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THE IMPACT OF WEST BANK SETTLEMENTS ON ISRAELI NATIONAL SECURITY

At the Herzliya Conference in June 2015, Ehud Barak made the following statement:

> "If you gathered all the former living chiefs of staff, the heads of the Central Command, the heads of the Israeli Security Agency (Shabak) and heads of military intelligence – 80–90 percent of them will tell you that the IDF will best be able to protect Israeli citizens from a recognized international border. To the claim that it is impossible to combine the security needs of Israel and a two-state solution, they will tell you – the opposite is true" (Barak, 2013).

A survey conducted by *Molad*, an independent research center, concludes that 52% of the Israelis believe that the Jewish settlements within the West Bank strengthen the security of Israel, and 50% of the Israelis believe that a Palestinian state, if formed, will be a serious threat to Israeli security (Molad, 2015: 18, 19). While surveys of the Israeli public are meaningful, and statements of Israeli politicians are very important, there is a scarcity of updated research about the perspective of the Israeli national security elite. This group of top Israeli officers in the fields of intelligence and strategic planning has a strong presence in national security discussions at the very top levels of the Israeli decision-making process, including in the Prime Minister's Office.

In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, what is the impact of the Israeli West Bank settlements on the national security of Israel? More specifically, this article explores the following question: Are the settlements a contribution to the national security of Israel or a liability? This article presents the outcome of face-to-face interviews conducted with 27 of those top officers between during 2016. In the next part, the relevant literature is reviewed and terminologies will be explained. The following part will specify how and why participating interviewees were entitled to be defined as part of the 'Israeli National Security Elite'. The names and relevant positions of the interviewees are listed, with an explanation of how the interviews and the analysis process were conducted. Literature is presented to support the research methods used, including: elite interviewing (Herzog, Ali, 2015) and semi-structured research (DiCicco-Bloom, Crabtree, 2006). The Findings section is followed by a discussion about the significance of the findings.

This article does not deal with core pillars of the conflict such as the Palestinian refugee issue (Fischbach, 2003) and Jerusalem (Dumper, 2002), nor with other issues

such as religion, historical rights, universal rights, justice, international recognition, Palestinian security, and natural rights. The question raised by this article is explored specifically via the perspective of the Israeli national security elite.

THE WEST BANK, SETTLEMENTS, AND THE ISRAELI NATIONAL SECURITY

A. The West Bank

The West Bank is the accepted term used by the international community for the territory west of the Kingdom of Jordan, called by most Israelis 'Judea and Samaria', corresponding to the ancient Kingdoms of Israel and Judah (Einhorn, 2014). The territory is part of the proposed Arab state to be carved out of the mandate of Palestine as part of the November 1947 UN Partition Resolution 181 (Einhorn, 2014). The territory is situated east of what used to be the eastern border of Israel prior to the 1967 war, when the West Bank was occupied by Jordan. Its population in 2005 was estimated at less than 2.4 million, mostly Palestinians, and its size is a bit less than 6,000 sq. km (3,700 sq. miles) (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 2016). The territory of Israel, excluding the West Bank, touches the West Bank on the east and the Mediterranean Sea on the west. The Israeli land between the West Bank and the coast of Tel Aviv is as narrow as 18 km (11 miles) and as narrow as 15 km (9.3 miles) in other areas. This strip of Israeli land contains some of Israel's most strategic assets, including the Ben Gurion International Airport, located 6 km (3.7 miles) from the West Bank, and a bit more distant is the largest electric power station in Israel. In addition, this Israeli strip of land is the most populated zone in Israel and includes Tel Aviv and other major cities. The distance between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea is approximately 40 nautical miles (74 km). This means that a combat aircraft can fly from Jordan to the beach of Tel Aviv in less than four minutes. A plane could penetrate the country via the Jordan Valley and reach Jerusalem in less than two minutes (Dekel, 2014: 85).

The topography of the West Bank and Israel is such that the West Bank hills and mountains overlook the lower strip of Israel, which is mostly at sea level.

