Maj. Gen. (res.) Gershon Hacohen has joined the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies as a senior research associate. He served in the IDF for 42 years, commanding troops in battle on the Egyptian and Syrian fronts. When he retired, he was the last serving IDF officer to have fought in the Yom Kippur War. He was the last active IDF commander to have fought against Syrian troops on Syrian soil; and was the only active IDF commander to have battled the Egyptians.

Hacohen served as commander of the IDF Military Colleges and commander of the Northern Corps. For the past decade, he has been in charge of designing the IDF’s major war games exercises. He also commanded over Israel’s disengagement from Gaza. Last year he published What’s National in National Security (Hebrew: Ministry of Defense Publishing House), which is a discourse on values and vision in the crafting of national security doctrine.

In two incisive recent papers for the BESA Center, Hacohen has critiqued the security approach of cabinet and military leaders to the recent Palestinian wave of terrorism. Their approach, he says, is primarily defensive, rather than, reactive.

“Restoring calm” in Jerusalem and the West Bank (through anti-terrorist operations, fences, roadblocks etc.), Hacohen says, is akin to putting a derailed train back on track – no more. It is a technical solution, not a goal-oriented chess move that drives a new reality. The Zionist movement always sought to, and today too should seek to, reshape Israel’s strategic reality according to its preferences.

Hacohen: “Those who view Israel as a stepping stone for redemption and as the Jewish national spiritual homeland will act differently in responding to Palestinian violence than those who view Israel merely as a safe haven state. If the former, the government should do more than just approve security operations against Palestinian terrorists. It should approve renewed building in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria.”

He sees settlements as forward outposts of Zionism, in addition to their being critical to Israel’s military deployment in the territories. “Where there is a farmer on his land,” he says, “the army has the strength to rule.”

Unlike so many of his left-leaning former military colleagues, Hacohen is utterly opposed to the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank, and equally opposed to any further unilateral withdrawals too.

Underlying Hacohen’s weltanschauung is the notion of ongoing struggle, and deep faith in the righteousness of the Jewish return to Zion.

This first part of this thought-process is somewhat Bolshevik in approach: Israel is engaged in a permanent revolution. Consequently, Hacohen says, Zionism must constantly seek to re-shape and shake-up the strategic environment, never giving up on its ideals despite strategic and tactical difficulties.

Even if Israeli leaders can’t see where the struggle might lead, they are nevertheless mandated to push forward, says Hacohen.

You shuffle the cards and create facts on the ground. And then, drawing on passionate commitment that comes from true belief in your cause – religious-nationalist faith in the justice of Zionism – have confidence that the Heavens will help stickhandle the helm of state.

“Our enemies such as ISIS and Iran are resolutely motivated by revolutionary ideologies,” says Hacohen. “In this situation, Israel can’t get by with leaders bereft of ideological zeal; stuck in a holding pattern or in a management mindset. Israel must reacquire sufficient ideological determination to persevere, progress, repulse, and overwhelm its adversaries.”

At the BESA Center, General Hacohen is working on a project on the role of the IDF military presence in the West Bank.