The Internal Arena and National Security

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The nuclear agreement between Iran and the P5+1, banning Iran from developing nuclear arms and limiting its ability to do so, was generally viewed by the Israeli government and the public as a bad development. Nonetheless, the deal might postpone the realization of the nuclear threat to Israel by ten to fifteen years at least, and therefore can offer a genuine sense of relief as it directly affects the map of Israeli security threats in the coming years. This is not the only area in which there is a significant chance of reducing the overall security threat to Israel. Concurrent with the problematic nature inherent in Islamic radicalization, manifested by the Islamic State and al-Qaeda affiliates, as well as by the ongoing Iranian support of radical elements, the broad picture shows that the regional threat against Israel is actually decreasing; the Arab states have not posed a military threat to Israel for over a generation, while Hezbollah and Hamas, for different reasons, are no longer at their peak. The real complex threat that continues to be troublesome is the conflict with the Palestinians; a recent escalation of security threats – beginning in Jerusalem, and boiling over into the Green Line and now mostly in the West Bank – risks turning into a third intifada.

Given these circumstances, in 2016, Israel most likely will continue to confront primarily low-to-mid-intensity security challenges in ongoing cycles of conflict with the Palestinians, which time and again demonstrate the centrality of that conflict in the Israeli reality. This gives rise to several questions. To what extent will Israel consider confronting the roots of the conflict, so as to promote the desired reality of two nation states? To what extent will Israel

consider turning its attention to other important topics on the national agenda that are not directly connected to military security, but significant for fortifying society and ensuring civil security in the broad sense of the term?

This chapter deals with four major internal issues that are analogous to the four walls of a house whose strength and sturdiness are critical for Israeli society to flourish and be secure. They are constructive governance; civil public discourse and conduct; positive inter-tribal relations; and a supportive economy. Each is accompanied by challenges that threaten the ability of Israeli society to function and thrive.

The First Wall: Constructive Governance

According to the United Nations, good governance promotes equality, participation, pluralism, transparency, assumption of responsibility, and the rule of law, and does so in an effective, efficient, and sustainable manner. The practical meaning of these principles is manifested in free, fair, and regular elections; representative legislation creating laws and providing enforcement; and an independent judiciary that is supposed to provide an interpretation of the laws passed.[1] In true democracies, this definition represents the barest minimum. At first glance, Israel would seem to enjoy a satisfactory level of governance, even in comparison with other solid democracies. So, for example, in 2014, according to the governance index of the World Bank,[2] Israel ranked at 85.6 percent in government effectiveness (compared to 92.8 percent for the United Kingdom, 84.6 percent for Spain, and 97.1 percent for Japan), reflecting stability over the years. Israel received 87.5 percent in quality of regulation (compared to 97.1, 75.5, and 84.1 percent to the United Kingdom, Spain, and Japan, respectively), a higher grade than in the past. In the rule of law, Israel ranked at 83.2 percent (compared to 94.2, 79.8, and 89.4 percent, respectively, regarding the above-mentioned nations), also a higher grade than in the past. For controlling corruption, Israel received 76.4 percent (compared to the United Kingdom at 92.8, Spain at 70.2, and Japan at 93.3 percent), a grade lower than in the past. *The Economist*'s democracy index for 2014[3] placed Israel in the thirty-sixth place, with a score of 7.63 among the nations of the world (compared to the United Kingdom, ranked sixteenth with a score of 8.31; the United States, ranked nineteenth and scored 8.11; and Spain, which placed twenty-second at 8.05).

