

The Victory of a Democracy in the War against Terror from an Israeli Perspective

Until I became the director of the Israeli Shin Bet, I had no idea what it was like to live in a reality of terror—when fear controlled our daily lives. In ten days during February 1996, Israel experienced what we call the Days of Terror. Terrorists killed sixty citizens and wounded hundreds of others in suicide bombings attacks in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. It was the most violent wave of terror since the creation of the state in 1948. Parents didn't send their children to public schools. Shopping malls were empty. Headlines in newspapers focused on one story: violence and terror. Our poetry and our literature, too, featured only terror. Fear and hatred widened the rift between Jewish and Arab citizens in Israel. Even our courts, sworn to uphold justice, distinguished between Jews and Arabs. Changes in our political behavior could be seen in voting patterns. In the 1996 election we didn't elect a leader who promised to bring peace, or a better education system, or a better life. We elected our leader according to one parameter: how he would fight terror.

The Days of Terror occurred on the first seven days I was on the job at the Shin Bet. In a cabinet meeting, ministers asked me what we had to do to achieve victory over terror. Of course, I could offer no definitive analysis, and what I said came from intuition. What we had to do first, I replied, was to redefine the essence of victory over terror.

The question of victory in the war on terror has occupied my mind ever since that first week on the job. What I've concluded is that we must begin by examining the broader phenomenon of terror.

First, there is no universally valid answer to this question *what is victory in the war on terror*. The answer you get depends on a person's culture, religion, and ethnic or national origin. The answer to the question also depends on when you ask the question. Is the person you ask sitting in mourning for a victim of terror?

We must also define the kind of war we were fighting. Wars are relative and change over time. What was happening to our buses and cafes in 1996 can't be compared to the battles we fought against the Egyptian army in the Sinai.

Another line of inquiry relates to the enemy. Who is he? What is his strategy? What is the strategy of the organizations we fight? In the words of the ancient Chinese sage Sun Tzu, in war what is of supreme importance is to attack the enemy's strategy, not the enemy himself.

In the public debate, we normally talk about our strategy to defeat the enemy but we forget to discuss what seems to me a more fundamental issue: What is our political goal? What is the future we have in our mind when we go into a fight in which we will kill the enemy, and in which some of us may die? Where do we come from? Who do we want to be? In the words of Rabbi Akavia Ben Mahalalel: "Know where you came from, and where you are going..."

Since we neglect the question about our goals, we can be winning every battle while stepping backwards from the future we desire.

When I ask myself the question *who are we and where are we heading*, I think back to my parents who arrived from Europe to British-controlled Palestine in the 1930s. It was

an era of great dreams and of great wars. My parents and their friends felt that they were leading a revolution. The dream was to create a New Man, a farmer, a person who would work the land and create a new Jewish society of justice and equality.

Their political concept was this: the Jewish people are in a great danger. This was Europe of the 1930s, and they felt they had to save the Jewish people. The only way for them to do this was to create a Jewish state. Their narrative was that we were returning to land that had been stolen from us 2,000 years ago. To recover our land, they developed the concept of 'settlement and security'. The idea was to create and defend settlements everywhere in the Land of Israel.

In 1947, through UN Resolution 181 calling for a Jewish and an Arab state, the international community recognized our right to self-determination and defense. But instead of building an Arab state alongside a Jewish one, the Arabs attacked us.

This entire narrative was written in the Israeli Declaration of Independence of 1948, which is still the closest thing we have to a constitution in Israel.

This narrative continued in full force in 1967, when the Syrians, Egyptians, and Jordanians attacked us. After we won this war and captured the West Bank, Gaza, the Golan, and the Sinai Peninsula, the Arab states in the Khartoum Resolution came up with their Three No's: "No peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiations with it."

In 1967, my generation felt like liberators—we liberated Judea and Samaria, where we were born as a people, and places we learned about as children when we read the Bible: the old city of Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Nablus. My mother used to tell me

stories about how on the weekends when she was a schoolgirl in Jerusalem she would go to the Wailing Wall and to Bethlehem.

