What to pray for this Yom Kippur?

written by David M. Weinberg | 22.09.2023
Some things to pray for this Yom Kippur for the Jewish state.

Zionist strategy for Israel

written by David M. Weinberg | 22.09.2023
The tentative Saudi reconciliation with Iran this month, brokered by China, sent some Israeli politicians into a tizzy. Opposition leader Yair Lapid, for example, was quick to condemn Prime Minister Netanyahu for "collapse" of the Abraham Accords and any prospect of Saudi-Israeli (and Saudi-US) rapprochement.

Leaving this aside, the semi-surprising development does raise questions about grand strategy, making creative Israeli maneuvering more necessary than ever.

I, for one, do not believe that the Saudi-Iran agreement closes the door on Saudi-Israeli entente, nor on a renewed pro-Western regional alliance involving Israel and the Saudis – if only Washington would wake-up and buttress this with smart, concrete commitments.

One thing is clear: Israel must play three- or four-dimensional diplomatic chess to secure its regional security. This requires clearheaded strategic thinking with unfailing devotion to Zionist and Jewish goals.

Entering this intellectual space is the new Institute for Zionist Strategy and National Security, *Misgav*, led by Meir Ben Shabbat. Ben Shabbat served as Israel's national security advisor and head of the National Security Council between 2017 and 2021 (for far longer than any NSC chief in recent decades), and for 25 years prior to that he held senior positions in Israel's General Security Service.

He is respected as an astute analyst, an effective security practitioner, a discrete diplomat, and a man of principle.

Many readers will remember his magnificent diplomatic address in Rabat, Morocco in December 2020 in fluent Darija, the Moroccan Arabic dialect. Ben Shabbat, who hails from Casablanca, at the time led the Israeli delegation to Morocco (alongside Jared Kushner and an American delegation) that resulted in establishment of full relations between the two countries. The video of Ben Shabbat's stirring speech went viral in the Arab world.

On the agenda for the new think tank are a range of critical issues beginning with countering Iran in every way, investment of resources in growing the Abraham Accords, managing Israel's diplomatic ties with China, Russia, and Europe, reinforcing Israel's sovereign control in Jerusalem, restoring Israeli governance in Area C of Judea and Samaria and in the Negev and Galilee, preparing for the day after Mahmoud Abbas in Palestinian-held areas, reforming the Israeli Police, and bolstering the IDF (particularly its ground forces) in preparation for a possible three-front war.

Fellows of the new institute also will focus on major challenges to global Jewish strength, including the high cost of Jewish education, aliyah impediments, problems in the Law of Return, the woke and BDS assaults on the confidence of young Jews everywhere, deficits in (perception of) Israel's democratic and Jewish foundations, integration of Israeli Arabs and Ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israeli society, Zionist and Jewish civics education in Israel, and more.

Regarding Iran, Ben Shabbat argues that the time has come for the West to change course and pose a credible threat to the regime of the ayatollahs – to reduce the risk of actual war. Advancing a military option against Iran will not necessarily lead to war. Just the opposite is true, Ben Shabbat asserts. Without such measures, the likelihood of a violent eruption in the Middle East significantly will increase.

Regarding Palestinians, Ben Shabbat insists that Israel must act compellingly to prevent terrorism from snowballing any further. He says the threshold for conducting administrative detentions of terrorist supporters and those who praise terrorist attacks should be lowered. More rapid and effective IDF and police responses are required at the very moment an attack is perpetrated too, leading to the "neutralization" of terrorist attackers – to dissuade copycats.

Punishment for terrorism must be enhanced as well. This includes destroying the

houses of the perpetrators as a deterrent measure against future attacks (which is particularly effective in traditional Palestinian society where the family plays a key role), taking away social benefits from the terrorist and his family, and revoking the residency status of inciters from eastern Jerusalem and deporting them.

Israel also must act forthrightly against sources of incitement in schools in eastern Jerusalem, in the media and social media, and in sermons voiced in mosques.

OVERALL, there is, in fact, a successful Israeli "grand security strategy" of sorts and it must be pursued with determination. It involves steadfastness, patience, and looking over the horizon for new partners while fearlessly confronting bad actors. It involves being both flexible and firm.

It means strictly securing Israel's borders, managing frictions with the Palestinians, and pursuing Zionist goals like continued settlement of the Land of Israel. It involves positioning Israel as a regional anchor of sanity and a global source of ingenuity.

In the face of Iranian hegemonic ambition, Russian adventurism, Chinese expansionism, American retrenchment, and Palestinian rejectionism, Israel stands tenaciously firm with the strongest military ever assembled in the Middle East, and a (still) believing people.

Vigilance and diplomatic nimbleness will see Israel well through the regional and global storms. The Institute for Zionist Strategy and National Security will contribute concrete policy proposals to keep Israel's leaders focused.

Published in The Jerusalem Post, March 17, 2023, and Israel Hayom, March 19, 2023.