Pessimism on Steroids

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Critical voices have surfaced in the Israeli public and in the media concerning the goals of the war, which are presented as presumptuous and impractical, and regarding the tension between destroying Hamas as a military and governing entity and releasing the hostages. Criticism is also heard regarding the political echelon's vacillation about deciding as to the "day after."

This criticism, which should properly be heard and discussed even in wartime, recently has morphed into a cascade of gloom and doom on the part of some opinion leaders, culminating in appeals to "concede defeat, accept Hamas's terms for a hostage release deal, and end the war.

This dispiriting commentary runs up against the sense of achievement felt by Israel's troops in the field, and by the resolve of the military and political echelon to attain the war's goals and by their complete confidence in the necessity of the war.

There is a grand incongruity between the dispiriting criticism and widespread public support of the war's goals and confidence in the ability of Israel to attain those goals – as expressed in every public opinion poll. (See, for example, polls conducted by the Institute for National Security Studies, the Israel Democracy Institute, and others).

Without having been declared or formally organized, a new movement has effectively been founded in Israel: The Downer Movement ("Dichonistim" in Hebrew). The movement boasts members such as media outlets and opinion leaders who wield extensive influence by virtue of their prominence in public discourse. They are agents of demoralization, steadily and doggedly dripping their despondent messages into public discourse.

They do not necessarily do this maliciously; likely motivated by a profound "downer" conviction – pessimism on steroids – resulting from severe crisis of trust in the resilience of Israeli society and in the IDF's capabilities, as well as from their harsh, even virulent, disapproval of Israel's current political leadership.

However, regardless of the causes of such despondency and pessimism, their

efforts can adversely affect the fighting spirit of the IDF, boost Hamas's morale and that of the entire resistance axis, and invite the exertion of heavier and more significant external pressures on Israel, including by the US administration.

The pessimistic analyses and evaluations paint a grim picture of reality, which again is quite different from the situation as perceived by the majority of Israelis. This is borne-out in a study conducted by Dr. Gil Samsonov and his colleagues at Publicis, which shows an immense gap between the spirit inculcated by the Downer Movement and the spirit of Israel's younger generation. (See: Today's Youth Against the Background of the Iron Swords War – Among Teenagers, Soldiers and Students, A Study of Israelis 16-25; Glikman, Shamir, Samsonov – The Publicis Group; December 2023).

The study's authors argue that Israel is undergoing nothing less than a generational upheaval, one that shatters paradigms and entrenches new perspectives: from an disconnected, global generation of Israelis to almost pioneer-like optimistic generation.

According to the study, 59% of young Israelis believe that Israel is strong, will win and has a future. 58% have a purely positive outlook, 28% have both a positive and a negative outlook and only 14% have a purely negative outlook. 70% of people aged 16-18 believe in Israel's strength and future. Young people understand the difficulties faced by the country, with 57% saying that Israel will gradually regain its standing despite substantial difficulties posed by a hostile Middle East, relying on a strong military. 29% think Israel will quickly regain its strength and resume growing, with many immigrants making their way to Israel.

Young Israelis understand the need to party less and work more (through both university studies and military service). Finally, 57% think Israel will emerge victorious from the current crisis thanks to its strong army.

The survey's findings indicate a strong spirit exhibited by the younger generation, with impressive optimism, a spirit of volunteering, and belief in the justness of Israel's path as the nation-state of the Jewish People.

In an interview television, Dr. Samsonov summarized his study's findings by stating that the younger Israeli generation is more like the rugged, realistic, and scrappy generation of Israelis in 1948 – the generation of their grandparents – than its own parents' generation.

The Downer Movement sometimes dominates public discourse because Israeli media highlights its members and messaging. But again, the despondent messaging is not truly reflective of mainstream Israeli thinking and feeling.

Part of the despondency stems from the downers fervent and near-religious beliefs in the so-called two-state solution; from being addicted to the notion that no solution exists other than reliance on the Palestinian Authority. They advocate for propping up the PA even at the cost of compromising on critical demands for reform of that problematic body. Their inability to move beyond the PA, their reliance on failed paradigms of the past, leads them to bleak assessments regarding the IDF's ability to attain Israel's war goals. Alas, they don't understand how resilient and determined Israelis are to do things differently.

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