

Israel's National Security Agenda in the Coming Year

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We are at the last stages of the al-Aqsa Intifada, which has claimed from Israel a toll of over 800 fatalities. Thousands of people were injured, great damage was caused to property, and an extremely severe blow was dealt to the country's economy. The Palestinians did not succeed in subduing Israel, nor did they succeed in compelling it to withdraw from territories and conduct negotiations under fire. The Palestinians did succeed, however, in imprinting onto Israeli consciousness the understanding that Israel's extrication from its difficult economic straits and any subsequent economic recovery would not be possible without entering into a political process. The linkage between the political-security situation and the socio-economic reality in Israel in the minds of both the Israeli leadership and the Israeli public is a striking expression of Palestinian capability. In my opinion, the Palestinians will seek to maximize this leverage in the foreseeable time span, through direct or indirect means.

Conversely, Israel's ability to inflict losses on the Palestinians and cause them to recognize their basic weakness has also been proven. It propelled even the extremist Palestinian organizations to join Fatah in a ceasefire, albeit a temporary one. This wherewithal of Israel, which will be discussed later on, is a central lever in the reality evolving in our region. Israel has proven that it is capable – from the standpoint of its military, intelligence, and technological abilities, as well as its decisiveness – of intensifying the battle against the Palestinians and escalating it to a level where the price becomes intolerable for the Palestinians and their leadership, including the leadership of the terror organizations.

This Israeli threat, whether materialized or portrayed as a potential capacity that can be translated into action at any given moment, will be a central foundation in our regional reality in the upcoming period. Israel is entering this period bearing declared and proven capabilities, along with a clear understanding of the limitations of power. Unlike the Palestinians, Israel cannot and perhaps does not wish to sacrifice its economic and social

achievements to the point of their complete or partial ruin, in order to attain advantages in the bloody campaign against the Palestinians. From here on, Israel's decisions will, therefore, be the product of compromises that it makes between these two poles. This view, I believe, represents the consensus of those in Israel's national security establishment.

The Palestinian Ceasefire

As to the role of the terror organizations – Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and particularly Hamas – in the overall picture: over the past few weeks the Israeli leadership has made it clear that it is not involved in the internal discussions within the Palestinian camp on a ceasefire, a *hudna*. Israel conducts negotiations with and addresses only the authorized and official Palestinian leadership, which is the leadership of the Palestinian Authority and its prime minister, Mahmoud Abbas, otherwise known as Abu Mazen, along with Mohammed Dahlan. This position is, of course, an imperative, and is accepted by all of the formal

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players, both within the arena and outside it. At the same time, however, it is clear that Israel is following extremely closely what is taking place among the Palestinians themselves. Israel demands the dismantlement of the terror infrastructure and seizure of illegal weapons, and is pressuring for quick fulfillment of these Palestinian commitments, based on the roadmap and the erstwhile Tenet and Zinni agreements. It is clear that if the process of confiscating weapons and dismantling the terror infrastructure does not begin within a certain period of time, Israel will not necessarily continue with the process of transferring security responsibility for additional Palestinian territories into Palestinian hands.

Will the ceasefire be utilized by the terror organizations, first and foremost Hamas, for the purpose of reorganizing and reequipping themselves with weaponry? Is the three-month hiatus, the time span of the *hudna*, a tactical move by Hamas? And what will happen if the three months are extended to six, or to a year? Will Hamas begin to change? Is it capable of changing? Will it undertake to transform its character under the pressure of the evolving reality within Palestinian society? Will the PA's threat to dismantle the terror infrastructure bring Hamas to carry out an internal process of dismantling its infrastructure, or of sidelining its infrastructure? Or will Hamas attempt to achieve greater integration in the Palestinian Authority as a political movement that strives to increase its strength to the point of

taking control of the Palestinian Authority? Conversely, what will happen if Hamas does not challenge the PA? What will happen if Hamas demonstrates flexibility, and even agrees here and there for weapons to be confiscated and for portions of its infrastructure to be dismantled? Signals that it is willing to join and participate in the Palestinian government? This direction would appear to contradict the essential

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Hamas spirit, as it requires de-facto recognition of the State of Israel, yet might this be a possibility?

Whoever argues that this "optimistic" scenario borders on the imaginary would do well to recall the effort invested by the Egyptians for over a year in order to put together the agreement that was finally achieved between the terror organizations and the PA. We always assumed that this effort was doomed to failure. None of those assessing the situation believed that the Egyptians had a chance of realizing their dream and bringing about a *hudna*. There was not a single party that believed

that the indefatigable efforts of Omar Suleiman, director of the Egyptian General Intelligence Service, would be crowned with success. Time after time, the Egyptians' hopes were dashed. Time after time, their advances were rebuffed and their pressures defied in laborious discussions that wearied participants and mediators alike. Egypt suffered repeated blows to its international image and its prestige within the Arab world for a long period of time. The US leadership also did not give a real chance or attach importance to what was derisively called the "Egyptian babbling." And yet today, the American pressure and Egyptian pressure have joined forces, and together with the beginnings of change on the Palestinian street, the *hudna* resulted and became a significant factor in the current situation. Before us is an initial agreement that is tenuous, temporary, and unsteady. It is an interesting experiment that Israel will follow, even if it is not a partner to it and does not refer to it formally. This is an experiment that is fraught with dangers to Israel, and it would have been preferable from Israel's standpoint had it been foregone. But it is an experiment that is underway in actuality, and therefore requires serious and close monitoring.

