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The Unfortunate Advantage of the Holyland People

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THE UNFORTUNATE ADVANTAGE OF THE HOLYLAND PEOPLE

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“[A]nd I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey”¹

I. INTRODUCTION

Israel’s geography has fostered a unique national security

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1. *Exodus* 3:8.

culture, which has resulted in an unfortunate advantage. This essay reviews the conditions and factors that have begot the wide adoption of more advanced counterterrorism initiatives in Israel. From geopolitical reality to operational deployment, this essay suggests Israeli methodologies and countermeasures that can be adopted by American security and law enforcement entities for a more comprehensive and effective security posture.

II. GEOGRAPHY

Upon graduation from the geography department at California State University, Northridge, it is customary to receive—along with the master's diploma—a bumper sticker reading, “Without geography you are nowhere.” This statement could not be more relevant to someone, like me, who grew up in the State of Israel, the land of milk and honey. The honey production process involves a beehive environment where one can be stung at any moment and where many predators from the outside—or “honey seekers”—want their fair share. To put it bluntly, Israel is a beehive located in a bad neighborhood. This metaphor helps illustrate why geography is everything when it comes to the Middle East conflict. As such, one must acquire some basic geography tools to grasp what is at stake and, moreover, to assess the relative success of counterterrorism measures.

It is instructive to compare the physical size of Israel to analogous spaces we are familiar with. Israel covers a landmass equal to one-eighth of the size of Florida—a bit smaller than New Jersey.² At this size, it would take the average driver cruising at sixty miles per hour less than six hours to cross Israel from the northernmost point (the Lebanese border) to its southernmost tip (the Egyptian border). Traveling from west to east at its greatest width, it would take the same driver a little over an hour before he or she arrived at the Jordanian border.

Even before the U.N. declared the partition plan in 1947 and formally allowed the State of Israel to exist, the people who lived there experienced de facto “Terrorism 101” on a daily basis. The local Arab villagers, as well as the governing monarchies in the region, felt threatened by the waves of Jewish immigrants arriving from Nazi-occupied Europe and changed the region's sensitive

2. *Just How Big is Israel?*, LOOK ISRAEL, <http://www.lookisrael.com/files/justbig.php> (last visited Mar. 16, 2011).

balance. The State of Israel's Declaration of Independence signed in May of 1948 coincided with a declaration of war on the newborn state issued by several Arab countries—including Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt, and Iraq.³ The guarding militias that protected the Jewish cities prior to the war had to form a unified and organized military overnight. Equal portions of bravery, luck, desperation, and survival skill contributed to the war results. The Israeli state was preserved, but its existence within this homogeneous Arab space was fragile. As a result, the Israeli Defense Force was charged with the awesome responsibility of protecting and preserving the state in this fragile circumstance.

Any organization is measured by its numbers. Of the 7 million people in the State of Israel, over 1.5 million are Israeli-Arab (whose loyalty is not necessarily to Israel or its interests)⁴ and over half a million are Ultra Orthodox Jews (who serve no one but God).⁵ Israel is obligated to maintain a substantial military force against its adversaries along the immediate borders of the tiny state.⁶ This circumstance necessitates mandatory military service in Israel, which is the most critical difference between the United States and Israel in their counterterrorism structures.

III. MANDATORY MILITARY SERVICE

Before sending off every single citizen in America to experience the Marine Corps's boot camp, it is imperative to evaluate the conditions required for such an experiment to succeed. Military service in Israel is three years for males and two years for females, followed by twenty years of reserve service.⁷ Practically speaking, a person would have to serve one month every year until she is forty to sustain their military skills and to help

3. COLIN SHINDLER, *A HISTORY OF MODERN ISRAEL* 46 (2008) (After the signing of the Declaration of Independence, "[T]he Arab states predictably invaded.").

4. See *The World Factbook: Israel*, CIA (Mar. 8, 2011), <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/is.html> (noting about twenty-four percent [a little over 1.5 million] of the population is non-Jewish/mostly Arab).

5. See Isr. Ministry of Tourism, *Population of Israel*, GO ISRAEL, http://www.goisrael.com/Tourism_Eng/Tourist+Information/Discover+Israel/Population.htm (last visited Mar. 16, 2011) (noting about twelve percent [about 840,000] of the population are ultra-Orthodox Jews).

