

Heading towards Another War?

The ideology of political Islam advocates the domination of religion over state, the establishment of an Islamic Caliphate, and the replacement of secular law with an Islamic code. The extremist elements that represent this perspective are engaged in an armed struggle against the West – its culture, institutions, and way of life. Therefore, I cannot envisage a situation in which religious Islamic regimes will recognize the State of Israel and accept our right to exist as a Jewish and democratic state.

The phenomena of a return to religion and rise of Islamic movements have enflamed the clash between Islam and Israel, and turned the political conflict in the Middle East into a religious-cultural war.

Iran is the premier example of this dangerous process: since the Khomeini Revolution, which toppled the Shah's regime and established the Islamic Republic of Iran in its place, Middle East has become a much more explosive region.

Religion's politicization has turned the struggle of Islamic terrorist organizations against Israel into an ideological struggle between Muslim and Jew that will not end in the foreseeable future unless global terror is defeated by the free world.

The recent events in the Arab world are creating deep changes in the Middle East and posing new challenges for Israel. The democratization of the Arab world will be a long and drawn out process. Whoever thinks that democratic elections are the be all and end all is making a very serious mistake. Arab society has never experienced a democratic regime, and the term "democracy" and its derivatives are neither understood nor naturally accepted by the Arab world.

In order for Arab society to achieve democracy it will first have to internalize democratic values. Democratic society demands the kind of education that leads to and sustains a change in the way of thinking and bold new perspective of social-political life.

Much time will pass until the regimes in the countries surrounding us become democratic, and until then we are likely to witness increasing instability, intensified hatred of Israel, and the growth of

Islamic forces. In the short and intermediate terms the Middle East will be a very inhospitable place, rife with tension and fraught with danger.

I believe that the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty will remain intact, mainly due to Egypt's dependence on American financial aid and military hardware, but it will be a much frostier peace than in the Hosni Mubarak period.

Another challenge stems from the freeze in the political process between Israel and the Palestinians. This September the UN General Assembly will vote on the establishment of an independent Palestinian state within the 1967 borders. Israel will choose to ignore the vote, but the world will not, and we are likely to come under international pressure to withdraw IDF forces from Judea and Samaria. When this happens a Third Intifada could break out, this time with the addition of heavy shooting and missile attacks from Hezbollah and Hamas, which is liable to escalate to all-out war.

But the greatest threat remains Iran: a state where political Islam has succeeded in gaining absolute control. Iran must not be allowed to get the bomb. It is an existential threat to Israel.

I do not see international sanctions halting Iran's nuclear program, therefore Israel's military option must remain on the table.

The world, too, must take military action. If we're left on our own, we will act in self-defense.

The IDF is a strong army, and our intelligence services are excellent, but even so, there are still things we don't know. The IDF has to be prepared for every scenario, including war.

I believe we will emerge victorious from the next war, but our leadership has to do everything in its power to prevent it from starting. It would be the ultimate frustration if another round of violence erupted, God forbid, and at the end of the fighting we faced the same basic problems of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the same geography and topography. There is no need for another terrible war in order to return to the negotiating table. We must renew the negotiations and prevent the next war!