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Resilience

Abstract

Resilience is the mother of all strategic issues. This is primarily because in most human endeavours it is a necessary and indispensable condition for the achievement of any worthwhile and sustainable objective. It is only rarely that the balance of power is so overwhelmingly in favour of one party and the other parties cannot or never even try to challenge their unfavourable position. When challenged by a considerable, let alone more powerful opponent, resilience may determine the outcome more than the physical resources mobilized and deployed by the parties. Whereas it may seem like a "soft" component of the political, social or military arsenal, is often the decisive one in the ultimate test. Weaker parties always count on it and stronger often underestimate its significance.

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Resilience is crucially important in the kind of war that democratic open societies increasingly, almost exclusively, find themselves engaged in: against much weaker authoritarian societies who build their strategy on the assumption of the structural resilience gap in their favour. They assume that democratic societies are too spoiled and have too many scruples to be resilient, while autocracies can rely, on top of authentic sentiment, also on political and social coercion to produce dedication to the cause far beyond what the individual may want to exhibit out of his own volition. If democracies cannot build up voluntary determination to indefinitely pursue self-defence, even an aggressive version thereof if need be, in the face of unscrupulous authoritarian enemies, and prove that the apparent resilience of the latter can be cracked, all the military and economic advantage of the most powerful Western societies may not save them from eventual decline.

Effective decisions on resilience require, more than in most other concerns of the national decision makers, a very multifaceted and comprehensive discussion of all four major components of strategic thinking. *First*, a very wide variety of issues - mostly elusive "soft" attributes - need to be considered. *Second*, he needs to identify out of dozens of relevant issues those that are supremely imperative for resilience and compromise most others for their sake. *Third*, the decision maker must constantly keep his ear to the ground, realizing that today's effective response could be counterproductive tomorrow. *Fourth*, special attention is required, particularly in protracted conflicts, to long term considerations. Decisions concerning resilience are more intuitive in nature than any other. A decision maker can be professionally instructed about possible ingredients, but identifying the winning mix and center of gravity is the essence of inspired leadership.

While the examples concerning national resilience that are most often discussed are related to the extreme cases of war and violent confrontations, resilience is not less important, in the long run even more important, in other national emergencies. Two historical traumas of Western societies may demonstrate this: the Great Depression in the United States and the effects of WW I on the recent history of Europe. The Depression was a massive trauma to the American People. America's

recuperation after its horrific hardships is a testimony to the strength of its national resilience at the time. In contrast, Europe did not fully recuperate from the Great War even after a hundred Years. The lessons of catastrophic consequences of European appeasement on the eve of WWII and the grave mistakes of some of its elites during the Cold War did not override their obsession with "Nie wieder Krieg", as if War is the ultimate evil, even worse than capitulation or acquiescence with totalitarian hegemony ("better red than dead"). The polarizing response decades later of European societies to the post 2015 immigration crisis was anything but resilient.

Whereas this discussion is focused on the resilience of open and democratic societies, some attention to the resilience of different cultures and value systems can be useful to better understand what fortifies or undermines authoritarian societies they are often confronting. Non-democratic societies may demonstrate a high level of resilience that can be sustained for a relatively long period of time, but then they inexplicably crack or even reach a meltdown. This is often a product of a deficit of pluralism and of substituting the constructive element of society building with a quest for long lost national glory to be proud of. In this category Russia seems to offer a good example.

Even when such societies display the ability to sustain struggle and endure suffering for a long time, a profoundly different kinds of resilience at play: when open and pluralistic societies resolve to stand their ground, their determination is more likely to be deep rooted and lasting. Resilience that is superimposed in a non-pluralistic system may be better than disintegration, but eventually not much better. Building a non- democratic version of resilience in North Korea or in Stalin's Russia through indoctrination or by intimidation and force is relatively easy, particularly when it can draw on an authentic determination (like in Russia's Great Patriotic War). Convincing people to hold for a long time under very difficult circumstances is another matter. Some Third World nations pride themselves of never yielding until they achieve what they consider to be historic justice. This may have been a reasonable position in the anti-colonial struggles for independence, but not under profoundly different circumstances generations later. Western democracies are not seeking the renowned resilience of cockroaches. Survival is indeed a crucial precondition, but the constructive impulse is what builds and strengthens a society providing quality of life and resilience that helps sustain it

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Eight conditions seem to be the most important for building resilience in an open society. The struggle must be perceived as meaningful, just, eventually winning and worthwhile. The response should be effective and somewhat punitive. The outcome must bring the society together rather than tear it apart.