6. See generally SHINDLER, *supra* note 3, at 42 (depicting the U.N. partition plan).

7. CIA, *supra* note 4.

deter Israel's enemies from challenging such a small military force. Sustained military service (and the fact that it does not end when the college years begin) comes in handy when dealing with counterterrorism. Most incidents in the past decade were mitigated by civilians who happened to be in the immediate vicinity of the attack. Because of this, the Palestinian terror organizations attempt to justify their attacks on civilian targets claiming that, in Israel, one cannot distinguish between members of the military and civilians because all civilians are also military at one point or another.

Although it is called the land of milk and honey, the lack of resources in Israel is relevant to all aspects of life and organization. Military training, for example, must prepare a small group of soldiers to deal with multiple and diverse tasks. The objective is not necessarily to turn good drivers into NASCAR drivers, but rather to turn them into off-road drivers. The logic behind this approach is to create multipurpose soldiers equipped with tools to deal with a wide range of situations and conditions. This mindset is carried forward when soldiers segue into the private and public sector. In short, Israelis question everyone and everything and maintain opinions as passionate as any experienced politician. Rumor has it that in 1973, when the Israeli military started regaining ground during the Yom Kippur War, U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger came to the region to defuse the geopolitical ticking time bomb.⁸ He met with Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir and asked her to declare a cease-fire.⁹ According to legend, Prime Minister Meir, an American-raised woman, responded that the Israeli citizens didn't want a cease-fire. "Yes, but you are the prime minister—you dictate," Kissinger allegedly claimed. "In America you have 250 million citizens to manage," Meir replied, "I have five million prime ministers to deal with."

For any commander in chief, this persistently questioning mindset might be quite annoying. Nobody salutes the ranks in Israel without first questioning the rank holder's capabilities. When it comes to the street and public places, this constant challenging allows for spherical awareness. In late 2008, I

8. See Phillip Jacobson, *How Golda Meir Won the Yom Kippur War*, THE SUNDAY TIMES, June 22, 2008, http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/weather/world/middle_east/article4164420.ece.

9. *Id.*

facilitated a government-to-government week long counterterrorism workshop in Israel. The participants, mainly from the Office of Homeland Security in California, returned with a concrete conclusion: in Israel, it is *everybody's* job to protect against terrorism. This level of awareness is a force multiplier that should be adopted anywhere and anytime, without being associated to the color on the threat level scale.

In the recent book *Start-Up Nation*, Dan Senor and Saul Singer review the innovative and entrepreneurial culture in Israel.¹⁰ Their conclusion mainly associates Israel's economic miracle with mandatory military service and the fact that Israelis originated from different backgrounds and places in the world—resulting in a melting pot.¹¹ Israel's economy is largely dependent on research and development and security technology.¹² Its hands-on expertise and technological capability make Israel a significant player in this field. When there are few financial resources and the number of people is limited, the only advantage Israel can depend on is innovation.

IV. ANTICIPATING THE NEXT ATTACK

In the War on Terror we—the defending forces, whether in Israel or in the United States—fight the *magic circle*. That magic circle starts with an event that usually creates a significant body count and dictates new procedures and policies. After the event, we are playing catch-up and attempting to seal the breach in security. In the last decade or so, this catch-up has been accomplished mainly through security technology. The circle is then fully closed when the bad guys find ways to overcome our procedures and technology and start the whole process over again.

Research and development in the security industry is focused on getting ahead of the curve and finding solutions that make it harder for the bad guys to overcome. Because a majority of engineers in Israel were also in the military and have hands-on experience in the field, their experience assists them in

10. See generally DAN SENOR & SAUL SINGER, *START-UP NATION: THE STORY OF ISRAEL'S ECONOMIC MIRACLE* (2009).

11. *Id.* at 121–34, 225–36.

12. *Id.* at 227 (“Today, Israel leads the world in the percentage of its GDP that goes to research and development, creating both a technological edge critical to national security and a civilian tech sector that is the main engine of the economy.”).

maintaining technological superiority. In my work with the Science & Technology Directorate at the Department of Homeland Security, we often learn that technology fails in real-life situations even if it works perfectly during the research-and-development process. For instance, the body puffers—those chambers in which a stream of air blasted against you and detected traces of explosives—were deployed in several airports in the United States.¹³ Those machines were found to be problematic in detecting explosives and therefore removed in 2009 from the airports.¹⁴ It is more than just squandered funds that were lost in such initiatives; it also meant that, for a year, we had a breach in the security capabilities at any airport that used that technology. In short, by employing research and development scientists with combat experience who understand the needs of the end users—first-line officers in this case—the development timeline for creating the next generation in terror mitigation is shortened.

