

The Military Secretary at the Junction of Israel's Security Decisions

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The prime minister's military secretary is an officer with the rank of major general whose official role is to serve as a liaison between the prime minister and the IDF and other security agencies. In practice, his duties are more extensive, and thus his position is one of the most influential ones in the decision making process on security issues in Israel. Nevertheless, the military secretary does not have formal responsibility in the realm of national security, nor does he have a professional staff at his disposal. On certain issues, there is even overlap and a lack of clarity in the division of powers between him and the National Security Staff. In addition, the fact that the military secretary is a major general in the IDF who is subordinate to the prime minister and not to the chief of staff is not self-evident in the structure of government in Israel. This article will analyze the responsibilities of the military secretary, examine differences of opinion regarding the military secretary's realms of activity and his rank, and present recommendations for resolving outstanding issues relevant to the position. It is proposed that the military secretary's activities be limited to the formal description of the position, that the interfaces with the NSS be defined, and that a civilian with extensive security experience be appointed to the position and called the security secretary to the prime minister.

Keywords: military secretary; decision making; prime minister; intelligence; security; IDF; National Security Staff; Lipkin Shahak Commission; chief of staff; defense minister; state comptroller; GSS; Mossad

Introduction

The prime minister's military secretary is an officer with the rank of major general whose job is in part to act as a liaison between the prime minister

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and the IDF and other security agencies.¹ By nature, the job of military secretary has relatively little exposure, but there are a number of reasons that it should be in the public eye.

The first reason concerns the weight of the position and its place in the decision making system. According to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the military secretary's work lies at the most sensitive decision making point for Israel's security.² While there is some overlap between his work and that of the National Security Staff (NSS), the military secretary does not have formal responsibility in the area of national security, and unlike the heads of the defense establishment and the NSS, he has no professional staff. Nonetheless, the military secretary wields much influence over critical decisions on state security that reach the prime minister because of his control of sensitive information, his involvement in preparing the agenda for the prime minister and the cabinet, his direct access to the prime minister, and his senior rank.

The second reason concerns changes that have taken place over time. In recent decades, the complexity of the political-security issues confronting the prime minister, the amount of information received by the prime minister's bureau from various sources, and the challenges of state intelligence organizations, two of which are directly under the auspices of the prime minister, have all increased significantly. The prime minister's small bureau and his advisers, including the military secretary, are not built to handle national security challenges and oversee intelligence organizations. The National Security Staff was established for that purpose, and the NSS has grown much stronger since passage of the National Security Staff Law of 2008. In addition, the Ministry of Intelligence Affairs, which was established in 2009, assists the prime minister on these issues. These agencies are supposed to perform a considerable number of tasks that were the domain of the military secretary and advisers in the prime minister's bureau, while the position of military secretary is supposed to be modified to meet the new situation.

The permanent presence of a major general in uniform in the prime minister's bureau is not a given. This is especially true since the *Basic Law: The Military* of 1976 does not grant the prime minister supreme command authority over the army. The law states that the chief of staff is the "senior command echelon in the army," and it does not recognize a situation in which a major general in the IDF is neither subordinate to the chief of

staff nor required to report to him. Furthermore, the position of military secretary has created a track for promotion of an officer to the rank of major general outside of the IDF though he will likely return to the army's top echelons. While he is selected by the prime minister, he is not always the first choice of the chief of staff and the defense minister, who are responsible for appointments in the army.

There is a disagreement on the definition of the position and its seniority. The conclusion of the Lipkin Shahak Commission³ and former heads of the defense establishment (including Defense Minister Ehud Barak and Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi)⁴ is that there is no place for a military secretary with the rank of major general in the prime minister's bureau. They believe that the position of military secretary is suited to the rank of colonel or brigadier general, whose functions and influence are more limited, as was the accepted practice until 1993. Nevertheless, Prime Minister Netanyahu has made it clear that an officer with the rank of major general is required for the position.⁵

From 2006 to 2012, at least three reports published by the state comptroller on a variety of issues revealed systemic shortcomings connected to the role of military secretary; two were published after the National Security Staff Law was passed. In addition, the Winograd Commission and the Lipkin Shahak Commission reports address the need to resolve the issues related to the position of military secretary.

This article examines the position of military secretary and the source of its power. Among the questions raised: What are the differences of opinion regarding the position? Why have the recommendations of the Lipkin Shahak Commission from 2007 to downgrade the position of military secretary and limit the areas dealt with by the office not been implemented? What is the prime minister's view? The article concludes with recommendations to improve the situation.