- ***Steadfastness Is Meaningful***. Convincing people that their standing and their suffering, have meaning is key - a meaning not only to themselves, but also to others, not only for their own generation, but for the future. This can only function within a solidarity group, beyond the individual and one's immediate family. The most important functioning solidarity structure is the national.

- ***The Cause Is Basically Just***. For a society to develop resilience the mainstream needs to believe that its cause is basically right. Not that its side is always perfect: it may make mistakes and occasionally even commit occational crimes, but it must be convinced that justice is basically on its side. This is, of course, a matter of conviction, not objective analysis.

- ***Time "Works for Us".*** People must believe that they are not fighting for a lost cause, that at least in the long run, time is "working" for them. Steadfastness may be extremely difficult today, but it will get more tolerable tomorrow, even easier later and ultimately bear the desirable fruits.

- ***A Good Life, Worth Defending***. When people believe that their life is essentially good, beyond their inevitable complaints and grievances, they are willing to take a lot of punishment to defend it. A good life is not necessarily a comfortable, a wealthy, free of care or a safe one. This elusive element relates to a feeling of satisfaction and is a matter of subjective judgement.

- ***A Functioning Response System***. Even under extreme circumstances, when the challenge is formidable, the perception that there is an essentially effective response at hand, rather than helplessness or incompetence, builds resilience and perseverance.

- ***A Positive Macro Strategic Perspective can overshadow major difficulties***. What is being achieved is by far more significant than what is being sacrificed, not only for the collective but ultimately also in the overall calculus of the individual.

- ***A Modicum of Retribution*** (preferably carefully camouflaged). The enemy should not be perceived as "getting away" with aggression. The infliction of injury and destruction on the enemy is required to satisfy a sense of justice, that is needed more than ever when people are suffering.

- ***National Consensus in Face of the Challenge***. This is a condition of a different nature, as it relates to the structure of the political and social community before the test the society faces and the effect this test has on the society after the test is over. A polarized society is much less

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resilient than one that has a solid majority in the middle of the political spectrum. A challenge that polarizes the society will make it much less resilient when the next challenge comes along.

A lot of these conditions depend on leadership. Putting the struggle in a perspective that generates hope, installs confidence, gives it meaning and mobilizes solidarity depends not only on the effectiveness of the measures taken. It rests to a large extent on the leader's inspired cultural identification of his people's motivations, anxieties and aspirations and on the leader's subsequent ability to harness its latent emotional resources to the pursuit of its collective objectives.

Two Case Studies – Israel and Europe

A comparison of two very different open and democratic societies in crises - a variety of European states on the one hand, and the nation state of Israel on the other - can not only illustrate the significance of the specific conditions discussed above. It can also explain the striking differences in the level and characteristics of resilient behaviour in both societies, beyond the obvious dissimilarities between the challenges they are confronting.

Israel

Israel's national challenges are unique, both in nature and in magnitude. For more than a century, long before political independence, the Jewish community and the state it established in 1948 lived in the shadow of persistent war, terrorism, boycott and delegitimization, usually with a strong existential dimension. Moreover, there is no indication that these extreme challenges will cease to burden Israel in the foreseeable future. No other open society ever endured for generations threats of any comparable scale or severity with no prospect of anticipatable termination.

Within the last decade and a half, since the beginning of the present century, Israelis experienced, to mention but a few, a massive Palestinian terror campaign in their population centres with about 1200 fatalities and 16000 wounded (the "Second Intifada") a war in Lebanon and three major confrontations in Gaza, with missiles targeting Israel's major cities and towns. It is also confronted an advanced military nuclear project by a regional power - Iran - openly stating its objective to obliterate the Jewish state, as well as an arsenal of 130000 rockets and missiles accumulated by an Iranian proxy in Lebanon similarly committed to the destruction of Israel. At the same time it is also experiencing isolation and defamation in hostile international organizations and witnessing a major wave of antisemitism in Europe.

Israeli resilience in face of all this is manifested in both word and deed: not only by an unusually large portion of Israelis that persistently proclaim enjoying a good life and expecting their life to be even

better in the near future. It is also manifested in their behaviour: particularly as reflected in the increasing birth rate and the extremely low emigration rate, considering the unique combination of threats and opportunities. With 3.1 children per woman, Israeli women bare one child more than the average of OECD, twice as many as in some of the more developed countries in Europe and Asia. Moreover, unlike other societies, educated and well off Israeli women, committed to their career stand out in the number of children they bear. This is happening in spite of an exceptionally high rate of working women, second only to Finland, in spite of the towering cost of living, with secular women showing the most dramatic recent increase of birth rates.

