

Principles in Countering Terror Threats

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On February 19, 2006, Lt. Gen. (ret.) Moshe Yaalon, outgoing chief of staff of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), addressed the Intelligence Summit in Arlington, Virginia. General Yaalon is a distinguished military fellow at the Institute. The following is the prepared text of his remarks.

In the past five years, the State of Israel has experienced an unprecedented war of violence and terror, initiated and orchestrated by the Palestinian leadership. More than 1,000 Israelis have been killed—over 70 percent of which have been civilians. In addition, about 7,500 Israelis have been wounded in more than 25,000 terror attacks. These past five years have witnessed more than 140 suicide bombings against the Israeli population, and Palestinian terrorists have launched hundreds of rockets into Israeli cities and villages.

In the face of these attacks, the State of Israel steadily maintained—until the implementation of the Disengagement plan—one basic principle: under no circumstance should we surrender to terror.

I cannot emphasize it enough: this is the primary and most important principle in addressing terror threats. No surrender.

I wish now to review some of the major developments in international terrorism over the past five years, each of which spoke to the changing nature of terrorist threats.

- First, in spite of the global war on terror, the international jihad network continues to be active. Although the war on terror has succeeded in undermining the control and command capabilities of jihad leaders, radical Islamist ideology continues to propagate subordinate terrorist cells to act—as seen during recent years in Spain, Turkey, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Sinai, Southeast Asia, London, and Jordan.

- Second, Islamist terror—whether Sunni or Shiite—aims to create chaos, targeting sensitive areas and undermining stabilizing processes. Such efforts have been prominent in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and among the Palestinians. In the Palestinian arena, for example, the linkage between Shiite terror rationale—as proffered by Hizballah involvement and Iranian sponsorship—and Sunni terrorist organizations has strengthened in the past three years, and particularly since the ascendance of Mahmoud Abbas. Indeed, Abbas has succumbed to Iranian threats, which were made against him when he became prime minister during summer 2003. I have no doubt that his failure to confront radical Islamist terror groups upon being elected chairman in 2005 is a result of these threats.

- Third, we have witnessed an effort by the international networks to change the policies of key countries and

influence the results of political and electoral processes. In this vein, terrorists have kidnapped foreign nationals and presented ultimatums for relevant governments to remove their forces from Iraq. The Madrid terrorist attacks, which hit three days prior to national elections, are another prominent example of this modus operandi. These cases exemplify the use of terror and its promotion through the media to influence public opinion in open, Western democracies. In such instances, fanatical, antidemocratic groups manipulate democracies through fear, ultimately undermining the democratic process itself.

•Fourth, in the past year, the international terrorist network has failed to innovate their modes of attack, thereby failing to update their modes of asymmetry. Terrorist training has remained localized—possibly as a consequence of the growing hardship for terrorist groups to exchange data with one another. So far, efforts to cross the conventional threshold have failed, as have attempts to incorporate advanced military technology into terrorist attacks. This danger, however, remains very relevant, due to the possible nexus between countries that support terrorism, as well as those developing weapons of mass destruction, like Iran.

•Fifth, in the face of terrorist groups' failure to innovate their terrorism, terrorist groups have escalated the viciousness of their attacks in pursuit of international attention. Indeed, these groups remain inspired by the vision of the September 11 attacks and are motivated to carry out attacks to boost their profiles. This can be seen in the beheading of hostages in Iraq and Saudi Arabia, in suicide attacks on commercial transportation worldwide, and in the horrific attacks in Beslan, Russia, and Amman, Jordan.

In countering these terrorist threats, we must answer two questions. First, "Is it possible to reach a decisive conclusion to terror?" To this, I answer affirmatively, yes, it is possible to reach a decisive conclusion to the threat of terrorism. We must therefore ask, second, "How do we achieve this conclusion?"

In answering this question, I would like to walk you through the principles that I have gleaned during my military service, particularly during the past five years of fighting Palestinian and Hizballah terror, while simultaneously witnessing the threat of global terror.