The Role of the Prime Minister in Areas of National Security

The roles filled by the military secretary are derived to a large extent from the prime minister's work on national security. The prime minister is in direct charge of the General Security Services (GSS), the Mossad, the Atomic Energy Commission, the National Security Staff, the National Cyber Staff, and more. However, the prime minister is not officially in charge of the IDF, which is the pillar of the defense establishment. According to the *Basic*

Law: The Military of 1976, “the military is subject to the authority of the government,” and “the minister in charge of the military on behalf of the government is the defense minister.” Unlike the president of the United States, who is defined as the commander in chief of the armed forces, in Israel the government is collectively the commander of the army.

In practice, the prime minister’s influence over the military is greater than what the Basic Law stipulates, in part because over the years, norms have been established whereby the prime minister approves important military actions. The situation is also a result of the prime minister’s major influence on the agenda and staff work of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee⁶ and the entire government, where issues relating to security and the IDF frequently come up for discussion. In addition—and this is perhaps the main reason—the prime minister has taken it upon himself to direct some of the main efforts in foreign affairs and defense, including Iran’s nuclear program, the political process with the Palestinians, and strategic relations with the United States. All of these require constant strategic and operational staff work.

In January 2007, Prime Minister Netanyahu made some observations about the daily aspects of his job, asserting that decisions about the numerous security-political issues in the State of Israel command the greatest urgency. It is impossible to compare the amount of time and resources that an Israeli prime minister devotes to these issues to the time and resources spent by any other country or politician in the world—in part because in Israel there is no minimal centralized structure or orderly capacity for this. The prime minister spends an enormous amount of time in security briefings that deal with both very important matters and less important matters. In practice, dealing with a low level terrorist translates into something akin to dealing with the Iranian problem. The flow of intelligence is naturally something that one does not want to limit, and if it is not limited, the result is a tremendous cascade of intelligence, which demands an hour or two a day just to review. While both tactical and strategic intelligence is overflowing, the items are actually forwarded to the prime minister without distinction and with very little triage done beforehand, with the final triage done by the military secretary. While he is bombarded with intelligence, the prime minister does not have the benefit of an orderly structure for staff work, which should outline for him the main topics that he must address or on which he and the cabinet must

give their opinion. In addition, he has no tools to determine which issues should be the focus of the government systems.⁷

The Military Secretary in the Hierarchy

The military secretary is subordinate to the prime minister alone. According to the explanation given by Prime Minister Netanyahu to the state comptroller, "the military secretary's loyalty must be to the prime minister, and therefore, he is chosen by him personally, is subordinate to him, and works according to his instructions." However, he is appointed "in consultation with the minister of defense and the chief of staff as well."⁸ Formally, the chief of staff is the person who appoints the military secretary (who has been chosen by the prime minister) and gives him his military rank, but he has no influence over the military secretary.

Tasks Performed by the Military Secretary

- a. Contact person for relaying the prime minister's instructions. "The secretary, on behalf of the prime minister, gives directives to the heads of the defense establishment and government offices and holds an ongoing and continuous dialogue with them and monitors the implementation of the directives," as Prime Minister Netanyahu explained to the state comptroller.⁹ However, the prime minister and the heads of the defense establishment hold working meetings and direct discussions, and at least some believe that it is not appropriate for their relationship with the prime minister to go through the military secretary, and feel they should have direct contact with the prime minister. In addition, there are those who believe that the military secretary serves as "the super-coordinator for the defense establishment," while he should actually serve "strictly as the military secretary."¹⁰
- b. Sorting information and transmitting it to the prime minister. The information includes intelligence, reports, assessments, recommendations for action, and other material in the political security realm. It comes mainly from the security agencies and the Foreign Ministry, mostly at their initiative, and sometimes at the request of the military secretary. A significant part of the information is sensitive intelligence that requires tremendous capital to obtain, including sometimes a risk to life. In addition, the military secretary conveys

to the prime minister information from meetings he has attended. According to Eitan Haber, who served as the head of the prime minister's bureau under Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in the 1990s: "The military secretary to the prime minister is the State of Israel's number one confidant." The military secretary participates in all discussions between the prime minister and the chief of staff, the head of the Mossad, the head of the GSS, the director general of the Atomic Energy Commission, and representatives from the defense industry, and therefore "only the military secretary knows all."¹¹ Azriel Nevo, who served as military secretary to Prime Ministers Menachem Begin, Yitzhak Shamir, Shimon Peres, and Yitzhak Rabin, noted that "one of the problems of the military secretary is the need not to overburden the prime minister with too much information. He must select material from the large pile and decide what is important and what is not."¹² In other words, the considerations of the military secretary and his deputy in sorting and understanding the information—what is important and what is peripheral—have a great impact on the picture the prime minister sees, and hence also on his decisions.

