Assessment of Israel's 'Operation Days of Repentance'

written by Dr. David Wurmser | 27.10.2024

Based on very initial knowledge and limited information, I would conclude the following results of Israel's three-wave Oct. 26 strike on Iran, which were partly strategic, but mostly tactical:

1. Israel finally broke the aura of Iranian invincibility. It dispelled the 30-year obsession in the West that a strike would have apocalyptic consequences, and established precedent for hitting Iran directly. This is no small thing, and lifts an analytical and policy straight-jacket that paralyzed Israel and others for decades. Iran has been exposed as weak; its bluffs and bluster called. The emperor has only old, threadbare underwear. Not quite nude, but close.
2. Israel started normalizing striking Iran in the same way that, over the years, Israeli strikes on Syria have become routine and barely noticed.
3. Israel set itself up well for a strike that truly devastates the Iranian regime in the unlikely event that it responds.
4. Israel showed itself to be a tactical genius and a military power rivaled by none in competence—a true pride of the Jewish people.

On the negative side of the ledger, the bottom line represents a failed strategic result, for the following reasons:

1. Israel finally broke the aura of Iranian invincibility. It dispelled the 30-year obsession in the West that a strike would have apocalyptic consequences, and established precedent for hitting Iran directly. This is no small thing, and lifts an analytical and policy straight-jacket that paralyzed Israel and others for decades. Iran has been exposed as weak; its bluffs and bluster called. The emperor has only old, threadbare underwear. Not quite nude, but close.
2. Israel started normalizing striking Iran in the same way that, over the years, Israeli strikes on Syria have become routine and barely noticed.
3. Israel set itself up well for a strike that truly devastates the Iranian regime in the unlikely event that it responds.

4. Israel showed itself to be a tactical genius and a military power rivaled by none in competence—a true pride of the Jewish people.

On the negative side of the ledger, the bottom line represents a failed strategic result, for the following reasons:

1. The United States wanted Israel to hit mostly that which is aligned with what the administration defines as U.S. priorities: anything that helps to harm Russia's war against Ukraine. Those sites were, in fact, hit.
2. Israel limited itself to those sites and the ones that Israel needs to strike in order to operate over Iran. Those sites, namely anti-aircraft, were hit.
3. Israel did *not* hit any site that hurts Iran's regime and could lead to escalation as defined by Iran's pre-strike chest-thumping: nuclear, oil, infrastructure, regime figures or symbolic targets.
4. So after a year in which Iran and its proxies killed 2,000 Israelis; destroyed up to 60% of cities in the north; sent 250,000 Israelis to be internal refugees; launched a global campaign of Nazi-level antisemitism; launched 600 missiles and drones into Israel; shut down half of Israel's ports and caused all international airlines to indefinitely stop flying to Israel; tried to kill several of the most senior Israeli officials; and sent a drone to hit the sitting prime minister's house, Israel launches a strike that protects Ukraine but leaves everything else untouched.
5. In other words, after a month of bluster that Israel will change the face of the Middle East, it appears to have returned to the Oct. 6 strategic concept of "we showed them" and deterrence, rather than conducting a strike that shakes the foundations of the Iranian regime and maintains strategic strategic momentum. Instead, it let the United States finally achieve its goal of strategically leashing Israel and forcing it back essentially into a strategically reactive, de-escalatory posture.
6. Israel thus let Iran's chest thumping, which was designed to panic Washington, succeed in reshaping Israel's reaction—in essence, giving Iran control over what Israel would hit.
7. The key strategic gain Israel had in the last months was that it brought "victory" as understood in terms of regional culture and grasp— that Israel had "lost it," was "possessed by the jinn" and the master of the house went crazy. But that concept, appropriate for the region, was traded in again for a failed Western understanding of conflict

management—“Restraint is strength,” “We showed them,” “Iran got the message”—deterrence.

8. In short, Iran, whose entire strategy is based on manipulation, chess and using your soul as a weapon against you—all of which depend on your being rational, predictable and manipulatable—used the power of the U.S. as Israel’s strategic Achilles heel to transform the strategic reality of defeat, retreat and fear it faced in the last two months as Israel has become a dangerous uncontrollable and unpredictable force into a successful effort to return Israel into a controllable, reactive and manipulatable position. From there, Iran now can reassert its domination over setting the agenda; manipulate events to reverse its retreat; return the strategic momentum it had lost; and enter a long-range confrontation with Israel on its terms.
9. Regionally, Israel no longer appears to be the strong horse that can replace indispensable U.S. power, but instead has reverted to being a dependent U.S. vassal in terms of strategic behavior. Everyone knows this was not the strike Israel needed and could have executed, but that it was the strike that Washington imposed.
10. Israel’s limiting its strike undermines chances for real peace with Saudi Arabia. The Saudis were looking for a strong horse that replaces U.S. power. Instead, they see now that Israel is nothing more than an American vassal—which is useless to them.

I realize this is harsh. I realize Iran may strike back, so Israel might have a second chance. But it’s doubtful that Iran will take the bait.

Israel’s strike is a form of strategic victory for Iran in regional terms, no matter how much our Western minds try to rationalize it as an objective show of strength. Iran will far more likely respond in ways that continue to reassert its manipulative control over events, rather than lash out in a way that allows Israel a second chance.

In conclusion, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ordered this strike under withering pressure from every direction inside Israel and from abroad. The leaked plans, hostile demeanor and slightly veiled threats coming from Israel’s key ally and soul-mate, the United States, were wounds that are not easily dismissed.

Israel has a small population, less than a 10th of Iran's, while fighting an eight-front war alone and with its allies slowly choking off its arms supply. It must look over its shoulder at international institutions that are engage in lawfare to annihilate it, and is plagued by an unimaginative defense establishment that suffers deeply from the Western malady of having forgotten the meaning of victory in war.

So, Israel not only acted alone, but with a strong headwind from every direction, even that of its allies. Netanyahu's perseverance despite these forces of sabotage will earn him a hallowed place in history. He has emerged as the only leader in power with such vision and resolve to defend Western civilization.

But a sober analysis must identify and overcome the internal forces and hopefully still deliver the strategic victory that, at this point, only Netanyahu has the talent to properly grasp and achieve.

Published in JNS, October 27, 2024.