

## Meet the women who make Israel more secure

**“Women bring a different viewpoint and sometimes different solutions and we don’t have enough women in the high echelons of the security establishment.”**

By Maayan Hoffman / January 23, 2018 16:57



*(L-R) Sima Shine, Pnina Sharvit Baruch and Orit Perlov. (photo credit: INSS)*

ORIT PERLOV and Donald Trump have something in common. They both spend a significant amount of time on social media.

While Trump’s total time on Twitter and Facebook has never been published, for Perlov it can be as much as 14 hours per day. She is a social media analyst for the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), where she follows and participates in discourses on social networks in Arab states.

According to Perlov, about one third of the Arab population in the Middle East is actively using social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram – in the Middle East, and she communicates and engages daily with many leaders of public opinion in the region. They are from countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and Tunisia, Saudis as well as Palestinians.

“I am having conversations with them and listening to the conversations they have with others,” said Perlov. “My job is to feel the pulse, bring Initial information, and

understand the nuances of these conversations, to recognize trends, and write about them.”

These reports are being read by a variety of government institutions, the IDF, as well as the Israeli public. Perlov said she can help put security threats, social unrest and other events into perspective and sometimes see security challenges and trends in their early stages. Perlov, for example, was one of the first to write about events in Egypt and Syria in 2011 that eventually led to the revolutions and the Arab Spring.

“Not every social unrest is an ‘intifada’ or ‘spring,’ though the media wants to see these concepts, with attractive, simple titles,” said Perlov. “I bring the complex story and the nuances. My stories are a little less sexy but a lot more reliable.”

Perlov’s research will be featured at INSS’s 11th annual international conference on January 29. Discussion at the conference will center on the need to address the stark difference that frequently exists between illusion and reality. The social networks, she said, make it possible for people everywhere to express an opinion at any time and freely influence the creation of news – not infrequently through the manipulation of facts. If public moods are what determine policy, decisions that are taken are valid for a short time only.

“You cannot rely on information only on social media,” said Perlov. “You need to combine it with other information from traditional media, academia, and other security sources. This combination maximizes the ability to understand reality on the ground better.”

Perlov has been at INSS since 2012. Before that, she served as a political adviser to the Israeli ambassador-at-large based in the Gulf.

Perlov’s current employment with INSS cannot be taken for granted. The organization took a chance on a relatively young woman whose specialty was – and in some ways still is – a subject “that no one touches, no one knows what you are talking about, or how to digest it,” she said.

“They believed in me,” she said of her employers, “and took a unique unicorn into INSS.”

INSS continues to be a pioneer when it comes to employment of women researchers on issues related to security. According to Pnina Sharvit Baruch, a senior research associate at INSS, between 40 and 50 percent of INSS researchers are female.

Sharvit-Baruch heads INSS’s program on law and national security and focuses on issues related to international law, as well as to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which she said has a strong influence on the identity of the State of Israel and its international standing. Her team has been evaluating the various peace proposals – one-state, twostate and everything in between – to propose directions for progress toward better containment of the conflict, as well as its future solution.

“DURING MY military service I was also involved in the attempts to reach a peaceful

resolution of the conflict with the Palestinians and with Syria, as a legal advisor to negotiations teams in the different rounds of negotiation. My experience in this field is very relevant to the different research projects at the INSS on Israeli – Palestinian relations. I have analyzed different aspects of this issue, focusing lately on exploring alternative ideas to the two-state solution. I organized a round table on the one-state option and another on the idea of a confederation. I am currently working on a project of mapping and analyzing all the relevant options."

"Coming from within the security system I appreciate the contribution of the INSS by providing research and in depth analysis that are very important to decision makers and to which there is often not enough time to invest while in active service".

Before coming to INSS, Sharvit-Baruch served in the IDF's international law department for 20 years, including as its head from 2003 to 2009, retiring with the rank of colonel. "The fact that I was involved in providing legal advice to commanders on operational issues enables me to analyze the activities of the IDF and of other militaries and offer insights based on an understanding of the challenges facing the fighting forces. For example, I carried out an in depth analysis of the Report published by the Human Rights Council Commission of Inquiry following operation "Protective Edge". This examination revealed significant problems in the report: a flawed legal analysis, an inaccurate legal analysis, absence of relevant expertise and a clear lack of objectivity. I also share my experiences and legal expertise regarding the laws of armed conflict in frequent lectures and presentations given to different delegations and groups, including diplomats, researchers, journalists and students".

She said that during her tenure, there were only about 30 women colonels out of hundreds and that there has only been one woman in the rank of Major general in the IDF up to today.

"There are always all kinds of excuses for this," said Sharvit-Baruch, who in addition to her work at INSS, focuses her time on efforts to promote women in the IDF through Forum Dvora: Women in Foreign Policy and National Security.

Sharvit-Baruch has pushed for the IDF to open positions for women that enable them to progress in their military careers. Then, after the army, these same women can participate in hard-core security and counter- terrorism research at the same level as their male counterparts.

"Men don't understand more than women," said Sharvit-Baruch. "You are either an expert or you are not."

Sima Shine said she agreed.

Shine, a senior researcher at INSS, served as head of the Mossad's Research Division, a position never held before by a woman. Shine has also served in various posts on the National Security Council and served as the Deputy General Director in the Ministry for Strategic Affairs, responsible, inter alia, of the Iranian file.

At the INSS, Shine focuses on what she calls "second tier" countries, those that don't

border directly on Israel's borders. Days before the Iranian protests broke out, Shine and her team held a simulation exercise with top US researchers to determine possible outcomes, and to see what may occur if Trump decides not to sign the waiver that will allow for the continuation of sanctions relief following the nuclear deal with Iran.

Shine said the simulation strengthened the understanding that for Israel the immediate concerns are Iran's ballistic missile program, its wider presence in Syria, and support for Hezbollah, leaving the nuclear issue for a later stage.

"THE SIMULATION found that the US would not be persuasive at leaving the nuclear issue on the side, and that all attempts at negotiations with the Europeans and the Russians would fail," said Shine. "So, while Israel would prefer to deal with immediate threats, it did not work in the simulation, and it is therefore likely that Israel will find itself obligated to support the American position."

While reflecting back on her time in the Mossad, Shine said that she was happy to promote very knowledgeable and talented women but, in some cases women chose not to promote themselves because of their responsibilities at home.

"When looking back, I often found myself the lone woman around the table," she said.

But Shine has a message to women interested in getting involved in the security arena: "We need you."

She said that in the research field the fact that women must balance, simultaneously, so many diverse duties between work, home, and children, gives them the ability to see the bigger picture and connect variant components in ways that improves their evaluations.

Shine said, "Women bring a different viewpoint and sometimes different solutions and we don't have enough women in the high echelons of the security establishment."

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<http://www.jpost.com/Jerusalem-Report/Women-who-make-Israel-more-secure-539579>