- c. Coordinating the discussions of the prime minister and the cabinet on defense and political issues. This position gives the military secretary tremendous influence through his involvement in setting the agenda and preparing the discussions. The head of the NSS also serves this function, yet according to the state comptroller's report, "most of the prime minister's discussions on issues of foreign affairs and defense were coordinated by the military secretary and not the NSS, which is in accordance with the prime minister's directives."¹³ The report also notes that "the military secretary coordinated discussions on subjects important to state security, including discussions of the forum of seven, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and the map of Israel's security interests." The state comptroller explained that the military secretary has no professional staff¹⁴ whose job is to perform ongoing, integrative staff work on issues of foreign affairs and defense and examine the recommendations of the respective institutions, as the NSS is required to do in the discussions it coordinates. This could interfere with a comprehensive view of foreign affairs and defense, the decision making processes in the discussions coordinated by the military secretary, and the organizational memory.¹⁵ Dr. Uzi Arad,

who from 2009 to 2011 served as head of the NSS, has noted that the lack of clarity in the division of tasks between the military secretary and the head of the NSS caused “glitches and conflicts,” and it was not always clear, even to institutions in the system, whom to approach on issues relating to discussions underway or proposed deliberations. It thus happened that the NSS and the military secretary scheduled discussions in the prime minister’s bureau on the same subject for the same week.¹⁶

- d. In a meeting in July 2011, the prime minister made clear to the state comptroller that the NSS should first of all coordinate cabinet meetings and ministerial meetings on security issues. He noted that the military secretary handles ongoing intelligence and operations and that it is very difficult to define in advance when the operation becomes something that spills over into an issue that must be handled on the level of the NSS. The prime minister also explained that he decides to divide the topics between the military secretary and the NSS, “partly in accordance with ‘its [the NSS’s] competence in certain areas.’”¹⁷
- e. Consulting for the prime minister on security issues. There is a dispute, or at least a substantial lack of clarity, concerning the status of the military secretary as an adviser to the prime minister.¹⁸ Major General (ret.) Danny Yatom, who served as the military secretary for Prime Ministers Rabin and Peres from 1993 to 1996, thinks that “it is your duty to express your opinion and your position, and we should remember that the military secretary is with the prime minister more than any other aide. There are almost endless opportunities to influence the decision maker in the discussions. In this job, you have a tremendous ability to have an impact.”¹⁹ According to the Lipkin Shahak Commission report, it is not the job of the military secretary to advise the prime minister on defense issues, but “over the years, the position has grown, and there were those who saw him as the prime minister’s adviser on security.”²⁰ In 2011, the Prime Minister’s Office told the state comptroller that “the military secretary does not serve as an adviser to the prime minister.”²¹ However, among the military secretary’s roles noted in the job description is in fact the task of “providing a recommendation to the prime minister on operational issues that require his personal involvement.”²²

- f. Representing the prime minister in defense forums. The military secretary participates in General Staff discussions, serves as an observer in the committee of heads of intelligence services,²³ appears before Knesset committees as the prime minister's representative, and more. The military secretary is not obligated to report to state institutions, e.g., Knesset committees, with his security assessments, unlike other office holders, such as the chief of staff and the head of the NSS, who present their surveys and situation assessments.
- g. Performing special tasks on behalf of the prime minister. For example, in May 2010, in connection with efforts to persuade the Turkish government to block the flotilla from the area, "the military secretary worked with political and informational officials himself, which included direct interaction with the Foreign Ministry and foreign ambassadors."²⁴ Uzi Arad, who was head of the NSS at that time and worked on the political aspect of this task, noted that he did not know in real time about this irregular activity by the military secretary on the issue of the flotilla.²⁵

Three Types of Military Secretaries

The job of the military secretary is a one-man show, and therefore his personality and experience and the prime minister's trust in him have a great impact on his powers and contribution. This article does not discuss the contribution of a particular military secretary, but only the nature of the position. In this vein, then, from the time of Israel's establishment until today, there have been three different types of military secretary: an officer with the rank of colonel-brigadier general (a senior staff officer), a major general in his first job (an entry-level major general), and a major general who comes to the position of military secretary after performing other functions as a general in the IDF (a seasoned major general). This typology is supposedly based on the military hierarchy, but in practice, it has ramifications for the nature of the job—how the military secretary is perceived by the prime minister and the defense establishment, and even by the holder of the office himself.