Within the narrative of 'settlement and security', after 1967 I chose security by staying in the Navy. Many of my friends from the kibbutz, where I was raised, chose instead to create settlements in the Jordan Valley, Sinai, and the Golan. In those days these new settlements were supported by the mainstream Labor Party, not only by religious fundamentalists.

It was first twenty years later, when I was the deputy commander of the Navy, that I began to understand that this narrative of Zionism was leading us Israelis to a dead end. I'll never forget that day. In January 1988, I was on my way to meet Palestinian fishermen in Gaza. To reach my destination, I had to pass through the refugee camp of Shaati. It was there that a group of teenagers attacked me with rocks. There was hatred in their eyes. One boy in particular stands out in my memory. When I looked into his eyes, it was clear to me that he wanted to kill me with the stone in his hand, and that he was willing to die.

For me, this was the moment that the Palestinian people became a reality. Until then they were individuals, not members of a nation. Nor did these Palestinians regard me as a liberator; for them, I was a cruel conquer who oppressed and humiliated them every day of the lives.

I had a second realization that day. The Zionist narrative of my parents I was raised with—that the Land of Israel was a land without a people awaiting our return—was wrong. We couldn't be both occupiers and humanists. Either we maintain our occupation and control over the lives of millions of people living in the lands we

conquered, robbing from them their freedom every day; or we choose our liberal values, which are anchored in our 'Declaration of Independence', and are part of the reason we left fascist Europe and sought to create a new society.

This is still the paradox we live with. If we cannot change this settlement-and-security narrative, we will have a never-ending war with the Palestinians. Just as bad, we will lose our identity as members of a democratic and liberal state.

So what is the war we are fighting today? What is the war on terror? To begin with, it is a totally different kind of war than the ones we Israelis experienced in 1948, 1967, and 1973.

In spring of 2000, after four and a half years in the Shin Bet, I was asked what lessons I had learned in fighting Palestinian terror. My response was this: "People are not targets". As a soldier and commander with more than thirty years in the Navy, I never learned the names of the many people I killed. I knew nothing about them, nor did I have to. What was the biggest surprise for me in the Shin Bet was that in order to fight, meaning to interrogate or recruit an enemy, I had to know everything about him. Muslims usually have four names, and I had to know them all. I had to know something about his wife and children, his neighbors, and the people he prayed with in the mosque. Without being aware it was happening, by learning about someone, his names, his motives, he ceased being a mere target and turned into a human being. Even if I knew that the minute I released him, he would go on killing my friends and fellow citizens, he remained for me a human being.

An equally important lesson I learned in our war against terror is just as elemental: “we shall have security when Palestinians will have hope”. For many of my friends in the military, deterrence means using hard power to bend the will of an enemy. My years in the Shin Bet taught me the radical inverse of this: for Israelis to have security, Palestinians have to have something to lose. The only effective deterrent against behavior that threatens our security, in short, is hope. You cannot deter people if they have nothing to lose.

Carl von Clausewitz, the nineteenth-century father of military-strategic studies, made a distinction between the nature of war and its conduct. The nature of war, he said astutely, is as constant as human nature. People have killed for power, influence, or money in the past, and will go on killing as long as human nature remains the same. What changes, and the proper subject of military-strategic studies, is how revolutions in technology and culture impact the conduct of war. In my estimation, there are seven parameters we must study if we are to grasp our war against terror at the beginning of the 21st century.

The first parameter is the globalization of the economy, culture, and the digital media. The latter, especially, has created a new world of transparency.

Terrorist wars have become like a reality show in which some actors die, and others do the killing. The camera, a dominant factor in this war, transmits in real time from the battle field—the stage—images of a jet fighter on the attack, or of a burning

bus after a suicide bombing, or of a checkpoint. The global spectators in this battle, whose borders are set by the Internet, feel as if they are participating.

Spectators, moreover, are not satisfied with passive entertainment but want to influence the outcome.

