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Social Resilience in the State of Israel

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INTRODUCTION

Interestingly, as I was summing up this final paper, the Red Alert sirens went off in Tel Aviv for the first time since 2014, and waking up to the news of mass shooting incident in a mosque in New Zealand. A week later, a rocket attack in Mishmeret (11km from where I lived) injured a family of seven. In the immediate aftermath of the rocket attack at Mishmeret, the citizenry and first responders functioned at a high level. The local council decided within an hour of the attack to keep schools open, and the turnout of students that day was very high. This conduct attested to a swift restoration of routine – a clear benchmark of societal resilience in the face of a surprising and troubling disruption.

It was a somber reminder as I reflected on how Singaporeans will react the day after a terror attack. I grew up in Singapore, a nation that is seemingly an oasis of calm – a nation that in a long while, has not had to endure the aftermath of a terror or rocket attacks. With the rise in global terrorism worldwide and in our region – the question for us Singaporeans is when and not if a terror attack will strike. In the book the Startup nation, the term “Davka”, an untranslatable Hebrew word that means “despite” - is used to described the resilience and grit shown by employees of the chip manufacturing company, Intel in Israel. Dov Frohman, the former vice president of Intel Corporation informed his employees of his unilateral decision to keep Intel Israel open during the Gulf war in defiance of the government orders. This was on a voluntary basis and no worker will be punished for not showing up. Despite the multiple Iraqi missile attacks – the turnout increased on a day to day basis. The irony is the more brazen the

attacks, the larger the turnout. The challenge for Singaporeans is how we recover from such a crisis, demonstrate resilience and continue with our way of life – something that we can learn from the Israelis.

The rise in global terror attacks have shown that no state is immune. Planning parameters for National Security should encompass threats will eventually come to fruition. The National Security strategy for combating and mitigating the threat of terrorist attacks solely on operational and kinetic domain needs to be reviewed. Terrorist actions are calculated not just to inflict injury and cause material damage, but also to unsettle the social balance of pluralistic societies. Civilians and soft targets (such as schools) continue to be the preferred target of attacks. Beyond the obvious and direct consequence from terrorism (such as loss of lives and properties); disruption to the way of life and the alienation of a particular community will have protracted effects on society. States needs to recover and restore normalcy rapidly to overcome disruption to the way of lives and challenges to social cohesion. Allocating resources for rapid recovery (instead of solely prevention and direct response) becomes essential. There is a need to incorporate building Social Resilience as part of National Security Strategy as an enabler to achieve this. The litmus test is how countries and societies deal and recover from terror attacks the day after. I took to investigate what makes the Israeli's so resilient in the face of the many wars, terror and rocket attacks it had to endure and what lessons the tiny state of Singapore can gleaned.

SOCIAL RESILIENCE CONTEXTUALISED

Social resilience is the capacity of a society to prepare itself, to contain and effectively manage major national crises, to react in accordance with their severity and magnitude, and to “bounce back” expeditiously to an enhanced functioning. Social resilience addresses the issue of the society’s sustainability, strength and durable stability in face of adversity¹. Resilient societies and communities demonstrate readiness to face a grand crisis, without giving up on national and strategic objectives². Building social resilience within communities will mitigate both the threat and the ensuing impact of terrorism and extremism in the community and provides the foundation that would ensure the social fabric of the community remains untethered in times of turmoil and adversity³. Meir Elran said that the very essence of social resilience is to ensure the functional continuity of the civilian population and the threatened communities in the most effective way. As an elaboration, Reuvan Gal describes the level of resilience was measured simply by how well they managed to function: Did parents continue to send their kids to school? Did they keep the shops open? Did they continue to use public transportation? This definition of resilience is embedded as part of the Israeli way of life given its experience of disruption throughout the years⁴. To contextualised, Social Resilience entails the ability of countries to put in place necessarily institutional frameworks and activities that will enable the community to return to normalcy as soon as possible. There must be dedicated means and coordinated activities to enhance the ability to bounce back from crisis.

¹ Yohanan Eshel and Shaul Kimhi, 2016.

² Reuvan Gal, Shlomo Maital, Hui Zhang and Einar Tangen, 2016.

³ Jolene Jerard and Salim Mohd Nasir, 2015.

⁴ Meir Elran, 2013.

TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF THE ISRAELI SOCIETY

Reuvan Gal gave an ironic twist to the level of resilience exhibited by the State of Israel. He said as long as the State of Israel continue to have threats of wars and terrorism, the Israeli society will remain a strong and resilient society. And ironically, he added the biggest concern is during the period of relative quiet and peace the Israeli Society may then have a little less solidarity and the national ethos will play smaller role⁵. Since Independence, Israel has experienced a long series of wars with neighbouring countries. The last total war Israel has fought was in 1973, during the Yom Kippur War. Since that time, Israel has been challenged by clashes, conflicts and wars that was limited in nature. With the evolution of the threats, originally confined primarily to the military sphere, now most threats are posed by non-state actors, directed at civilians and civilian infrastructure⁶. These conflicts put to the test the endurance of the Israeli society⁷. Some of these wars involved not only armed forces on the battle fields, but also civilian population in their towns and homes. All nations undergo stressful events and crises. Israel has had more than its share and as a result has extensive experience with the way its citizens respond to them. Israel is a country that had endured through six wars, endless terror, daily threats from its northern and southern borders, and a host of international pressures and attacks throughout the world⁸. Terrorism against civilians in Israel is designed to disrupt normal routine and demoralise the civilian population to damage the fabric of daily life⁹. These circumstances have led Israelis to consider how

⁵ Reuven Gal, Shlomo Maital, Hui Zhang and Einar Tangen, 2016.

⁶ Meir Elran, 2013.

⁷ Moshe Ya'alon, 2016.

⁸ Adam Slonim, 2015.

⁹ M. Elaran, Z. Israeli, C. Padan and A. Altshuler, 2015.

they will deal with these threats and also to ensure the functional continuity of their civilian population and threatened communities in the most effective way¹⁰.

SHARED ETHOS – A SOURCE OF RESILIENCE FOR ISRAEL

The meaning of social identity is influenced by the ethos that members of a society share. During the years of intractable conflict, Israeli society developed societal beliefs of a conflictive ethos that were conducive to successful coping with the conflictive situation¹¹. Israeli society has struggled from the dawn of Zionism until today. The struggle for the establishment of a permanent Jewish national home and its defence in the present and in the future require unity and belief in the righteousness of the chosen path, as well as the willingness to defend the State of Israel, to the extent of risking one's life¹². The collective ideology of the "Haluziut" became the foundation of the most cultural expression of Israeli society in its formative years. In this pioneering ideology - an individual was expected to express the interests of that society, and to work for its benefit – part of a number of larger communal units that interacted to form the society as a whole¹³. The kibbutz movement is also noted for its remarkable communal cohesiveness, a strong tradition going back to pre-statehood. The kibbutzim, then, have a cohesive communal spirit and faith, two of the well-known attributes of social resilience. This has been translated into a strong sense of self-confidence and trust in the community and its path, which allowed

¹⁰ Meir Elran, 2013

¹¹ Daniel Bar-Tal, 2000.

¹² Moshe Ya'alon, 2016.

¹³ Pioneering Ideology, 2019.

residents to choose to stay put even under conditions of direct physical danger.

Few subjects have affected the Israeli psyche more powerfully than the conflict that has engulfed the country, in different forms, since the very first day of statehood. The Jewish ethos, as an ethos of conflict emerged as a result of the powerful Jewish collective experience of living under conditions of intractable conflict¹⁴. Etched in the Jewish history is that the Jews must never rely on others, never live defencelessly among others, never be at the tender mercy¹⁵. Perhaps The statement by Tom Friedman best sums up the societal beliefs for the state of Israel which have been confronting a hostile external environment since its establishment. He said “*A country that sees itself living on the lip of the volcano, or inside the eerie halls of Yad Vashem, does not plan for the future and does not think about bold initiatives. It only holds on for dear life.*”¹⁶”

CULTURE OF PREPAREDNESS

Preparedness is central to social resilience. When a community is prepared, it can react more rapidly and effectively to disaster by implementing a coordinated and cost-effective response¹⁷. In Israel, a culture of preparedness for emergency had become embedded in every organization and many households, thousands of citizens had been trained to serve as first responders in emergencies. The Israeli’s capacity and strong resilience to overcome adversities over the years did not happened by chance. It’s “*Top-*

¹⁴ Daniel Bar-Tal, 2000

¹⁵ Inbar, Efraim, 2002.