The Senior Staff Officer

This type of military secretary is a staff officer with the rank of brigadier general whose main job is to act as a liaison between the prime minister

and the IDF and other security agencies. The first military secretary was Brigadier General Nehemia Argov. He was first called the prime minister's military adjutant, and in 1950 he was appointed to the position of military secretary to the prime minister.²⁶ From 1950 to 1993, the officers who served in this position ranged from colonels to brigadier generals, and most were not promoted to command positions in the IDF after serving as military secretary.²⁷ The prime minister could see such a military secretary as a professional aide, a trusted person who for the most part had no agenda of his own in the army's top leadership. The best known of these was Brigadier General (ret.) Azriel Nevo, who served as military secretary for four prime ministers (1981-1993).

The Entry-Level Major General

This is the model of the twenty-first century military secretary, which began during the tenure of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. Since 2001, six of the seven IDF officers appointed to the position of military secretary have been promoted from the rank of brigadier general to the rank of major general while serving in this position. Most returned to the IDF and continued to perform other duties of a major general.²⁸ The rank of major general gives the military secretary an elevated status in the military and political system. The choice of an entry-level major general over a seasoned major general could have advantages in terms of his relationship with the Defense Ministry and the IDF, to which he will likely return, and because of his distance from the political system, where the seasoned major general is liable to find himself at the next stage.

Nevertheless, a beginning major general may be at a disadvantage compared to a seasoned major general in terms of prior knowledge and experience regarding the strategic-political level and familiarity with the intelligence community. The gap between the traditional tasks of the military secretary (as described in the senior staff officer model) and the strategic thinking ability and command skills expected of a major general in the IDF could lead the beginning major general to give security-political advice to the prime minister and exert his influence during coordination of complex security-political discussions, even though he does not have a professional staff like that of the defense minister and the head of the NSS. Furthermore, at least in the first part of his term, his knowledge and experience are limited to areas he has dealt with previously, since he has

not had special training for the position. This is significant, since the terms of military secretaries are relatively short (on average about 2.5 years in the past decade), and thus, the time for learning is a significant portion of the period of service of the beginning major general who serves as military secretary.

Because he is in the prime minister's bureau, the entry-level major general could find himself with a conflict of interests: on the one hand, he is an officer who is scheduled to return to the army, and on the other hand, he is a loyal adviser to the prime minister, discreet and professional, who is sometimes required to make difficult decisions, even at the expense of the interests of the army or in opposition to the position of the army. And indeed, there is resistance in the defense establishment to appointing a major general as military secretary, particularly a beginning major general, as will be discussed below.²⁹

Seasoned Major General

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who also served as defense minister, was the first to appoint a major general as military secretary. His choice was Major General Danny Yatom, an experienced officer who served from 1993 to 1996. Prior to that, Yatom had served as OC Central Command and as head of the IDF Planning Branch. Experienced major general Zeev Livneh succeeded Yatom, serving from 1996 to 1997 under Prime Minister Netanyahu. Both military secretaries were with the prime minister at the height of the peace process and were privy to sensitive diplomatic information that even the heads of the defense establishment did not know. Their tenure preceded the establishment of the NSS.

The seasoned major general can be characterized as an officer with much experience, knowledge, and well thought out opinions, who is deeply involved in the politics of the defense establishment and even the political system. The prime minister may see him as an authority on defense issues and rely on his judgment, more than with a senior staff officer or beginning major general. He may offer the prime minister alternative positions to those of the defense establishment, which he knows well, while he enjoys priority over the heads of the defense establishment in familiarity with sensitive political information, access to the prime minister, and the ability to influence the cabinet's agenda. As noted, he does not have the responsibility that they have.

The Preferred Model

The best model for a military secretary is to a large extent dependent on the challenges facing the prime minister and his advisers. Already at the time of Israel's establishment, it was clear that the prime minister could not fill his role properly without appropriate mechanisms for advice on national security and intelligence, even though the military secretary was always at his disposal. During periods when prime ministers also functioned as defense ministers, they positioned themselves to a decisive extent on the apparatuses of the IDF and the Ministry of Defense, so that the gap was less conspicuous. However, the surprise of the Yom Kippur War in 1973 undermined this model.