Again, I wish to emphasize that the first and foremost principle in countering terrorism is: Under no circumstance should we surrender to terror!

In democratic societies, this principle demands moral and emotional strength: it requires the ability to absorb casualties, as well as the willingness to be harmed by terrorists rather than surrender to their demands. Such a society requires determined leadership, strong public solidarity, and public awareness of the requisite endurance and resilience in undertaking a war against terror. Indeed, a war on terror is time- and resource-consuming; it is not, alternatively, a war identified by swift victory. The public must understand that in such a conflict, they are on the front line, meaning that their behavior, reactions, daily routine, and political decisions greatly affect their society's ability to defeat terrorism.

Very simply, any surrender to terror attacks—in public sentiment, in transportation choices, or at the ballot box—will convince terrorists of the success of terrorism and generate more terror attacks.

The mobilization of a democratic society to stemming terrorism leads me to the second principle in countering terror: There is no way to defeat terrorism without producing a very well integrated and coordinated political, economic, cultural, psychological, and military response. In short, counterterrorism strategizing must go beyond military planning to incorporate all arenas of civilian life as well. I wish to address each of these arenas individually.

First, the principles of military counterterrorist operations. In the military arena, the first principle is: The best defense is a good offense.

This principle was exemplified by Operation Defensive Shield. From September 2000 through April 2002, Israel

witnessed deterioration in its security situation, reaching rock bottom with the devastating attacks in March 2002. During Operation Defensive Shield, Israel moved from the defensive to the offensive, hitting Palestinian terrorist infrastructure, surrounding Yasir Arafat in Ramallah, and raising the price of terrorism for armed groups. Since the operation, Israel has witnessed significant improvement in the daily lives of its people and in its overall security outlook—improvement that can still be seen. This is due to the operational achievements in reducing the terror capabilities.

The preemption doctrine against terrorism lies at the heart of the operational concept. We cannot wait for the terrorists to arrive at the front steps of our shopping malls, to board our buses, or to enter our restaurants. We need to be proactive in locating terrorists in their own surroundings, to make them feel pursued and unsafe by targeting them individually.

Proactive actions should be taken against all terror infrastructures and all terror targets. These include:

- First, the terrorists. Terrorist leaders and terrorist activists must be targeted alike without distinction—they are all accountable for the terror attacks.
- Second, the weapons producers and smugglers.
- Third, the financial system. This means that fundraising, charities, money laundering, and other channels of allocating funds must be obstructed and shut down.
- Fourth, where applicable, organizational installations. These include training camps, terrorist headquarters, offices, ammunition depots, et cetera.

The most important offensive operational principle is intelligence dominance.

The integration of all types of sources of information is critical to fighting terror. Humint, sigint, visint, osint, and masint are pieces of information that must be fused. This requires blurring the boundaries between agencies, services, and organizations with national security responsibilities. In Israel, we were able to accomplish this effectively.

Real-time information—which enables security forces to capture or kill terrorists—is also crucial. While it is important to know when, where, and what a terrorist did yesterday to understand his *modus operandi*, it is operationally insufficient. The targets in a war on terrorism, mainly terrorists themselves, are low profile: they move, escape, and seek cover, making “intelligent encounters” with targets often very brief. This creates a substantial challenge for intelligence, but by improving the ability to access real-time information, it is a challenge that can be overcome by integrating and fusing all pieces of information available from all sources and agencies.

Another important offensive operational principle is information dominance, or the capability to deliver all types of information—including intelligence—to the relevant decisionmakers in real time. We need command, control, communications, and computer systems to allow the flow of information, in any given moment, to reach every decision-maker, from the platoon leader, to the pilot, up to the chief of the General Staff. In Israel, we have accomplished this.

Another principle is operational flexibility.

The capability to arrest terrorists or launch “targeted killing” operations is based on the very high level of operational readiness of ground, air, and naval forces. Readiness to move and deploy troops on very short notice is essential; otherwise the target will quickly disappear. This requires well-equipped and well-trained officers, soldiers, pilots, et cetera, ready to execute any mission assigned.