During past peace negotiations, the Palestinians demanded the vast majority of the West Bank while Israeli negotiators expressed their willingness to give away the majority, and yet, the parties did not reach an agreement regarding the precise percentage of land to be ceded and the other fundamentals issues of the conflict.

Because of the West Bank's proximity to Israel and topographical superiority, Israel had several security demands that were intended to protect Israel's civilian population, aviation, power plants, electromagnetic frequencies, and more. These demands were also meant to reduce the probability that certain types of weapons would reach the hands of extremists within the West Bank.

Israel demanded that in any possible structure of peace agreement, three measures would be ensured: 1. The West Bank would be clean of such weapons that can be used

against Israel, 2. There would be efficient mechanisms that ensure that the forbidden weapons will not enter the West Bank in general and in particular, through the Jordanian border, 3. Observation points controlled by the IDF will be positioned in more than one location in the West Bank (Dekel, 2014).

While there were many suggestions during the past peace negotiations with regard to the potential role of the UN in enforcing demilitarization, Israel had a basic distrust of the ability of the UN peacekeeping forces to act effectively, in light of past experiences (Amidror, 2014: 53). In addition, given the instability and fragmentation amongst the Palestinian organizations, it is not clear who might take over the control in the West Bank, following an agreement with Israel. Will the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) hold the legal and military power or will it be the Hamas? Will the entity in control have the power to enforce the execution of the agreement and control resisting entities? How long will the leadership that gains control over the Palestinian state stay in power? (Eldar, 2015).

B. The Settlements

The West Bank Settlements are the Jewish communities established after 1967, east of the Green Line, on land captured by Israel in the Six-Day War. As of 2009 there were 120 official settlements in the West Bank not including east Jerusalem. The official jurisdiction of the settlements stands at approximately 9.3% of the West Bank. In addition, there were 99 outposts, which are unofficial small settlements, containing mobile houses, permanent structures, and a limited number of inhabitants (Ofran, 2009: 1).

The official position of the State of Israel is that Judea and Samaria are 'disputed territories' and not 'occupied territories' and although Israel has not actually annexed them to Israel or extended its sovereignty to them, it does nevertheless have a priority claim to sovereignty until the dispute is peacefully resolved. In the interim period, there is nothing illegal in the establishment of Jewish settlements on that land (Einhorn, 2014: 4). This interpretation of the legality of the settlements arguably strengthen the claims that the settlements, from a national security perspective, are an integral part of Israel proper and entitled to protection.

According to international law, an occupier must not confiscate land for the needs of the occupying people (*Geneva Convention*, 1949). Major players in the international community claim that accordingly, Israel cannot confiscate privately owned Palestinian land to build settlements. This issue is very complex and dealt with at length in many articles (Roberts, 1990). Regardless of who's right and who's wrong in the debate over legality, Israel has been in an ongoing conflict with the international community over this issue and under continued pressure to discontinue expansion and initiation of settlements in the West Bank.

A recent survey concluded that 52% of Israelis believe that the settlements strengthen the security of Israel (Molad, 2015: 18–19), which highlights the fact that the internal Israeli debate is not necessarily about the legality of the settlements.

Those who believe that the settlements are a burden on the security of Israel build their arguments on at least two foundations: First, they claim that the settlement enter-

prise is one of the reasons preventing a peace agreement, mainly because it is hard to give up land that is populated. For example, Herbert C. Kelman from the Psychology Department at Harvard University claims that the Israeli leaders spoke about their commitment to peace in vague, general terms, but failed to educate the public that the Israeli project of building and expanding settlements was inconsistent with the logic of the two-state solution (Kelman, 2007). Second, the settlements require ongoing army presence, security roads, security checkpoints, and other means of defense that together increase the ongoing conflict and hatred between Palestinians and Israelis, demand financial resources and allocation of armed forces that could have been placed elsewhere, endanger the lives of soldiers and citizens, and cause conflicts with the international community (Peace and Security Association, 2012). In the Molad survey, a representative sample of the Israeli population was asked whether the settlements harm Israeli security because they place the Israeli soldiers in daily danger, or whether they strengthen security because they enable an Israeli military and civilian presence in places where Palestinian hostiles would otherwise be able to organize strikes against Israel without impediment. 35% percent supported the first argument while 52% supported the second (Molad, 2015: 18).