The amendment to the *Basic Law: The Government* from March 1992 states that "the government will have a team, set up and operated by the prime minister, for ongoing professional advice in the area of national security." In fact, this team was not established, and seasoned major generals (Danny Yatom and Zeev Livneh) were appointed to the position of military secretary and closed the gap partially, since they were not head of a professional staff. Only in 1999 was a decision made by the government, headed by Netanyahu, to establish the National Security Council (NSC) as "the staff institution of the prime minister and the entire government on matters of national security," and Major General (ret.) David Ivry was appointed head of the first NSC. The military secretary at that time was a brigadier general. In 2001, Prime Minister Sharon began to promote officers of the rank of brigadier general to major general during their term as military secretary. The model of the entry-level major general apparently suited Sharon, known for his deep involvement in the IDF. The NSC had already been established, but it was not included in decision making processes, which were coordinated by the military secretary and holders of other offices in the prime minister's bureau.³⁰

The gap was even more prominent in both the state comptroller's report on the NSS³¹ and in the conclusions of the committee to examine the events of the Second Lebanon War (the Winograd Commission of 2006), which pointed out serious flaws in staff work and in the decision making process of the prime minister's office. In 2007, the steering committee to implement the recommendations of the Winograd Commission interim report (the Lipkin Shahak Commission) suggested limiting the role of the military secretary to the realm of the prime minister's connection with the

security agencies and giving the military secretary the rank of colonel.³² This suggestion was intended to pave the way for the development of the NSS in order to improve government decision making.

The bill to establish the National Security Staff, which was discussed in the Knesset in 2007 and preceded the National Security Staff Law of 2008, is in keeping with the conclusions of the Lipkin Shahak Commission (to recommend the model of a senior staff officer), and for similar reasons. In addressing the role of the military secretary, the commission wrote that the prime minister, in consultation with the minister of defense, should appoint an officer of the rank of colonel to the position of military secretary, and that the role of the military secretary would be to serve as a liaison between the prime minister and the IDF, the GSS, and the Mossad.³³

Nevertheless, the National Security Staff Law, passed in the Knesset on July 29, 2008, did not define the role of the military secretary. The law left it to the prime minister to arrange through (internal) regulations the relationship between the head of the NSS and other officials in the Prime Minister's Office (including the military secretary).³⁴ While such a regulation was approved by the prime minister in 2011, it became clear that it allows him to delegate staff work connected to foreign affairs and defense to officials outside the NSS, including the military secretary. This means that the role of the military secretary has remained quite extensive and its delineation in regard to the NSS has remained vague. As a result, in spite of the NSS Law, the inherent tension between the head of the NSS and the military secretary has not disappeared. In 2012 Uzi Arad noted that "the military secretary does not obey the NSS Law and attempts to keep as much power for himself as possible, at the expense of the head of the NSS."³⁵ This claim matches the state comptroller's report from June 2012 on implementation of the NSS Law, which noted that the two documents received by the Prime Minister's Office that are supposed to resolve the issues regarding the role of the military secretary (the procedure for implementing the NSS Law and the job description for the military secretary) "include clauses that are opposed to the NSS Law and its intent. Therefore, it would be advisable to correct these documents so that they are compatible with the provision of the law. A situation in which there is overlap and a lack of clarity in the division of powers could perpetuate power struggles between the NSS and [the office of] the military secretary, and impair the ability of each to fulfill its role optimally."³⁶

The prime minister needs assistance on issues connected to management of the intelligence community, with an emphasis on the Mossad and the GSS, which are directly under him. He also needs advice on the use of intelligence and intelligence assessments for decision making purposes. In previous decades, various elements pointed out the gaps in the prime minister's ability to cope with these issues on his own. Thus, for example, commissions that examined the issue of intelligence, such as the Yadin-Saraf Commission in 1963 and the Agranat Commission in 1975, recommended the appointment of an intelligence adviser to the prime minister.³⁷ Since then, the intelligence community has grown much larger, as have the intelligence challenges. The vacuum was eventually filled by the military secretary, with the assistance of a colonel appointed as deputy military secretary for intelligence. Efraim Halevy, former head of the NSS and the Mossad, has noted that since generally the military secretary is an officer from operations, his understanding of intelligence is lacking.³⁸ In 2006 the Winograd Commission recommended eliminating the military secretary's "intelligence division" and establishing a team in the NSS to deal with intelligence assessments that would integrate the information and assessments coming from intelligence agencies. This recommendation was not accepted by the prime minister. However, in May 2009 the Ministry of Intelligence Affairs was established, headed by Dan Meridor, to assist the prime minister (the Mossad and the GSS remained under the prime minister). In March 2013, Dr. Yuval Steinitz was appointed minister of strategy, intelligence, and international relations.