To sum up the offensive principles in countering terrorism, we can use the following slogan: Know first, understand

first, decide first, and act first!

Although the best defense is a good offense, internal security measures must be considered as well. In this domain, intelligence is a similarly key factor. Bolstering security requires use of early warning information and potential threat analysis.

Security measures include physical obstacles, such as fences and sensors, as well as operational measures, such as closures, curfews, checkpoints, and security guards at the entrances of crowded public facilities and on public transportation.

Large-scale security measures can deter attempts to carry out terrorist attacks. This was exemplified by the measures taken at the 2004 Athens Olympics, during the recent U.S. elections at polling stations, and in the case of Israel's security fence.

While domestic security measures can be effective, I wish again to emphasize the order of priorities in fighting terrorism: 1) Offense; 2) Fence; 3) Defense.

It cannot be ignored, however, that offense, fence, and defense all take considerable tolls on innocent civilians, particularly among terrorists' neighbors and constituents. Particularly for democratic societies, it is essential to establish an acceptable balance between protecting your own civilians from terrorism on the one hand, and on the other hand imposing as little hardship as possible on innocent civilians on the other side. Security measures such as closures, curfews, searches of homes, and roadside checkpoints must therefore be considered in light of both their effectiveness in thwarting attacks and their consequences for innocent civilians. Counterterrorist policymakers and specialists must remain constantly cognizant of their mission to fight terrorists, not the local population.

Balance is not merely a moral principle, it is tactical one. Terrorists thrive off of counterterrorist activities that are too broad in nature or take too high a toll on the local population. Very simply, overzealous counterterrorism empowers them to make their own violence seem more salient, thus rallying the public to their side. During the past five years of Palestinian terrorism, Hamas was particularly successful in inviting hardship for local Palestinians: by launching attacks on industrial zones and crossing points in Erez, Karni, and Rafah, harming Palestinians' economic needs and interests and blaming Israel for their miseries.

In promoting balance between security concerns and civilians' quality of life, policymakers must constantly remind themselves of the consequences of both extreme action and extreme inaction. Setting up a roadblock in the West Bank, for example, may successfully thwart a terrorist attack, but it will also create hardships for Palestinians on the ground and foment popular frustration. So too, lifting a roadblock may ease tension, but it will also create greater mobility for potential terrorists and put Israeli lives in immediate danger. Promoting balance is thus done incrementally and based on the situation on the ground: in due time, it should lead to maximal defense against terrorism and minimal hardships for civilians. This must be the end goal.

Another factor to be considered in fighting terror is legitimacy.

In conventional war, our maneuverability is dependant on the extent of territorial space. In the war against terror, a nation's ability to operate depends on the legitimacy of its cause. Democratic societies are particularly sensitive to the use of force. When force becomes necessary, it is therefore crucial that it be utilized wisely to maintain its legitimacy.

In Israel, we have learned that legitimacy has three dimensions: 1) How the army itself—soldiers and commanders—perceives our actions. This dimension is often referred to as the "mirror test." Can we look at ourselves in the mirror after the operation? 2) We must consider how our society perceives our actions. 3) We must assess how our actions are perceived by the like-minded players of the free world—our allies, other nations, and NGOs.

Central to these three dimensions—and underscoring the complex sensitivities that counterterrorism arouses—is the following principle: what you do is important, but how it is perceived may be even more so. As a result, the media becomes an essential player in either promoting or undermining the legitimacy of a nation’s war against terrorism. The media’s portrayal of counterterrorism efforts—and the magnified voice it often gives to opponents of these efforts, domestically and worldwide—affects all relevant constituents: soldiers, commanders, your own society, the enemy, the enemy’s society, and international players.

The essential point is that the war against terrorism is fought not only on the physical battlefield, but in those arenas where a nation’s legitimacy to act and its morality are called into question: public opinion, the judiciary, the political arena, international forums, and so forth.