C. Israeli National Security

On August 2015, the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) published a document titled 'The IDF Strategy'. In a section, which is not classified, the document lists the national goals of the State of Israel, based on an analysis conducted by a committee headed by Dan Meridor, previously the Israeli Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Intelligence and Atomic Energy. The full report is known as 'the Meridor Report' and is classified 'top secret' (Reut Institute, 2007).

The following national goals are listed (Eizenkot, 2015: 9):
1. Securing the existence of the state of Israel, protecting its territorial wholeness, and the security of its citizens and inhabitants.
2. Preserving the values of the State of Israel and its characteristic as a Jewish and democratic state and as a home for the Jewish people.
3. Securing the social and economic strength of the State of Israel.
4. Strengthening the international and regional position of the State of Israel, while striving for peace with its neighbors.

The frequent wars and clashes between Israel and the Arab states and organizations have fostered a persistent Israeli self-image of a state facing a continuous existential threat and being under siege (Barak, 2016: 244).

Some researchers have claimed that while the national security of Israel has been challenged by its enemies in the Middle East, an integral part of the national security of Israel is its relationship with the US. Some of them have gone as far as stating that in the final analysis, developments in Washington are much more important for Jerusalem than those in its region. (Inbar, 2012: 69). Others have warned about politicians who use the argument of national security for political reasons, without a sound basis, a phenomena sometimes called *securitization* (Lebovitz, 2010: 98).

The theoretical definition of national security is not trivial, neither in Israel nor globally. President George W. Bush's five-page National Security Presidential Directive 1 referred to 'national security' thirty-three times without offering any definition (Donohue, 2011). When discussing the term 'national security' in this article, the reference is to the broad definition of securing the national goals as defined by the IDF in the Eizenkot document (2015).

The West Bank and the settlements within it contains ideological, historical, ethical, and religious contradictions. While some of these issues are the most persistent negative barriers in the Israeli Palestinian conflict (Kurtzer, Matthew Duss, Munayyer, 2014: 3), they are beyond the purview of this article which focuses on security aspects.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The research is based on interviews with 27 members of the Israeli national security elite (INSE) and with top advisors to Israeli Prime Ministers, who held senior positions between the years 2000–2016. The interview design and execution were based on recommendations of qualitative researchers, mainly focusing on constructive methods and pragmatic approaches for thematic analysis (Aronson, 1994).

Preliminary interviews: Preliminary interviews were conducted at the beginning of the study, to explore hypotheses, and assist in defining the main group of interviewees. The preliminary interviewees included: Azriel Nevo, Brig. Gen., the Military Secretary of four Israeli Prime Ministers: Begin, Shamir, Peres and Rabin, in the Jewish Business News of May 12, 2016; Haim Mendel, Colonel, head of the Prime Minister's Office at the time of Ehud Barak (Sher, 2006); Dov Weissglass, former Chief of Staff of former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, in Christoph Schult's article in Spiegel Online from November 4, 2010, and Yair Shamir, former chairman of the Israel Aerospace Industries and the son of Itzhak Shamir, former Prime Minister, on the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs website.

Main interviews: Elites can be defined as those with close proximity to power (Lilleker, 2003) or with particular expertise (Burnham, Gilland, Grant, Layton-Henry, 2004). Preliminary interviewees confirmed that the INSE members are those with the standing and expertise to influence the decisions shaping of the Israeli national security. There was a consensus amongst the interviewees that those who had been part of the INSE are capable of providing strategic insights even after they left their formal jobs, and therefore their insights are very relevant.

