

The laundromat trap

written by David M. Weinberg | 31.05.2024

Beware nicely disguised strategies for Israel's defeat.

Grandstanding to defy Israel

written by David M. Weinberg | 31.05.2024

Ersatz recognition of a Palestinian state at war with Israel retards peace.

Grouches fail to foil Israel Independence Day

written by David M. Weinberg | 31.05.2024

Most Israelis reject dangerously debilitating narratives about Israel's unworthiness, and have recommitted themselves to hope, brotherhood, and aptly deft diplomatic defiance.

Long wars ahead

written by David M. Weinberg | 31.05.2024

Back in 2013, the IDF chief-of-staff promulgated a multi-year plan for the Israeli military called "Teuzah" (prowess or fearlessness). That plan accepted a significant decrease in overall funding to the IDF and shifted priorities away from

the ground forces in favor of air force and cyber capabilities, intelligence, special operations forces, and stand-off precision fire. This came atop a cut of 25 percent in the ground forces budget between 2002 and 2006.

The IDF chief of staff at the time was Lt. Gen. Benny Gantz.

According to Amir Rapaport, publisher and editor of the military industry-leading *Israel Defense* magazine, Gantz accepted the relative weakness of the maneuvering capabilities of the ground forces as a given. He did not think that the IDF would need to fight conventional army forces in the foreseeable future, nor have to conduct large-scale ground maneuvers in enemy territory.

Obviously, Gantz and his predecessors and successors (Mofaz, Halutz, Yaalon, Ashkenazi, Eisencott, and Kochavi) - all of whom were party to this grand conceptual error to one degree or another - were dead wrong. It is today quite clear that Israel will likely fight several wars in enemy-held territory over the coming decade.

Responding to Gantz's mistaken plan in 2013, Dr. Eitan Shamir and Dr. Eado Hecht of the BESA Center warned that "Neglect of the IDF's ground forces poses a risk to Israel's security. There are real battles ahead against well-entrenched Hamas and Hezbollah armies." But back then nobody was listening.

Today it is clear that the IDF needs to knock-back the Iranian-proxy armies and jihadist militias camped on our borders. It needs to go house-by-house and tunnel-by-tunnel to ferret-out and eliminate terrorist cells in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza. It may need to "decommission" Iran's nuclear enrichment and bomb-making facilities.

Consider the situation in Lebanon. To rout Hezbollah and destroy its missile stockpiles in the coming war Israel will have to reconquer southern Lebanon. Even with the Israel Air Force working intensively from above (including massive leveling of Lebanese infrastructures), Israel could be facing months weeks of real and unrelenting ground combat in the deep valleys and steep mountains of Lebanon where Hezbollah is well dug in. (The Iranian-built and -funded terror army sits on a tunnel and bunker array that reportedly makes the Hamas military infrastructure in Gaza seem like child's play).

Given America's stampeding retreat from overseas commitments, the creeping

repeal of an American protective diplomatic umbrella for Israel by presidents Obama and Biden, and the newest restrictions on use of US weaponry – Israel may be fighting truly alone.

UNDERSTANDING THIS is particularly relevant as Israel prepares to replace its military and intelligence leadership.

Military Intelligence chief Maj. Gen. Aharon Haliva has just resigned for his role in the gargantuan failure of October 7, appropriately so. Soon, IDF Chief-of-Staff Herzi Halevi, OC Southern Command Chief Yaron Finkelman, Mossad Chief Dedi Barnea, General Security Service Chief Ronen Bar, and dozens of other senior defense establishment leaders are expected to resign or be sacked, appropriately so.

The question is not only who will replace them but what sort of operational prisms their replacements will bring to the task. And what conceptual prisms will Israel's politicians lay out for them. (A new set of politicians is necessary too!) And what budgets Israel's prime minister and defense and finance ministers will allocate for the defense establishment.

Here is a brief list of necessary fixes:

* **Manpower:** Over the past 40 years, the IDF has shrunk from 15 to 10 divisions. It now needs to grow by at least three divisions. That is 50,000 soldiers more, and tons and tons of military equipment.

* **Training:** A gargantuan increase in the training of front-line troops is necessary. It is a well-known secret that many of the infantry and armored forces that went into Gaza over the past half-year were insufficiently trained for combat in built-up areas.

