Israel's Emergency Management Challenges

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The stabbing and car-ramming terrorist attacks that started in the fall of 2015 were not one of the main scenarios for which Israel's complex emergency management system had prepared or drilled. Since the Second Lebanon War in 2006, the institutions charged with preparing for emergencies have focused most of their efforts on different scenarios involving missiles and rockets. Indeed, Israel has made significant progress in preparedness for such attacks, but the stabbings and car-rammings highlight the complexity and multidimensionality of emergency preparedness. This interdisciplinary and inter-organizational mission requires ongoing cooperation among all parties involved; comprehensive planning with built-in flexibility; intensive drilling of various scenarios; and conceptual and operational preparedness for unexpected, unfamiliar, and changing situations. Meeting this challenge is difficult, but it is possible and critically important in the current situation.

Israel's Emergency Management System: Current Structural and Inter-Organizational Characteristics

The Ministries of Defense and Public Security are charged with responsibility for the emergency management system. Each of them faces challenges, both internally and in creating synergy and maintaining coordination between them. As a result, despite the efforts of both, there are still gaps impeding their ability to take the next step required to defend Israel's home front.

On June 1, 2014, the government of Israel adopted two decisions, 1661 and 1662. These eliminated the Ministry of Home Front Defense, placed

overall responsibility for emergency preparedness on the Defense Minister, and instructed the Ministries of Defense and Public Security to discuss the division of responsibility and authority between them.[1] To date, this process has not been completed, nor has it resulted in a clear and comprehensive arrangement, yet it is extremely important that this happen in the very near future. A whole year elapsed before the Defense Ministry advertised the position of National Emergency Management Authority director (who plays a key role in the defense establishment's emergency preparedness, together with the commander of the IDF's Home Front Command),[2] and it is important that an appointment has been made. One can list various possible reasons for the delays in coordination between the Ministries of Defense and Public Security, including Operation Protective Edge, the March 2015 Knesset elections and the attendant political instability, and the recent spate of stabbings and car-rammings. However, the result is inadequate to meet Israel's emergency management challenges.

The situation at the Ministry of Public Security is also complex. The drawn-out, obstacle-strewn path to appointing a chief of police after Commissioner Yohanan Danino's retirement did not help achieve the peace and quiet needed to formulate and assimilate the multidimensional, integrative improvements necessary for Israel's emergency management system, even though the Israel Police are admirably handling the security challenges posed by the current wave of terrorism.

The Current Opportunity for a Strategic Leap Forward in Emergency Preparedness

Given the many upheavals and changes in Israel's emergency management system in recent years, it would appear that the time is ripe to promote the long-awaited strategic change, based on the two following facts. The first is that following the elimination of the Ministry of Home Front Defense it is now amply clear that the leading government ministries on the emergency management issue are Defense and Public Security. The second is that three key officials are new to their positions: the Commander of the Home Front Command, the Director of the National Emergency Management Authority, and the Police Commissioner. In an optimal scenario, these two facts together could create an opportunity to introduce significant reforms and take a real

strategic leap. One of the key prerequisites for a significant improvement in Israel's emergency preparedness is integrated, coordinated, and continuous inter-organizational work. The country's complex emergency management system can and must function much more harmoniously and with greater integration than in the past, without the frequent organizational shocks that have greatly impeded continuity of functioning. In addition, emergency management issues should be significantly prioritized in Israel's national security array to meet the multiple multi-faceted challenges.

Legal Aspects

One of the major challenges that must be faced without delay involves the legal and regulatory foundation for Israel's emergency management system. A key law on this subject is the Civil Defense Law, which was passed in 1951 when the situation was very different and addressed only security-related emergencies. Since the Second Lebanon War in 2006, many attempts have been made to pass the Emergency Management Law, which would provide a comprehensive and updated response to the issue. However, for a combination of political, organizational, and inter-organizational reasons, these efforts have so far failed. Comprehensive, up-to-date regulation and legislation, which may have to consist of several laws touching on different aspects of the emergency management cycle, are crucial for strategic improvement of emergency preparedness in Israel.

