Peace, a Condition for Israel's Security

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Abstract

The current study examines the conceptual framework of what Israel calls 'Israel's national security'. Using short interviews with Israelis and citing statements made by Israeli leaders, the study found first that Israelis are raised to embrace a bunker mentality where people always feel they are subject to constant threat; and second that Israel understands security only in terms of power, with the ultimate goal of bringing the Palestinians/Arabs under its dominance. The study argues that this theory has never brought security to Israel and it is unlikely to achieve this goal in the future. The study concludes that it is only through an all-out, just peace that Israel can feel secure, thrive and establish a favorable climate for the generations to come.

Introduction

Israel's national security is basically grounded in the tenets of Zionism, particularly 'to be or not to be', with the assumption of the state being under a constant threat from Arabs, and that security is the key to its demographic, economic and geopolitical survival. As such, Israel's security is constantly evolving, echoing these Zionist ideological beliefs.

Israeli national security reasoning is very conspicuous: that Mandatory Palestine is a land without a people, and so if such a people exists, it should be thrown out. That is why Israel denies a Palestinian presence- trying to create a land without Palestinians by all available means, particularly military operations. This has for long informed Israeli strategists in their effort to establish a theory that is, they believe, responsive to the requirements of the Zionist ideology. Driven by the Arab-Israeli recurrent military conflicts, as well as the geopolitical developments and the facts arising from them, Israeli security approaches have changed over the years:

* First, Israel and the Jewish military organizations used terror and massacres to force Palestinians to leave their homeland (Benny, 2004: 265).
* To neutralize the lack of strategic depth, Israel's security concept was based on pre-emptive strikes. It was vital not to allow a war to be waged within Israel, moving it quickly into the enemy's territory.
* Israel then moved a step further, starting wars if the enemy tried to do anything that would worry the nascent state, such as mobilizing troops on the Israeli border or denying the state access to water resources. The nationalization of the Suez Canal, for example, triggered Operation Kadesh[2] in 1956.
* Inspired by the UN Security Council Resolution 242, Israel introduced the 'safe and secure borders' theory right after the 1967 war. The UN Security Council Resolution 242, called on the Arab states to accept Israel's right "to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries" (S/RES/242, 1967). This theory is based on defensible borders without resorting to pre-emptive wars.
* The 1973 war rendered all these theories ineffective, forcing the Israeli decision-makers to forge a new theory, now calling it 'the pretext for war theory', according to which Israel will not, in any way, refrain from going on preventive wars if a threat form Arabs starts to materialize. This theory, together with 'the war of choice approach', led Israel to attack Iraq, Lebanon, and Tunisia in the 1980s.

The Palestinian uprising and Lebanese resistance have undermined the concept of blitzkrieg- with potentials for long-term engagements. For the Israelis, the uprising was a war waged on Israel with the aim of

deconstructing the settlement enterprise in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. Back to square one: Israel is once again using terror to intimidate the Palestinians into acquiescing. In all cases, there has been only one recurrent term used in Israeli political discourse, namely force. This has entailed using genocides and ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians (Pappe, 2007 as cited in Dershowitz, 2008: p. 270).

Methodology

Data for this study were obtained from two sources:

1. Short interviews conducted in December 2014 with 150 male and female Israelis in West Jerusalem, including 96 students from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem: the sample subjects were asked to respond to two questions:

1. Who do you think is the main source of threat to Israel's national security? 2. How do you think can the state achieve national security? Two Israeli students who know both English and Hebrew helped the author approach respondents.

The results of the interviews are outlined in the tables below.

Table 1

Responses to the first question	No. of respondents
Palestinians	37
Lebanese Hezbollah	34
Hamas	35
Iran	25
Al-Qaeda	11
Egypt	3
No answer	5

Table 2

Responses to the second question	No. of respondents
Boosting air firepower	15
Maintaining a superior air force	19
Mobilizing more personnel in security services	13
Keeping security personnel on alert	12
Force	23
Cracking down on Palestinians	18
Restricting Palestinian access to Israel	17
Striking a peace deal	15
Deportation of Israeli Arabs	9
Rapprochement with neighboring countries	4
No answer	5

2. Statements made by Israeli political, military, educational and religious leaders. Central to the analysis of thought is understanding the influence that leaders have on the perceptions of the target audience. Below is a brief record of some statements/actions underpinning Israel's security percepts.

1. In a cabinet meeting in 2013, Israel's economy minister, Naftali Bennett, boasted: "I already killed lots of Arabs in my life, and there is absolutely no problem with that" (Booth, 2014). Only months later, he told the Israeli Radio Station "When we kill Palestinians, we bring life for Israel," (Days of Palestine).