Emigration from Israel seems to be relatively low compared to OECD countries. Whereas comparable data is often debatable, sometime questionable and rarely updated, the per-capita ratio of Israelis who emigrate is considerably lower than that of peaceful Switzerland or affluent Germany. This is true in spite of the Israeli protracted reality of recurring wars, extensive terrorism, mounting external threats and structural domestic inter-communal tensions. An unusually high portion of Israelis hold dual citizenship, holding European or American passports, possess the most wanted professional and linguistic skills, that makes them desirable and "integrateable" immigrants in Western countries. This unique combination of "push" and "pull" factors could have explained a dramatically higher emigration ratio.

Israelis of almost all convictions are profoundly convinced that their steadfastness is historically, collectively and personally meaningful. This is deeply encored in a deep commitment to national solidarity shared by the mainstream of the Jewish and Druze populations with the tacit acquiescence of many of Israel's Arab citizens. Mainstream Israelis also strongly believe that their cause is essentially just and worth fighting for. Their experience since the beginning of their national enterprise and the establishment of their state convinced them that with Israel as the most formidable regional power time has been and is "working" in their favour in terms of an ever strengthening security posture vis a vis their enemies. This holds true even when the conduct of their struggle is getting consistently more complex and often frustrating. They are also well aware that they enjoy a good life worth defending, not only by the stumpy standards of the Middle East, but even by any Western developed yardstick.

While Israelis are acutely aware of the inadequacies of the response systems to the kind of war against the civilian population and infrastructure that they expect from their Arab and Iranian enemies, they are also cognisant of the enormous efforts invested in these systems and their outstanding success compared to any other. Their expectations are realistic, because they understand the structural limitations in preventing any and all harm to the population.

Israel invested colossal resources - national attention, scientific innovation, financial investment, technological venture - in passive and active defence, offering the population the most comprehensive, though far from perfect, protection system any state has ever provided or is likely to deliver in the foreseeable future. This ever challenged and ever improving system includes a wide variety of measures - from four layer missile defence, through massive anti-tunnel barriers and security fences, to effective intelligence and well-trained anti-terrorist unites, as well as family bomb-shelters and nationally coordinated civil response measures.

This structure is, of course, penetrable and suffers from the inevitable shortcomings and specific incompetencies bedevilling every massive and complex structure, but Israelis, alongside justified and vocal complaints, don't feel forlorn or helpless in their time of ultimate need. They know that enormous efforts were and are exerted to minimize their distress, and essentially know what to do when they need to deal with their personal and communal difficulties. All this is, again, encored in a strong feeling of national solidarity.

Paradoxically, Israeli resilient optimism in dealing with the hardships of any specific confrontation, is rooted in the deep pessimism mainstream Israelis entertain concerning regional peace and the expectations of Israel no longer having to face major violent challenges from its regional neighbours. Cognisant that a war of the kind Israel is facing in recent decades is "just one of those things" it endured in the past and is likely to be inflicted on her in the future, Israelis remember that their phenomenal success as an ever strengthening state and ever improving quality of life for its individuals was not essentially impeded, if occasionally slowed down, by those wars. In time of duress it is comforting to know that the macro perspective may temporarily be somewhat dimmed but certainly not overshadowed by insurmountable inflictions.

With the exception of a small elite that is progressively losing the trust and even attention of the mainstream, Israelis recognize that they are confronted by genuine enemies (not mere "adversaries") and seek not just to minimize their own anguish, but also to inflict a measure of retribution on these aggressive enemies. A recurring comment to journalist interviewers of Israelis who are confined for weeks to air raid shelters while their neighbourhoods are bombarded is: "I am willing to stay here for as long as it takes, provided our army makes sure that the aggressors won't get away with what they have done". This is considered not only as measure of deterrence, but also as satisfying a need of a form of justice. While collateral damage to innocent civilian casualties on the other side is regretted, widespread losses to enemy combatants and destruction of their infrastructure are celebrated. It is much easier to sustain the cost of war when people are satisfied that the instigators paid a potentially prohibitive price.