Stabbings and Car-Ramming Terror Attacks in 2015

The stabbing and car-ramming attacks of fall 2015 are a stark reminder that Israel's civilian front could face many, varied, and possibly unpredictable situations. It is thus crucial that the institutions charged with defending the home front prepare concurrently for a large range of possible scenarios and strive constantly for conceptual and operational flexibility and innovation. Emergencies are dynamic and multidimensional. It is therefore extremely important to challenge conventions and to ask questions that demand a reexamination of existing patterns of thinking, conventions, and methods of action that may suit one situation but not another. This pursuit of innovation, flexibility, and critical examination of reality requires ongoing effort, but it provides significant added value for emergency organizations that do it

successfully.[3] To adopt such an approach, Israel's emergency management organizations must promote and develop dedicated units charged with the issues outlined above to serve as a sort of parallel to the "devil's advocate" function in the IDF Intelligence Branch. In addition, there must be close inter-organizational cooperation in the emergency management system.

The current wave of terrorism is increasing the public's anxiety and creating an atmosphere of tension. In such a situation, it is difficult to remain resilient not only functionally, but also morally. Yet these are the very situations that test communities, societies, and nations. It is very important that Israeli society maintain its moral compass and basic values when facing this serious violence. In the face of the current wave of violence, Israelis have shown extraordinary courage, heroism, and solidarity. At the same time, there have been manifestations of unacceptable phenomena, such as racism, intolerance, and cruelty. It is important that Israeli society continue to condemn loudly and clearly any non-normative behavior or bellicose atmosphere. The struggle against terrorism is long and painful, and maintaining high moral standards is critical for coping with it.

Preparedness for Missile and Rocket Attacks

Israel has made impressive strides in its response to missile and rocket attacks, which became a major issue after the Second Lebanon War. This can be seen particularly in the technological aspects of early active defense: the most prominent evidence is the development of the Iron Dome and the ongoing enhancements to the system. Israel's success in this area has saved lives, provided the political leadership with enhanced executive flexibility, and prevented significant economic damage. The key challenge now in connection with Iron Dome is to expand the number of batteries so as to provide concurrent protection to civilians, IDF facilities, and critical infrastructures. The investment in Iron Dome has clearly proved to be effective, and should be increased to provide a comprehensive response to the wide range of needs. The resources are limited and must be allocated based on agreed (by the National Security Cabinet and the relevant executive agencies) priorities. Historically, civil defense issues were a low priority and received insufficient funding from the defense establishment. In 2006, the Meridor Commission, charged with formulating Israel's national security

policy, recommended that civil defense be made a high-priority issue, given the change in the threats Israel faces. In this context, it would be wise to consider increasing investment in deployment of Iron Dome as part of the current defense budget. The significant aid extended by the United States is extremely useful, but it cannot serve as a substitute for Israel's allocating the resources needed. The expected deployment of David's Sling in 2016 will mean another active defense tool at Israel's disposal.[4] Development of the Iron Beam system, which is designed to intercept mortar bombs and short-range rockets not within Iron Dome's range, is an important advance.[5] Completion of development and operational deployment of Iron Beam will prove very beneficial to residents of the communities adjacent to the Gaza Strip, who have suffered from shelling since 2000 and have yet to receive a technological solution to short-range rockets and mortar bombs. For them, Iron Beam may be a lifesaver, and could help increase the chances of continuity of functioning even in emergencies, as occurred in other regions of the country.

Another important tool that may help people to function in emergencies is rocket and missile early warning systems that allow civilians to enter secure spaces during the brief window available. In recent years, the Home Front Command has devoted much effort to issuing more focused and specific warnings than in the past while increasing the number of warning zones in the country. As part of this plan, zones have been added in the north of Israel. Moreover, an effort is being made to transmit warnings in as many formats as possible, and Israelis can now tune in to the Home Front's silent radio station and receive alerts via their computer speakers.[6] All of these are significant, low-cost measures that contribute greatly to public resilience.

The Elephant in the Room: Preparedness for a Major Earthquake

Traditionally, most of Israel's attention to emergencies has been focused on security threats and war. While security risks are obvious, complex, and dynamic, it is important to remember that Israel could face large-scale emergencies of other types and that it should prepare for them conceptually and operationally. The most prominent risk Israel faces, other than war, is a major earthquake. The earthquakes that struck Nepal in the spring of 2015

highlighted the possibility that such natural disasters could occur in Israel, as well as the nation's level of preparedness to deal with such a complex and multidimensional challenge. It appears that Israel is not yet sufficiently prepared for an earthquake with mass casualties, material destruction, infrastructural damage, and disruption of daily life for the lay citizens.

