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## Israel digging its own grave

Linda Heard

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By refusing to make any real concessions to achieve peace, Israel is digging its own grave. Israelis exist in a state of low-key fear of obliteration that has become absorbed into their psyche. They're so used to it that it has become part of who they are. The Jewish state may call itself a democracy but in fact it's a militarized entity always alert to criticism and attacks from its foes within and without. If Israelis feel vulnerable it's their own fault. They've had several opportunities to make peace during past decades but, on each occasion, they've chosen to hang on to Palestinian land illegally grabbed in 1967.

They believe they have the right to continually flout international humanitarian law, send assassination squads around the world and militarily threaten neighboring Lebanon, Syria and Iran without any comeback. They see themselves as eternal victims when they are, in reality, the region's aggressors. This type of siege mentality reminds me of the abandoned dog I recently found cowering in the street that I felt compelled to bring home. He never stopped growling and snarling and when approached he sank his teeth into my hand. The difference is that dog was acting instinctually; he didn't possess the thought processes needed to realize that offering his paw in friendship was the fastest route to his own comfort and security. Israelis have the necessary, exclusively human, critical faculties to understand that aggression begets aggression but their addiction to power and expansionism acts as a veil over reason. Each year that passes the window for peace narrows.

If Israelis fail to lift that veil in the foreseeable future long enough for sincere cooperation with the peace process, the only alternative is war. Most Israelis don't admit their fears that are either buried deep or converted into bravado. They've enjoyed a string of military successes in the past and until they received an unexpected beating from Hezbollah in 2006 they thought their army was invincible. Since, they have become far more vulnerable. Israel may be a nuclear-armed power but a nuclear capability is worth little against Lebanon or Syria due to its close proximity while any nuclear attack on Iran would affect its US ally that has a substantial presence in the vicinity. The next regional war will be no picnic and it appears that Netanyahu's government is acutely aware of impending danger primarily from Iran. In May, Israel began distributing gas masks to its population and there are plans to dig massive underground bunkers, each one capable of protecting tens of thousands of citizens from biological or chemical attacks.

The first of eleven will hold 5,000 and is scheduled to be built 260 feet down under a Jerusalem train station with a 35-mile-long tunnel linking it to a central bunker in Tel Aviv. It will be equipped with supplies of food and water for the long term as well as sophisticated air filtering machinery, communications tools and everything needed for medical emergencies. No government would undertake such an extensive and expensive project in today's cash-strapped times unless it viewed the potential threat as real. Certainly Israel's outgoing head of Military Intelligence Maj. Gen. Amos Yadlin thinks it is. Earlier this month, Yadlin came out with a grave warning. "The recent security calm is unprecedented," he said, "but there should be no mistake that there are efforts (by elements) in the area to grow stronger. The next military confrontation will not be between Israel and another country but between Israel and two or three different fronts at the same time. It will not be similar to anything we have grown accustomed to during the Second Lebanon War or Operation Cast Lead," he told a Knesset panel. Yadlin predicted a far greater threat from a strengthened Syria that has acquired advanced S-300 anti-aircraft mobile systems from Russia. "The effective, deadly missiles will make it more difficult for the air force to have freedom of operations," he said. He further warned that Hezbollah is also growing stronger in terms of advanced weaponry and expects S-300 missiles will be passed by Damascus to Hezbollah's military wing.

A recent report published by A-Sharq Al-Awsat expresses the concerns of a former Lebanese President Amin Gamayel that Hezbollah may be plotting with its allies to take over Lebanon and turn it into an Iranian satellite or a launching pad to attack the Jewish state. If that is the plan, a fuse may be lit by indictments of Hezbollah members expected to be issued next month by the UN tribunal tasked with investigating the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah denies any involvement and has, instead, produced evidence that points the finger at Israel. On Tuesday, one of Hezbollah's top officials Naim Qassem told the BBC that any indictment constitutes "a warning bell equivalent to lighting the fuse, to igniting the wick for an explosion, and is dangerous for Lebanon." It goes without saying that an Iranian satellite on its doorstep would also be dangerous for Israel. There is a very simple answer to such looming regional crises and to Israel's ultimate security. Israel holds the key but refuses to walk through the door.

Engaging in a peace process that would involve the creation of a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital — blessed by the Palestinians and all Arab League member countries — would put a lid on any bubbling conflict and diminish the crowd-pleasing abilities of Hassan Nasrallah and Iran's leader Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Tehran has indicated on several occasions that it would endorse the will of the Palestinians should any peace process be sealed and would be expected to quit saber rattling. At the same time, Hezbollah's military *raison d'être*, as the only organization capable of defending Lebanon from the Israeli aggressor, would be substantially weakened once Lebanon's only foe is rendered benign. And from a broader world perspective, Middle East peace would likely diminish the numbers of recruits queuing up to join extremist entities such as Al-Qaeda. Peace would put an end to Israel's security worries, bring increased prosperity, and dampen demographic concerns that Israeli Jews will soon be outnumbered. Moreover, there would be no more anti-Israel boycotts, no need for all young Israelis to be conscripted into military service, no necessity for such high taxation — and Israelis could go out into the world with their heads held high. US President Barack Obama's inability to give this country addicted to war a dose of tough love is doing Israelis no favors. The million -shekel question is this: What will it take for Israelis to say 'Enough already!'