The coming year will be marked by the fact that the Palestinians, the Israelis, the Americans, and the Arab states have demonstrated support for the principle that in the immediate time span temporary agreements should be sought. In the past, the

Israeli-Palestinian conflict was characterized in part by the exchange of positions by Israel and the Arab world. When Israel sought to achieve final status agreements, the Palestinians wished for temporary arrangements. When the Palestinians wished for a final status arrangement, Israel believed that the conditions were not ripe for it. From Hamas to the Israeli government, from the US administration to the Arab states, everyone understands that the coming year and perhaps the next two years are a fitting period for an interim arrangement. Who knows better than we that two years in the Middle East can be an eternity.

To Hamas, the *hudna* is a ceasefire. To Israel it is an interim arrangement, in other words, its consent to a Palestinian state with provisional borders. This is the first time that the objectives of all sides share a common denominator of temporariness. It is only natural that each of the players seeks to maximize the situation and to define and embed those advantages that it wishes to preserve, in the spirit of the well known Israeli saying that there is nothing more permanent than the temporary. As far as Israel is concerned, temporariness holds great blessings. It serves not only as a convenient backdrop for conducting a measured and beneficial foreign and security policy; it also serves the intentions of the Israeli government to calm the public and enable a period of economic recovery, social reinforcement, and stabilization.

Without addressing the details of the roadmap and Israel's fourteen

qualifying points, I will note only that the map also delineates parameters for a final status arrangement. But upon examining it closely one realizes that while the map deals extensively with the stages of the temporary interim arrangements, it deals with the final status arrangement in much less detail. It leaves room for discussion between the parties on this fundamental issue. It is very hard to

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predict what direction the difficult negotiations on the final status arrangement will take.

Four Security Issues

Israel's national security agenda for the coming year is not limited to the aspects that I mentioned so far, although even if it included only these issues it would be full enough. However, other realms that are very significant and possibly fateful for our future must be considered as well. I will list some of them. If the current political move progresses and if the series of steps brings about the establishment of a Palestinian state

with provisional borders and limited elements of sovereignty, the issue of the trilateral relations between the State of Israel, the State of Palestine, and the Arab minority of Israel's citizens will take on a new meaning. The connection between Israel's citizens and the State of Palestine will be an issue that each of the three parties that I mentioned will have to address, although it is difficult for all of them, not only for Jewish Israel. In this regard, the behavior of the Arab citizens of Israel and the behavior of the Palestinian state with the provisional borders will also be challenged, and to a certain degree even more so than the Israeli government. I will note further that the report of the commission headed by Justice Orr is scheduled to be publicized in the near future. Whatever the findings, conclusions, and recommendations, they will touch upon very sensitive nerves related to our national security.

A second topic that will occupy Israel in the coming period – though not Israel alone – is the future of Hizbollah forces on the northern border. In the wake of the US-led war in Iraq and the isolation of Syria, Hizbollah has been forced to engage these past weeks in serious soul searching. It can no longer depend upon Syria's vital support, or on Iran's steadfast solidarity. Hizbollah cannot be certain that the growing American pressure will not cause both Damascus and Tehran to decide to sacrifice it, fully or partially, within the framework of their wider national interests. Judging by Hassan

Nasrallah's statements over the past weeks, it appears that he fears such an eventuality. He does not trust the calming words that he hears from his Syrian and Iranian benefactors. Israel will doubtlessly monitor Lebanon, Syria, Iran, and Hizbollah closely. Will Hassan Nasrallah opt for the course chosen by Ahmed Yassin? Is there a possibility that Hizbollah will follow in Hamas's footsteps, under the pressure of the American moves that have shaken all the existing balances in the region? At present this seems little more than a remote possibility, but we have already seen remote possibilities become reality. Whatever Hizbollah's intentions on our northern border are, the organization's very ability to aim hundreds of missiles of varying ranges towards the heart of Israel is not a reality that Israel will be able to accept for long. Among other developments, the coming year will be marked by the removal of this threat by Israel, by one means or another. There are other ways of neutralizing Hizbollah besides a frontal Israeli operation: there are sufficient international and regional levers that can wield a critical influence on the continued existence of the military capability held by Hizbollah.