2. In the introduction to his book, *The History of the Haganah*, the first Israeli Minister of Education and university professor, Benzion Denola, says "There is no place for the Arabs in our land, and we will tell them to leave; if they resist, we will deport them by force."

3. Israeli journalist and filmmaker David Sheen (2015) quoted Member of the Knesset, Ayelet Shaked, writing on her Facebook "Who is the enemy? The Palestinian people are all enemy combatants. This also includes the mothers."

4. He also quoted ruling party faction leader, Moshe Feiglin, posting on his Facebook: "The civilian population will be concentrated. Israel should declare war on the entire Palestinian people, including its elderly and its women, its cities and its villages, its property and its infrastructure."

5. In an interview with Israeli journalist Ami Kaufman (July 21, 2014), Dr. Mordechai Keidar, a lecturer on Arabic literature at Bar Ilan University and chairman of Israel Academia Monitor, said "Only raping the sister of a terrorist can deter him."

6. In a Facebook post, Noam Perel, leader of Bnei Akiva (the largest religious Jewish youth group in the world) called for the Israeli army not only to kill at least 300 Palestinians, but to bring back their foreskins as war trophies as retribution for the killing of three Israeli settlers (Sheen, 2015).

7. The Jerusalem councilor who heads the city's security committee invoked the Jewish young people to "commit acts of Phineas,"[4] a blatant call to kill Palestinians (Sheen, 2015).

8. In his book *The King's Torah* published in 2009, Rabbi Yitzhak Shapiro (who heads the Od Yosef Chai Yeshiva) says it is permissible for Jews to kill non-Jews, including children and babies (Oster, 2009). According to *Haaretz*, many renowned rabbis have recommended the book to their students and followers.

9. In an article entitled 'Who is funding the rabbis who endorse killing Gentile babies?', Akiva Eldar (2009) confirms that Israel's government ministries regularly transfer support and funding to the Od Yosef Chai Yeshiva.

10. According to Eldar (2009), Lior Yavne, head of research at the Yesh Din human rights organization, found that in 2007, the Ministry of Education department of Torah institutions transferred more than a million shekels to the Od Yosef Chai Yeshiva in Yitzhar, a West-Bank settlement.

11. Following the Chinese Tienanman Square Massacre of 1989, Benjamin Netanyahu (Israel's present-day prime minister), "publicly deplored the fact that while international attention was focused on China, the Israeli government had missed an opportunity to transfer the Palestinians by force into Jordan or Lebanon," (Curtiss, 1995).

12. Back in 2002, Avigdor Lieberman, now Israel's Minister of Foreign Affairs, proposed an ultimatum: "If it were up to me, I would notify the Palestinian Authority that tomorrow at 10 in the morning we would bomb all their places of business in Ramallah, for example," (Jacobson, 2009).

13. In the 2008-2009 Gaza War, Lieberman blustered that Israel "must continue to fight against Gaza just like the United States did with the Japanese in World War II, probably a call to nuke Gaza (Gordon, 2009).

14. Ovadia Yosef, the spiritual leader of Shas (Israel's third largest political party) preached in a sermon to mark the Jewish festival of Passover: "It is forbidden to be merciful to Arabs. You must send missiles to them and annihilate them. They are evil and damnable," (BBC, April 10, 2001).

15. Dov Lior, Chief Rabbi of Hebron and head of the Council of Rabbis of Judea and Samaria, has always encouraged the killing of non-Jews and praised Baruch Goldstein[1] as a saint and martyr (Foreign Policy, April 2008).

Israel's recurrent combats

Following 1967 war, Israel took control of the West bank (including East Jerusalem), the Gaza Strip, the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula and the Syrian Golan Heights. In the wake of the invasion of Lebanon in 1982, Israel retained an area under its military control. The 1973 war made Israel settle with Egypt the crisis of the Sinai Peninsula, withdrawing from the Egyptian occupied territory in 1987 following an Israeli-Egyptian peace deal sponsored by the United states. Since then, Israel reported no major breach from the Egyptian side. The other areas remained an arena for clashes, frequently forcing Israel to launch offensives.

The Gaza Strip

Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005; yet it retained heavy military presence around the enclave, home for 1.82 million Palestinians (CIA Factbook, 2014). In 2006, this presence developed into an air, land and sea blockade against which the Gazans would frequently revolt– sometimes launching rockets at Israeli soldiers stationed at the Gaza borders. Palestinians in Gaza always demanded one thing: "Lift the siege and let us breathe."