It is important to recognize that a major earthquake could hit Israel in the near future. In the last few centuries, such earthquakes struck the area every eighty to one hundred years, and the last destructive earthquake took place in 1927 – eighty-eight years ago. In 1995, an earthquake hit the city of Eilat in southern Israel, but the damage was slight and neither the public nor decision-makers experienced the event as traumatic. The last reminder of the very real risk Israel faces came not long ago, on June 27, 2015, with an earthquake measuring 5.2M, without casualties or damage. But given the possible damage from such an event, it is important to understand that a major earthquake constitutes a strategic challenge for the country that should be addressed in a comprehensive and integrated manner.

While it is currently impossible to predict the precise timing of an earthquake, or the exact strength and location, there is some good news: most of the damage a major earthquake could cause can be significantly reduced, with a potential mega-disaster turned into a containable emergency.

For years, and more extensively since 1999, the Inter-Ministerial Steering Committee for Earthquake Preparedness, the Home Front Command, all government ministries, and infrastructure institutions have engaged in a variety of activities designed to improve preparedness for a major earthquake. Nevertheless, the remaining disparities between the actual level of preparedness and the scope and impact of the challenge are very large. They include legislation and regulation, the level of public awareness and knowledge, professional training, awareness of thousands of buildings of significant proportion that cannot withstand a major earthquake, the warning systems, and communal resilience. The following policy measures are intended to close the gap to provide a strategic, comprehensive, and effective response to a major earthquake:

a. Legislation of the Law on Earthquake Preparedness, which would define areas of responsibility during the preparatory stages, disaster response,

and short-term and long-term recovery, from the individual to the national level.

b. Development and implementation of the National Building Reinforcement Program with the goal of reinforcing all relevant public and residential buildings in Israel over the next decade, giving clear priority to Israel's periphery and to earthquake-prone areas.

c. Acceleration of deployment of a national warning system so that when an earthquake occurs, the system will provide with precious extra seconds to take lifesaving action.

d. Increase of the involvement of Arabs and ultra-Orthodox Jews in search-and-rescue units, which are greatly in need of manpower, as part of their civilian service (this voluntary service options exists for those groups in the Israeli society who are not obliged to serve in the Israeli army).

e. Inclusion of the earthquake preparedness component in the various programs designed to enhance community resilience in Israel.

Conclusion

While Israel has come a long way in preparedness for war-related and other emergencies, it has not yet taken a strategic leap forward. There is a significant gap between potential threats and the current response with security-related situations, and an even greater gap with other types of emergencies, such as a major earthquake. Given the variety of threats, it is strategically essential for Israel to promote conceptual, executive, legislative, and budgetary changes so that it is adequately prepared for a variety of emergency situations.

Notes

1   Government Decision 1661 and Government Decision 1662 of June 1, 2014, http://www.pmo.gov.il/secretary/govdecisions/2014/pages/dec1661.aspx, and http://www.pmo.gov.il/Secretary/GovDecisions/2014/Pages/dec1662.aspx.

2   Civil Service Commission Tender for Filling the Position of National Emergency Management Authority Director by August 13, 2015, http://www.csc.gov.il/Tenders/Jobs/Pages/372-2015.aspx.

3   See, among others, Herman B. Leonard and Arnold M. Howitt, "Acting in Time against Disaster: A Comprehensive Risk Management Framework," in *Learning from Catastrophes: Strategies for Reaction and Response*, eds. Howard

Kunreuther and Michael Useem (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Wharton School Publishing, 2010), pp. 18-41.

4   Yohai Ofer, "An Addition to Iron Dome: Iron Beam Operational," *NRG*, April 1, 2015, http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART2/687/018.html.

5   Amir Buhbut, "The Laser System that Will Intercept Very Short-Range Rockets," *Walla! News*, January 19, 2014, http://news.walla.co.il/item/2713120.

6   Matan Hetzroni, "The IDF Changes Its Warning System in the North," *Mako*, November 15, 2015, http://www.mako.co.il/news-military/security-q4_2015/Article-c88fea8a94a0151004.htm.