

Israel must uproot all ideas of repeat of Oct. 7 in Judea and Samaria

written by Meir Ben Shabbat | 31.05.2024

The ramming attack near Nablus that claimed the lives of two IDF soldiers, as well as the shooting incidents and drone flights toward Israeli towns near the Seam Zone, momentarily drew public attention to the simmering Judea and Samaria arena. While defined as a secondary front in the multi-arena campaign Israel is waging, the threats emanating from it continue to be a source of concern for the IDF and the Shin Bet security agency.

So far, two factors have somewhat restrained the potential for terror from Judea and Samaria. The first is the shock and dismay that gripped the terrorist elements and the Palestinian public in this area following Oct. 7. The fear that Israel might unleash its wrath over the horrific massacre on anyone who provokes it has caused some terrorist elements to be more hesitant. Even the worsening economic situation due to the ongoing closure has not shattered this psychological barrier. The second factor, which came in parallel, is the intensive activity of the security establishment. This has been characterized to a much greater extent by proactive friction and aggression, leading to thousands of arrests, thwarting numerous attacks, and dismantling parts of the terrorist infrastructure.

However, the audacity displayed by terrorist elements in Judea and Samaria in recent times likely indicates the dissipation of the first factor's influence and an adaptation to the IDF's current modus operandi. Against this backdrop, terrorist elements in Judea and Samaria have begun adopting an approach of initiating attacks against communities, apparently inspired by Hamas' Oct. 7 onslaught.

Even if their performance currently seems far from mimicking that attack, the very intention to emulate this pattern, with necessary adaptations in the Judea and Samaria arena, must be viewed with utmost seriousness.

The security establishment must take steps to make this course appear futile and hopeless in the eyes of the Palestinians. Consideration should be given to defining

a special regime, including unique open-fire instructions for the Seam Zone, and to nip in the bud any attempt to act in this direction, even through the use of targeted prevention measures.

Enforcement must be exhausted, and administrative measures taken against anyone involved in these ideas – perpetrators, accomplices, suppliers of means (such as drones), transporters of wanted individuals, and their employers. In the face of this dangerous pattern, it is appropriate to consider using sweeping measures against areas from which attacks or preparations for them originate. This must be a top priority for IDF forces, the Shin Bet, Border Police, and the police in this sector.

The large accumulation of events unfolding simultaneously across seven geographical arenas (the Gaza Strip, Judea and Samaria, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and above all, Iran), the international legal arena (the courts in The Hague), and the political arena could create the impression of “the Philistines are upon you, Samson.”

The protracted war, the direct and indirect costs paid thus far, the disputes over its continuation, the dead-end regarding the hostages, and the uncertainty of the evacuated northern residents regarding their future – all contribute to a sense of stagnation. The high cost of living, economic hardships, as well as the resurgence of political issues and internal divisions on the agenda, add to the general concern. It can be assumed that Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas are closely following developments in Israel, hoping that these trends will erode national resilience and lead to a change in its positions. The concept of a multi-arena war with Israel was also aimed at this. The basic perception in these circles is that the ultimate weapon against the West, including Israel, is steadfastness over time. As Secretary-General of Hezbollah Hassan Nasrallah has said, Israel is weary of wars and lacks the resilience and fortitude to withstand a bloody struggle and sustain casualties.

And yet, Israel’s conduct during the eight months of war has slapped them in the face. Despite internal and external challenges, Israel persists in resolutely striving to achieve all its objectives.

At this juncture, given the challenges that still lie ahead, the political leadership should invest in strengthening national resilience alongside the ongoing efforts on

the military and diplomatic fronts. It is appropriate to minimize public uncertainty as much as possible, bolster economic continuity, alleviate the economic burden, avoid or postpone addressing divisive issues, and strive for broad consensus.

The Israeli public, accustomed to living in the light of a grand vision, also needs this. At this point, the American proposal for a new regional order meets the authentic yearning for an organizing idea, but Israel cannot afford the accompanying price tag. For the time being, the organizing principle for Israel's conduct is simpler but faithful to reality: We are acting to ensure our existence so that, when the time comes, we can fulfill the vision that will be agreed upon.

Published in Israel Hayom, June 2, 2024.