There is little explicit guidance on what sample size is needed for a thematic analysis (Emmel, 2013) with suggestions ranging from 6 to 400, depending on the type of data collection and size of the project (Braun, Clarke, 2013). In the case of the INSE, the circle of possible relevant candidates is small. It was loosely estimated by the preliminary interviewees that 20 interviewees would constitute 30–50 percent of the total relevant INSE members during 2000–2016, depending on the exact definition. The interviewing process started without a fixed n goal, and n = 27 approach was finally employed, after a saturation of information (Guest, Bunce, Johnson, 2006) was

achieved. To be as bias-free as possible, the interviewees came from all the different branches of the National Security tree. More specifically, the professional credentials of the interviewees include 3 heads of the National Security Council, 2 Heads of the Mossad, 2 heads of the Intelligence Corps, 1 head of the Military Intelligence, 4 heads of the Research and Analysis Division of the Military Intelligence, 3 heads of the IDF Planning Directorate, 3 heads of the Strategic Planning Division in the Planning Directorate of the General Staff, 1 head of the research division of the Internal Security Agency, 1 Chief Military Advocate-General, 1 Military Secretary of the Prime Minister, 2 heads of the Mossad's intelligence directorate, and 2 members of official Israeli negotiation teams. Some of the interviewees held more than one of the positions mentioned.

Following is a list of the names of the interviewees, each of whom can be easily searched on Wikipedia or googled for a detailed bio: Yaakov Amidror, Dani Arditi, Eli Ben Meir, Dr. Barak Ben-Zur, Shlomo Brom, Itai Brun, Danny Efroni, Eival Gilady, Efraim Halevy, Itzhak (Haki) Harel, Ariel Karo, Yossi Kuperwasser, Ido Nehushtan, Assaf Orion, Gadi Shamni, Moshe Shchori, Nimrod Shefer, Amnon Sofrin, Uri Sagi, Haim Tomer, Shalom Turgeman, Danni Yatom.

Interview design: Following the suggestions of DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) regarding semi-structured in-depth interviews, the interviews were scheduled in advance at a designated time and location, usually at a café or at the office of the interviewee, and were generally organized around a set of predetermined open-ended questions which gave plenty of room for elaboration. Most commonly the interviews took between 60 minutes to 90 minutes to complete. A second meeting was scheduled in most of the cases, when a shorter follow-up interview was held, discussing supplementary issues or comments, lasting between 15–60 minutes.

The interviews uncovered also many issues that are beyond the purview of this research, to be analyzed in separate researches. Special attention was given to the creation of comfort level of the interviewees to avoid lack of cooperation (DiCicco-Bloom, Crabtree, 2006). This was especially relevant given the sensitivity of some of the issues, and the secrecy surrounding Israeli national security. The interviewees were presented with the main research question, along with other questions that spontaneously emerged as part of the discussion, to enable free associative responses. The interviewees were encouraged to provide their insights even when such insights branched out. In line with the suggestion of Jennifer Hochschild from the Department of Government at Harvard, information gleaned from previous interviews was used to probe more deeply into the current subject.(Hochschild, 2009).

Reaching out to the interviewees was done mostly by using the credibility of the participants in the preliminary interviews, personal connections, and by highlighting the importance of the issues researched as was successfully done by other elite interviewing researchers in other fields (Aberbach, Rockman, 2002). There was an intentional effort to avoid using the snowball approach (Ali, 2013) to eliminate its inherent unification biases.

As the interviewees belong to a group that usually prefers to stay in the shadows, it was necessary to guarantee anonymity of the respondents. Permission was granted in writing by the interviewees to include their names as participants in the research,

but not to record them and not to associate their names with specific answers. The interviews were documented in writing with notes during the interviews and in detail immediately following each interview. Restrictions on recordings are known to be part of sensitive cases (Byron, 1993), and the implication was clear as many of the INSE interviewees are still in the "system" and have political aspirations. The documentation is in line with the literature of elite interviews concerning reliability and validity of written documentation (Clausen, 2012) and minimization of possible risk to participants due to the themes explored in the interview.

To be consistent with the terminology used in the Israeli security forces and to avoid possible interviewee antagonism, the term 'Judea and Samaria' (Einhorn, 2014) was used during the interviews and not 'West Bank'.

