

# A Critical Look at Intelligence

**Aharon Ze'evi (Farkash)**

Some claim that Military Intelligence oversteps its bounds when it presumes to sound a warning. I believe that in Israel's current security situation, Intelligence has no choice but to sound a warning. There is a particular need for Intelligence's warning since there is currently no other element capable of filling this void. Many of Israel's intelligence failures turned into national traumas, including "the [Lavon] affair," Operation Rotem, the Yom Kippur War, the Bus 300 affair, and the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin (a trauma for the GSS). Out of my fourteen predecessors, six heads of Military Intelligence ended their tenure prematurely.

We have learned much about the role of the Intelligence Corps from committees of inquiry. When I assumed my position as head of Intelligence, I asked myself: what is my mission? I couldn't find an answer in the professional literature. I learned it from a talented officer who tried to define the job of the Intelligence Corps by means of committee of inquiry reports. After I had been in the job for about a month I went to Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and said: "I think these are my tasks." The prime minister commented on my proposals, and they were agreed upon.

Intelligence has had its successes, as have the IDF's operations against suicide terrorism and in many other areas. There have also been failures. If we do not (even unsuccessfully) relate to the national mission on sounding a warning entrusted to the Intelligence Corps, Israel will struggle to survive in the current balance of power in the Middle East. This is my conclusion from my experience of more than four years as head of the Intelligence Corps.

My experience is based on various events, including the Iraq War of March-April 2003; the second intifada; the Iranian nuclear issue; Syria under Basher Asad, Lebanon in the wake of the al-Hariri assassination and the withdrawal of the Syrian army from Lebanon; the emergence of two systems in the Arab world, which is a complex and problematic process – a radical Shiite axis led by Iran facing a Sunni axis, led principally by Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan that is trying to attract Israel toward it in order to generate a considerable counterweight to the radical Shiite axis; the civil war in Iraq; the civil war in the Palestinian Authority; and the civil war in Lebanon. Based on all these I would like to offer the following conclusions and lessons.

---

Director of the INSS Sari and Israel Roizman Program in Intelligence Studies, and former head of Military Intelligence. This article is based on his lecture at the INSS conference "Intelligence in the Yom Kippur War: Insights and Lessons for Today" in January 2007.

## The Role in Decision Making

Intelligence is not only involved in Israel's decision making processes; it is a major partner in every decision making process. Intelligence has often contributed to sensitive discussions in an extended forum of heads of the secret services in the presence of the chief of staff, defense minister, minister of foreign affairs, and prime minister – the most sensitive forum in Israel. One must go to such sessions well prepared and “charged,” as without sound reasoning, the prime minister will not accept your position. Intelligence is a partner in various forums where there is a responsibility to delineate central processes, and not just report on localized events. It has to connect the points, and be careful to connect the points correctly.

There is an oft-told story of connecting points in a wrong way: An elderly woman was caught in a multi-story building in London that collapsed after a massive aerial

ational decisions made in which Intelligence does not have input and a position, even if there are all sorts of surprises. Therefore, it is important for the Intelligence Corps to prepare itself for discussions in which it participates in decision making processes in Israel.

## Situation Assessments

The Ministry of Defense and the minister of defense, prime minister, the Cabinet, the government, and the relevant Knesset committees, including subcommittees, are all important forums in which Intelligence plays a regular, ongoing role. If the head of Intelligence believes that areas within the realm of responsibility of the Intelligence Corps are being discussed with a political slant or viewed through political lenses, he must appear before the public and present the subject as he deems fit. He is obliged to convey a picture that he believes to be relevant, even if ultimately it is inaccurate. It is important to preserve the Intelligence

appraisal. However, in such a case, the head of Intelligence must go out on a limb and convey his thoughts to the minister of defense, even though they were not incorporated to his liking in the chief of staff's situation appraisal. He must even present his opinion to the prime minister.