What seems to be in the long term the most important explanation, as well as the most encouraging product of Israel's resilience in its protracted conflict, is the structure that places the clear majority of the Jewish population in the center of the political and social spectrum. Israel benefited from such a structure since the emergence in 1930 of *Mapai*, with the exception of the period between the First Lebanon War in the beginning of the 1980s to the "Second Intifada" in the very beginning of the 2000s. For 20 years the society and the political system were polarized between a hard line-Ultraorthodox coalition on the right and a dovish-Israeli-Arab coalition on the left. Both engaged in a destructive zero-sum game of launching irreversible policies (settlements for the right, Oslo for the left).

Whereas the Israeli political system, like most democracies, suffers from polarisation and is widely mistrusted by an important segment of the population, nevertheless, the Israeli society in the last two decades features a well-balanced structure: a small minority on the deep left, a somewhat larger minority on the deep right and about two thirds in the center of the political spectrum. Members of this center generally accept that the reality of an indefinite violent conflict cannot be terminated by Israel, either by means of a "once and for all" war or through a "once and for all" peace. This puts each specific confrontation in a historical perspective of realistic choices, that is conducive to resilience: the perspective of "one of those things" that happen in the unstable and violent Middle East, to be dealt with pragmatically - rather in terms of damage control, than in terms of definitive solution. People can be much more resilient when they agree that a confrontation may disrupt their way of life, but it is not threatening its very foundation.

Europe

Comparing a state with a continent comprised of more than two dozen extremely divergent nations that only recently embarked on an unprecedented route to establish a voluntary union, is of course tricky and potentially misleading. In light of the similar commitment to democracy and the core values of an open society and the related threat of terrorism, it could, however, be fruitful to compare the societies' response to major exogenous challenges and to comment on the reasons for what seems to be a comparatively fragile European immune system.

The most outstanding exogenous challenges Europe is facing are three - Russian aggression, domestic terrorism and massive unwelcomed immigration. The last two originate primarily in Muslim communities in Europe and abroad.

To the Russian aggression Europeans have essentially decided to respond by denial. To the occupation of Crimea and the blatant intervention in the Ukraine they have responded with limited sanctions. To the much more dangerous Russian cyber campaign, designed to systematically undermine European

societies, they have no response at all. Their military forces are, with a few exceptions, grossly underfunded and mostly ill prepared. To say that they are strategically inadequate would be a gross understatement. Europe acts as if a major confrontation is not only unthinkable but also like in the worst case scenario Europeans will not be expected to contribute, alongside the United States, their share in their own defence. What they are planning is an even greater crippling dependence (through the proposed Nord Stream 2 pipeline) on Russian energy.

Europe's terrorism challenge is miniscule in magnitude and physical impact compared to that Israel is facing for decades. With a population about 100 times larger than that of Israel at the time of the "Second Intifada", the equivalent of terrorism casualties in Europe within a few years would have been a staggering 120,000 fatalities and 1.6 million wounded. In spite of the relatively few losses, it is nevertheless much more difficult for Europeans to explain and digest the phenomenon. The simple minded European explanation for Arab terrorism against Israel is "resistance to occupation" (ignoring the pre 1967 and pre 1948 legacy of Arab terrorism and its repeatedly stated objective of obliterating the Jewish entity). In Europe they have a major difficulty in fully confronting (and often deny) the cultural motivation and the element of tribal revenge, including by Arab citizens born and educated in Europe.

Evaluating European response and comparing it to the Israeli record is difficult because the three challenges require a very different kind of resilience. The magnitude and severity of Russian challenge is essentially denied. There is no real European response that can effectively deal with it. Europeans basically hope that it will go away with a fall-back hope that the Americans will deal with it. The response to the terrorism challenge is essentially operational, such as more police, better intelligence coordination and more defensive precautions in public events. Alongside, there is lately very limited willingness to monitor and restrict the abuse of European civil liberties and the commitment to multicultural ideals by ideologically oriented groups for recruiting, organizing and radicalizing young Muslims. This response brings to mind policing efforts more than an anti-terror campaign, rests more on the hope that terror will not erupt into a massive indiscriminate onslaught, than on an action plan to prevent it or to systematically deal with its roots. The European response to uncontrolled immigration vacillates between irresponsible permissiveness on one pole and wholesale xenophobic rejection on the other.

All three are strongly associated with a low level of resilience. The European society is willing to do very little, certainly compared with the Israeli determination, to stand up to these challenges: to deter Russia, to fight imported and home-grown terrorism and to adopt a reasonable and sustainable immigration strategy.