It is actually a miracle how well the IDF has fought in Gaza, with mid-level military commanders in the field (the lieutenant colonels, battalion commanders; and the colonels, brigade commanders) learning on the go and quickly bringing their troops up to speed. They are among the true heroes of the current war.

Alas, training is expensive, especially for combined arms high intensity conflict – which involves multiple branches of the military working together. Training of the reserve forces is even more expensive. And unfortunately, budget lines for

training are usually the first thing to be cut when the overall military budget is slashed – as it has been in recent decades.

* Platforms: The army needs to reverse the demobilization of armored formations and buy and deploy many more “Namer” armored personnel carriers equipped with the “Iron Fist” active defense system; “Merkava” main battle tanks with the “Trophy” system; and self-propelled artillery guns with the “Thundermaker” system. This will cost hundreds of millions of shekels.

* Ammunition: The IDF used up much of its ammunition reserves over the past six months, especially its stocks of shells for the ground forces and precision-guided missiles for the air force.

While the US has rushed tons of weaponry to Israel, Washington also has held up resupply of some of these munitions at certain times, and there is anyway a global shortage of some firepower like 155mm artillery shells (with the war in Ukraine soaking-up much of the available weaponry). As mentioned above, Israel also now faces increasing restrictions on its use of US-supplied weaponry.

The takeaway is that Israel needs to self-manufacture and the IDF needs to stockpile much larger reserves of weaponry for the lengthy wars of the future with Hezbollah and Hamas. Again, this requires more money with guaranteed funding over a multi-year plan.

Reportedly, Prime Minister Netanyahu has ordered a massive build-up, eight times over the current manufacturing capacity of the Israeli defense industries. Let’s see whether this order is implemented and budgeted appropriately by the next Israeli governments.

* Navy: Elements of radical Islam are gaining control across the eastern Mediterranean basin, from Libya to Syria and Turkey. Israel and Greece are the only Western-oriented countries in the region.

Former Israeli Naval Chief, Admiral (res.) Eliezer “Chiney” Marom, argues that Israel needs a much more powerful navy, with a long reach, to counter the strategic realignments underway, and to protect from terrorist attack the substantial natural gas fields we have discovered at sea.

The Israel Navy wants more than \$5 billion in new ships, submarines, weapons

systems. and personnel over the next decade for this.

* West Bank: Given that security cooperation with the Palestinian Authority essentially has collapsed, and Mahmoud Abbas' forces are no match for Hamas and other terrorist mini-armies that have entrenched themselves across Judea and Samaria - Israel needs to pour more troops into policing the territory. This is a big drain on the military system, but without it nobody in greater Tel Aviv or Jerusalem will be safe.

The fact is that Palestinian terrorism is off the charts with organized battalions of terrorist commandoes operating openly in dozens of cities and refugee camps. Take, for example, Nur Shams, a tinpot refugee camp adjacent to Tulkarem in central Israel just over the security barrier. The IDF operated there for four days last week and was unexpectedly met by insane quantities of Palestinian firepower.

(So much for dreams of a "revitalized" Palestinian Authority that would not only truly combat terrorism in the West Bank but also assume responsibility for administering, demilitarizing, and deradicalizing Gaza. Hah!)

* Jordan Valley: Many voices in the defense establishment are calling for the building of a well-fortified security fence along Israel's long border with Jordan, as has been done along the Sinai, Lebanese, and Golan borders; alongside the permanent stationing of more troops along this strategic seam line.

Iran is actively seeking to undermine the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and take advantage of the porous border between Israel and Jordan to ship weaponry into the West Bank. The fluidity of the political and security situation to our east requires a military buildup in the Jordan Valley, and this needs to be budgeted for expeditiously.

* Iran: If worse comes to worse (and every day indeed it seems that worse news comes from Iran about its nuclear advances and from Washington about its strategic capitulation to Iran), the IDF and IAF may have to act against Iran's nuclear and missile facilities. Then Israel will have to deal with the fallout from Iran's retaliation - and the country had better be ready both militarily and on the home front.

This month's unprecedented Iranian drone and missile attack on Israel proves that Israel needs quite a few more Arrow 2 and 3 anti-missile defense arrays. A

small fortune.

Israel's independence depends on robust defense readiness. And on new military-intelligence leaders with clear-eyed understanding of the situation.