From the above, it is evident that a number of officials who examined the issue found that the desired model for a military secretary is a senior staff officer. All of them ruled out the models in which a major general serves in this position. Their reasons were as follows:

- a. It is an important position that is appropriate for a colonel or brigadier general.
- b. The power and the broad activities of a military secretary of the rank of major general are not desirable and could even be harmful. They are liable to limit the influence of offices with responsibility and actual and legal authority, such as the NSS and the Defense Ministry, on issues of weighty significance for national security, for example, a strategic attack on an enemy country, a decision to launch or postpone a military operation, a change in the size of the defense budget, IDF buildup,

division of operational responsibility among security agencies, and security aspects of political issues (such as withdrawal from the Golan Heights, the fate of the Jordan Valley in a political agreement, and the like). In addition, a high ranking military secretary could create an undesirable barrier between the prime minister and the heads of the defense establishment; this was pointed out, for example, by former defense minister Major General (ret.) Yitzhak Mordechai³⁹ and former Mossad head Efraim Halevy.⁴⁰

- c. The military secretary is at a relative disadvantage. The ability of the military secretary to coordinate security discussions and advise the prime minister could be inferior to that of the head of the NSS and the Defense Ministry, partly because the military secretary does not serve as the head of a professional staff suited to this. Furthermore, the military secretary's working in parallel to the NSS without coordination is likely to cause problems.
- d. Negative impact on the IDF: As defense minister, Ehud Barak noted that the appointment of an officer of the rank of major general from the command track as military secretary "has a negative impact on the officers themselves and is damaging to the IDF." Then-Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi also had principled reservations about such an appointment.⁴¹

The Prime Minister's Position

Since Netanyahu's election as prime minister in 1996, it has generally been evident that he considers orderly, in-depth staff work on the national level to be very important, and his contribution to the establishment of the NSS is noteworthy. However, in recent years since the passage of the NSS Law in 2008, which he supported, Netanyahu has given the impression of having retreated significantly from his concept of the NSS as a dominant institution in preparing staff work for the prime minister. This can be seen in his prior high expectations of the NSS,⁴² compared with his current support for the position of the military secretary and his powers even at the expense of the NSS.

A letter from Prime Minister Netanyahu to the state comptroller in July 2010 reflects his position.⁴³ According to Netanyahu, the military secretary operates at the most sensitive junction for decisions on Israel's security. His work requires an officer with the rank of major general, who

is greatly recognized by the defense establishment and the prime minister, the prime minister's bureau, and the entire government. The officer must have experience in the use of operational force and force buildup, including strategic thinking and assessment. "All of these leave no room for discussion about the rank of the military secretary." And, "the military secretary gives directives to the heads of the defense establishment and government ministries on behalf of the prime minister, holds an ongoing dialogue with them, and monitors their implementation of directives. Since the prime minister and his bureau's work interfaces with the heads of the defense establishment, if the interests of the defense establishment are represented in the prime minister's bureau by an officer with a rank lower than major general, they could be significantly harmed." The prime minister added that "ultimately, the military secretary, like other staff in the prime minister's bureau . . . must be representative and have official status. Therefore, the military secretary cannot have a rank other than major general." In closing, the prime minister wrote that "in light of all of this, I agree with the position of previous prime ministers in stating that the status and the rank of the military secretary should be major general."

In a meeting with the state comptroller in June 2011, the prime minister noted: "I have never thought, although this is the law, that one institution [or] person should give you the recommendations, because this is a recipe for trouble . . . in other words, it [the NSS] is a major institution but not the only one. I really think that it is dangerous for a prime minister to be in a situation in which he accepts, on almost all the issues I mentioned, one opinion or [person] that coordinates all opinions for him."⁴⁴ And indeed, the state comptroller's investigation showed that the prime minister gives the military secretary the task of coordinating discussions on foreign affairs and defense, even more than the head of the NSS.⁴⁵

The above shows two reasons for the prime minister's rejection of recommendations on lowering the status of the military secretary. One is that the rank of major general gives the military secretary authority as the representative of the prime minister, especially in contacts with the IDF, and it makes the prime minister's retinue more representative. For this purpose, it is possible to make do with a beginning major general as military secretary, since if his professional experience on strategic issues was the decisive factor, a seasoned major general should have been chosen.