The most outstanding difficulty for Europeans when it comes to resilience is the framework of solidarity. Following decades of nibbling at the legitimacy of nationalism, often even delegitimizing it altogether, there is no authentic alternative that is strong enough emotionally to take the place of national solidarity in comforting individuals in times of confusion and crisis and offer meaning to their hardship and a perspective of hope for the future. Whereas European solidarity may one very distant day be real enough to substitute for national identity, for the present predicaments it is no more than wishful thinking in extremely narrow circles. Universal solidarity may motivate charitable behaviour with self-assured people in good times, but when uncertainty and distress knock at the door it is ridiculously irrelevant when people yearn for shelter in the comfort of a collective that they trust. In this context it is as unreal as ideologically superimposed class solidarity.

The drive in Europe to diminish and even delegitimize nationalism rests on the assumption that it is bound to slide on the slippery slope towards chauvinism and ultimately perhaps fascism. Paradoxically the attempt to impose artificial post-national structures has already driven European political systems towards the kind of nationalistic parties that are indeed a threat to the open society.

Without a functioning solidarity group, steadfastness has no meaning beyond the individual and beyond the present. Churchill iconic battel cry illustrates it best: after voicing his promise "I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat…We have before us many, many months of struggle and suffering" he set his gloomy prediction in the collective historic perspective that could strike a chord in the British nation - "Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth last for a thousand years, men will still say: 'This was their finest hour'."

Europeans have good reason to be proud of their achievements in their peaceful continent, enjoying unprecedented freedom, civil liberties, welfare and a very high quality of life in general. What they have lost, however, is the will to defend their way of life by themselves, denying the existence of real enemies, except individual terrorists and their organizations. Important elites and what seems to be the mainstream of public opinion have convinced themselves that "soft power" measures that proved so effective in maintenance of the post WWII realities in Europe itself are applicable to world affairs in general.

Europeans have conveniently chosen to forget that only the massive application of "hard power" in WWII made their way of life possible in the first place, and that only the American willingness to use it again provided the strategic deterrence that kept it alive during the Cold War. Since the demise of the Soviet Union war some of their influential elites seek to construct a virtual world order based on a

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hallucinatory "international community" settling differences by way of an international dialogue and the new term they concocted for appeasement of radicals: engagement.

Their governments are not willing either to challenge these irresponsible assumptions, or to allocate the resources necessary for self-defence. Even if they wanted to fund the kind and size of armed forces Europe needs to play a meaningful role in its own defence, they could not find enough people willing to fight for their country. On other matters of policy they can only say what sounds pleasant, even if they know better. The EU that needs the consensus of all states to form a common policy is even more addicted to unrealistic platitudes.

These circumstances make resilience all but impossible. With all the justified pride in Europe's achievements, the general mood is gloomy. Initial hopes have given way to confusion and deep rifts, not only between different countries but also between conflicting convictions concerning the most fundamental issues within each and every one of them. Rather than national consensus (let alone European consensus) in the middle of the political spectrum, most societies are polarized and pursue a zero-sum-game. When there is no common cause, it cannot be perceived as just. When there is no consensus where the country needs to go, time is either "working" for one fraction or for the other. When people have a good life, but are not willing to fight for it with whatever it takes to win and either deny the threat or expect the Americans to respond to it for them, it cannot go very far. If the response system is essentially operative, it may fight terrorists but not provide an effective response that will deny terrorism the option of fundamentally disrupting Europe's way of life.

The best way to evaluate Europe's resilience is to follow its response to 2015 eruption of the refugee crisis. Much more than Markel's initial mistake, it was the earth-shaking response throughout the continent that exposed the deep rooted weakness of the European structure. The seemingly most responsible leader of the most successful country in Europe committed a major misjudgement when she welcomed more than a million people, mostly from cultures that proved in past experience to be very difficult, if not impossible, to integrate in European societies. The shockwaves throughout Europe - in Germany itself, in Britain, France, the Nederland, Sweden, Italy, Austria, Hungary, Poland and other countries, exposed the inability to contain the crisis and avoid a profound polarization. This juxtaposed a combination of genuine compassion, inspiring Universalist platitudes and irresponsible social adventures, on the one hand, with a confused mixture of legitimate social, economic and cultural apprehensions and xenophobic bigotry, on the other. What is distressing is the failure to reconcile all of these within a wide and workable consensus supporting a sustainable plan of action.

 This is where Europe failed so far to fulfil its most inspiring promise - to show haw its pluralism and commitment to open dialogue and human rights can find a workable compromise that will benefit all.

It seems that this stands a much better chance when the society is self-assured and resilient than when it is uncertain with every sector barricaded in its own righteousness.