¹⁶ Charles Freilich, 2012.

¹⁷ Daniel Hamiel, Leo Wolmer, Smadar Spirman, Nathaniel Laor, 2013.

down, Bottom-up” approach in emergency preparedness is a key enabler to build strong social resilience. Every year, the State of Israel conducts a national-level exercise in order to train all the military forces and the civilian forces for a combined operation in emergency time. Prior to this exercise, throughout the year, every organization will conduct its own training, following the goals that had been set in advance. The State of Israel have also established a very enhanced training program for different levels: from the personal level and up to the regional government level. Once a year national-level training at all levels, up to the government offices are conducted. At the personal level the central idea is that any single citizen to take responsibility, to prepare himself and herself for an emergency. The training entails teaching the sense of responsibility and how an individual is part of the community and how they support the community. At the government level, the Home Front Command (HFC) through its territorial’s divisions, is in charge of training and preparing the local leaders and their staff. The HFC will dictate a specific scenario for the regional government to complete in a 3-year training program and will lead the actual training on ground¹⁸. Interestingly the findings of a study in 2015 to assess the level of household preparedness in Israel highlighted the shortfall existing in the level of household preparedness for war in Israel. Despite growing efforts by the Israeli government and the Home Front Command to advance public preparedness for emergencies, the overall achievements have been limited. This could be attributed to the lack of funding. The report highlighted the need to improve individual household preparedness for this and other threats

¹⁸ Homefront Command, 2019.

in order to increase Israeli resilience and reduce to a minimum the expected negative effects¹⁹.

The Israeli government also recognised that the basic building block for preparedness is the local government, embedding within the communities with crisis support elements such as the Resilience centers and stress clinics operated by the Israel Trauma Coalition (ITC). The ITC was created in 2002 on the initiative of the UJA-Federation of New York. The ITC has five Resilience Centers, in Sderot and the four regional councils in the Gaza border area, the Coalition has been operating five Resilience Centers in accordance to Government Resolution 746 and engaged in direct treatment of the population and in capacity-building for crisis response. Within the framework of the Resilience Centers, the Gaza envelope residents can receive both the trauma therapy they need as well as workshops which strengthen community and build resilience. By creating the Resilience Centers, the focus changed from victim-based trauma to a proactive community approach which places a focus on strengths, resources and a culture of preparedness and mutual help. This model has contributed to the resilience of communities not only in times of crisis but also in times of relative calm and routine. The ITC assists local authorities in instilling crisis preparedness by training of local teams, preparing emergency plans²⁰. The unique model of 'Resilience Center' has proven important for the preparedness and resilience of the communities where it has been implemented. These resilience centers contributed significantly to the recovery of Eshkol and Sahar Hanegov Regional Councils during OPE²¹.

¹⁹ Moran Bodas, Maya Siman-Tov, Shulamith Kreitler, Kobi Peleg, 2015.

²⁰ Israel Trauma Coalition, 2018.

²¹ M. Elaran, Z. Israeli, C. Padan and A. Altshuler, 2015.

SOCIAL RESILIENCE IN ACTION

Against the backdrop of adversity and challenges to the daily way of life – the Israeli have demonstrated strong social resilience. This strong social resilience was evident in the study conducted during Operation Protective Edge (OPE) on the Jewish communities around the Gaza Strip Envelope²². In a separate study conducted to measure the social resilience of Israeli in times of protracted crisis – the results also shown that despite three years of terror inflicted bloodshed during the Second Intifada, Israelis were able to return to life routine quickly²³. The Israeli's strong sense of fortitude were also displayed in the wake of the stabbing, car-ramming and shooting attacks in 2015-16. Then, communities were mobilised for overall assistance to soldiers, injured people, civilians and bereaved families. The Israeli society stood steadfastly and did not caved in to the demands of terror²⁴.

Throughout 2018, Hamas and other terrorist organizations launched hundreds of rockets toward Israel. In July and August alone, Israel suffered a barrage of 180 and 220 rockets and mortar shells, respectively. There was a surged in the barrages with the massive firing of 460 rockets and mortar shells at the Gaza envelope and Ashkelon areas in the 48 hours following the botched IDF operations in Nov 2018 and constituted a new record in the sheer number of rockets launched since the disengagement from Gaza²⁵. "Resilience" is a word that pops up over and over again every time residents of Gaza border communities are forced to grin and bear a new onslaught of missiles slamming their communities, as they huddle in their safe rooms for

²² M. Elaran, Z. Israeli, C. Padan and A. Altshuler, 2015,

²³ Reuvan Gal, 2013,

²⁴ Moshe Ya'alon, 2016.