A second reason is that Prime Minister Netanyahu is not prepared to give the NSS exclusivity over coordination of staff work on national security, in spite of the NSS Law. He leaves a considerable portion of this work in his hands, through the military secretary. It would appear that Netanyahu has learned from experience about the capabilities of the NSS, but also about its limitations, and he divides the issues between the military secretary and the NSS, "partly in accordance with the NSS's capability in certain areas," as the state comptroller put it.⁴⁶ Aside from the need for pluralism, noted by the prime minister, he apparently sees the military secretary as a senior personal and professional aide, and a member of his staff, who is loyal exclusively to him. The NSS, in contrast, is a governmental institution that is required to fulfill its functions under the law and is liable to have a conflict of interests with him. For example, the head of the NSS could present to the prime minister and later to the cabinet a political-security situation assessment formulated by a professional staff without considering political sensitivities. Such a result could be avoided by using the military secretary or a personal adviser. In addition, holding discussions that include a small number of people in the prime minister's bureau reduces the risk that sensitive information will be leaked. In other words, compartmentalization and the duty of loyalty give an advantage to the military secretary.⁴⁷ The position of the prime minister, that the NSS "should first of all coordinate cabinet meetings and ministerial meetings on security issues"⁴⁸—and by implication, the military secretary will coordinate more limited discussions—tends to support this distinction.

Prime Minister Netanyahu appears to find advantages in the position of military secretary on a number of other issues, such as those requiring short response times. For example, it is possible that in many cases, the Prime Minister would prefer to receive staff work quickly, all of which was coordinated by the Ministry of Defense with the mediation of the military secretary, and not to delay them with further staff work by the NSS. In addition, he relies on the military secretary for ongoing operational matters and for conveying intelligence and reports on security incidents. In the meantime, it appears that Netanyahu ultimately has left to the military secretary the task of "regulating and conveying intelligence" to the prime minister, which in the past, he considered to be clearly the job of the NSS.⁴⁹ To be sure, establishing the NSS has not yet solved the problems in operational coordination between all security agencies in Israel, which

are in various government ministries. This is a function carried out to a certain extent by the military secretary as he coordinates between them and the prime minister. There are also the difficulties the NSS has encountered in cooperation with the defense establishment, even after passage of the NSS Law. The heads of the defense establishment are not enthusiastic about the division the military secretary creates between them and the prime minister, but the head of the NSS, who has a staff and can check their outcomes, could be a greater obstacle than the military secretary.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Some of the problems that have become evident in the role of the military secretary are only symptoms of deeper problems in the management of defense and foreign affairs in Israel. These concern, inter alia, the need to define the role of the prime minister vis-à-vis the IDF⁵⁰ and the need to define the control, division of responsibility, and joint action of all institutions in Israel that deal with foreign affairs and defense matters, which are in different government ministries. This article has not discussed these matters but has instead examined the role of the military secretary within this matrix.

In the past five years, there has been evident improvement in staff work on national security in the Prime Minister's Office, especially because the NSS has grown stronger, and there are periods of coordination and cooperation between the military secretary and the NSS, in spite of the structural flaws. Nevertheless, the potential for glitches has remained, and the issues with the position must be resolved by the prime minister, who determines the nature of the position and its powers.

What follows are some recommendations to improve the situation:

- a. Define clearly and formally the role of the military secretary as a component in the overall staff work of national security. The current ambiguity concerning the functions of the military secretary could prevent the closing of the circle of authority and responsibility for issues of national security and leave an opening for failures in the future. Such a correction is necessary for the proper functioning of the entire security-political complex in Israel. In the meantime, the clash between the NSS Law and the regulations defining the role of the military secretary should be resolved. Either the arrangement should be amended or the NSS Law changed. In addition, it would

be preferable for the responsibilities of the military secretary to be anchored in a government directive or in a law (appended to the NSS Law) and for them to be mainly on non-classified issues.

- b. Limit the work of the military secretary to the traditional role of liaison between the prime minister and the security agencies. This role is highly influential in any case, and it suits the position of the military secretary in the system. This would also allow the NSS and the Ministry of Intelligence Affairs to perform their functions and realize their relative advantages. For example, Intelligence Affairs could have an advantage in coordinating staff work (work plans, budgets, and the like) with intelligence organizations, with ongoing operational activity remaining at this stage with the military secretary. The NSS has an advantage in comprehensive staff work and organizational memory, and therefore, it would be better if the NSS also coordinated broad staff work on foreign affairs and defense that the prime minister assigns to others (outside the NSS), mainly the Defense Ministry.
- c. Appoint a civilian to the position. It is not necessary for the military secretary to be a military figure, and in any case, a considerable part of his work concerns liaison between the prime minister and civilian security organizations that are subordinate to the prime minister. Appointing a civilian would make it possible to shape the role of the military secretary in accordance with its original purpose and would resolve the need to appoint an officer with the rank of major general out of considerations of representation. This would end the permanent presence of a senior officer in uniform in the prime minister's bureau, which is rife with political tensions, and would remove the incongruousness of a major general in the IDF being subordinate to the prime minister and not to the chief of staff. The civilian should be someone with broad professional knowledge and experience in security (such as a former high ranking official in the IDF, the GSS, or the Mossad) who is familiar the defense establishment and the intelligence community, is experienced in staff work, and has strong personal skills in communication and coordination. This appointment should be based on trust and not a political appointment, and the position be called "security secretary to the prime minister."
- d. Have a personal adviser. On security-political issues that are very sensitive politically or personally and on which the prime minister is