Is it right for Intelligence to be responsible for assessing national intelligence, or should this be the domain of another entity? This question requires intensive examination, but let me illustrate the subject with one example. The Revolutionary Guards in Iran are responsible for the surface-to-surface missiles, the ballistic strategic Shehab missile that are ultimately slated to carry conventional or non-conventional warheads. The surface-to-surface missile facility is in the hands of the Revolutionary Guards, not the army. The head of the Revolutionary Guards answers to Supreme Leader Ali Khamanei, and not to Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Is this a strategic, political, or operational area? Where are the lines drawn? Should they be drawn between Khamanei and the head of the Revolutionary Guards, or between the head of the Revolutionary Guards and the commander of the surface-to-surface missile unit? It is a complex issue. When the war in question is asymmetric and not symmetric, the reality is even more complex. Aryeh Shalev's book (*Success and Failure in Advance Warning: Israeli Intelligence Assessments before the Yom Kippur War*) takes an in-depth look at this area. Currently,

## Insofar as it relates to combating global threats, Intelligence must be integrated in Israel's international relations.

bombing by the Germans during World War II. After she was rescued the woman said: “That was the first time in my life that I flushed the toilet and the building collapsed.” She connected the points in the wrong way. And I say that we do this many times in our intelligence work. There are no significant strategic and oper-

Corps' independence. After the Yom Kippur War this area was defined in the High Command instructions.

The head of Intelligence takes part in situation assessments of the General Staff, and the chief of staff frames his own picture of the situation based on this assessment. He is not bound to accept Intelligence's

the Intelligence Corps has the exclusive ability to see a general and integrative intelligence picture. It must utilize its participation in some of the main forums that take national decisions to present its professional and reasoned position.

### Educating Ourselves

Developing and applying knowledge of the enemy is the responsibility of Intelligence and the air force. In order for the air force to successfully carry out massive attacks on medium range and strategic rockets as it did in the second Lebanon War, this knowledge must be imparted to and assimilated by the air force, down to each and every pilot. The IDF has to understand the meaning of "nature reserves," and not wait for a war to start. If the IDF does not know what a nature reserve is and/or has not managed to impart this to the reserve forces, it had best not act at all.

Another example is the Hizbollah profile. Who is Hizbollah? The head of Intelligence must himself ensure that the minister of defense, chief of staff, and prime minister all understand what he is saying. One of the first incidents I experienced as head of Intelligence was connected with the Syrian army, and we reported on this for six months and compiled thirty-one written reviews of the subject. One time, the prime minister turned to me and said, "Why am I hearing this now for the first time?" In my opinion, the information somehow eluded



the prime minister. This taught me that anything I consider important I must convey personally so that the prime minister can hear for himself what I think he should know.

### Work Processes

Important lessons on work processes in the intelligence community surfaced after September 11 and after the Iraq War, in Britain, the United States, and Australia. The working guideline of the intelligence community must be Israel's security, and not the individual success of the Intelligence Corps, Mossad, or GSS. We have much more to

achieve in this area in order to judge Intelligence's success by the collective work of three services, and not by examining the success of each entity on its own. This means that the different issues should be analyzed in an integral manner, and the solution for each issue should be provided whereby each service utilizes its abilities in the areas within its responsibility in order to create a formative solution, in order to generate an integrative and optimal solution.

We must seek fusion and not only cooperation. Without this we will not succeed. The classic example is

the way we dealt with suicide terrorism by breaking down the walls between the various types of sources (SIGINT, HUMINT, VISINT, etc.) and creating joint operations rooms that carry out integrated work in real time, in one location, with almost total openness. It is a kind of

**With regard to the second Lebanon War, Intelligence was prepared, presented a correct intelligence picture at the operational-tactical level, and said what it did not know.**

intelligence collage that encompasses all the intelligence relevant to the mission at hand and breaks down the walls in question regarding the source protection. This naturally also entails risks for the sources, but in terms of cost effectiveness, this is the right approach.

In 2002, there were fifty-five terror attacks inside Israel, in which 215 people were killed within the Green Line. In 2005, there were six attacks in which fifteen people were killed, and there were even fewer in 2006. This is no miracle – this is the result of intelligence work. Some will argue that is all tactical. I do not need to explain why this is highly strategic, and not tactical. This represents a fundamental change in the nature of potential sources. This naturally comes at the expense of other tasks because there are inadequate resources. Yet one can say that ultimately this integrated work produced the desired results and did strategically change Israel's solution to terror, which impacted strongly

on life in Israel and the economy.

