The Second "Beat" — Percentages and Security Considerations

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The Israeli government argues, and undoubtedly quite rightly, that even if political agreements were to be reached with all our neighbours, especially the Palestinian Authority, they would still not guarantee our arrival at the pacific shores that would allow us to forego military readiness and the capability to confront the threats to our security that may arise if, heaven forbid, the agreements prove to be worthless.

Considering its approach, it should come as no surprise that the Israeli government utilises the security argument to justify its explanations about the difficulties entailed with executing the redeployments in the West Bank (expressed as the implications of the different percentages associated with the "beats"). This argument states that, first, Israel cannot afford to complete a "beat" that threatens its vital security interests; and second, Israel alone can determine what risks it can take upon itself.

Let us assume that Israel, in a worse case scenario, will be required to confront five types of military-security threats within the foreseeable future:

One. An Arab ground attack (primarily a Syrian attack on the Golan Heights) for the purpose of freeing territory Israel captured during the Six Day War.

Two. An Arab ground attack aimed at capturing all or at least significant amounts of Israeli territory in order to annihilate the state.

Three. An attack on Israeli territory employing weapons of mass destruction delivered by a neighbouring state or one within its proximity.

Four. Violent operations along the border, undertaken with regular or irregular forces stationed across Israel's frontiers, aimed at shedding blood and waging a war of attrition.

Five.A variety of terrorist activities directed against objectives within Israel as well as against Israeli and Jewish objectives located beyond the nation's borders.

The continued presence of Israeli military forces (i.e., the IDF) in the West Bank is totally meaningless with respect to the third and fifth threats. Such a presence has no influence on Moslem or Arab capabilities concerning the use of weapons of mass destruction, nor does it contribute significantly either to the prevention or frustration of terrorist attacks. On the contrary, the IDF's withdrawal from those areas, within the framework of a political agreement, may significantly decrease Arab motivations for taking such actions; it would also substantially diminish the frictions and provocations that incite hostility and escalation. There are those, however, who argue that Israeli presence in the West Bank is a necessary condition for waging an effective war against terrorist organisations. Yet, the experience during the last thirty years has taught us an important lesson in this regard: It is impossible to compare the efficacy of a detested Israeli "occupational regime" in battling terrorism with that of the Palestinian authorities — if the latter view such measures as serving their interests.

It is also doubtful if an Israeli military presence in the West Bank can contribute to countering the first threat — a Syrian attempt to overtake the Golan Heights — especially if Jordan is persuaded either to join the campaign or to open her borders and permit foreign Arab armies (the forces of Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Iran, or even Syria) to operate against Israel from its territory. Within the framework of the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty, Jordan clearly committed itself to preventing the entry of foreign forces into her territory; by doing so, it essentially extended Israel's eastern security border from the Jordanian border to the Jordanian-Iraqi border.

The continued presence of IDF forces in the West Bank may, however, contribute to thwarting the two remaining threats: those of a comprehensive Arab ground attack against Israel and a war of attrition that would be waged, in this case, along the length and breadth of the former "green line," one of Israel's most sensitive and critical areas. The signing and implementation of peace agreements are meant to neutralise such threats. Moreover, assuming that Israel's security cannot be based solely on "written" pacts, Israel will undoubtedly condition its agreement upon reliable security arrangements, particularly the continued presence of IDF units at mutually agreed-upon sites for purposes of advanced warning, deterrence, and gathering of intelligence. If the approach to Israel's military presence is based exclusively on security considerations, there will be no need to demand a continued, indefinite IDF presence in the area. Even if an extensive period of deployment is agreed upon in advance (for example, similar to the stationing of American forces in the Panama Canal Zone or in

Guantanamo Bay, Cuba), this presence should be considered temporary and, what is more important, devoid of demands for Israeli sovereignty in the respective areas.

It is now clear that the dramatic debate currently being waged in Israel over the percentages (9%, 11%, 13% or even 15%) of the "beat" is **irrelevant to any of the five threats we have enumerated; it is divorced from Israel's true security interests as well.** The sole significance of the debate rests with the 160,000 Jewish inhabitants of the settlements scattered throughout the West Bank. These settlements have finally begun to realise the purpose for which they were founded by those who initiated, planned, and established the staggering number of such communities: to prevent a political agreement between Israel and the Palestinians involving the surrender of territory in "the land of Israel."

During the implementation of the Cairo agreements, as Israeli forces withdrew from Jericho and Zone A in the West Bank, it soon became apparent that this problem would arise. However, the limited dimensions of this phase permitted quite expensive solutions to be devised: the paving of by-pass roads that enable settlers to avoid passing through territory whose security lies within the Palestinian Authority's jurisdiction. The withdrawal from additional territory will make it difficult to resort to such logistical acrobatics.

The process has reached the moment of truth; only three options stand before Israel:
1. Retreat from the agreement concerning the "beats," whatever the rationalisations offered. Such a move would halt the peace process and, perhaps, plunge the region into violent conflict as well as create tensions with the US and the European Union.
2. Continued holding of all the settlements, the large majority of which would be maintained as enclaves within territory under full Palestinian control.
3. Removal or resettling of isolated settlements to blocs of settlements located close to the "green line." These blocs would, eventually, come under Israeli sovereignty in the final status.