V. MINDSET

I grew up in a place where terror threats were common. Moreover, the schools and their inhabitants were seen as juicy targets by terrorists. So, when I presented my ideas to American school systems, I was disappointed when the only feedback I received was, “Are you out of your mind?!” There was no way they would allow me to instruct children on how to identify suspicious activity and assess threatening situations. They didn’t want to panic schoolchildren and cause damage to their innocence. It was frustrating that they did not have the ability to view this as a tool to teach awareness to children. In Israel, awareness at school was as imperative in the educational curriculum as math. The lessons I learned at ages five, six, and seven were lessons for life. We didn’t feel panicked. We felt empowered. We knew what to do if we encountered a suspicious object. This comprehension helped us mature and granted us an invaluable sense of responsibility. Today, we know schools are still very vulnerable, and even in the few instances where school resource officers are deployed, they will be the first to go when an organized attack takes place. We should

13. Thomas Frank, *Last Gasp for Anti-Bomb ‘Puffers’: \$36 Million Airport Program Scrapped*, USA TODAY, May 21, 2009, at 1A, available at http://www.usatoday.com/printedition/news/20090521/1apuffers21_st.art.htm.

14. *Id.*

devote every means we have to strengthen schools. Increasing the vigilance of students at school can only assist us in achieving that goal.

Israel, being such a small country geographically with small demographic numbers, “enjoys” better social and familial connectivity. In Israel, there are no six degrees of separation—there is merely one. Everybody knows everybody. The military, a melting pot for all the Jewish-Israelis, serves as an effective provider for this connectivity. This integration helps when information given by someone needs to be validated. This also works for intelligence sharing between agencies, since everybody knows everybody or at least served with his or her brother or sister. This network also assists in the vetting process of individuals, whether for employment purposes or national security clearance. The one thing that should be adopted from the Israeli network is integration. The social networking between people from different agencies helps in achieving professional goals. There is no formula for effective networking, except for the simple directive: start communicating. When diverse people get together with a social agenda, it can foster the desired working relationship in a professional network grid.

President Eisenhower noted in 1958, “It is not the size of the dog in the fight that counts. It is the size of the fight in the dog.”¹⁵ Regardless of the gear and tools security forces might be equipped with, what counts most is the mindset the equipment bearers hold. In *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*, Nassim Nicholas Taleb paints a pessimistic picture of the way society deals with rare, extreme, and unexpected events—what he calls “Black Swans.”¹⁶ Taleb’s book does not attempt to predict Black Swan events, but to build robustness into negative events that occur and being able to exploit positive events.¹⁷ Moreover, according to Taleb, a Black Swan event depends on the observer.¹⁸ What might

15. President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Remarks at the Republican National Committee Breakfast (Jan. 21, 1958), *available at* <http://www.eisenhowermemorial.org/speeches/19580121%20Excerpts%20From%20Remarks%20at%20Republican%20National%20Committee%20Breakfast.htm> (last visited Mar. 22, 2011).

16. NASSIM NICHOLAS TALEB, *THE BLACK SWAN: THE IMPACT OF THE HIGHLY IMPROBABLE* xxi–xxiii (2d ed. 2010).

17. *Id.* at 206–10 (providing “tricks” for capitalizing on the inability to predict).

18. *Id.* at 44 (“[T]he Black Swan is a sucker’s problem. In other words, it occurs relative to your expectation.”).

be a total surprise for one person could be predicted by another.¹⁹ The best example he uses is common turkeys, who are fed and pampered for a year.²⁰ Nothing in the poor bird's past prepares it to predict the day in which it is prepped for Thanksgiving dinner.²¹ For the butcher, of course, the turkey's dramatic and fatal event is no surprise.²² Despite the booming information era we live in, the only thing we are sure we know is that we don't know everything. For that reason, flexible thinking, constantly focusing on the aggressor's point of view, and proper training can assist us in embracing and coping with events that we might not be able to predict. Most Israelis observe Black Swan events happening in their comfort zone. Once a random event hits, this mindset is tuned to be better prepared. In decision-making process and response, the mindset is what dictates whether we win or lose.