Analysis Approach: The thematic analysis that is so common in qualitative research (Guest, 2012) was used for examining themes within the interviews (Daly, Kellehear, 1997) The analysis process was done without trying to fit the data into a pre-existing model or frame, as suggested by the inductive approach (Boyatzis, 1998). The information provided by the interviews was initially organized into broad categories and then rearranged into new more detailed categories, and then again to more focused categories, a process sometimes termed by theorist Glaser as analytical mapping (Glaser, 2013) and described by Kathy Charmaz as part of constructing grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006).

Given that the respondents' answers regarding the national security issues inherently belong to interpretive research, the psychological biases of the respondents, as well as the researcher (Creswell, 1994), were explicitly acknowledged, and they were considered in the presentation of the data. Special attention was given to mixing first-hand knowledge with second-hand information, and mixing second-hand information and facts with assumptions. An effort was made to neutralize such biases, by explicit questions and cross-checking with other interviewees and literature.

FINDINGS

The findings are divided into 3 parts, per the 3 different high-level assessments that were extracted from the interviews. Each part is organized according to the relevant themes provided by the interviewees. All themes correspond with the main research question: Are the West Bank settlements a contribution to the national security of Israel or a security liability?

A. The West Bank settlements are a national security liability

a) Conflict with the international community

INSE interviewee: As a small country in the hostile Middle East, healthy relationships with the international community and especially with the USA are not a privilege but rather an existential need. The Israeli Defense Force relies on foreign advanced weap-

ons and on replacement parts. During past wars and operations, the IDF requested and received aid and supply. Without it, the results could have been different. The issue of the settlements is like a bone in the throat of the peace process, and a major cause for the ongoing conflict with the international community. Some people believe that the strong Israeli – USA relationship will stay intact forever regardless of the actions that Israel takes. Well, it is my belief that from a national security perspective, Israel is better off dealing with angry settlers than with a furious USA.

INSE interviewee: The Israeli economy is dependent on trade with the international markets. It is only because the economy is so strong that Israel can afford an annual security budget of over NIS 60 billion. So far, Israel has managed to push and pull the gas pedal of the settlement enterprise according to the international pressure. But, it's a very risky game to play. Expansion of the settlements may lead to unofficial economic sanctions and then to official sanctions that will hurt the economy and the security budget.

b) Endangering the Zionism vison

Interviewee: The national security of Israel has been directed, among other goals, by the wish to protect the only Jewish state, preserving its values and Jewish identity, and ensuring that it will be a safe home for Jews in need from the diaspora. The settlements may be a double-edged sword. If the Palestinians lose hope of gaining a country of their own, they are likely to turn to the only other democratic alternative to the two-state solution, which is one democratic state of Jews and Arabs. The implication is a country that will not have a sound Jewish majority, and arguably, an Arab majority. Practically, either the Arabs won't get the right to vote and Israel will stop being a democratic state, or it will stop being a Jewish state as was envisioned by the founding fathers of Israel. In either case, expansion of settlements can be viewed as an effort to obliterate at least one of the values the national security of Israel tries to protect.

c) Decrease IDF training time

Interviewee: Every road that is built to serve a settlement needs protection, every gas truck may be a Palestinian target. The army units could better spend their time in training for wars instead of guarding and protecting civilians. If talking only about security, of course the settlements are a burden.

d) Closing the door on future peace opportunities

Interviewee: The leadership of the settlers tries to deploy small settlements in such locations that will prevent the formation of a continuous Palestinian state without Jewish settlements in it. If they succeed, it will be impossible to create a reasonable Palestinian state even if both parties are ready for it. If the situation persists, the door will be shut on any practical peace solution, and Israel will be doomed to fight forever. The Palestinian leaderships and the Israeli governments are at least as guilty as the settler leaders, but the settlements are a major spoke in the peace wheel, preventing any progress.

