Israel's Survival Amid Expanding Chaos

by Louis René Beres (October 2015)

In world politics, preserving order has an understandably sacramental function. The reason is plain. Without minimum public order, planetary relations would descend rapidly and perhaps irremediably into a "profane" disharmony.

It has happened before, since time immemorial.

To be sure, generalized anarchy is not entirely new. In fact, in one form or another, it has long been an integral feature of international relations. This unsteady condition of structurally decentralized authority was even codified at the Peace of Westphalia, in 1648. Nonetheless, it should be borne in mind, anarchy is always less threatening or destabilizing than true chaos.

Today, in the Middle East especially, the fully "normal" absence of supranational authority is being transformed and worsened by something unique and potentially devastating. This "something" is the palpable and simultaneous disintegration of national boundaries, classical power balances, and collective security remedies. Within this literally dreadful pattern of system-wide dissolution, tens of millions of stateless refugees now wander desperately across the earth. At the same time, presumptively sober jurisprudential limits on the spread of nuclear weapons have come to represent little more than a humiliating parody of effective legal controls.

Soon, too, a conspicuously stark juxtaposition of pre-modern ideologies with futuristic weapons could define an unprecedented challenge for dealing with chaos.

In the most uncontroversial narratives of counter-terrorist obligation, even our most industrially backward enemies will have ready recourse to advanced strategies of cyber-defense and cyber-warfare. For the United States, the implications of all this expanding access are deeply profound and predictably worrisome. For Israel a beleaguered mini-state, the implications are far greater.

For Israel, the implications are unambiguously existential.

It is time for candor. International law will not save Israel. Assorted agreement expectations notwithstanding, including those of the sordid new pact with Iran, certain of Israel's Islamic enemies will inevitably "go nuclear." When this happens, there will be foreseeable interactions between individual catastrophic threats, so-called "synergies." These interactions will make the risks of an already-expanding chaos still more pressing. When this occurs, the imperiled region could slip into the primordial chaos of marooned boys in William Golding's great novel, *Lord of the Flies*. Then, all cultivated expectations and ordinary protocols of civilized existence would lie in tatters, mercilessly torn to shreds by what W.B. Yeats had called a "blood-dimmed tide." Then, prophetically, the Irish poet's symbolic "ceremony of innocence" will finally have been "drowned."

For Israel, the pertinent dangers of chaos are both particular and unique. Facing not only an unprecedented nuclear threat from Iran, but also the appearance of Palestine, the Jewish State could quickly find itself engulfed in mass-casualty terrorism, and/or in unconventional war.

In time, as we must now realistically expect, chaos would have its retrograde pride of place. Even together with elements of "international community," there would then be no safety in arms, no rescues from higher political authority, and no comforting reassurances from science. New wars could rage until every flower of culture is trampled, and until all things human were leveled in a vast and more or less primal disorder. Although counterintuitive, chaos and anarchy actually represent opposite end points of the same global continuum. Perversely, mere anarchy, or the absence of central world authority, is "normal." Chaos, however, is *sui generis*. It is "abnormal."

Since the seventeenth century and the end of the Thirty Years' War, the last of the major religious wars sparked by the Reformation, our anarchic world can be best described as a "system." What happens in any one part of this world, therefore, necessarily affects what will happen in some or even all of the other parts. When a particular deterioration is marked, and begins to spread from one nation to another, the corrosive effects could speedily undermine regional and/or international stability.

When deterioration is rapid and catastrophic, as it would be following the start of any unconventional war and/or act of unconventional terrorism, the corollary effects would be correspondingly immediate and overwhelming. These critical effects would be chaotic.

Aware that even an incremental collapse of remaining world authority structures will impact its few friends as well as its many enemies, leaders of the Jewish State will soon need to advance certain precise and plausible premonitions of collapse, in order to chart more durable paths to survival. Such indispensable considerations will be distasteful, of course, and are thus likely not yet underway.

Historically, Israel's leaders have wasted precious time with purely ritualistic considerations of American "road maps" and "peace plans." Soon, and in at least partial consequence of such misspent opportunities, they will need to consider just how to respond to international life in a global state of nature. The specific triggering mechanisms of our already-disassembling world's descent into chaos could originate from a variety of mass-casualty attacks launched against Israel, or from similar attacks against other western democracies. Even the traditionally "powerful" United States, now suffering huge economic, demographic, and infrastructure dislocations, would not be immune to such a remorseless vulnerability.

Jerusalem must take careful note. Any progressively chaotic disintegration of the world system would fundamentally transform the smaller Israeli system. Such a transformation of microcosm by macrocosm could sometime involve total or near-total societal destruction. In prudent anticipation, Israel will have to orient much of its core strategic planning to an assortment of worst-case prospects, now focusing much more deliberately on an expansively wide range of self-help security options. Correspondingly, for Israel, certain once-prominent diplomatic processes of peacemaking that are conveniently but erroneously premised on "scientific" assumptions of reason and rationality will have to be reduced or even renounced.

Israel's one-sided surrender of territories, its mistaken reluctance to accept certain vital preemption options while still timely, and its periodic terrorist releases may never bring about any direct defeat. Taken together, however, these ominously synergistic policy errors will have a cumulatively weakening effect on

Israel. Whether the principal effect here will be one that "merely" impairs the Jewish State's commitment to endure, or one that also opens it up, operationally, to a devastating missile attack, and/or to major acts of terror, is still unclear.

What remains clear is Israel's unwavering obligation to look beyond the somnolent darkness of expanding global and regional chaos, and to acknowledge that the highest sacramental achievements of the Jewish State must inevitably lie in a triumph of mind over mind, not of mind over matter.

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