A third topic on the agenda will naturally be the security establishment's re-organization in the face of the new emerging reality. This can also be phrased in the following terms: in the aftermath of the war in Iraq, what war does the IDF need to prepare for? Considering the severe budgetary constraints within which

the IDF will have to operate in the coming years, the General Staff and the political echelon will need to determine priorities and take risks on the basis of completely new situation assessments, since the map of threats has changed. Has it shrunk in the inner circle, only to expand in the outer circle – specifically with Iran in mind? Suffice it to say that this will be a central matter to address over the coming year.

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A fourth and final topic that should be put on Israel's national security agenda is Jewish immigration to Israel. The last decade of the past century was characterized, inter alia, by mass immigration to Israel, especially from the states that were part of the former Soviet Union. Over one million people came to Israel during this period. This accelerated growth changed Israel's relative weight in the region and in the entire world. We are a state with over 6 million people, including over 5 million Jews. There is no doubt that this immense addition to Israel's population was a central factor in

fortifying its strength. For the purpose of comparison, consider that we are more numerous than Ireland with its 3.5 million citizens, larger than Norway with its 4.5 million citizens, and larger than Denmark with its population of 5 million. Today Israel is no longer a small country, population-wise. But what of the future? Will Israel succeed in attracting tens of thousands of Jewish immigrants in the first decade of the twenty-first century? Will we succeed in convincing the Jews of the world that only here will they be able to completely fulfill their aspirations, not only for freedom but also for a good livelihood and quality of life? I see this challenge as a central matter on Israel's national security agenda, in the true sense of the phrase: will we have the strength to breathe new life into the Zionist dream, adapting it to the conditions and circumstances of the twenty-first century.

United States Regional Involvement

The changes that have taken place in the region due to the American involvement in the past two years – the war in Afghanistan against the forces of al-Qaeda and the Taliban, the conquest of Iraq by the US army, and the leading of the international campaign against the terror of global jihad on the one hand and against dissemination of weapons of mass destruction on the other – are all a direct result of overall global American policy. And then, in steps that were both unusual and unexpected, the US administration

decided to expand its involvement in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and spearhead initiatives to fulfill President Bush's vision for the establishment of two states for two peoples, or more precisely – to fulfill the vision of the establishment of a Palestinian state.

It must be conceded that the administration's new intervention was indeed surprising. The accepted assumption was that it would not follow in the path of its predecessor – the Clinton administration – and be dragged into what is called "micro-management" of the conflict. At the outset, the Bush administration did not plan to plunge into the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and invest in it as it is doing today: on the contrary. And yet it has become apparent that the Bush administration has gone farther than the Clinton administration, and has made it clear that it would be willing to pressure both sides in order to try to reach the goal that it has set. It cannot be recalled that a US administration ever spoke openly in the past about willingness to pressure both sides. There is no doubt that the American activity will require extremely serious Israeli attention over the coming period. The United States would not want to fail in a task that it has undertaken, and President Bush will not want the fate of his initiatives to resemble the initiatives of his predecessor.

The optimistic scenario, or as it is customarily called, the "best case analysis," will not necessarily materialize. There is the possibility that the most recent efforts at

intervention or the roadmap in its entirety will not lead to the anticipated results, or will lead to only some of the anticipated results. There is also the dire possibility that the entire effort will fail. This could happen because terror does not stop, because the confidence building measures between Israel and the Palestinians are not carried out due to a mutual lack of trust, because of

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external intervention – Iranian, for example – that would obstruct these positive initiatives, or because of other reasons. There is the danger that the failure of these moves will bring about a renewal of the acts of hostility between us and the Palestinians, and everyone would agree that this would be an unfavorable result. Along with such a development, there is the danger that the failure will also be cast as a failure of the US administration and President Bush. Presumably, the US administration will spare no effort to forestall such a failure, and thus it will not only be the Palestinians who will be on the receiving end of the

United States' efforts – and a word to the wise should suffice here.

Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations*, which was recently published in Hebrew, deals, among other issues, with wars between civilizations, and contends that a large portion of such clashes occur on the fault line between civilizations – in Europe, the Middle East, and other places in the world. According to Huntington, the conflicts themselves stem from the geographical proximity of different religions and cultures, from different cultural institutions, and from the collective historical memories of the opposing societies. Over the course of centuries, these may change through a process of slow evolution. Or, the conflict may vanish abruptly and harshly if one group liquidates the other. But if neither of these two possibilities takes place, in other words, if on the one hand the conflict does not dissipate and on the other hand there is no decisive outcome, then the conflict continues and evokes recurrent periods of violence.

The Israeli-Arab conflict takes place on a fault line between civilizations. According to conventional wisdom, every war must end. Yet is this true of fault line wars? To Huntington, fault line wars are intermittent, but fault line conflicts are interminable. If, then, we are destined to an interminable conflict, I hope we will be able to establish the temporary solutions for a long period of time – the interim non-final solutions to the conflict that we face here.