Israel could have reached an Egyptian-sponsored settlement to the issue. Instead, and in accordance with its security premise of 'no compromise', it launched three wars on Gaza (2008-2009, 2012 and 2014), killing thousands of Gazans and destroying thousands of homes (96,000, according to UN estimates).

West Bank (including East Jerusalem)

In the West Bank, Israel continues its settlement enterprise– confiscating thousands of acres to build colonial settlements on lands the international community recognizes as occupied territories. Above, by taking actions ahead of time, Israel has always thwarted peace initiatives (the last was proposed by US Secretary of State, John Kerry) at the pretext of security concerns. It refuses to stop building settlements and insists on Israeli military presence in the West Bank, particularly the borderline with Jordan. Believing that the peace talks reached a deadlock, Kerry quit, and now Israel is intensifying settlement building activities, keeping more than 3 million Palestinians in cantons fragmented by military checkpoints and aggressive settlers who attack Palestinians on a daily basis.

South Lebanon

In south Lebanon, clashes had been recurrent until Israel pulled back in 2000. Yet, it retained Mazare Shab'a, a buffer zone that borders Israel on the south for 14 kilometers and Syria on the East for 25 kilometers. Lebanese militants, headed by Hezbollah, would launch attacks against Israeli soldiers in that area. In 2006, this was escalated with killing and kidnapping some soldiers who patrolled the zone. Israel attacked back with heavy air strikes. Hezbollah, fully aware that Israel would not go for a long-term attrition war, struck back, which drove Israel to a ground battle. Israel casualties were enormous, and its deterrence power was severely harmed. Millions of Israelis went down to shelters for 33 days. The UN brokered a truce that is now swaying, with constant threats from Hezbollah.

The truth about the conflict

It is in our nature as human beings to keep asking questions about the outcome of our actions. The 2008 offensive only helped to give the Palestinian militants a push to solidify their positions– growing in number,

gaining more support from the population and, now, throwing rockets at areas far beyond the Gaza Sphere[2]. The militants did not surrender: "Lift the siege," they said again. Israel responded with tightening the siege, denying even construction material (e.g. cement) into Gaza.

Desperate by the suffocating blockade, Gaza militants intensified their attacks, with rockets now reaching as far as the suburbs of Tel Aviv. Israel, fully sure it would stop attacks for good, launched its second offensive in 2012. Militants retaliated with attacks that blocked more than 1 million Israelis in shelters for more than three weeks. The parties reached a truce that stipulated a lift of the blockade. Israel, rather, tightened the siege. Palestinians in Gaza lost hope and voiced their concerns, but their pleas went unnoticed, with Israel clamping down on farmers in their fields and fishermen in their fisheries, as well as destroying the tunnels– the only lifeline that Gazans used to smuggle food to the ever-growing population, and life became beyond human tolerance.

In July 2014, an Israeli raid on Gaza was only the trigger that unleashed thousands of rockets that reached as far as Tel Aviv and West Jerusalem in the center, Haifa in the north and the Negev in the south; i.e. every single spot of Israel. Startled by the unexpected counter-attack from Palestinians, Israel mobilized thousands of military personnel for a ground invasion. In parallel, it intensified air strikes, wiping off entire neighborhoods in the enclave, killing hundreds from those civilians who took refuge to UNRWA schools. Gazan militants retaliated against Israeli soldiers, inflicting dozens of casualties, targeting airports and sending millions of Israelis to shelters. Egypt again brokered a ceasefire that ended belligerencies.

For three times, Israel bombarded the Gaza Strip back to the stone age, "causing further destruction to an area that Israel's action is already rendering uninhabitable, according to a UN report" (Sherwood, 2013).

It is true that the siege on Gaza is harsh, and the Strip has seriously suffered, but it has not been forced into submission, and Hamas has not been overthrown. Counter to Israel's security theory, that it is only force that brings security to Israel, Gaza combats proved that power-based security is nothing but an illusion. The Gazans now say they are preparing for the next round, with weapons that would deter Israel. The question now is, 'for how long will the Israelis keep holding to this false theory?'

It appears that Israelis are obsessed with security matters, making 'security' the most recurrent word in their political discourse. Nowhere in the world this word counts as it does for Israel. There is no place in the world where the talk 'one mistake can kill us' type applies than it does to Israel. The Israelis, it seems, are brought up to believe that security can be achieved only by power. Of course Israeli leaders have influence on the people, and what they inject is taken for granted.

