

Book Review

David Rodman (2024) *Israel's national security predicament: Guarding the Third Temple.*

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This is a concise book about the Israeli national security. It analyses the national security apparatus itself, the security doctrine that has directly impacted the development of this apparatus in the past decades and the security challenges the Israeli state and nation have faced and continue to face. The advantage of this research, besides its pertinence and timely publication, is the book's encompassing character which provides an overview for all readers interested in national security, Israel in general, or, for comparative purposes, the security doctrines and strategies of other states. The style of the author makes this book a handbook-style introduction for those who are willing to learn about Israel's security structures, while also offering interesting details for those who are already familiar with the topic. Some of these security structures did change overtime but it is this evolving pattern that is described within these pages, which makes this book interesting to take into account when studying military policy and civil–military relations.

The book is divided into eight chapters, which address the following topics: the history of Israeli's national security, its foundations, strategy and warfare paradigms, goals and realities, new battlefields (kinetic and cyber), alliances and soldiering, foreign policy, and domestic trends.

Israel is one of the rarest countries in the world that is in a perpetual state of war. Since its creation, it has waged war for at least eight times and engaged in at least twenty war-like armed conflicts. The reasons for this perpetual state of war lie in its history, the circumstances of its creation, and its geographical location. Upon its establishment, Israel was

surrounded by hostile Muslim countries and populations. Its initial security doctrine was truly the one of survival. Interestingly, a formal written version of this survival doctrine was only drafted in the 2000s. It is the so-called Meridor Committee Doctrine 2006 (Meridor and Eldadi, 2019) and is authorised by the Israeli government. Notably, parts of this document remain shrouded in secrecy and the (international) public has access only to some of its public segments.

In this context, Israel's national security seems to be a complex topic to study and the author does explain these circumstances that make such a study intricate. The national security apparatus *per se* is probably unique in the world which has a goal not only to protect the citizens of the country but also its extensive diaspora across the world. When speaking about national security, the author of this book uses the concept of the Israeli "experience" (which is a "hint" to Tal's [2000] book) and rightfully so, because Israel's national security is not only the responsibility of its institutions but is also shaped by a collective imagination, which stems from the fact that this nation once faced total annihilation and is painfully reminded that that can happen again. In a constant state of danger, the Israeli national security has developed its own strategy and a glossary of security that goes with it. For instance, it differentiates between "basic" national security challenges and "current" (or, more aptly, "chronic") national security challenges. Such a way of thinking—creating a specialised language for addressing special, local national security concerns—is a potentially thought-provoking blueprint for other countries in more or less similar situations of immediate threat. The goal-oriented political geography of the country, as explained by the author, divides countries or rather "actors" according to the principles rooted in national security. Such an analytical approach offers an utterly different political perspective from the usual, Western-hemisphere model, centred on its own political interests (and often blissfully unaware of other existing models, I would personally add).

Of course, such an analytical model is not flawless and the author dedicates space to describing various blunders which were later re-examined by several commissions with a task to improve Israel's national security and learning from past mistakes (for instance, the Agranat Commission, the Winograd Commission, and the Kahan Commission, to mention a few, which were established to address issues created by the IDF or other security branches).

In a situation of perpetual armed conflict, it is not sufficient to defend from danger and Rodman does provide space in his analysis for that challenge. Hence, the uniqueness of the Israeli model: it developed strategies of deterrence and to discourage its adversaries. These concepts are of great importance in the present geopolitical situation, as they offer an understanding of the current and future military actions of this country. Worth pondering for the reader is that when dissuasion and discouragement do not bear fruits, what is left is an act of *manu militari*, where the last hope is invested.

However, the Israeli model does offer nuances between the development of open hostilities and discouragement: as for instance, deterrence by punishment and Rodman explains these differences to the reader. Anyone following the current Israel– Hamas and Hezbollah war (October 2023 and ongoing) will interpret the current events in light of this analytical model. No Arab country has initiated an open war against Israel since the 1967 Yom Kippur War (a detail that is sharply underlined by the author); however, the use of proxies has proven to be both lethal and politically savvy (especially on the international level) to set the Israeli machine of national security into motion. In the recent past the return of partial chunks of territories was a fatal error, as the author notices, and rightfully so: it enabled terrorist organisations to cement themselves close to their target. It remains to be seen what new additions this conflict will bring to the existing model and what lessons will be learned.

