Mobilize the public for real war preparedness

written by David M. Weinberg | 26.06.2024

A cold, calculated analysis of Israel's strategic situation will reach the conclusion that this country faces a decade of tough warfare on seven different fronts, mainly against Iran and its proxy armies. Enemy armies and militias are entrenched on Israel's borders, with Iran actively arming and seeking to radicalize Palestinians in Judea and Samaria, and Jordan, too.

Full-scale war with Hezbollah in Lebanon, which is two days or two years away at most, will be an earth-shattering event in particular, bringing inevitable destruction of unprecedented proportions to civil infrastructure in Israel (as well as in Lebanon).

Neither the Israeli military nor home front is sufficiently geared to handle this grim reality. Therefore, the Government of Israel must embark on an emergency effort to significantly strengthen the IDF, and to mobilize the public in preparing for long-term struggle in wartime conditions. This requires punishing economic decisions and a change of mindset led by leaders with both grit and vision.

I believe that the Israeli public instinctively understands the dramatic inflexion point at which this country stands and the sacrifices that yet will be required to guarantee the country's very existence – beyond the enormous sacrifices in men and material that already have been amassed over the past eight months.

And I believe that the Israeli public, young and old across all partisan lines, is yearning – screaming! – for national leadership that will motivate it to participate in an escalating national war effort despite the severity of the costs involved.

I am not talking about the many magnificent initiatives that have been launched by Israeli civil society organizations over the past year to support soldiers and their families, and to heal and comfort war victims. I am not talking about bar-b-ques for the troops, weekend retreats for war widows, or loans for devastated small businesses and farmers. I am not talking about the selfless activists who have rallied to advocate for Israel's hostages or to back the government's war goals against international pressures.

All these activities, from all sides of the political and social spectrum, are good and important, even heroic. And they certainly should and will continue.

Rather, I am talking about extreme moves to shift this country onto a true wartime footing, in order to rigorously prepare for the imminent, overwhelming challenges ahead.

I am talking about activating the Defense Ministry's Supreme Emergency Economy Board to ramp-up and reinforce services such as hospitals, electricity grids, water and sewage networks, and food manufacturing and stockpiling. Israel must have at hand sufficient (again, massive) supplies of medicines, food products, and core industrial ingredients to last-out a one-year-long interruption in air and sea imports.

Also in need of colossal emergency augmentation: firefighting and rescue services. Far beyond the widespread forest and brush fires in Israel's north wrought by Hezbollah in recent months, and wildcat arsons across Judea and Samaria perpetrated by Palestinian marauders, Israel must be ready for large-scale industrial explosions and fires at key infrastructure sites caused by precision-guided, large-ordinance Hezbollah missile strikes.

Israel also needs trained personnel to clear and dispose of massive amounts of wartime debris. According to disaster specialist Dr. Efraim Laor (the longtime Israeli oracle of emergency preparedness for earthquakes, and for chemical, biological, and nuclear strike), this could amount to 200 million tons of rubble, possibly contaminated itself, or that threatens to contaminate basic water supply and interfere with essential sewage treatment.

Then there is the military. The IDF needs to grow by at least three divisions. That is 50,000 soldiers more, with tons of military equipment. A gargantuan increase in the training of front-line troops is necessary, especially armored formations. The Israeli navy needs more than $5 billion in new ships, submarines, weapons systems, and personnel over the next decade.

Israel's defense industries need to produce 10,000 surveillance and attack drones, 200 Thundermaker self-propelled artillery guns, 100 Namer armored personnel carriers, and 50 Merkava main battle tanks – per year. Israel also needs to self-manufacture 155mm artillery shells, and precision-guided missiles for the air force, in insane numbers. (This is especially true since Israel faces increasing

restrictions on the use of US-supplied weaponry, and because there is a global shortage of such ammunition.)

This is a very tall, almost impossible, order, and it will cost hundreds of millions of shekels. Overall, it is estimated that Israel needs a huge build-up, eight times over the current manufacturing capacity of Israeli defense industries.

Besides the budget allocations for all this (and the concomitant cuts in civilian budgets that will be necessary), the Israeli government will need to mobilize the public to manufacture and man the above platforms.

It is time to raid the high schools, university campuses, and senior citizen homes for manpower; to press the entire Israeli public, young and old of all hues and stripes, into industrial and emergency service.

New factories and new rescue/response brigades need to be staffed by every able body. This inevitably will have to include segments of Israeli society that currently are underrepresented in industry and military.

And with political leadership that knows how to scare, inspire, and drive the Israeli public into the emergency super-structure and national crisis footing I am describing, I am certain that the public will respond with alacrity. I sense that Israelis are thirsting for such leadership. They are aching to be called upon for the Herculean efforts necessary.

SOME WILL retort that what I am calling for amounts to a near-complete shutdown of civil life in Israel, of education, culture, and leisure activities – and that this would be a major mistake. It would reinforce the assaults of our enemies who seek to indeed make Israel unlivable.

It would undermine our own self-confidence that despite enemy attacks, and alongside a painful war effort, everyday life in Israel proceeds apace with vigor, joy, simple pleasures (like vacation time), and with great accomplishment in all fields from science to music.

Nevertheless, it is high time for a national reset, for a forbidding awakening that marshals the public for the tough grind ahead. It is time to rally the troops – and that means all Israelis in all sectors and stages of life – for a period of intense national struggle. For sacrifice that goes beyond anything known to Israelis to-

date.

Maj. Gen. Gershon Hacohen, who is the most ideologically rooted military thinker in Israel today, argues that rekindling an ethos of national struggle in Israel today – and acting decisively on this basis – is both essential and possible.

He recalls that David Ben-Gurion did so before and during Israel's War of Independence in 1948. This entailed throwing Holocaust survivors off the boats from Europe into battle, the drafting of teenagers into work brigades and senior citizens into factories and fields, even the rationing of basic foodstuffs. It involved subserviating all aspects of the economy to the war effort.

After the Yom Kippur War disaster, Hacohen says, Israeli leadership also knew how to rapidly rebuild the military, aggregating every resource to do so – despite global boycott, mushrooming debt and economic depression, and without succumbing to too much legal and other government bureaucracy.

Two years ago, the leadership in Kyiv threw Ukrainians into national war mobilization too, mustering a large fighting force within half a year and equipping itself with the newest battle technologies such as UAVs.

In May 1940, Prime Minister Winston Churchill famously girded the people of the United Kingdom for an arduous path ahead. Before he drafted every single Briton into war service of one type or another, he warned that "We have before us an ordeal of the most grievous kind. We have before us many, many long months of struggle and suffering. I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat."

"You ask, what is our policy? I can say: It is to wage war, by sea, land, and air, with all our might and with all the strength that God can give us, to wage war against a monstrous tyranny, never surpassed in the dark, lamentable catalog of human crime. That is our policy. You ask, what is our aim? I can answer in one word: It is victory, victory at all costs, victory despite of all terror. Victory, however long and hard the road may be. For without victory, there is no survival."

Israelis hanker for such leadership today. The emergency mobilization of society and economy described above is certainly necessary, and Israelis assuredly will be up to task.

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