### **Broader Knowledge of the Enemy**

In an era of asymmetric war, it is important to acquire an in-depth understanding of non-military elements in order to gain a better un-

derstanding of life on the other side. The intelligence bodies have to be able to penetrate the outer layer of the other side and access its core. They have to be able to read poetry and understand the culture. Enhancing information gathering in these areas will assist the achievement of a better understanding of the processes that occur on the other side. Can one say that this is an absolute, decisive tool? Certainly not! Even in Israel, with an open media in a democratic country, it is hard to do. But this activity allows us to discern deep processes that take place in countries on the other side of the border.

For example, a clear assessment was conveyed to decision makers of the significance of the process of democratization in Egypt. There was no need for a superlative IQ in order to understand the main trends. In the elections, five times as many members of the Muslim Brotherhood were elected to the People's Council in Egypt. There were sev-

enteen in the previous council, and over eighty in the new council. Such a process cannot be understood only by means of military intelligence.

### **Multiple Entities**

Parallel responsibility for the intelligence appraisal must be bolstered. The operational translation is: in the Palestinian area, division of responsibility between the GSS and Military Intelligence, to generate pluralism; and with regard to the enemy and rival – Lebanon, Hizbollah, Syria, Iran, and others – a division of responsibility between the Mossad and Military Intelligence so that the prime minister can always get at least two reasoned opinions to explain why each intelligence party thinks differently. In this regard, there is great importance in the Intelligence Corps' integration ability.

The National Security Council should be further empowered as a *net assessment* body. There is no such entity in Israel, and I suggest not breaking up other entities before a National Security Council that performs net assessment – and not only examines the enemy but also Israel – is established. A council that undertakes a net assessment, if it is correctly integrated in decision making processes in Israel and participates in every sensitive forum, will be able to express its opinion and present dilemmas and alternatives to the prime minister. This might have occurred on July 12, 2006 had such an entity existed at the time.

## International Threats

Insofar as it relates to combating global threats, Intelligence must be integrated in Israel's international relations. The prime minister often asks the heads of the services to come with him to explain the overall intelligence system to other prime ministers and presidents. I believe that Intelligence must contribute to Israel's foreign policy in two global areas: global terror, which Israel cannot combat on its own, and the nuclear issue, and particularly the Iranian nuclear issue. These are two areas that have a significant bearing on the ability of Military Intelligence to persuade and provide a reasoned evaluation to enable leaders to act before the events take place. In these two areas, the Israeli intelligence community leads, aids, and makes a significant contribution. Often the question arises as to what should be done with the intelligence that the intelligence community provides. But I believe that a combination of intelligence and reasoned evaluation in combating these two global threats can bring tangible benefits.

## The Domain of Intelligence

Intelligence's domain must be better defined and its responsibility delineated not just from reports

submitted by committees of inquiry, but also by means of positive definition of the intelligence community's responsibility and a division of responsibility between Israel's intelligence services. I have addressed this area often and I suggested, let's generate Intelligence's theoretical structure. I went further, and I defined for myself the tasks that Intelligence will face in 2015 and on their basis the necessary fundamental changes, as was the case in recent years. I believe these changes produced beneficial results.

These results also incorporate the increase in the number of opinions, including a forum of academics, and representatives of the Foreign Ministry and the Mossad. We would convene this forum to discuss issues relating to Iraq or aspects of the Iranian nuclear issue, in order to hear different opinions and enrich our own knowledge, to challenge the reality with various theses and academic viewpoints, and to oblige intelligence personnel to contend with these views. And vice versa – the academics would have to deal with the same knowledge as we did. This process generated some interesting results, for example, smart questions that arose in light of forum discussions.

## Conclusion

Understanding the many lessons learned in recent years by the Intelligence Corps and by the GSS and Mossad prevented intelligence failure on a national level with regard to the second Lebanon War. I must, with all due modesty, note that this is the first time that Intelligence cannot be blamed. This does not imply that all is well with Intelligence. However, Intelligence was prepared, presented a correct intelligence picture at the operational-tactical level, and said what it did not know. Intelligence cautioned that escalation on the northern border could be expected during 2006 following Nasrallah's insistence on kidnapping soldiers, and repeatedly stressed that he could succeed and, therefore, preparations should be made.

The warning given by Intelligence prior to the war and the appraisal it provided did not happen by chance but were the result of a number of changes we initiated. Intelligence experts must relate to their mission professionally and, despite the risks involved, must understand that they are capable of providing the decision makers with both warnings and relevant intelligence for the war and for combat.