²⁵ Lior Akerman, 2018.

days on end until they get the green light from the Home Front Command to resume normal life²⁶. The strong societal resilience displayed in Israel's southern communities is a success story that should be considered at the national level.

In the context of the Gaza Envelope, however, it must be added that the concept of resilience was manifested in different aspects. The local residents at the Gaza Envelope continued with their daily routine albeit disrupted only when they had to seek shelter when the red alert sirens went off. Reuvan Gal describes the level of resilience is best measured simply by how well they managed to function in crisis: Did parents continue to send their kids to school? Did they keep the shops open? Did they continue to use public transportation? According to Reuvan Gal's measurement on the level of resilience, the residents in the Gaza envelope did display a high level of resilience going about with their routine.

There was however, a sense of frustration that bored out of the recent rocket barrage in Nov 2018 with the residents in the South. According to the Jerusalem Posts reports²⁷, the residents in the Gaza envelope were fed up with their "normal" – putting on a brave face going back to their routines but many living with trauma and all shrouded in uncertainty about when the next round of violence will start up. This resulted in thousands of Israelis from the Gaza envelope area, demonstrated against what they called "the deteriorating security situation" and raised signs reading that "the lives of the envelope residents are not cheaper than the lives of Tel Aviv

²⁶ Southern Front: Was this the last straw for the 'Resilient' South?.,2019.

²⁷ Southern Front, Was this the Last Straw for the Resilient South, 2019.

residents”²⁸. The frustration was targeted at the lack of leadership at the national level and the perceived lack of assertion over the Hamas. troubling disruption.

CONCLUSION

Terrorists needs to get it right once to strike fear while security agencies need to get it right all the time. There is now greater consensus that the fight against terror cannot and must not be fought by military means²⁹. The strategy for combating and mitigating the threat of potential terrorist attacks cannot be centred solely on operational and kinetic domain. Social resilience is preferable to a risk-based approach to counter-terrorism. The ultimate response to terror would be to strengthen the nation’s social resilience to deter terrorise from achieving their goals and allow normalcy to ensue³⁰. The true test is how countries deal with terror attacks the day after. In Israel’s strategy and approaches to building resilience have shown that Social resilience needs to be taught and not caught. There needs to be deliberate planning and programs to build social resilience. A culture of preparedness has transformed Israel into a network of resilient communities³¹.

The strong social resilience in Israel means during times of crisis, individuals, households, businesses or other organizations immediately turn into nodes of a national network of resilient communities. The Israel story have shown that there must be deliberate efforts to build social resilience. Several specific programs have been carried out in many Israeli

²⁸ Israelis Gaza Envelope Protest Against Deteriorated Security Situation, 2019.

²⁹ Muhammad Haniff Bin Hassan & Kenneth George Pereire, 2006.

³⁰ Reuvan Gal, 2013.

³¹ The REUT Institute, 2008.

communities since the early 1980s. They are designed to enhance the capacity of the population to stand up to terrorist attacks and to keep up, as much as possible the functional continuity of community life³². Studies have also shown the such programs have a mostly positive outcome of the communities' resilience and conduct in ensuing emergencies³³. Social resilience encourages greater preparedness should a terrorist attack occur and more importantly it broadens the emergency planning agenda beyond terrorism to other important national security threats such as natural disasters and the outbreak of deadly viruses.

However, the State of Israel needs to guard against complacency and not take things for granted. Interestingly the findings of a study in 2015 to assess the level of household preparedness in Israel highlighted the shortfall existing in the level of household preparedness for war in Israel. Despite growing efforts by the Israeli government and the Home Front Command to advance public preparedness for emergencies, the overall achievements have been limited. This could be attributed to the lack of funding. The report highlighted the need to improve individual household preparedness for this and other threats in order to increase Israeli resilience and reduce to a minimum the expected negative effects³⁴.

³² Meir Elran, 2013.

³³ Reuvan Gal, 2013.

³⁴ Moran Bodas, Maya Siman-Tov, Shulamith Kreitler, Kobi Peleg, 2015.

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