And in the world of today, they can. They are the ones who decide who is the hero, who is a villain. Because people naturally identify with the weak, consumers, in deciding what to buy, sometimes boycott products because they are produced by the bad guy. As in the legend of David and Goliath, digital images weaken the strong and empower the weak. We Israelis can build walls to save hundreds of lives from suicide bombers. But world opinion will never accept the walls as legitimate because of films such as *Five Broken Cameras*.

The upshot is that military success on the battlefield alone cannot bring us closer to the victory we seek. We can win every battle and lose the war of public opinion.

The second parameter of the asymmetrical modern war on terror is diversity. War, no longer fought primarily between states and armies, pits states against organizations, and states against other cultures and sometimes religions. In this kind of war, there is a correlation between culture and strategy.

In Israel as children we used to play the game Scissors, Paper, Stone. When paper meets the stone, the paper wins even though the stone is much stronger. But strength doesn't help the stone because the stone lacks the flexibility of paper. We need flexibility in the war on terror because the fighting takes place among civilians, and we

must also convince the civilian population of the justice of our fight. Brute force cannot accomplish this.

In the war on terror, we are moving away from a military lexicon to one of police and internal security. Importantly, when we shift from one framework to another, the legal framework should change, as well. The rules of law enforcement, not the rules of war, come to the forefront.

The third parameter of the war on terror is the absence of military decisions on the battlefield.

In the old Clausewitzian military-strategic thinking, military strategy was to break the military power of the other side. A decisive military victory was the cornerstone of the concept of war. In the world today, terrorists will never surrender and there is no celebration of victory at the end. In the last war in Gaza, we fought for more than fifty days. We killed more than 2,100 people, half of them civilians. Thousands of people were wounded, and we drove hundreds of thousands from their homes. But our foes didn't raise the white flag. Because even after military defeat, theirs was a war of ideas more than of weapon systems. Hamas became stronger in the Palestinian street because they raised the flag of the liberators from the Israeli occupation.

The strategy of non-surrender wins whenever war becomes a never-ending struggle and an ongoing process, which is the fourth parameter of the war on terror. In such a

war, we do not remember when it started, we do not know when it will end, and we don't even have a clear idea what victory or defeat will look like.

So, once again, this leads us back to the language of criminal justice. Nobody thinks we can completely defeat crime. Instead, we have to put up with a certain level of crime in our streets—we have to live with the enemy while reducing the intensity of violence. And we can do this so long as we can continue to live and enjoy prosperity. Security is relative, and is not defined by a lexicon of war. Security concept in our age of terror is not painted black-and-white.

During the first Intifada, when political leaders asked our general chief of staff Dan Shomron about defeating Palestinian violence, he responded with sound intuition. He told our leaders that the Intifada wasn't a military phenomenon the Israeli army could defeat. All the military could do, he said, was to reduce the level of violence, to lower the intensity of the flames, and leave it to political leaders to deal with.

The fifth parameter is that terror takes on a variety of forms. There are different kinds of terror organizations with vast distinctions between their goals and means. Some organizations use terror because they want a state and seek to join the international community which is based on states. Other organizations want to destroy the world order and replace it with a new caliphate. Such organizations employ totally different strategies with different level of terror and violence.

Returning to Sun Tzu, we have to adjust our strategy in order to meet the strategy of the enemy. We cannot use the same strategy on ISIS or Al Qaeda that we use in fighting Hamas or Islamic Jihad. They are totally different types of terror.

As the sixth parameter, in the war on terror we are fighting on several fronts. With great fluidity, the war passes from the battlefield to the international front, and then back to the home front—our society. For the terror organizations, the main target is the home front. Many terror organizations do not kill in order to stop acts of violence coming from a state; they kill in order to create terror. Images and pictures become key in their efforts to foment terror within society.

But what happens to a democracy, which is based on a broad sense of confidence, when an enduring fear takes over? It collapses inward. This weakness of democracy was the Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah was getting at when he likened Israeli society to the spider's cobweb.

The seventh and final parameter is how the war on terror influences our core liberal values as a democratic society. On the home front, terror tests our social resilience. There is a concept called “defensive democracy,” which means that during a time of war, people prefer security over legal standards, human rights, and minority rights. Today we see this process of erosion in America, Europe, and Israel.

