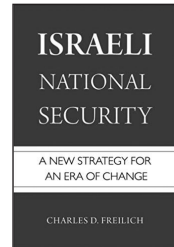

Book Reviews

*Israeli National Security: A New Start for an
Era of Change*

Charles David Freilich,
(New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018)
ISBN 978-0-19-060293-2 pp 470 \$39.95.



Charles D. Freilich's book, *Israeli National Security: A New Start for an Era of Change* is drawn from a unique blend of the host of national security threats confronting Israel, with its logical requirement of being reviewed, and then, sculpted into a comprehensive Israeli national security strategy. Freilich, a former Israeli Deputy National Security Adviser, is a Senior Fellow at Harvard's Belfer Centre. He teaches political science at Harvard, NYU and the Herzliya Inter-Disciplinary Centre and specialises in the fields of Israeli national security strategy, the US' Middle East policy and Middle Eastern affairs at large. Given his expertise, the author seeks to throw his weight behind diplomacy rather than undertaking a militarised approach to the study.

Security concerns have dominated the Israeli political discourse (both at home and abroad) since its inception. This very factor has been manifested in many insightful books on the subject, such as: *Israeli Statecraft : National Security Challenges and Responses* by Yehezkel Dror or *Israeli's National Security* by Efraim Inbar, and others. However, Charles D Freilich's book has connected almost all the dots dealing with the Israeli security apparatus, to include its internal and external national security domains, and contextually established a fine balance between its

historical baggage, with the understanding that not only Israel but the entire region deserves to secure its future.

The book deals with the prevailing geo-political environment Israel finds itself in and its requirement to find friends in the international community, especially the United States of America, covering the whole range of support that the latter extends to Israel, including on the increasingly important financial front. President Trump formally recognising Israel's sovereignty over the Golan Heights recently, substantiates the author's arguments, as also concerns. The book expresses concern over the existential threat to Israel that has got renewed due to the US pulling out of the US-Iran nuclear deal. It also underlines the realisation of the fact that Israel cannot do it alone (anymore) and must find more friends, which in the current geo-politics must include the European Union (EU), India, Russia and China. More specifically, as the author categorically notes, national security involves many domains of national power other than military capability. Freilich posits that Israel "faces foreign policy and demographic challenges that may prove to be almost as dangerous to its long-term future as the military threats, in some ways may be more so".

The book has been divided into four parts, with the chapters detailing the author's arguments most aptly and exhaustively. Part one on "Confronting a Strategic Nightmare", introduces the reader to the most defining attribute of Israel's existence, that is, the Jewish will power, which manifested in Israel's birth as a nation state amidst the most hostile neighbourhood and regional powers.

It exposes the reader to the tenets, distinctions and nuances of the 'Ben-Gurion Doctrine', that underlined the Israeli security paradigm and response, as late as the 1980s. The very first chapter puts into perspective the great asymmetries Israel faced since its inception, in terms of an extremely hostile Arab neighbourhood and lack of geographical space (thus, resultant resources). In this part of the book, the author also

reveals the three components/pillars of the Israeli response, as part of the Israeli national security strategy formulated mainly by the founding Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, duly advised by the senior Generals of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) viz, deterrence, early warning and military decision.

Part two of the book themed as “A Strategic Environment Transformed,” lays down an environment scan for the reader in three broad terms viz., the first two being an analysis of the primary changes in the nature of Israel’s security environment and the strategic constraints in the past few decades; while the last gives out a synopsis of the present Israeli security environment, akin to a lone ranger forced to fight for its survival, however, with a caveat that it can survive only if it wins each bout, that too, decisively.

In part three on “Israel’s Strategic Response”, the author analyses the effectiveness and efficacy of the three components/pillars of the Israeli response viz., deterrence, early warning and military decision, with an addition of another pillar—that of defence. Freilich provides a critical assessment of each of the pillars in the context of the responses that Israel has exuded in the past, coupled with their applicability and relevance to the new, hybrid and ever increasing challenges that Israel faces presently, both internally and externally. In doing so, the author has also highlighted the limitations of each of these pillars in the prevailing security environment and the geo-politics confronting Israel in the current times.

Finally, the fourth part on “A National Security Strategy for an Era of Change”, lays down the crux of the analysis of the changed nature and character of threats in the Israeli security calculus. In a comprehensive manner, this section provides detailed and precise policy recommendations to the Israeli leadership, as also every other country, institute, think-tank and individual interested in the nature of threats presently facing Israel and its response options to deal with them holistically.

Owing to its comprehensive assessment, Charles D. Freilich's book is current with the environs that Israel finds itself in viz, the Arab states as a collective front, the existential threat from Iran, the chances of Saudi Arabia acquiring weapons of mass destruction, the chemical weapons threat from Syria, the projectiles with increasing lethality, range and accuracy in the hands of Hezbollah and Hamas, coupled with the perennial threat from terrorism and cyber/hybrid warfare. The book provides a holistic, insightful, unbiased and data backed analysis of the threats faced by Israel. It offers precise and concrete ways ahead to the present Israeli leadership, as also to anyone interested in the security environment and resultant future of the Promised Land and the countries posing threats (including existential) to the promise of that land. His arguments, prognosis and recommendations are duly backed with his years of experience, coupled with well researched and unpublished data, supporting his analysis of the present threats faced by Israel to the last word. The suggestions laid out are pragmatic and precise, almost a ready-made security review, with futuristic milestones laid threadbare, for the consideration of the present Israeli policy-makers. However, the author's significant suggestion in this book is that of opting for other means (mostly, diplomatic and political) over military options. In doing so, the author fails to take into account that the standing of Israel as a prominent nation is primarily owing to the response/s it has had to the threats it has faced, with most of them being military in nature. The Israeli leadership and population will do well to realise that, unfortunately, they do not possess many of the attributes that define power in terms of nation building viz, geographical expanse, resources, population, etc., etc., and, hence, the proverbial Jewish will power, which manifested in Israel's birth at the first place and its sustenance till today, will perhaps be the most important reason for their survival in the future too.

Overall, the book makes a comprehensive, coherent and lucid read. This is a must read for, at the foremost, the Israeli policy-makers

and thereafter for any nation, department, institute, think-tank and individuals who are not only interested in the happenings in Israel but are also entrusted with safeguarding their own countries from a myriad threats, similar to the ones faced by Israel today.

From India's perspective, the book is of immense importance to Indian readers, from the entire spectrum of various defence agencies and related professionals to academics and researchers, under a two-fold way: first, to facilitate educative debates on national security issues (India is facing similar challenges); and, secondly, to initiate India to come out of its inertia and craft its national security strategy by laying down time-bound objectives, with dedicated fund allotment. Hence, the book's opening quote by the Israeli founding Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion viz., "The most dangerous enemy of Israel's security is the conceptual inertia of those responsible for its security", are words that India can ignore only at its peril.

Puneet Doval

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