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Watershed moments for Israel

written by David M. Weinberg | 31.05.2024

October 7 and April 14 demand that Jerusalem free itself from stale strategic paradigms.

Whitewashing Qatar

written by David M. Weinberg | 31.05.2024

Qatar is a dangerous and disingenuous actor which falsely presents itself as an honest broker and a friend of the West, even of Israel. It is unfortunate that an Israeli newspaper fell hook, line, and sinker for Qatar's fairytale of moderation.

Targeting the "head of the

octopus”

written by David M. Weinberg | 31.05.2024

The tectonic threat of Iran to Mideast and global stability must be countered head-on.

Don't patronize Israel

written by David M. Weinberg | 31.05.2024

Israelis are not “traumatized” by October 7, but rather alert. They are not wounded babies that have to be coddled and coaxed into making “adult decisions” like embracing Palestinian statehood.

The US is absolving Iran of responsibility for terrorist proxies

written by Dr. Yossi Mansharof | 31.05.2024

By striking only at Iranian proxy targets, Biden signals he is still seeking to “restore trust” between Washington and Tehran in order to revive the JCPOA.

Returning

Gaza

Envelope

Residents Back Home

written by Col. (res.) Prof. Gabi Siboni | 31.05.2024



The evacuation of communities from the Gaza Envelope settlements, including the city of Sderot, following the events of October 7th - and the ruin left in the area in their wake - is a traumatic event for the settlers, a scar in the soul of the Israeli people, evidence to what many perceive as a disgraceful failure of the State's systems, and no less importantly, a substantial psychological achievement for Hamas, the Palestinians, and our other enemies in the area. Every day that the Western Negev stands devoid of its residents amplifies the enemy's achievements, provides further tailwind for its continued struggle against Israel, and further incentivizes it to continue on the path of terrorism, and to support its inciters and sponsors.

Settlement in this area, and along the Israeli border as a whole, is part of the Zionist ethos of inhabiting and defending Israel, reclaiming and making agricultural use of the land - both as a value and as a crucial component of the State's economy and resilience. Any delay in restoring the settlements of the Gaza Envelope to their former glory - and in expanding, developing, and supporting them - further erodes the Zionist ethos.

No less importantly, though - any delay in restoring this region, returning its citizens to their rightful place, and making it thrive again serves to deepen the crisis of faith between these residents and the State and its institutions, as well as the crisis of faith between Israeli society and its leadership - all while making the physical and mental scars of the evacuated residents run even deeper. This, of course, is compounded by the economic aspects of this ongoing situation - partially due to the direct costs of hosting thousands of families in hotels, but

mostly due to indirect costs from loss of income, the impaired production capability and continuous supply of agricultural produce, and the future indirect costs of the mental and physical rehabilitation of those thousands of families and of entire communities.

Thus, as the fighting in the Gaza Strip advances and operational achievements accumulate, it would be prudent to bring the residents back to the Gaza Envelope settlements. As published in early January, some of the residents at the Hof Ashkelon and Shaar HaNegev regional councils have already started returning to their homes. Now, however, is a good time to systematically act to restore the settlements in their entirety - something that harbors much significance for a variety of reasons, including reasons of state sovereignty and regional security, community and personal aspects, the psychological and national resilience element - and finally, for economic reasons.

The State of Israel must reassert its sovereignty over the entire country, including the Gaza Envelope. Reasserting sovereignty and security is fundamental to the State's duties towards its citizens. Thus, we must act quickly to exercise sovereignty and restore our hold over the areas of the nation that were evacuated and abandoned. To this end, two fundamental terms must be met - the first of which is disrupting the capabilities of Hamas and other Gaza-based terrorist organizations to attack the settlements. The IDF's mounting achievements and the building of a security buffer and military defense envelope will make it very difficult for the enemy to launch infiltration or standoff firing attacks in the direction of the settlements - and will eventually, through a prolonged process, negate its capabilities for massive rocket fire towards the settlements as well. The IDF had already begun implementing a broad-scope plan to defend the settlements and respond to their security needs by reinforcing the settlements' rapid response teams, providing proper equipment and regular training, alongside integration of the IDF's area defense into the settlements and installation of various deterrents such as indicative fences, smart cameras, Command and Control rooms, etc.