Interviewee: In 2002 the Arab league tabled the Arab Peace Initiative, which is basically a general suggestion for a regional peace solution. If it materialized, Arab countries would sign a peace agreement with Israel. Since the introduction of the initiative, the Saudis have made it clear that they would not move forward without a two-state solution to the Palestinian issue. As the settlements, except for the major blocs, rule out the two-state solution, they are an obstacle to the Arab initiative and with it the opportunity to supply Israel with security via regional peace.

e) A trigger for violence and war

Interviewee: When people who hate each other live next to each other, unavoidably, bad things happen, regardless of the security efforts to prevent them. Let's analyze the 2014 kidnapping and murder of the three Jewish teenage Yeshiva students who were hitchhiking from the junction next to Alon Shvut. It was an operation planned by a member of Izz a-Din-al-Qassam which is the military arm of the Hamas. The goal of the operation was to kidnap Jewish settlers, but the kidnappers lost control and shot and murdered the three innocent guys minutes after they got into the getaway car. The murderers escaped, buried the bodies, and hid out. From that point, this terrible personal tragedy transformed into a national security game changer. When the young men were reported as kidnapped, thousands of soldiers and volunteers searched for them, and hundreds of Hamas activists were arrested and interrogated, including senior ones. Rage surfaced on both sides, and several Palestinians were killed during the search and arrest operations that required force. One of them was a 13-year-old-Palestinian boy from Dura, who became a Palestinian symbol. Hamas launched rockets from Gaza against Israeli cities on a daily basis, the Israeli air force retaliated by attacking Hamas targets in Gaza. Then, the bodies of the Yeshiva students were found, and as revenge three Jewish individuals murdered a Palestinian teenager from Shoafat. Hamas increased the rocket attacks, and Israel launched operation 'Protective Edge', more of a war than an operation, with over 1,000 civilians and soldiers wounded on the Israeli side and over 10,000 wounded Palestinians. So, my answer is that although most the settlers are superb, peaceful individuals, the decision of the government to allow them to live on disputed territory is a national security mistake.

f) Egypt

Interviewee: The economic situation of Egypt has worsened with every new child born and with every new mouth to be fed. The birth rate in Egypt is one of the highest in the world with over 2 million newborns every year. Unemployment drives Egyptians to join religious organizations because they provide alternative support. Egypt has opposed the settlements consistently since the 1978 peace agreement. If a new religious government rises in Egypt, or if the existing one becomes less stable, then the establishment of new settlements is likely to be an excuse and a catalyst to a deterioration of the relationship with Egypt to anywhere between a diplomatic conflict or a peace halt, to a new southern battlefront.

g) Economic burden

Interviewee: The settlements are expensive to protect, support, and subsidize. Even more expansive will be a future decision to relocate over 200 small and mid-sized settlements. It may be so expensive that it could significantly delay or even prevent such a decision, and with it the ability of any Israeli government to execute unilateral separation from the Palestinians or an agreed-upon disengagement. The settlements are like a deep anchor that is tied not also to the boat but also to the floor of the ocean, and therefore locks it in one place even when the captain knows that a huge storm is coming.

h) Palestinian extremism

Mixing nitro with clay looked like a good idea to Alfred Nobel for opening pathways in the mountains and getting over natural barriers, but the dynamite was used heavily for wars, causing Nobel to end his days in depression. This is what happens when you mix different elements that shouldn't be mixed. They explode. The ongoing friction between the Palestinians, the settlers, and Israeli security forces increases Palestinian hatred toward Israelis. It also increases the disappointment level of Palestinians with the Palestinian Authority and pushes more Palestinians into the arms of Hamas. This is bad for Israel.

B. The West Bank settlements are a contribution to the national security of Israel

a) Controlling strategic land

Interviewee: Without the settlements, it would be much easier for terrorists to move freely in Judea and Samaria. It would be much harder for the army to limit and control such movements. The settlements, while civilian in their nature, have armed security and observation points on the area surrounding them. The position and movement of the armed settlers is a deterrence factor. If you take the settlements away, you take away with it also a large portion of the Israeli deterrence, the Israeli control over the strategic hills and junctions of the land. The army can't position bases on each hill, and each hill evacuated from a settlement would be taken over by a Palestinian presence. This is a real security danger for so many reasons, including the presence of armed hostile Palestinians high above so many of the strategic facilities of Israel and the nearby populated cities of Israel.

b) Preventing threats like the Oslo agreement

Interviewee: The settlements contribute to the national security of Israel because their presence prevents the next accords of the unsafe Oslo agreement. Without the settlements, Israel would be pressured to grant the Palestinians security control over zones B and C in Judea and Samaria in addition to zone A that is already under their control,

and effectively over all the land. This will not happen, of course, when hundreds of thousands of Jewish inhabitants live there. But let's assume that Israel keeps security control over the largest settlements and hands over to the Palestinians the control over the rest of the land which will be clear of Jewish population. In such a situation, Israel will lose security control, as it lost it in Gaza, and the Palestinians will strive to mimic Hamas and Hezbollah.

