Women in National Security –

An International Perspective

Author: Dr. Ofra Graicer

Working Paper - The 12th Herzliya Conference

February 2012

The panel **'Women in National Security'** at the 2012 Herzliya Conference brings together a group of professionals, who assumed positions in a traditionally male-dominant security domain across the globe. The introduction of women who have chosen strategy as their expertise and defense as their profession, could serve as a valuable reference to examine current Israeli national security discourse, both in structure and in content. This is because women can offer alternative and fresh approaches to security, stemming from their unique political, social and gender experience.

The panel enfolds a unique opportunity to open the discussion on Israeli security, and serve as a springboard for Israeli women opting to participate in that field.

Why now?

For the past several years, it seems national leaders are failing in keeping pace with evolving realities, both internally and internationally. This observation runs across the political spectrum, regardless of worldview: governments rise and fall, but are often incapable of identifying potential; initiating policy or shaping a better geo-strategic reality for their voters.

The nature of warfare has been shifting dramatically since the end of the cold war, owing to a growing cultural asymmetry between conflicting entities and resulting in a disparity on the rules of the game. These 'new wars' reject traditional dichotomies between war and peace, crisis and routine, front and rear, and fighters and innocents. As a consequence, the number of civilian casualties has been consistently surpassing that of soldiers, thus raising question marks with respect to the state's ability to fully protect its citizens.

Israel is no exception – the Israeli *Security Concept* has difficulty in coping with emerging strategic challenges and opportunities, while failing to pro-actively develop positive goals. National security discourse in Israel could be one of the reasons for this deadlock, i.e. the manner in which existential threat is perceived largely shapes the national agenda, budget allocation and attention span of our statespersons.

The Israeli Defense Forces' (IDF) dominance within national security discourse is culturally, organizationally and politically founded. Over the years, the IDF operational concept has become the national security concept in a clearly uncritical manner. Yet, this national security discourse lacks

civilian substance and does not necessarily incorporate alternative perspectives. As a result, Israel's strategy could be greatly affected by an irrelevance of current national security policy in light of emerging strategic challenges. Moreover, the current policy incapacitates Israeli growth potential since all resources are primarily allocated and thought of through the security prism, or in its service.

At this stage in time then, emphasis should be given to analyzing the mechanisms, organization and processes through which national security in Israel, and international security at large, are designed. New partners and stakeholders should be brought into the table, and new learning systems should be generated, in order to change the way we think about security and generate an alternative security paradigm. Such a paradigm should consider the intricate interfaces between national, political, governmental and security systems in charge of designing and implementing the national security agenda, and simultaneously acknowledge the growing frustration of attempting to raise alternatives from within the current defense structure.

A major step in that direction was taken 10 years ago with the passing of UNSC Resolution 1325, reaffirming "the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building, and stressing the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution."[1]

Israel was the first state to pass legislation to that effect in 2004, calling for proper representation in any public committee or national policy design teams or bodies (security and foreign affairs; the prevention, management or resolution of conflicts); and, teams of negotiations towards interim agreements or peace agreements. Yet, the *practical* implementation of this amendment is lagging: the 2009 national elections, for example, resulted in 21 female members of parliament out of 120 (17.5%) and 3 female ministers out of 30 (10%). While this picture appears grim, it should also be mentioned that this 18th Knesset is the most inclusive of women in Israel's history. This could be a trend worth considering.

A mapping of the key-positions generating security policy in Israel indicates, there are either little or no women involved. Structures in the formal dimension include: the Prime Minister's office (NSC and Atomic Energy Commission; Government (PM, National Security Cabinet, Ministries: Security, Homeland Security, Internal Security); the Parliamentary Committee on Security and Foreign Affairs and its significant sub-committees (Defense Budget, Intelligence and Secret Services, Security Concept and Force Buildup, Preparedness and Routine Security); Mossad; GSS (General Security Service); and, IDF General Staff. Aside for a small number of exceptions which attest to what could become a positive trend, these structures hardly include women in senior and core positions.

In the non-formal dimension, often the more intimate and influential one, those positions include: exclusive membership in the PM's ministerial "Kitchenette" ('Forum Septet'), or, special envoys representing the PM in negotiations. Here Israeli women are completely absent.

---

[1] http://www.un.org/events/res_1325e.pdf

Different levels of action could be taken in order to generate an alternative security concept. These include a variety of spheres such as:

- **Conceptual**: dealing with the actual definition of national security

- **Structure: constructing planning processes in addition to the military one**

- **Legislation: passing an act in the spirit of the 'Goldwater-Nichols act'2 dealing** with the nature of strategic decision-making in Israel

- **Transparency: generating a mechanism that binds the Israeli defense system to accountability budgetary wise and increases its transparency**

- **Cultural: initiating processes (such as trainings and school curricula) that generate agents of change with respect to fostering an alternative view of defense to the traditional one**

- **Learning from others: taking an example from other states which have already created a National Action Plan (NAP) with respect to Women, Peace and Security (such as the US NAP published in December 2011).**

---

[2] The Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 caused the most significant defense reorganization in the US since the National Security Act of 1947. Operational authority was centralized through the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs as opposed to the service chiefs. The chairman was designated as the principal military advisor to the president, National Security Council and secretary of defense. The act established the position of vice-chairman and streamlined the operational chain of command from the president to the secretary of defense to the unified commanders.