

The masculine March of Folly

By Danny Rabinowitz

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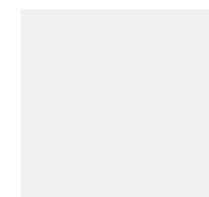
It is a statistical fact that women live longer than men, with the gap in Western states averaging seven years. A study recently released in the United States draws a connection between the gap and what is called "masculine behavior."

Men in crisis, apparently, first try to return to their previous course of life. They take pains to send to themselves and to others a message of toughness and control over their destiny, they tend not to take any preventive treatment, and they avoid changing their way of life and thinking.

Compared to women, few men ask for help, and when it seems to them that the plight has passed they avoid analyzing its reasons. Women, on the other hand, tend to take their traumas seriously, ask for help, process the situation, draw conclusions, and change direction and habits. This, apparently, lengthens their lives, improves their quality of life and makes them, in the long run, stronger and more resistant.

The understanding that toughness is fragile and that flexibility empowers is also relevant in analyzing the behavior of political leadership. Israel, which perceives itself as a society that lives by its sword, consistently elects generals to key government positions that enables military thinking to permeate the decision-making process in governments. The result is patterns of reaction and decision-making that increase ad absurdum behavioral components that the study identifies with masculinity: rigidity, an insistence on autonomy and control, an obstinate adherence to a line perceived as consistent, and a limited willingness to make adjustments and changes required by circumstances.

This behavior pattern is greatly responsible for the rigidity reflex that appears in Israel's decision-making process every time it makes political sense to be flexible. The possibility of

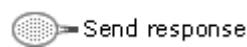


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entering political negotiations, of lifting some of the closures, of releasing prisoners and of course giving up territories - even negligible ones like the land offered in the disengagement plan - puts security types on the defensive.

When discussing concessions, there will always be senior officers and ministers who will remind you that the other side might see every concession as surrender, and claim in their stupidity that this in itself is sufficient reason to cancel the concession.

The security oriented official is a prisoner of his own rigidity, surrendering to the urge to display a semblance of power and consistency and thus tossing aside considerations of morality and political expediency. The belief that rigidity and obstinacy provide endurance is behind the preference for unilateral action, a preference Sharon and his advisers have perfected.

Thus, equipped with a desire to fall in line with what was presented in the past as a supreme security consideration, the army was dispatched under various and strange pretexts to places such as Rafah to spread death, mayhem and destruction, and to eliminate, in a rush of toughness, any chance of political solution and future stability.

Political behavior based on masculine obsessions of power also has a status element. Men whose careers are built on military success have an interest in establishing such an agenda, even if in the long run it will undermine the stability of our life. For this they summon the rational continence of one who appears to be exercising responsible judgment.

However, this performance is credible only until the iron collapses from too much rigidity. Security oriented people who promised peace and security and now appear against the background of the destroyed houses and the crying children, in an inane attempt to protect their short-sightedness, are increasingly appearing like men whose resolve has turned into an irresponsible march of folly.

recommendations for managing over-centralization and conflicts of interest.

By Sami Peretz

If Zionism is supposed to be more than giving Jews a chance to die with honor like men, Israel needs an alternative common sense that will prefer flexible intelligence to rigid aggression. Common sense of the kind that brought "Four Mothers" to the front line of the security debate in 1999, and which Shuvi, the Fifth Mother, Women in Black and other organizations are now trying to bring forth.