Guns for grandmothers

written by David M. Weinberg | 17.11.2023

Over the past month, more than 200,000 (!) Israelis have filed applications for gun licenses, permits to always own and carry a firearm. Given the spike in Palestinian terrorism over the past 18 months, and the Hamas massacres of October 7, this is not surprising, and is even welcome. I think that every Israeli grandmother should now pack a pistol.

In saying so I am shocking myself, because I grew-up in Western liberal society where gun toting was rare and frowned-upon. If anything, it was the passion of far-right rednecks who were viewed from afar as irresponsible. The Americas are plagued by too much gun violence, with regular shotgun and machine gun shootings by deranged people in malls, schools, campuses, playgrounds, and even occasionally churches and synagogues.

Furthermore, in this country to which I immigrated many decades ago, guns were considered the province of the military, to which we send our sons and daughters to serve. Soldiers coming home for the weekend with their sophisticated and scary-looking rifles are a regular sight, and troops in the streets to secure major holiday pedestrian traffic and tourist sites are commonplace (and necessary), especially in Jerusalem.

In other words, this country is seemingly well protected by its large citizen-based army, police force, para-military forces, and penetrating intelligence forces. It not necessary for the average citizen in Israel, men and women, to be personally armed. Or so it seemed.

The time when every Israeli working in agricultural fields or walking to work in Tel Aviv needed to have a loaded gun is over, or so we thought. The time when every Israeli needed to display instant readiness to repel attack had passed, or so we thought.

Israel's War of Independence was over, so we thought. Back *then*, the battle was for every living room and nursery room. But *today*, the IDF with its Hellfire missiles, Iron Dome anti-missile defenses, and crack commando units suffices to secure our security. Or so we thought.

But now the second War of Independence is upon Israel. The battle for basic security is underway not just in the towns of the Gaza Envelope but in every border area, and frankly this country is so small that everywhere is a border zone.

Israeli Arabs and Arabs from Judea and Samaria are so integrated in Israeli commerce and industry that the potential for terrorist attack is viscerally felt everywhere, rightfully or wrongly. After all, quite a few Palestinians from Gaza who seemingly worked peacefully in Beeri, Reem, and Kfar Azza apparently provided precise intelligence on Beeri, Reem, and Kfar Azza to the Hamas butchers who invaded on Simchat Torah.

The notion that one can comfortably invite Arab construction workers into one's home or neighborhood has been seriously undermined. The notion that Modiin, Raanana, or Emek Hefer cities and industrial zones can go without armed civilian guards at checkpoints at every entrance has been genuinely destabilized. Israelis are rightfully afraid, and correctly arming up.

AT LEAST 20 YEARS AGO, Major General (res.) Gershon Hacohen told me that every grandmother in this country should pack a gun. Every citizen should be armed and ready to defend the country. This is a matter of both mental and operational readiness, he told me. Israeli society, he long has argued, has grown too comfortable, too middle class, too bourgeoisie, too blind to the dangers that surround Israel.

If most (sane, responsible) citizens in this country were armed, the signal to our enemies would be clear: Israel is never asleep, and it is ready to defend itself vigorously at any moment – Hacohen has argued. And to prove his point, he will show you the pistol he has permanently strapped to his lower leg underneath his pants.

General Hacohen long has been a mentor to me in strategic and defense affairs. He is an out-of-the-box deep thinker. Throughout his 41-year military career, he was widely considered to be the "thinking intellectual" of IDF generals, although not all his colleagues understood what he was driving at. He is messianic and impulsive in some of his prescriptions, ideologically precise and visionary in others.

I always have liked the revolutionary fervor inherent in Hacohen's approach. He wants to bring back a Zionist discourse on pioneering, redemption, and

settlement – taking themes from the dynamic worldviews of Berl Katznelson, Ben-Gurion, and Rabbi AY Kook.

His book, What's National in National Security (Hebrew: Ministry of Defense Publishing House, 2014), is essentially a discourse on the importance of faith, vision, and religious-ideological aspirations in the crafting of national security doctrine. It should now be mandatory reading.

Hacohen's central insight is this: Those who view Israel as a stepping-stone for redemption and as the Jewish national spiritual homeland will act differently in responding to Palestinian attack than those who view Israel merely as a safe-haven state. If the former, the government should do more than just approve security operations against Palestinian terrorists. It should act to crush Israel's enemies and approve renewed building in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria.

Hacohen's message is that Israel must reacquire sufficient ideological determination to repulse and overwhelm its adversaries. When enemies such as Hamas-ISIS and Iran are resolutely motivated by revolutionary ideologies, Israel can't get by with leaders bereft of ideological zeal; stuck in a holding pattern or management mindset.

IN THE CURRENT CONTEXT, Hacohen is relevant for another reason. Over the past decade, he has overseen the IDF's major war games exercises. The central-most takeaway from the simulations he designed and ran was that Israel must be

prepared with massive ground forces to fight a two-front or even three-front war – exactly the scenario that may be developing right now.

Furthermore, Israel must be proactive, rather than, reactive. "Restoring calm" to Israel's southern and northern border areas, or "maintaining calm" in Jerusalem and the West Bank (through occasional anti-terrorist operations, plus fences and roadblocks, etc.) is akin to putting a derailed train back on track – no more, Hacohen argues. It is a technical solution, not a goal-oriented chess move that drives a new reality.

The Zionist movement always sought to, and today too should seek to, reshape Israel's strategic reality according to its preferences. This means maneuvering, expanding, building, and forcing the enemy on the defensive, says Hacohen, in Gaza and the Galilee, in Jerusalem, and in Judea and Samaria.

Underlying Hacohen's weltanschauung is the notion of ongoing struggle, and deep faith in the righteousness of the Jewish return to Zion.

This first part of this thought-process is somewhat Bolshevik in approach: Israel is engaged in a permanent revolution. Consequently, Hacohen says, Zionism must constantly seek to re-shape and shake-up the strategic environment, never giving up on its ideals despite strategic and tactical difficulties.

Even if Israeli leaders can't see where the struggle will ultimately lead, they are nevertheless mandated to push forward. So, you shuffle the cards and create game-changing facts on the ground. In Gaza too.

And then, drawing on passionate commitment that comes from true belief in your cause – religious-nationalist faith in the justice of the Jewish People' return to Zion – you express confidence that the Heavens will help stickhandle the helm of state.

All this starts with getting a gun. Today, I downloaded an application from the Ministry of National Security website.

Published in Israel Hayom, November 19, 2023.