What do Israel's own citizens think? The Global Corruption Index[4] of 2014 places Israel thirty-seven among 175 nations with a perception of corruption of 60/100 (similar to Spain; lower than the United States, in seventeenth place, with a grade of 74, and the United Kingdom, in fourteenth place, with a grade of 78). In general, there is a downward trend in the level of trust the Israeli public places in its government institutions, including the IDF, the courts, the police, and the state-controlled media.[5]

Both the Israeli public and government tend to be dissatisfied with the level of governance.[6] The oft-heard complaint is that since the establishment of the state, the governments of Israel have found it difficult to conduct and implement policy, so that the gap between the decisions made by the government and those implemented is large and growing larger. Execution of policy is often unreliable, incomplete, and/or slow. Israelis speak of bureaucratic obstacles, bottlenecks (especially in the Ministries of Justice and Finance), and the problematic nature of the interface between elected officials and the public service. This was the reason for the establishment of the Governance Committee ("the team for improving staff work and the executive capabilities of government ministries") headed by then-Director General of the Prime Minister's Office, Harel Locker, following the recommendations of the Trajtenberg Committee. The Governance Committee pointed to five structural flaws in the public service: the realization and execution of policy; a cumbersome bureaucracy; poor management of human resources in the civil service; the lack of systemic vision and lateral cooperation; and flaws in the ability to think strategically, plan policy, measure, and follow up. The committee's report was submitted and approved by the government in June 2013.[7]

To date, as far as we know, implementation of the committee's recommendations has not yet occurred. Several developments in the past year indicate that significant political and bureaucratic obstacles still make it very difficult to govern at both the national and local levels. This was especially apparent this past year in the convoluted processes of approving the natural gas framework; the serious corruption cases that came to light,[8] such as those linked to former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, the political party Israel Beitenu, and others; as well as the delayed appointments of several senior personnel, such as the governor of the Bank of Israel and the chief of

the Israel Police. The scandals and fiascos associated with the top brass of the police that led to the early retirement of a large number of senior police officers also played a role in frustrating the critical work of law enforcement and undermining public trust. Furthermore, the legitimate public debate over the role and functioning of the judicial system, especially the status of the Supreme Court and its relationship with the legislative and executive branches of government, often diverges into unwarranted directions, with severe implications for the foundations of Israel's democracy.

A regime that fails to govern because of political reasons, such as having a razor-thin majority, poor governance, or because it does not enjoy the public trust, will also find it hard to provide for its constituency. This is true when it comes to issues of quality of life, personal safety, and public order, and might also extend to issues of national security in the broad sense of the word. The repeated leaks from the cabinet sessions during Operation Protective Edge and the severe criticism aimed at the Prime Minister meted out by his fellow cabinet ministers, even those belonging to his own political party, are clear evidence of this difficulty, which threatens the government's freedom of action even when associated with critical issues of national security.

The Second Wall: Violence in the Public Discourse and Public Conduct

The past year saw the continued, if not intensified, trend of a public discourse that is hostile, alienating, and exclusionary. This peaked during Operation Protective Edge (2014) and the campaign for the election to the twentieth Knesset (2015), and was evident everywhere, from politicians' irresponsible statements to abusive comments in the blogosphere. This discourse promotes hatred, racism, and violence, all of which are gaining momentum through social media; some of these media serve as a platform for incitement and verbal violence.

A clear association exists between the deterioration of the public discourse into a violent debate and the freedom exercised by some individuals and organizations to conduct violent actions as well as between the ugly phenomena of racism, exclusion, and bigotry, and the apathy and lack of compassion towards the other and the weak. All these directly affect Israel's index of violence: according to the 2014 index, using international comparisons, the

murder rate in Israel is 2.4 per 100,000, similar to the average in OECD nations. But the rate of violent assault is more than twice as high in Israel, reaching 700 per 100,000, compared to the OECD average of 300. The rate of sexual assault in Israel is, on average, 10 percent higher than in OECD member nations. These data reflect a decrease in the overall number of violent crimes, but an increase in their severity. Since 2003, Israel has recorded 620,000 instances of violent crime on average per year, but only 210,000 (34 percent) are reported to institutional authorities, while 66 percent go unreported.[9] The roots of this phenomenon lie in the public's lack of trust in the police and law enforcement agencies. Moreover, the Ministry of Public Security concludes that, "violence in Israeli society is prevalent in every field and walk of life and is seeping into public institutions providing services to the public at large."[10]

