The West must play to win against terrorism

written by Arsen Ostrovsky | 26.09.2024

Following the exploding Hezbollah pagers in Lebanon and the elimination of the terrorist organization's senior leadership in the last week, there is a sense that Israel is shifting from a strategy of containment to one of decisive action. This paradigm shift moves beyond merely managing the threat toward a bolder objective: pre-emption and total victory.

As President Isaac Herzog said, "we don't want war, but if it's waged against us, we go all the way."

Israeli leaders have long understood the existential danger posed by Iran and its proxies, Hamas and Hezbollah. Yet over the last two decades, instead of eliminating these threats, Israeli policies — at the West's insistence — have often emboldened the rise of these powerful non-state militias. The policy of limited warfare has allowed these groups to survive, grow and become more entrenched.

This strategy is not unique to Israel. Since the end of World War II, Western powers have consistently avoided all-out victories, often choosing containment and appeasement or limited engagement over total warfare and the crippling of these terror networks. The result? Persistent, unresolved conflicts which, like the Korean War, linger to this day with continued threats.

If the West had allowed Gen. Douglas MacArthur to fully deploy his military strategy against North Korea and its Chinese backers — including a blockade of Chinese ports and decisive action to cut off supply lines — the outcome could have been quite different. As matters stand, we are left with a North Korean regime that continues to destabilize global security to this day.

The Vietnam War presents another example of limited warfare's long-term costs. President Richard Nixon eventually escalated U.S. actions with the bombing of Haiphong and incursions into Laos and Cambodia, but by then, it was too late. Had the U.S. taken these decisive steps earlier or used the full force of its military to block the Ho Chi Minh Trail from the start, the course of the war might have shifted. Instead, Vietnam became a symbol of American defeat.

Fast-forward to today, and the West is repeating this pattern of half-measures.

In Ukraine, the incremental and conditional aid provided to President Volodymyr Zelensky in his battle against Russian aggression evinces the same mindset. Instead of immediate, overwhelming support, Western nations trickle in aid and impose restrictions on its use.

Sanctions, too, are often enforced unevenly. For example, sanctions on Iran are easily circumvented, with Iranian oil still finding buyers worldwide, undermining the impact of economic penalties.

As history has shown, authoritarian regimes and non-state actors understand and respond to one thing: ruthless power. Whether military, economic or political, decisive action has proven to be the only language understood by those who seek to disrupt global stability.

Western nations learned this lesson the hard way during World War II, when British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's policy of appeasement failed spectacularly. Chamberlain's ill-fated agreement with Hitler, meant to ensure "peace for our time," only delayed the inevitable. As Churchill scolded him, "you were given the choice between war and dishonour. You chose dishonour and you will have war."

Ultimately, it was not diplomacy but total military defeat that ended Nazi Germany's threat to Europe. To use Churchill's words again, when asked what was Britain's policy, he said "victory, victory at all costs."

Yet since its establishment in 1948, the Jewish state has been the only democracy repeatedly denied the right to achieve total victory against enemies who have time and again initiated wars and pogroms, seeking no less than its very annihilation.

Even though it was Israel attacked by Hamas on Oct. 7, it was also an assault on the West and the principles it claims to uphold — freedom, democracy and the rule of law. If the West truly seeks to uphold these sacrosanct values, then it must finally abandon the strategy of limited warfare and throw its full weight behind Israel as the frontier of Western civilization.

This is not the time for half measures. Hamas, Hezbollah and their sponsors in

Tehran must be decisively defeated, not contained.

As Ronald Reagan warned in 1964, during his “A Time for Choosing” speech in the peak of the Cold War, “a policy of accommodation is appeasement, and it gives no choice between peace and war, only between fight or surrender.”

The bad actors of today — China, Russia, Iran, North Korea and their proxies — do not negotiate from a place of weakness or fear international opinion. Instead, they project power without concern for identity politics or public sentiment.

In short, the West must play to win in order to defend freedom.

The article was written by Arsen Ostrovsky in collaboration with Businessman Rick Ekstein, founder of Phaze 3 Associates, advocates for the Jewish community and improving Canada through political engagement.

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