An important tool for restoring sovereignty and security would be growing the population of the Gaza Envelope area through reviving the Nahal program and establishing Nahal settlements in the Gaza Envelope area - after two decades during which not a single Nahal settlement was established and converted into a civilian settlement. Beyond increasing the population, further settlement of the

area by Nahal core groups would enable reclaiming this geographical area in a productive and principled manner, serving as a lodestone for a reformed ethos of pioneering, inhabiting and working the land, alongside active defense of the area - the sickle and the sword as a foundation for volunteering and harnessing the national spirit to establish new settlements and restore security to the area.

In the personal-community aspect, keeping entire communities out of their natural environment may jeopardize their social cohesion and their ability to recover from the traumatic event. The sooner these communities return to their settlements, rehabilitate them, and establish routines of daily life, the more effective their recovery process will be.

In the national context, the settlements thriving and prospering once again will constitute a victory for the State of Israel - radiating strength both inwards into Israeli society and outwards, demonstrating the resilience of Israeli society and its perseverance in the Zionist endeavor. The residents' return to the Gaza Envelope settlements will also boost the recovery of the area's community and education systems - including that of schools, other educational institutions, medical services, public transport, and a variety of needful community services. This process cannot be serial - it must occur concurrently with the residents' return and brooks no delay. In this manner, community systems could be rehabilitated in a vibrant, healthy way.

One cannot underestimate the importance of the psychological dimension. Restoring and developing settlements will necessarily radiate on the Israeli society's sense of capability, on trust in the State's institutions and its capability to recover from severe trauma and devastation whilst harnessing national resources and capabilities for planning and execution - and no less importantly - on the sense of cohesion, solidarity, and mutual responsibility. All these are expressions and aspects of social and national resilience. National resilience is a fundamental and essential component of national strength - and thus, of national security in its broad sense. We cannot ignore the difficulties and the trauma caused by the events of October 7th, or their impact on our sense of capability, security, trust, and resilience. Since October 7th, Israeli society has gone a long way in the process of rehabilitation and recovery - but the process cannot be completed without restoring settlement, exercising sovereignty, re-establishing communities, agriculture, and industry in the area - and in particular, continuing

its development and expansion as an appropriate Zionist reply to the bloodthirsty destructiveness that Hamas demonstrated during the murderous terrorist attack of October 7th. Through its communities, Israeli settlement shall set exercising sovereignty and reclamation of the land through agricultural work against Hamas' destructive efforts. Renewing the settlement efforts, restoring them to their former glory, developing and expanding them will constitute the true Israeli victory in this war - the triumph of the Zionist ethos of building and development, reclaiming and settling the land, over Hamas' ethos of ruin and devastation.

Finally, the return of the Gaza Envelope's residents to their homes holds economic significance of the highest order, for several reasons. First, the direct costs of hosting evacuated individuals in alternative residences and in hotels and guest houses. An analysis of the proposal for increasing the 2023 budget suggests that the scope of addition to the budget required to support the expenditures of assisting evacuated individuals was more than ILS 6 billion. [1] This budget is expected to grow even further in 2024. Diverting funds from direct aid to the evacuated individuals into developing and rehabilitating the Gaza Envelope settlements will yield great returns and generate income for the national economy, made possible by restoring the Gaza Envelope's economy to a functional state - albeit partially, at first. Second - bringing the residents back would necessitate the provision of economic benefits - both for individual residents and on the community-settlement level. The State is required to invest in developing the area and the settlements, and to provide a variety of economic benefits in the form of tax breaks, grants, and aid in developing settlements, in a manner that would serve all national needs. This investment should be considered a substantial part of the war costs and one of the tools for winning it.

Many residents will wish to return to their homes as soon as possible, given the right conditions. The right time is now, and we must act to return the settlers to the Gaza Envelope. Uprooting these communities from their settlements was a necessary evil at the start of the war, but now we must put our full strength behind making these settlements prosper again. The leadership of the State must take the reins on this national challenge - this national mission -through relevant government ministries and State institutions. It is also the time for local leadership and community leadership - as well as for the communities themselves and their settlers - to shine. Now is the time for pioneers to take the van - the time for the nation to step forward in its journey to rise again and make its way

towards the establishment of Israel 2.0. [2]

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[1] Description and Analysis of the Proposal to Increase the 2023 National Budget and a Macro-Economic Review. Knesset Information and Research Center, December 2023.

[2] <https://www.misgavins.org/siboni-michael-israel-2-0-project-launch>