In Israel, Resilience Is Now a National Security Issue

By Rhea Siers / April 3rd, 2024

Rhea Siers is the former Deputy Associate Director for Policy at NSA. She currently works as a cybersecurity and national security consultant, attorney and educator and teaches at the Elliott School of International Affairs (George Washington University) and Johns Hopkins University.

OPINION — Six months after "Black Sabbath," the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel, the streets of Tel Aviv are as busy as ever, filled with traffic and the usual urban bustle. Beneath that buzz of normalcy, there are signs of the national angst – posters of the hostages being held by Hamas, yellow ribbons emblazoned with the slogan, "Bring them home," and a host of signs criticizing Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu. The signs show "Bibi" with the slogan, "You are the leader; you are responsible". At the same time, banners still fly, declaring, "Together we will win". Just this past Saturday night, the streets of Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and other Israeli cities were filled with the largest crowds of demonstrators since October, combining demands for new elections with calls for return of the hostages in Gaza.

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Meir Elran is a retired IDF Brigadier General and former Deputy Chief of Military Intelligence. In my previous visits to Israel, he hosted my graduate students at the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), discussing responses to terrorism. He and his colleagues have analyzed polling and other data to understand the "pulse" of Israeli recovery after terrorist attacks.

Dr. Elran sees resilience not only as the capability of a society or state to respond successfully to a significant disruption. This is not only about "bounce back" or recovery, he notes, but also about rising "to a higher level of systemic functioning while preserving the system's basic identify and values" – or, as he puts it, "bouncing forward." Recovery is shaped, according to Elran and his colleagues, by multidimensional factors, ranging from the responses of the affected Gaza Envelope communities to the low public confidence in the ability of the current Israeli government to respond coherently to the crisis. In other words, resilience and ultimately national security are not dependent solely on the kinetic war against Hamas in Gaza. Of course, they have also examined the importance of national unity as a key to resilience even in the politically fraught Israeli system.

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