The question of territory hence is crucial when dealing with Israel's national security, and David Rodman rightly dedicates a whole chapter (Chapter 2) to this theme in his book. Withdrawing from territories created one set of problems, but the acquisition of the biblical ones did as well. Having under control a hostile population with a high fertility rate brings *per se* another set of risks to national security—stretching in practice the eternal slogan “damned if you do, damned if you don’t” to its limits, as the author discusses this challenge. In military terms, this means that in practice, one must fight with quality against the quantity. It is here, perhaps, that the Israeli national security establishment proved to be quite original in finding solutions, as the author points out. Operational intelligence remains a key to overcoming challenges when getting into combat against a numerical superiority, and as we can see, it has its dysfunctions as well: a case in point was the recent attack on Israel, which happened after this book was sent to print. As in the case of the 1967 Yom Kippur War, when military intelligence failed to provide timely data—exposed later by the Agranat Commission enquiry—we can presume that the events of 7 October 2023 also resulted from dysfunctions in the existing complex operational intelligence services. An attentive reader will anticipate a future study on Israel's military intelligence and national security, which will shed light on that weak spot.

The national trauma, which sometimes is referred to in the everyday experience as the “siege mentality”—as one of Rodman's interviewees formulates it—has shaped a balance between civil and military relations since the early days of Israel, and the Israeli society can openly be called a highly militarised one. However, past events (numerous terror attacks: more than 4,400 between 1970 and 2020, according to the Global Terrorism Database [GTD]; National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism [START]), social alterations (the political shift from the Left to the Right), and demographic changes (the high fertility rate of orthodox Jews who were exempt from military service) in the country have exposed growing cracks in the social fabric. Rodman discusses these circumstances in his book (Chapters 6 and 8) and deals with these topics as well.

Geography cannot be overlooked when discussing any country's national security, and the issue of water is also addressed in this book. The Middle Eastern climate and its deserts pose a great challenge to all populations, especially those which are constantly growing, for the simple fact that these populations need to be fed and their crops watered. Hence, Israel's quiet and determined efforts to ensure itself as a “water superpower” and Rodman assesses this facet of national security too. Demography is often overlooked in discussions on national security strategy. One cannot forget that the fertility rate in Israel is three children per woman (compared to 4.4 in Gaza, according to 2023 data), much of which is attributed to the growing orthodox (Haredi) population, a part of the Israeli population that historically was exempt from serving in the IDF. The author mentions this challenge of conscription in Israel; however, the events of 7 October 2023 have shifted this trend. It remains to be seen whether this tendency will remain after the end of the present war.

It is difficult to write and to publish about a topic whose predicaments can shift from one day to the next, as is the case with Israel and the entire Middle Eastern region, where armed conflicts are very frequent. In retrospect, Rodman has produced an abridged work that nevertheless remains relatable even after the events of 2023–2024, which occurred after his manuscript was already sent to the publisher.

However, it seems that the author falls into the trap of the Western interpretational paradigm when holding on to the “two-state solution” on his pages and deliberates about the everlasting conflict between the Arab and Jewish populations in the region. Indeed, such a solution seems ideal for the Westerners who prefer the “two-state solution” whenever two populations seem unable to coexist (as seen, for example, in Cyprus or Kosovo).

However, in the realm of realpolitik, especially after the events of 7 October 2023, the situation seems utterly different. One has to keep in mind that the Palestinian elite did not support such a solution since the creation of Israel in 1948. Such a solution did not please most Palestinian political movements and political parties in the past, with Hamas standing out as the one whose ultimate goal has been the annihilation of Israel, not to mention the stance of Muslim countries (the 1967 Khartoum Conference being the case proving the point). The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has fifty-seven member states. Among them, a few have taken steps to normalise relations with Israel. Notably, Egypt and Jordan have long-standing peace treaties with Israel. More recently, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain have also established formal diplomatic relations through the Abraham Accords. However, only six OIC countries have formally recognised Israel. It must also be emphasised that Israel is the only Jewish state in the world. Therefore, creating yet another Muslim state, just in the neighbourhood, would be politically more than counterproductive. In that spirit, the solution to the ongoing conflict between Israel and several surrounding Muslim countries must come locally and it should not be imposed by the ideals of the Western hemisphere.

Rodman's scholarly contribution serves as a solid introduction for both students and experts of national security. Over the past two decades numerous wide-ranging and comprehensive scholarly works have been published on the topic of national security in Israel. These books (Bar-Joseph, 2001; Inbar, 2008; Rabinovich and Brun, 2017; Tal, 2000's *Israel's National Security Towards the 21st Century* (2001), Tal's *National Security. The Israeli experience* (2000), Inbar's *Israel's National Security Issues and challenges since the Yom Kippur War* (2008) Rabinovich and Brun's *Israel facing a new Middle East. In search for a national security strategy* (2017) and so forth) helped to navigate the informed and less-informed readership through this complex theme in the past years.

Writing about Israeli national security is a hard task. Describing an ever-changing political situation and challenges that go with it is difficult enough, but when speaking about national security, the task becomes even greater. This book provides a timely and accurate contemporary analysis, particularly if the author's goal is for the book to remain "readable" in a decade as well. In that spirit, Rodman's book, although basic, merits attention.

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