In the 2014 fight, the Palestinian fatality toll reached 2205, of whom 1483 were identified as civilians, including 521 children and 283 women, while the Israelis lost only 4 civilians (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2014). And yet, in the monthly Peace Index poll (conducted by the Israel Democracy Institute and Tel Aviv University), Israelis said they did not believe that their military used excessive force in the 2104 Gaza conflict. "Less than 4 percent of Israeli Jews accept accusations from the international community that the IDF has used excessive firepower in the Gaza Strip during Operation Protective Edge," the Jerusalem Post reported. The situation is best summarized by American author Norman Pollack:

Yom Kippur, only days away, a time of repentance, lately, the utter savagery in attacking Gaza and its people, the burning alive of a Palestinian youngster, the rubble, destitution, bombing of UN schools serving as civilian shelters, the water treatment plants, electricity grids (cutting off power to hospitals),

all in all, a full-scale display of shock and awe designed and intended to humble, humiliate, degrade, and depersonalize THE OTHER as so much tripe standing in the way of the Manifest Destiny of Fortress Israel in its might and superior moral worth.

He continues to ask:

What would the SIX MILLION[3] say (if they could) if they knew that modern Israel possesses the same traits that sent them to the ovens? Would they be proud of the hooliganism?

Israelis are programmed to believe in force as the only means to achieve security

The Bunker Mentality

Bunker (or Siege) mentality is the feeling of being constantly attacked, oppressed, or isolated from the rest of the world (Christie, 2011: 997). "A society that feels endangered may decide that its need to survive is so paramount that all means can be used. As a result, it may decide to take a course of action considered extreme and unacceptable by the international community" (Daniel Bar-Tal, 2004).

Under 'Israel's Bunker Mentality: How the Occupation Is Destroying the Nation,' Ronald Krebs (2011) wrote:

By inducing a bunker mentality among Israelis, the occupation has bred an aggressive ethnic nationalism that privileges the interests of Israel's Jewish citizens over those of its Arab citizens, who have come to feel that they will never be treated fairly in an Israel defined as a Jewish state. At the same time, by paralyzing the Israeli political system, it has strengthened ultra-Orthodox political parties, which have exploited divisions between the right and the left to become kingmakers. In exchange for their parliamentary support, they have demanded economic subsidies for their constituents, who often devote their lives to studying Jewish texts rather than participating in the work force. Educated, largely secular elites, frustrated by low pay and high taxes, have, until recently, been emigrating in substantial numbers, and the long-term prospects for reversing this brain drain are poor as long as the occupation continues. These are the real threats to Israel's founders' vision of a democratic, Jewish, and prosperous state.

This bunker mentality, and the resulting talk about existential threat that infest the speech of Israeli leaders, is grounded in the tenet that Arabs are enemies who threaten the Jewish state. According to the *New York Times*, "the Israeli peace camp– which remains obsessively focused on stopping settlement expansion and pursuing the ever-elusive two-state solution while ignoring Israel's failure to separate religion and state and guarantee equal rights for Arab citizens– has been incapable of challenging this mentality" (September 26, 2014). Ami Ayalon, former head of Shin Bet, the Israeli domestic intelligence service, once wondered whether the option of a Jewish democracy with apartheid is acceptable. He remarked that the Palestinians should not be expected to be content living "in a Bantustan", separated from Israel, as well as from Egypt and Jordan only "for security reasons" (http://www.geocities.ws/noapartheid/ayalon.htm).

The Violence mentality

Israel is bringing up its children on fear and hatred, which has produced a generation of terrified people who delightedly cheer slaughtering Palestinian children. On July 2, 2014, three Israeli settlers kidnapped the Palestinian child Mohamed Hussein Abu Khdeir, forced him to drink gasoline and then burned him to death. In an editorial on this inexorable wave of hatred, Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* wrote about the state of the Israelis:

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They absorbed their hatred of Arabs from their environment: perhaps at home, certainly from the educational and political systems. When incitement against Arabs has become politically correct, when rabbis urge the public to treat Arabs in a racist manner, when the Knesset passes legislation over which a racist flag waves, when the education minister extols Jewish supremacy over the Palestinians in Hebron, it's impossible to complain solely about those Israeli teens, who translated all this into the language of violence (Haaretz, August 21, 2014).

Different media sources quoted Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, saying there will be no Palestinian state if he wins the elections held on March 17, 2015 (see, for example, The Ney York Times, March 16, 2015). And yet, Israelis had no qualm voting for Netanyahu's ruling Likud Party, which swept to a decisive victory in the 20th Knesset elections. The defeat of the liberal Zionist Union, committed to negotiations and a two-state solution, can be interpreted as an increasing inclination to repudiate the feint that the Israelis seek anything other than an everlasting domination over the occupied territories. In other words, the results of the elections are ample evidence that the Israelis have overwhelmingly voted for those who believe in force as the only means to bring security to the citizens of Israel[5].