Physical violence is directly linked to verbal abuse and cyberbullying, a growing variation of the old theme of hooliganism, and manifested in the public at large and among children and teens. Cyberbullying is on the rise among Israeli schoolchildren. According to research done by the Ministry of Public Security in December 2014, 12 percent of schoolchildren aged 12-18 reported they had been threatened or humiliated online; 7.2 percent reported that they had been harmed by impersonation and/or identity theft; and 4.7 percent reported they had been sexually harassed on the internet.[11] A different study, published in May 2015, carried out by Kinneret College showed that half of all schoolchildren in grades 3-9 have been bullied in the social media and 70 percent of them have been bullied on school grounds.[12] Incitement and verbal violence are not the lot of the unschooled only; politicians are guilty as well, certainly at sensitive times such as during general elections and security crises.

The Third Wall: Polarization and Tribalism

Israel of 2015 is represented by the politics of identity. No longer is there a discourse of processes or moral values, only of tribal identities. Israeli citizens are hard pressed to define a shared vision, and many political leaders nurture tribalism instead of rallying behind unity and the needs of the state, its values, its future, and the individual's role in it. The vulgar discourse and violent behavior have torn new ruptures in the delicate fabric of relations

among ethnic and social groups. In this context, the relationship between the Jewish majority and the Arab minority is the country's most significant political and social challenge in terms of the character of a state that defines itself as both Jewish and democratic. This is the case particularly when the scales are increasingly tipping in favor of the first, perhaps at the expense of the second. In this past year, this relationship certainly experienced new lows, manifested in intentional legal exclusion through the Law on Governance (March 11, 2014), which raised the electoral threshold to 3.25 percent of the vote, motivated in part by the intention to curb the representation of Arab citizens in the Knesset.[13] The move failed because of the Arab parties' decision to run together as the Joint List, headed by Ayman Odeh, who tries to focus on the civil agenda rather than the political-national one.[14]

Exclusionary, hurtful statements aimed at the Arab minority were made in public, including some outrageous statements expressed during the elections to the twentieth Knesset in March 2015. The deterioration in the security situation starting in October 2015 again raised the level of fear and anti-Arab hostility, if not downright racism, among a growing segment of the Jewish public. This has been expressed in violence, some of it extreme, against Arabs. This further shreds the delicate fabric of relations between Jews and Arabs, a development that threatens public order and personal safety, and magnifies mutual fear and distrust. After previous crises, both sides managed to construct a conscientious and informed process of moving towards coexistence. It is important to make a concerted effort to make sure this happens again after the flames of the current crisis have been extinguished.

In the intra-Jewish arena, Israel experienced difficult confrontations between the ultra-Orthodox and the secular,[15] but the most anguishing social protest of the past year was led by young people from the Ethiopian community, and exposed the deep rift between them and Israeli society and its institutions. The protest included harsh allegations of persistent racist-motivated discrimination and exclusion. Despite the outcry, the protest failed to engage the interest of other social groups. The public discourse was rife with claims that the Ethiopian protest was being supported by elements on the radical left; accusations that social protests are "politically" motivated thus strip the protests of their essence and contents, and stop them dead in their tracks.

On June 7, 2015, President Reuven Rivlin coined the phrase "the four tribes," expressing a holistic view that "Israeli society needs a wake-up call," and that "the ultra-Orthodox, the secular, the religious, or the Arab must not be allowed to feel that what is most precious to them is in danger or is being threatened." According to President Rivlin, "the new Israeli order demands to move away from the commonly accepted notion of majority versus minority, to a new approach of partnership among the different sectors of Israeli society."[16] Four elements must serve as the foundation for that partnership: one, the sense of security felt among each sector that joining this partnership does not mean giving up the fundamental components of its identity; two, a sense of mutual responsibility; three, fairness and equality; and four, the most challenging, the creation of a shared Israeli ethos.

