

"Since Lebanon, we have gone from failure to failure."

INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR MARTIN VAN CREVELD - PART ONE OF TWO

- Yerushalayim's Giora Ayalon (March 1st): 'Our struggle against the Palestinians is lost, it was lost from the first day of the first intifada and it will finish us', says Professor Martin Van Creveld from the department of history at the Hebrew University, a world renowned expert on military history and strategy. The 56 year old Van Creveld is one of the most respected experts in the world. His books have been translated into ten languages, and he has taught at universities and military academies world wide. He goes in and out of generals' offices like I go to the market. His lecturing specialty: the future of war. Professor Van Creveld is known for his criticism of Israel's security policy, but has never sounded so decided and despaired to the point of casting doubt on the very continued existence of the State of Israel. Also the solution which he proposes, and which he conveyed to the security establishment, is chilling - and includes among other things deterrent action in the framework of which thousands and perhaps even tens of thousands of Palestinians will be killed.

Van Creveld says: 'Since the Germans entering into Yugoslavia and their clash with partisans in World War II, it is difficult to find instances in which a regular army has succeeded in contending with an uprising of this type. What is happening to us is what happened to the Americans in Vietnam, to the IDF in Lebanon and to the Russians in Afghanistan, and this in my opinion is also what is going to happen to the Americans there'.

Question by Yerushalayim: And don't you have a counter example to this?

Van Creveld replies: 'I don't know of a counter example. We are waging a war in which the other side has all of the advantages, we are playing on its field. At one time we played on our field against the British and we did similar things successfully. Today we are on the wrong side. I read the reports the British wrote about their struggle against the undergrounds here, and it is as though you are reading the reports of the IDF. All of the descriptions are the same, only the names have changed. The IDF is on the wrong side, the side that is doomed to defeat'.

Yerushalayim to Van Creveld: 'Doomed to defeat' sounds fatalistic.

Van Creveld replies: 'Not fatalistic, logical. Menahem Begin, who was a first class terrorist, analyzed this nicely. He wrote that actions of freedom fighters always succeed. When it succeeds it succeeds and when it fails it also succeeds, because the action shows the resolve of the fighters - and therefore the regular army which stands opposite can only fail, even if it succeeded in foiling a specific action'.

Yerushalayim to Van Creveld: You can't ignore the strength of the IDF, not only in comparison to the Palestinians, but also relative to what the British had here.

Van Creveld replies: 'We have might, but most of it we can't use, and even if we will use it, it is doubtful if it will help much. The Americans dropped six million tons of bombs on Vietnam, and I don't remember that this helped them. We had might in Lebanon and we fled from there. This is a struggle which someone who is smart doesn't get into, and whoever already gets into it should find a way to quickly get out. Israel has entered into a struggle with no chance which will finish it'.

Question by Yerushalayim: Doesn't the guerrilla always have an advantage in terms of morale and motivation?

Van Creveld replies: 'Yes, and I will give you an example of this. You are a big and strong man. Let's say a five year old child attacks you, even very dangerous, armed with a knife, and you kill him. You are put on trial and found guilty, because the judge will say, and rightfully so, that what you did wasn't self-defence, it was murder. The same thing in relations between nations'.

Question by Yerushalayim: And how will this affect the activity on the ground?

Van Creveld replies: 'A strong fighting against the weak eventually weakens. Whoever acts like a coward, and to fight against the weak is by definition to act like a coward, in the end will become a coward, and in regard to the Palestinians this works exactly the opposite and they are growing stronger. You can see how during the years there was one humiliation after another, ailure after failure, people refusing to serve and soldiers crying on graves. In my eyes this crying is one of the strangest things. If I could I would revent a publicizing of these pictures. On the other side you see the motivation. You only have to compare the funerals in order to understand who has the stronger motivation. By us there is wailing - with them, there is a demand for revenge. We are approaching the point whereby the Palestinians will be doing to us what the Mujahadeen did to the Soviets and what the FLN did to the French in Algeria'.

Yerushalayim to Van Creveld: Let's focus on specific instances: three Palestinians attack eight soldiers and kill most of them, except the one standing on the observation post who was in shock; two Palestinians attack three soldiers, kill two, beat on a third and take his weapon. And these are trained soldiers.

Van Creveld replies: 'The situation makes people cowards and good-for-nothing. It was strange to hear last week that the claim that in one instance the soldiers were there already for 14 hours and were tired, and in the second instance they claimed that they were there only 40 minutes and didn't have time to prepare for guard duty. This is a total pile of fiddlesticks. People turn into zeroes, people become idiots. In this war you can't be both smart and right, you can't be both strong and smart. It doesn't go together. Choose'.

Van Creveld continues: 'As long as we were small, few and weak, we were smart, and we were bold and won. "A small and courageous people", you remember? This was in 1967. Most of the people don't remember. In my class at the university, by the nature of things, most of the students are young and can't imagine to themselves that at one time people would be writing on the walls "Hats off to the IDF". They can't conceive of this. "There was such a thing? What, really? Were such things being written on the walls?", they ask me. The problem began in Lebanon, when we began fighting those weaker than us. Since then we are going from failure to failure'.