Way out of the dilemma

It is only through a lasting, all-out peace that Israel would feel secure. We have learned from history that to live long, a state has to build relationships with its neighbors– this is an axiom. Even at the individual level, life would look like hell if your neighbors do not accept you in the neighborhood.

It is true that Israel has so far succeeded in defending its borders against threats; yet this wasn't without a price. Apart from the casualties and economic losses, the frequent encounters have adversely affected the Israelis who are now preoccupied with concerns about the viability of their state. Whenever you visit Israel, you can easily notice this from the way they look, behave, walk, talk and whatnot. This is an expensive price that other nations don't have to worry about.

Worse still, it seems that the time when Israel enjoyed relative security is not going to stand for long. With globalization, elements of power, including technology, and the ease with which groups/states can obtain power, are now available to parties that have hostile intentions towards Israel. In Gaza, people are restless, all set to attack the state that clamps down on their children. In Lebanon, Hezbollah is strengthening its prowess with missiles that can cover every inch of Israel, with threats to burn up the state. In Syria, Islamists are trying hard to topple down the Iran-backed regime, and the fight is swinging in their favor. These Islamists are by nature hostile to Israel and can go very far in their antagonism. For these militants, the countdown for the 'big battle with Israel' has started once the entrenched Mubarak regime was toppled down.

In both Gaza and Lebanon wars, Israel harnessed all of its resources, depleted all of its weapon stockpiles, and had to appeal for the USA to support it with munitions. Israelis need to imagine a war waged from these three fronts. Israel would then need to fight a war beyond its manpower capabilities. It would be a tough combat for Israel, especially with people who don't care about how much they lose.

Israel can achieve its national security and spare itself the scourge of war through building a just, all-out peace with its neighbors. Of course, peace needs a price that Israel has to pay. At the bottom of the farce, in all cases Israel has to compromise. The question that Israelis should ask themselves is, "If we are giving up something in both cases, why don't we give it up for peace?"

In the first option (i.e. war), Israel might win, but it would lose lives and sustain big damages to its physical infrastructure. It might also be defeated, in which case it loses everything, even its own very existence. By building peace, on the other hand, it will definitely abandon some land, but eventually it will be given a space in the Middle East. Maintaining security would not then be a priority. Perhaps the efforts would be focused on how to spare a place as a developed nation that strives to maintain its people's welfare.

In an extensive report sponsored by the Strategic Foresight Group, Waslekar and Futehally (2010) estimated the opportunity cost of the Arab-Israeli conflict for the Middle East from 1991 to 2010 at USD12 trillion. The report concludes that if there had been peace and cooperation between Israel and its Arab neighbors, the average Israeli citizen would be earning over USD 44,000 instead of USD 23,000 in 2010. The authors also provided an estimate of human cost: somewhere between 70,000 and 110,000 lives up to 2010. The two Israeli-Gaza conflict in 2012 and 2014 added around 4,000 deaths, and billions of dollars.

Past experience tells us that the prosperity of a nation depends to a large extent on how much that nation observes boundaries that separate its territories from those of another nation. Crossing such boundaries is a transgression of other nations' rights. Israel occupies Arab land, believing mistakenly that expansion will bring it the long-awaited security. We must not forget that power will never be the answer. It could not protect the firmly-established regimes in Tunisia and Egypt, nor could it defend the apartheid regime in South Africa or the Nazis in Europe. Peace is a blessing from God, and it is for the sake of peace that we live. If we lose sight of the purpose behind our existence, life will be chaotic, very much like the jungle where the strong feeds on the weak. It is time for the Israelis to realize that a *calm Israel* in a troubled Middle East will not remain calm for long. The unrest in the region is just the beginning, and no state will be spared. You cannot place yourself in a circle, pretending that you are safe, while the large circles around you are burning. The illusive calm is only the ash, the crust of a destructive volcano that once it erupts, it spares nothing, nothing at all.

Notes

1 Baruch Goldstein is the mass murderer who perpetrated the 1994 Cave of the Patriarchs massacre in the city of Hebron, killing 29 Palestinian Muslim worshipers and wounding another 125.
2 Gaza Sphere is a term used to describe the Israeli villages bordering Gaza from the North, the East and the South.
3 A reference to the holocaust victims.
4 Phineas is a reference to the Biblical figure who is said to have murdered an interracial couple in the middle of love-making by skewering their intertwined genitals (Jones, 2008).
5 In the 20th Knesset election, the far-right won a large majority of 67 seats, leaving only 40 seats for the liberal Zionist parties and 13 seats for the Arab collation parties.

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