



PERSPECTIVES

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The Terrorists' Escape from Gilboa Prison: A Wake-Up Call for Israeli Society

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: Recent events, including the escape of six terrorists from Gilboa Prison and the death of Sgt. Barel Hadaria Shmueli, who was shot point blank by a Palestinian terrorist, represent a wake-up call for Israelis who have grown too accustomed to the pursuit of day-to-day quiet as a strategic choice. Whether Israelis recognize it or not, they are in a state of war with their enemies.

The escape of six terrorists from Israel's Gilboa prison caused countrywide hysteria, as did the shooting death of Border Police officer Sgt. Barel Hadaria Shmueli at the hands of a Palestinian gunman during violent riots at the Gaza fence. In typical fashion, the incidents were described as "blunders," with the accompanying implication that if everyone in charge had performed their duties properly and according to required professional standards and procedures, these "blunders" would not have occurred.

Individuals probably were negligent and should be brought to justice, but here lies the fundamental problem with this kind of approach to incidents like these: it ignores the chaotic dimensions of war. Of course there is room for inquiry, and lessons to be learned. This is true in every system, even the most sophisticated and up-to-date: care must be taken to prevent negligence, and in cases where it is not prevented, action must be taken against those who are at fault. But in a complex event like war—a phenomenon that is fundamentally different from, say, production line management—even the most professional and efficient system has its blind spots and can spin out of control, and this can occur even under responsible and experienced leadership.

The expectations of Jewish-Israeli society have shifted over the years in the face of its anxieties and aspirations. The public has never stopped wishing for

clear victories in the style of the Six-Day War, but over the years, it has become more and more reluctant to make sacrifices to attain such successes. Israeli society needs to acknowledge the gap between what it expects of its army and security systems and what it is willing to contribute to make those expectations achievable.

Israelis of today prefer to indulge in their pleasures as if they were in Scandinavia and to ignore Israel's non-stop confrontation with determined enemies committed to Israel's destruction. Those enemies, unlike Israelis, understand that they are at war and demonstrate a considerable degree of perseverance.

The problem of how to deal with Israel's enemies begins in the inner consciousness. It is totally distinct from the question of deterrence, which is obsessively examined as if the solution to the overall problem lies in the taking of yet more actions to establish the dissipated deterrence.

This approach is outdated. The perception of deterrence as an essential component of the national security equation belongs to the wars of the last century. Instead, Israelis must look inward and recognize the tension between their country's heritage as a pioneering society and its Western approach to the construction of a liberal civil society devoted to the illusion of stability.

Over the past few decades, Israeli society has reduced its dreams to nothing more than the maintaining of day-to-day quiet. Even the leaders of Israel's defense establishment have surrendered to the overarching desire to simply avoid friction. They have forgotten that without constant friction, and without a striving for friction, Israel and the IDF cannot help but degenerate operationally and lose their very *raison d'être*.

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