Interviewee: When talking purely about national security, the answer to the question is derived from the assessments of whether a Palestinian-controlled state next to Israel is a greater threat to Israel than Israeli-controlled land with hundreds of thousands of settlers on it. If one believes that in the foreseeable future, both disengagement and a peace agreement are dangerous aspirations, then the settlements are a great asset because they prevent the traps of disengagement and false peace efforts. Forcing people out of their homes and relocating them against their will is a major difficulty understood by both the Israeli public, the Palestinians, and the world. On the other hand, if you believe that either disengagement is a national security need, or that a sustainable peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians is a realistic possibility, then the settlements are not good for Israel.

C. The question is not relevant

INSE interviewee: The question, whether the settlements are a liability to the national security of Israel, is an irrelevant question. The settlers have established their homes in Judea and Samaria with the blessing of the Israeli governments. When citizens live legally in areas controlled by their country, it is the most basic obligation of the country to provide them reasonable security means. The definition of reasonable is enabling a normal, safe life. The high cost of providing reasonable security is sometimes an unavoidable part of the deal, similar to providing water to remote villages. If the government decides at some point to give away the land to another country or to clear off the settlements of Jewish inhabitants, it will be a different story, but as long as the settlements are there, their safe existence should be a national security goal and not a national security ambiguity.

INSE interviewee: It always demands more effort to protect areas in proximity to problematic borders and to provide them with needed services than to take care of the central zones of the country. The border between California and Mexico demands more security resources from the US federal government than the border between New York and Canada; nevertheless, will anybody claim that San Diego is a national security liability?

* * *

In the past five decades, Israel has faced continuous pressure from the international community (Friedman, 2012) to discontinue the initiation and expansion of Israeli settlements in the West Bank. Nevertheless, the settlement enterprise has continued. This article deals with the question: Are the settlements a contribution to the national security of Israel or a liability?

The approach used to explore these issues is face-to-face in-depth interviews, during 2016, with 27 high-ranking Israeli Generals from the intelligence and strategy branches, the Israeli negotiation teams, and from the Prime Minister's close circle of advisors.

The interviews revealed three perspectives. The first views the settlements as a national security liability, the second views them as a contribution to the national security of Israel, and the third, views the question as an irrelevant one, because it views the West Bank settlements as a *de facto* integral part of Israel.

The belief that both disengagement and peace processes are dangerous to the national security of Israel are prominent in the explanations of those interviewees that see the settlements as a contribution to Israel. Their explanations are usually aligned with explanations that were provided by security experts discussing the ability of an army in the field to defeat terrorism (Amidror, 2012: 5–42). The belief that Israel shouldn't shut the door on future disengagement or peace opportunities are recurring elements entwined in the explanations of the interviewees who see the settlements as a liability. Their approach is supported by security experts who believe that Israel can better protect its borders from international recognized borders outside of the West Bank (Barak, 2013).

As securitization (Sheffer, 2016) of political messages is arguably at least as common in Israel as in other countries, the insights of the Israeli National Security Elite (INSE) interviewees can help policy makers and researchers in extracting the professional security rationales from the ongoing misleading political clatter.

While the research is based on a relatively large variety of interviewees, one should be cautious and not consider the findings to be the results of a representative sample. For policy makers, the insights of the INSE suggest that beyond religious reasons, historical and legal rights, national aspirations, and real estate benefits, the controversial issue of the settlements is tightly linked to the Israeli national security in its broad definition. From a theoretical perception, the detailed insights of the INSE, an extremely influential group in Israel that usually stays in the shadows, is significant. It brings together a variety of reasoning derived from first-hand experience, and it sheds light on the settlements from a national security paradigm. The findings add first-hand information to the professional literature on security and conflicts.

