparedness for the next war and the toll it will take by providing detailed information in advance about what is expected on the civilian home front in a large-scale war. Such structured and intelligent information can contribute to national resilience. Together with the IDF's offensive and defensive capabilities, this can provide an important foundation to help the civilian front stand up successfully to the severe challenges of the next war.