Question by Yerushalayim: And what will happen to the IDF if tomorrow it will be called to fight against a regular army, of Syria or Egypt?

Van Creveld replies: 'My guess: it will flee. If tomorrow a war in the style of 1973 breaks out - a majority of the IDF, not all of it, picks up its legs and runs'.

Van Creveld says: '(Hizbullah leader) Nasrallah said that the Israelis like living too much, and also Arafat said that the Jews are strong outside but weak on the inside. They are 100% right. We are the same people we were, the circumstances have made us like this'.

Question by Yerushalayim: And if the determined settlers embark on guerrilla actions against the Palestinians in the framework of the war over the house, do they have a chance?

Van Creveld replies: 'They are the only sector in Israeli society which has motivation and a combative spirit, but they are outnumbered ten to one by the Arabs and won't achieve a lot. Also they know that this struggle is lost, look where most of them bury their dead'.

Yerushalayim to Van Creveld: In the meantime the numbers show that many more Palestinians than Israelis are being killed.

Van Creveld replies: 'This is irrelevant. In wars of this type many more are killed among those doing the uprising. 50,000 Americans and 3 million Vietnamese were killed, several thousand French were killed as opposed to 300,000 Algerians, in the Balkans several tens of thousands of German soldiers were killed as opposed to 800,000 Yugoslavs. The numbers aren't significant, and what's more, the Palestinians aren't paying a heavy price, contrary to what is being heard here. We, in order to establish the State, sacrificed 1% of the population, they aren't even close to this. They so far have lost two tenths of a percent of the population'.

Yerushalayim to Van Creveld: Perhaps it is better for Israel that there be established a Palestinian state which will have a regular and weak army, which we will be able to defeat.

Van Creveld replies: 'There is no doubt about this. Yesterday, by chance, I spoke with my friend, an American from Washington who for many years was an advisor to the American army, and this is exactly what he said to me: "Why don't you let them establish a state? You will be able to throw them out when you want within five minutes". This is true'.

Yerushalayim to Van Creveld: Most Israelis don't have a moral problem with an occupation of the territories and with what the IDF is doing there, and this includes many of those who support withdrawal. Why don't they have a motivation to fight, they don't feel unjust.

Van Creveld replies: 'It's not a matter of justice, the word justice should be taken out of the lexicon and think in terms of strength opposite weakness. Take basketball for example, you can't say that the weak team is just'.

Yerushalayim to Van Creveld: But when I feel just my motivation increases.

Van Creveld replies: 'How can you be just when you are fighting against a five year old child? There is no such thing, regardless of how many times the Avigdor Liebermans and Benny Elons explain to us that we are just. We get up in the morning and can't look at ourselves in the mirror, and the refusing (to serve) - which by the way began in the Lebanon War - is testimony to this'.

Question by Yerushalayim: And this refusing also weakens us?

Van Creveld replies: 'The refusing to serve is a symptom of an army which is falling apart, and it is the best thing that happened to us. Perhaps as a result of it we will finally get out of these horrible territories'.

Question by Yerushalayim: Do you differentiate between the functioning of the soldiers and the functioning of the security leadership, Sharon, Ben-Eliezer and Mofaz?

Van Creveld replies: 'The situation turns also the leaders into good-for-nothings and pitiful'.

Question by Yerushalayim: Does the situation bring about a choosing of the non-right people?

Van Creveld replies: 'No, the situation makes the leader into an idiot. No matter what you do, it won't help, any decision you take won't be the right one, regardless of what you decide. The people who ran the Pentagon during the Vietnam period were perhaps the most capable group of managers in history, but everything they did wasn't good'.

Van Creveld continues: 'Sharon is a very intelligent man, but the reality turns everyone into an idiot. This also explains why every day we are changing our policy. One time we hit hard, another time we want a cease fire, another time targeted killings, another time encirclements, another time putting Arafat under detention, another time releasing him. There isn't one policy since the beginning of the intifada which has lasted more than a month. Typical of the leadership is the fact that it doesn't have the slightest idea how we reached this situation, what it wants, and to where it is going'.

Van Creveld lectured in front of the IDF General Staff in 1994, and says in regard to them: 'I in my entire life never met such a group of ignoramuses. I have never encountered in any country or in any framework, a group of people who know so little about the profession and theory, including the theory and history of the IDF. They don't know anything, anything, nothing about nothing'.

Question by Yerushalayim: So we are on the way to the sea?

VanCreveld replies: 'If things will continue like this we will reach a falling apart of the State of Israel. We are on the way. The signs exist. But before we totally fall apart a civil war will break out here, and this is my red line. One more assassination like the assassination of Rabin, and I and my family are not here. I'll leave behind me my beloved people to kill one another...Look at the computer games in which you can kill Peres, Beilin and Sarid. It's only a question of time until someone will take them seriously'.

(Captured from the Catholic Information Network.)