VI. COMPARTMENTALIZATION OF INFORMATION

Sensitive Security Information (SSI)—a term bureaucrats learned to love and align themselves with—is anything unclassified whose public disclosure would, in the judgment of specified government agencies, harm transportation security; be it an unwarranted invasion of privacy or the revelation of trade secrets or privileged or confidential information.²³ Sometimes SSI is mistakenly considered as classified, or even top secret information. This error causes a chain reaction in which the end users at security checkpoints do not access vital information critical for their effective operation.

The best example is the term “bomb.” If we were to ask the average civilian what a bomb looks like, most answers would probably evoke images from a cartoon or television show. Fortunately, most security professionals know that a bomb can be anything. Rather than getting mired in a preconceived notion of what an object *should* look like, the more relevant question is what is the *potential* for an item to be threatening. For example, by asking how much explosive it would take to blow up an airplane in midair, one can develop an empirical notion of the kinds of objects

19. *Id.*

20. *Id.* at 40–41.

21. *Id.* at 40.

22. *Id.* at 44.

23. *See, e.g.*, 49 C.F.R. §1520.5 (2010) (codifying the protection of SSI for the Transportation Security Administration).

that might be threatening. So what is the *potential* of an item, say, a backpack, to contain a sufficient quantity of explosives to blow up an airplane? Most security personnel have no access to such information and therefore illogically check everything to gauge the likelihood of an item to do harm. This situation exists to a certain extent everywhere in the world. The governing agencies do not want sensitive information to get to the “bad guys” and therefore restrict the dissemination of that information. Those restrictions usually go beyond the public and include even employees in entry-level positions—entry level employees who are usually the first line of defense in any security operation.

Israel is not spared from this compartmentalization disadvantage. The only difference is the level of training for entry-level personnel. Since all security positions are manned by former military personnel, each person has the basic knowledge of common SSI and threat potential. This understanding instantly makes them more effective and vigilant in their job. There is no easy solution for this dilemma. SSI is recognized as sensitive for a reason. We should elevate operators’ knowledge and capabilities through threat-oriented training and hands-on experiential workshops. This will encourage independent logical thinking and prepare operators to better detect and deter.

VII. CONCLUSION

In general, Israelis are a very alert populace. It might have something to do with the history of the Jewish people, the Holocaust, or the threat Israel faces daily. The Israelis do not need intelligence analysis or levels to evaluate the threats around them. They know that the threat exists. It’s in their blood. To this end, it doesn’t matter if one thousand or one million of the 110 million immediate neighbors have the intention to do them harm as long as operatives actively seek ways to carry out their deadly wishes. When it comes to security and safety, the Israeli people are very assertive. They don’t hesitate to assess situations and people bluntly, recognizing abnormalities in the environment and take actions upon it. The motto driving their actions is “if not me, then who?” and for that matter, each one of them is a counterterrorism unit. A civilian will evacuate the area in a public place if he notices an unattended bag he is unable to associate with someone. He will not wait for security or first responders but instead will lead an evacuation procedure. In addition, a civilian’s occupation or field

of expertise has nothing to do with the fact that in that particular moment, he was the countermeasure for something that could have gone wrong.

In America, popular culture (especially television) affects public belief in many ways, and not all of them are good. The popular belief that people like Jack Bauer (from Fox's hit television show *24*) exist imparts a false sense of security renders the public more oblivious to everyday risks. The mind-your-own-business attitude doesn't contribute to a safer society either.

Outliers, the latest nonfiction bestseller by Malcolm Gladwell, examines the factors that contribute to high levels of success.²⁴ Throughout the book, Gladwell repeatedly mentions the "10,000-Hour Rule," claiming that the key to success in any field is, to a large extent, a matter of practicing a specific task for a total of around 10,000 hours.²⁵ Unfortunately, Israel validates this theory with over six decades of experience in the field of counterterrorism. The stressful reality in Israel that requires mandatory military service is also the best asset Israel has to offer to its citizens and markets abroad. Former soldiers are equipped with tools and awareness to better assess their surroundings and engage with situations, and in a way, are more responsible for their self-security. I am certain none of us wants to wait until all Americans log 10,000 hours in a bloody counterterrorism workbook. For that matter, more than anything else, experiential training is the key to improve performance and readiness. Knowledge is not only power—knowledge is the difference between a strong and effective society and a vulnerable one.

24. MALCOLM GLADWELL, *OUTLIERS: THE STORY OF SUCCESS* (2008).

25. *Id.* at 37–42 (summarizing a study in which researchers determined the "magic number" for expertise is 10,000 hours).