The war against terrorism is, additionally, a struggle for the hearts and minds of the terrorists’ constituents—a battle to shape the narrative of the conflict. Our objective is to convince terrorists’ constituents that violence produces violence, that terrorism will not advance their causes and that terrorism doesn't pay. Meanwhile, we must consolidate our own society’s justification of our goals. These objectives are accomplished by ensuring that our ends and means are perceived as legitimate, both at home and abroad.

In order to be victorious we must maintain a high level of creativity and flexibility. I say this emphatically: in fighting terrorism, the only constant is constant change! The enemy is dynamic; the threat is ever-changing. Defensive measures produce new vulnerabilities that need to be protected, while technological innovations allow for operational opportunities.

The only way to accomplish this principle is to educate yourself and your subordinates, asking yourself every day, “Am I relevant to our mission of fighting terrorism? Are my decisions relevant? Are our actions relevant?”

As I mentioned earlier, cooperation and integration between services and agencies is imperative in countering terrorism. International cooperation on intelligence and operational activities—as well as integration—is essential in combating global terrorism. The need to process a great amount of information cannot be met without sharing the burden among like-minded, free world parties.

International cooperation should include international pressure against state-sponsors of terror, such as Syria and Iran. Political and economic sanctions should be imposed on those rogue countries, as well as on Lebanon and the Palestinian Authority, which permit armed terror organizations like Hizballah, Hamas, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad to operate within their territory.

In spite of the military, financial, economic, and human resource capabilities of terrorist groups, it must be emphasized that the first layer of terror infrastructure is education. It is essential that effective counterterrorism not only deal with the terrorism itself, but with the roots of terror. In this context, I fully agree with Natan Sharansky’s proposals in his book, *The Case for Democracy: The Power of Freedom to Overcome Tyranny & Terror*.

Democratization entails a fundamental transformation of values within the societies that produce terror. Educating for democracy, promoting human rights in societies plagued by terrorism, and supporting liberalization is, indeed, a long process, but an unavoidable one. It must commence in kindergartens, in schools, mosques, the media, et cetera. Any financial aid given to contemporary tyrannies must be conditioned on the promotion of educational and political reforms—reforms whose progress must be continually monitored and assessed by sponsor countries.

In this regard, we should draw two key lessons from Hamas’s victory in the Palestinian parliamentary elections:

- 1) Democratization is much more than elections. Democracy is based on values, institutions, and the rule of law—all of which enable and serve the progress of civil society. It is impossible to practice democracy in a society that romanticizes death rather than emphasizing life. In such a society, human life is degraded, and human rights even

more so. Those who desire participation in the democratic political process should meet certain criteria; without setting a bar for participation, more radical elements will use the democratic rules of the game to gain power and implement an antidemocratic regime. It was, no doubt, a tremendous mistake to permit Hamas's participation in the elections without demanding that it meets the criteria of a party committed to democracy and human rights.

2) The Disengagement plan devastated Israel's battle against Palestinian terrorism. The Israeli political leadership explained the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza as an initiative "to take our own destiny to our hands, and to wait for the Palestinians to become a reliable partner." While Israeli audiences approved of this message, terrorist organizations—particularly Hamas—approved even more, viewing the withdrawal as surrender to "Islamic resistance," as they call it. Hamas used its proclaimed victory as a rallying cry in its election campaign. The damage to Israel's fight against terrorism must be observed carefully. Very simply, in the ongoing war against terrorism in Israel and worldwide, there is no way to escape terrorism but to defeat it.

Implementing a strategy against terrorism requires, lastly, the principle of moral clarity. We, like-minded free world players, must share philosophical common ground: terror is terror is terror, and it can only be obliterated—not tolerated.

In summary: The war on terror will be a long and challenging struggle. Only determined, continuous, and decisive efforts—implementing the principles that I have mentioned—will bring about decisive conclusion to this threat.

Thank you for listening, and good luck in your work fighting a good and important fight. ❖

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