Although President Rivlin did not mention intra-Jewish identity struggles, his words expressed a courageous and far-reaching vision based on the recognition that no single group or tribe has a monopoly or an inherent superiority within Israeli society. It is based on the profound understanding that allowing the situation to persist and deteriorate into instability and possibly even bloodshed, especially between Jews and Arabs, is unwarranted and totally wrong, and that we still have the power to change direction. Only time will show the extent to which the President's vision can turn into reality. It also greatly depends upon processes that all the tribal segments of Israeli society must undergo before they recognize that only this vision can ensure their long-term existence, prosperity, and wellbeing.

The Fourth Wall: A Supporting Economy

An important factor in the resilience of Israeli society and its ability to successfully meet repeated security challenges is the existence of a strong, stable economy, and – no less important – a supporting economy. A supporting economy refers to the construction and preservation of a national economy that strives for a reasonable measure of equal opportunity and a reduction of income gaps among the various sectors of the public. One of the fundamental challenges of the Israeli economy, however, is its high level of inequality, which has increased greatly in the last few decades, although recent indications have revealed a certain moderation of this trend.[17] This high level of economic inequality contributes to social tensions and has deepened the already

existing rifts in Israeli society. Inequality is measured in various ways, and includes poverty, which is relatively measurable; income gaps among different population sectors; and other more complex statistical indexes.

The system faces other challenges, some of which preserve inequality while others negatively affect economic stability and growth. The most important ones in the short term are the management of a reasonable fiscal policy that will not create enormous deficits and debt, in part by rationalizing the planning of the defense budget; and in the intermediate to the long term – addressing the exorbitant cost of housing, both via fiscal policy and via the Bank of Israel's policy.

Conclusion

The response of a sizable segment of the Israeli public to the violent events that erupted in Jerusalem in the fall of 2015 was notable for its worrisome mixture of panic, confusion, and growing hostility towards Arabs, at times bordering on overt racism and unbridled violence. This volatile mix of emotions was particularly striking given the fairly limited severity of the dangers and violent attacks against Israeli citizens (as of the date of this writing), certainly when compared to previous waves of violence. No less worrisome is the sense that the public response has been overly emotional and disproportionate, swayed by messages disseminated via the government institutions and social media, and by inflammatory statements made by public opinion leaders and politicians, some of which bordered on clear incitement aimed squarely at the Arab population. The first few weeks of this security crisis have given the impression that social resilience and public fortitude have been dealt a serious blow.

We must then ask if the disproportionate conduct is linked to the nation's internal socioeconomic state of affairs. While the present situation is complex, it also shows that it is not totally bleak; in several areas positive marks of strength could serve as the basis for societal growth. Still, the public at large – aside from the narrow discourse on security, which has a profound effect on the nation's mood – still does not pay adequate attention to the domestic socioeconomic arena and its interconnectedness with the security situation. The failure of the social protest of 2011 still reverberates, and the necessary engagement with ways of promoting and prioritizing social matters is still

marginalized, as is the significant connection between the social and the security domains. When such discussions are held, they are often seen as damaging to the security interests, as reflected in the IDF's harsh response and strident opposition to the Locker Committee's report on the defense budget. Furthermore, over the years, civil mechanisms of criticism of the army and the defense establishment, such as the State Comptroller, the Knesset, and the media, have weakened. As a result, the public discourse on security and foreign affairs has become shallow and polarized, and many issues are never brought to the public's consciousness or debated with any depth.

All of this leads to two conclusions: one, it is important to allow the public discourse to bridge the gap between security and social issues in order to enhance security in the broad sense of the meaning; two, reinforcing the components of internal strength, including the human and social capital in Israel, will also strengthen the resilience of the Israeli public and its ability to better handle national security challenges. The security escalation that started in the fall of 2015 exposed the weaknesses and strengths of Israeli society. It is critical to find ways to reduce the pitfalls, such as the unwarranted anxiety and hatred, and reinforce the strengths, such as alertness and the willingness to commit and be mobilized for the public's sake.