Future research may focus on exploring the INSE insights on issues, such as the risks and threats in the formation of an unstable Palestinian state and deception strategies in the conflict.

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ABSTRACT

Since the 1967 war in the Middle East, The Israeli settlements in the West Bank have always been one of the most controversial topics in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This article deals with the question: What is the impact of the West Bank settlements on the national security of Israel? The approach used to explore these issues is face-to-face in-depth interviews, during 2016, with 27 high-ranking Israeli Generals from the Military Intelligence (Aman), the National Intelligence Agency (Mossad), the Internal Security Agency (Shabak), the National Security Council (Malal), the Planning Branch of the General Staff (Agat), and the Prime Minister's close circle of advisors. The interviews revealed three perspectives on the importance of the settlements for the Israeli national security. The first, views the settlements as a contribution to the national security of Israel, the second, views the settlements as a heavy national security liability, and the third, views the question as an irrelevant one, explaining that no one asks if Tel Aviv is important for the national security of Israel. As securitization of political messages

is arguably at least as common in Israel as in other countries, with immediate national security challenges, the detailed perspectives of the Israeli National Security Elite (INSE) helps to extract the professional security rationales from the misleading political clatter. The article can be of interest to policy makers and researchers who deal with national security in general and in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in particular.

Keywords: Israeli Palestinian conflict, national security elite, settlements, peace

WPŁYW OSIEDLI NA ZACHODNIM BRZEGU
NA BEZPIECZEŃSTWO NARODOWE IZRAELA

STRESZCZENIE

Począwszy od wojny sześciodniowej z 1967 roku, osiedla izraelskie na Zachodnim Brzegu stały się jednym z najbardziej kontrowersyjnych zagadnień konfliktu Izraelsko-Palestyńskiego. Artykuł ten jest próbą odpowiedzi na następujące pytanie: Jaki jest wpływ osiedli usytuowanych na Zachodnim Brzegu na bezpieczeństwo narodowe Izraela? Dążeniem do uzyskania odpowiedzi są dogłębne wywiady przeprowadzone w 2016 roku z 27 wysokiej rangi generałami izraelskimi reprezentującymi Wywiad Wojskowy (Aman), Wywiad Cywilny (Mossad), Służby Bezpieczeństwa Ogólnego (Shabak), Rady Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego (Malal), Wydziału Planowania Sztabu Generalnego (Agat) oraz grupą doradców ds. bezpieczeństwa Premiera Izraela. W wywiadach zwrócono uwagę na trzy perspektywy spojrzenia na problem wpływu osiedli na bezpieczeństwo narodowe Izraela. Pierwsza wskazuje, że osiedla mają istotny wpływ na bezpieczeństwo Izraela, zaś druga perspektywa wskazuje, że są dla niego znaczącym obciążeniem. Trzecia wskazuje, iż problem osiedli nie jest istotny, gdyż można stwierdzić, iż skoro nikt nie pyta o znaczenie Tel Awiwu dla Izraela, więc konsekwentnie, dlaczego miałby pytać o wpływ osiedli. Używanie argumentów dotyczących bezpieczeństwa jest powszechne zarówno w Izraelu, jak i wielu innych państwach, dotyczy to zwłaszcza wyzwań bezpośrednio z nim związanych. Szczegółowy punkt widzenia reprezentowany przez Izraelskie Elity Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego (INSE) pozwala na wyodrębnienie fachowych i racjonalnych uzasadnień, spośród politycznego, zwodniczego jazgotu. Artykuł może wzbudzać zainteresowanie zarówno osób zajmujących się problematyką bezpieczeństwa ogólnie, jak i konfliktem Izraelsko-Palestyńskim w szczególności.

Słowa kluczowe: konflikt izraelsko-palestyński, bezpieczeństwo wewnętrzne, osadnictwo, pokój