

A New Consensus: There is no Military Solution'

[זויכראב שופיח](#)

Rabinowitz Danny

[תובתכ תשיכר](#)

Haaretz Op-Ed, November 11 2000

[עדימ זויכראה לע](#)

Four weeks into the first Intifada, in late 1987, prime minister Yitzhak Shamir still referred to the bloody clashes as "minor disturbances" and, with a nonchalant wave of the hand and with the smile of someone who has already seen everything anyway, he promised that Israeli security forces would restore peace and order "in no time flat." Since then, a lot of rocks have been hurled under the bridge, so to speak. Shamir arrived at the Madrid peace conference and paved the way for the Oslo agreement and for the divorce decree that put an end to the Greater Israel vision. In northern Israel, Hezbollah dramatically drove home the point that force has its limits, while teaching Israel's leaders a thing or two - even if somewhat belatedly - about unilateral withdrawals from occupied territory. These lessons, apparently, have not been forgotten by Israeli society. Five weeks into the Al-Aqsa Intifada - which is a more determined, more violent and more grassroots-oriented campaign than the first one - no Israelis are deluding themselves into thinking that this problem can be brought to an end with some magic, instant formula. From every corner of the political arena comes the same mantra-like evaluation: "This situation is going to be around for some time, and it will be painful and damaging to both sides." And a new consensus has emerged: "There is no military solution."

[זובשח בצמ](#)

[המסיס יוניש](#)

[תוריש](#)

[תובוגת](#)

[המסיס יתחכש](#)

This consensus is already having an impact on the dynamics of both the government and the public. Prime Minister Ehud Barak, a leader who, in his military plans, can think several moves ahead and who is well aware of the contact points between tactical and strategic decisions, is basing his policy of restraint on the new consensus. Apparently, both Barak and the top brass of the Israel Defense Forces have internalized the realization that any intensification in Israeli firepower will only further feed the enthusiasm of Palestinian youths. Furthermore, Barak also understands that Israel is only weakened by any direct physical control of Palestinians; thus, he finds the

lunatic option that Likud chief Ariel Sharon is proposing - the renewed capture of "Jericho first," followed by the renewed capture of other Palestinian cities - totally unacceptable. With the absence of any clearly defined military objectives and with the role of soldiers boiling down, as was the case in Lebanon, to "finishing your shift without getting hurt," the policy of restraint is becoming the sole rational option available in the face of all the chaos.

If you also factor in Israel's fear of horrific scenes on TV that could lead to international intervention in the territories, you can then understand why there have so far been no incidents with dozens or even hundreds of casualties.

Israel and the Palestinians are trapped today in the kind of junction that is a well-known phenomenon in world history - that is, a junction where the might of an imperialist military occupying force is ineffective against the energy bursting forth from the civilian population whose land it is occupying and which, in a determined fashion, is fighting for its freedom. As was the case in India, Algeria and Lebanon, a rock can bend a cannon barrel.

Seasoned military commentators know that the IDF has sophisticated contingency plans and highly effective means for the dispersal of demonstrators. These plans and means can, at best, buy a little more time. Down-to-earth reality, in this struggle for the continuation of the Israeli occupation and for the continuation of Israeli control of the Palestinians, is peeping through the crude tatters of aspirations for national unity. In a relatively short while, recognition of this fact will crack the ring of solidarity that the settlers have been enjoying over the past few weeks.

When former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu returned Hebron to the Palestinians, the settlers realized that the ideological successes they had chalked up in certain circles would not stand them in good stead in their attempts to shape the history of both Israel and the Middle East. These successes have been overshadowed by the settlers' failure to persuade the majority of Israeli Jews - whether leftist or rightist - that the settlements are of such crucial importance to the country. "We have managed to create settlements on rocky hilltops," the settlers have often said, "but we have failed to make any inroads into the hearts of Israelis."

The settlers' return to the lap of the national consensus must not be allowed to mislead the Israeli public. The settlers' situation as individuals who are living under conditions of siege and continual

attack is arousing the sympathy of some Israelis. However, the settlers' geopolitical project continues to be alien, bizarre and threatening in the eyes of most Israelis. The greater the focus of the media on the ugly and aggressive incidents in which a portion of the settlers are involved or to which a portion of the settlers tacitly agree - namely, incidents in which Palestinians are intimidated or taunted - the less sympathy there will be for their situation. The settlers will continue their attempts to persuade the Israeli public that Israel and the territories are one and the same thing. However, this struggle is a lost battle from the start and it will diminish in strength as more and more Israelis begin to understand the price they will have to pay for the vision of "settling the territories."

The settlers' failure to turn their vision into one that is embraced by all of Israeli society leaves them with a settlement project that exists beyond the legitimate geographical borders that are solemnly engraved in the Israeli public's consciousness. The English term for this sort of settlement project is "colonialism."

Colonial regimes remain intact so long as the "natives" are willing to passively accept their situation. However, when silent obedience is replaced by a thirst for freedom and by a willingness to fight for that freedom, the power of the colonial empire simply evaporates - like a dream that vanishes the moment you open your eyes. The might that was previously seen as a sheet of impenetrable armor then turns out to be nothing more than a thin layer of ice. With a bit of luck, we will not be forced to see that layer of ice smashed into tiny fragments. Instead, let us melt the ice down ourselves beforehand