The following chapters in this section will analyze these and other issues as interlocked parts of a whole that requires both broad and significant national attention. Without concerted government involvement, based on rigorous prioritization, multi-year planning, and meticulous implementation, the chance of changing this worrisome picture is unlikely, embedded as it is with toxic seeds of deterioration and the potential to damage the fundamental fabric of Israeli society and national security.

Notes

1   For more on the United Nations definition of governance, see http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/governance.
2   See the World Bank, "Worldwide Governance Indicators," http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#countryReports.
3   See the Economist Intelligence Unit, "The Democracy Index 2014," https://www.eiu.com/public/topical_report.aspx?campaignid=Democracy0115.
4   See the Global Political Corruption Index, https://www.transparency.org/cpi2014/results.

5   Yael Hadar, "Public Trust in Governing Institutions in the Last Decade," *Parliament* No. 63, http://goo.gl/vSGnke.

6   Dafna Barak-Erez, "Governing Instability in Israel: Is the Election System Fully to Blame?" *Law and Business* 14 (2012): 493-509.

7   See findings of the Governance Committee headed by Harel Locker, http://www.pmo.gov.il/SiteCollectionDocuments/meshilut2013.pdf.

8   Doron Navot, *Political Corruption in Israel* (Jerusalem: Israel Democracy Institute, 2012).

9   Ministry of Public Security, "National Violence Index, Central Findings, 2014," http://mops.gov.il/researchanddevelopment/israelviolenceindex/pages/israelvioind_statistics_2014.aspx#top; Ministry of Public Security, Division for Strategic Planning and Policy, "National Violence Index of Israel, summary," (2014), http://mops.gov.il/Documents/Publications/RD/ViolenceIndex/ViolenceIndex_des_n2_2014.pdf.

10   Ibid.

11   Ministry of Public Security, Research Department, "Survey on Cybercrime and Cyberbullying," January 2015, http://mops.gov.il/Documents/Publications/CrimePrevention/CyberBullying_Jan2015.pdf.

12   The study was done under the direction of Prof. Amos Rolider, chair of the Behavioral Sciences Department at Kinneret College, and Dr. Meyran Boniel-Nissim, a senior lecturer in the department. Conducted in 2015 via the Sarid Institute for Research Services, the study was based on data collected from a representative sampling of 1,300 schoolchildren in grades 3-9. See Eli Ashkenazi, "A Plague that is Spreading: Half of the Children is Bullied Online," *Walla*, May 13, 2015, http://news.walla.co.il/item/2853874.

13   Nadia Hilou and Manal Hreib, "Israel's Electoral Threshold: Implications for Israeli-Arab Political Representation," *INSS Insight* No. 539 (April 23, 2014), http://www.inss.org.il/index.aspx?id=4538&articleid=6869.

14   Itamar Radai, Meir Elran, Yousef Makladeh, and Maya Kornberg, "The Arab Citizens in Israel: Current Trends According to Recent Opinion Polls," *Strategic Assessment* 18, no. 2 (2015): 101-16, http://www.inss.org.il/uploadImages/systemFiles/adkan18_2ENG_version2288992018.pdf.

15   For example, the murder of the late Shira Banki during the LGBT parade in Jerusalem on August 2, 2015.

16   See "Speech of the President at the Herzliya Conference Marking a Year of His Presidency," June 7, 2015, http://www.president.gov.il/ThePresident/Speeches/Pages/news_070615_01.aspx.

17   See "Findings from the Household Expenditure Survey 2014 Data on the Israeli Households Income, Expenditure and Durable Goods Ownership," http://www.cbs.gov.il/reader/newhodaot/hodaa_template.html?hodaa=201515267.