Understanding Isreal's Security Outlook Post-October 7th

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Israel is a country obsessed with security. This is not unwarranted, given that since its founding in 1948 Israel has had to endure numerous wars with its Arab neighbors. The national security outlook as conceived by David Ben Gurion, Israel's founding father, was built on the principles of early warning, deterrence, decisive victory and after the Second Lebanon War of 2006, a military posture based on defence rather than offence. However, on October 7th 2023, early warning systems failed, deterrence collapsed and

there are question marks whether Israel has the ability to decisively and permanently win an asymmetric war, posing a great challenge to Israel's national security planners and decision makers.

Following these assertions, this article will attempt to concisely describe how half a year after October 7th Israel's strategic outlook has changed. Suffice it to say, in the aftermath of the deadliest day for the Jewish people since the holocaust, Israel's understanding of security has changed profoundly.

A New Strategic Environment

The horrific images of October 7th have put an end to many illusions and shattered the promise that Jews can live safely in the land of Israel. Restoring this promise has become a long-term national project and the conceptual changes that are necessary in order to achieve this are now starting to take shape.

Firstly, notwithstanding the fact that Hamas was the perpetrator of October 7th, the assessment regarding Iran as Israel's number one security challenge remains true, as even if Iran did not actively take part in October 7th, Iranian's Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) train, arm and actively support Hamas and other Palestinian militias in Gaza and the West Bank. It is clear that this is a continuation of Iran's attempt to export the Islamic revolution, create a "Ring of Fire" around Israel and prepare proxy forces in the region for a multi-front war with Israel.

It is for this reason that October 7th is understood by many as not just another round of fighting between Israelis and the Palestinians but as the opening blow for the conflict between Israel and Iran's Axis of Resistance.

Speaking of the Axis, a new outlook is developing on Israel's northern border where the threat of Hezbollah is ever-present. One of the main lessons drawn from the 2006 Lebanon War, a response to Hezbollah's kidnapping and killing of soldiers inside sovereign Israeli territory, was that military operations are no magic solution for long-standing strategic problems.

Giving diplomacy a chance, Israel tried to resolve the tensions on the northern border by adopting UN Security Council Resolution 1701 which mandated the establishment of a buffer area free of any armed personnel, assets and weapons other than those of the government of Lebanon between the Blue Line and the Litani river. However, Resolution 1701 was never implemented and Hezbollah has amassed approximately 150.000 precision-guided missiles that can accurately hit large Israeli population centres.

The lesson of caution learned during the 2006 war is now being challenged by the urgent short-term need to restore conditions of basic security for approximately 80.000 Israelis living in the north who have been displaced from their homes since the start of the war. Israel's tolerance level

for threats is at an all-time low and it cannot allow itself to live in the shadow of an even greater threat by Hezbollah. In light of this, a military posture based on defence has become untenable.

Another important change that is happening within Israeli society is a widespread recognition that a basic misunderstanding of the intentions of Hamas and radical Islamist groups, in general, is partly responsible for the catastrophic mistakes made by the IDF on October 7th. Hamas, an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, is a deeply religious organization that does cost-benefit analysis in a way that is foreign to the Western mind: its members, according to their own admission, value death more than life, and thus cannot be deterred in the conventional sense of the term. This key insight has not been adequately integrated into military and social planning.

Finally, there is a limit to what technological superiority can achieve. Terrorist organizations like Hamas, Hezbollah or the Houthis have reached quasi-military dimensions that require reemphasizing conventional military strength and pivoting away from solely relying on smart technological solutions. As the war in Ukraine has illustrated, technology should be a supplement for, not the replacement of, manpower and industrial capacity.

Conclusion

It is safe to say that given the scale of the attacks of Hamas on Israel on October 7th, it will have a similar, if not bigger, impact on its national security outlook than 9/11 had on the United States. But as the old assumptions are being reevaluated, planners and decision-makers cannot operate in a vacuum and have to replace their old assumptions and principles with new and better ones. While this process is still in its early stages, the above-mentioned points should be kept in mind when trying to understand Israel's new security outlook post-October 7th.