But if the war has no end, what happens to democracy? What happens to our societies if we choose security over rights day by day and month by month? Year after

year? In Israel and elsewhere, what we see are greater divisions between the majority and minorities. This may reach a point when we face internal violence between the citizens of the state. An never-ending process of terror puts us on a slippery slope that leads us to the collapse of democracy and into a reality described by George Orwell's *1984*.

So what is victory in this very strange war on terror, a war that has no beginning and no end, a war of ideas and not airplanes, missiles, and submarines, a war in which no one will raise the white flag even if he is defeated in battle, and a war that takes place simultaneously on three fronts: the military, international, and the home front?

First of all, to achieve victory we need a level of success on all three fronts, and to combine the fronts into a combined strategy. In military victories in the past, there was always a day in which the war ended and a future reality began. Not so today. Today we struggle every day, and we win or lose every day. In Israel, we win every day that citizens feel that our country is the home of all of us, majority and minority, Jews and Arabs. But every day we continue to conquer and oppress another people, we do not win. Every day we send young men to fire live ammunition at mostly unarmed Palestinians demonstrators, we move away from victory. And every day in which human rights organizations are defined as traitors and enemies, we are defeated.

Every day that Jews and Arabs in Israel establish joint businesses or when Arab and Jewish students meet in universities or laboratories to explore together, these are the days we win. Every day that as citizens Jews and Arabs are treated as equals

before the law in our courts, this is the day that we win. And every day we move one step closer to the values of our 'Declaration of Independence' we can declare victory.

In Israel today, in 2018, the road to victory is still very long. A person who looks at us from a different planet might say that we are simultaneously fighting two kinds of wars, a just and an unjust one. He would say that we are fighting the first war in order to build and defend the state of Israel in the spirit of the Declaration of Independence and along the borders of 1967. This is a just war. This war defends a state that was recognized by the international community and it is based on the natural right of every nation for self-determination and self-defense.

But this extraterrestrial observer would say that on the same time, we are fighting a second war, to expand our eastern border, build more settlements, and deny the Palestinian people their own state alongside Israel. This is not a just war. This war perpetuates the conflict; it deepens Israel's international isolation and widens the rift between Israeli citizens, Jews and Arabs. Most important, this war will destroy our identity as a Jewish democracy in the spirit of our 'Declaration of Independence'. This second war is a war we cannot and we should not win because military victory portends the end of Israel as a Zionist state.

Israelis cannot see this danger as clearly as the person who looks at us from a different planet. We live too close to this conflict, and it is too painful for us to believe that we are sending our children to fight a war we should not win.

Having said this, I still believe that we have the power and the ability to shape our future. In a gradual process, we can create a reality of two states without harming our security.

We know we are living in the Middle East with all its instabilities. We also know that it may be necessary to go on fighting our enemies. But our fight must be the just war of defending our way of life and borders that guarantee our identity as a Jewish democratic state and which are accepted by the international community. The Zionist narrative of my parents' generation which was based on the concept of exclusive and absolute ownership of the land of Israel which justifies the entire settlement enterprise and denies the Palestinians their right of self-determination, must therefore change. We must formulate a narrative based on the historical connection of the Jewish people to its homeland, our right to self-determination and international law as defined in our 'Declaration of Independence. We must distinguish between the Kibbutz of my parents that was established in order to build a state in a defensive war against an existential threat – and the settlements of my friends who perpetuate the conflict, increase the security threat and lead to the end of the Zionist vision. In order to win, to achieve victory in this war, we must understand that fighting for our security requires us to end the unjust war.

As a sailor I've spent many years at sea. Sailors like to quote Seneca, even though he wasn't a sailor. Seneca said that if a sailor doesn't know where he wants to sail, there is no wind on earth that will take him there. We can add that a captain who knows his destination will use every wind in order to get him to a safe place.

Those of us living in the Middle East are sailing in very rough waters. But even in the middle of the storm the rules of good seamanship will determine whether we will reach a safe haven or not. Our future is in our hands.