not interested in consulting with statutory office holders, such as the head of the NSS, it would be desirable for him to appoint a personal adviser who is not involved in staff work himself.

- e. Reexamine the need for a “cascade” of reports and intelligence reaching to the prime minister through the military secretary. It is clear that this is a result of a decision not by the military secretary, but by the prime minister himself and the organizations that provide the information to his bureau. Although it is hard to cut oneself off from the flow of intelligence, this resource places an enormous burden on the prime minister and it is doubtful that it is justified in terms of costs and benefits to his valuable time, which is supposed to be dedicated to a large extent to economic and social issues as well. Therefore, the procedures for disseminating security information to the prime minister should be reexamined with an eye toward focusing it and reducing the quantity, and having the reporting organizations take responsibility.

Appendix. Military Secretaries to the Prime Minister

Military Secretary	Term of Office	Prime Minister	Positions prior to and following military secretary position
Colonel Nehemia Argov	1948-1953 1955-1957	David Ben Gurion	Before the establishment of the state, served as adjutant to the Haganah. Between the establishment of the state and 1950, served as adjutant to the prime minister. In January 1950, appointed first military secretary. Died in November 1957.
Colonel Haim Ben-David	1958-1963	David Ben Gurion	Before military secretary position: chief of staff for Northern Command and head of officers' personnel administration in IDF Manpower Branch. After military secretary position: head of Manpower Branch.
Colonel Yitzhak Nessler	1963-1966	Levi Eshkol	
Brigadier General Yisrael Lior	1966-1974	Levi Eshkol, Golda Meir	Before military secretary position: head of Manpower/Individuals Department in Manpower Branch. After military secretary position: left the IDF, served as director general of national oil company.

Military Secretary	Term of Office	Prime Minister	Positions prior to and following military secretary position
Brigadier General Ephraim Poran	1974-1981	Yitzhak Rabin, Menachem Begin	Before military secretary position: IDF spokesman (brigadier general). After military secretary position: left the IDF.
Brigadier General Azriel Nevo	1981-1993	Menachem Begin, Yitzhak Shamir, Shimon Peres, and Yitzhak Rabin	Before military secretary position: deputy military secretary. As military secretary, was promoted from the rank of lieutenant colonel, to colonel, and to brigadier general. After military secretary position: military attaché in Great Britain and Ireland.
Major General Danny Yatom	1993-1996	Yitzhak Rabin, Shimon Peres	Before military secretary position: OC Central Command, head of Planning Branch. After military secretary position: head of Mossad, head of Ehud Barak's political-security staff.
Major General Zeev Livneh	1996-1997	Benjamin Netanyahu	Before military secretary position: head of Combat Corps headquarters (Ground Forces); commander, Home Front Command. After military secretary position: IDF attaché in Washington.
Brigadier General Dr. Shimon Shapira	1997-1999	Benjamin Netanyahu	Before military secretary position: deputy military secretary for intelligence. Promoted to rank of brigadier general during term as military secretary. After military secretary position: left the IDF.
Brigadier General Gadi Eizenkot	1999-2001	Ehud Barak, Ariel Sharon	Before military secretary position: Golani Brigade commander. Promoted to rank of brigadier general while serving as military secretary. After military secretary position: commander of reserve Armored Division, Judea and Samaria Division commander, head of Operations Branch (major general), OC Northern Command, and today, deputy chief of staff.

Military Secretary	Term of Office	Prime Minister	Positions prior to and following military secretary position
Major General Moshe Kaplinsky	2001-2002	Ariel Sharon	Before military secretary position: commander of the Galilee Division. Promoted to rank of major general while serving as military secretary. After military secretary position: OC Central Command and deputy chief of staff.
Major General Yoav Galant	2002-2005	Ariel Sharon	Before military secretary position: chief of staff, Ground Forces. Promoted to rank of major general while serving as military secretary. After military secretary position: OC Southern Command.
Major General Gadi Shamni	2005-2007	Ariel Sharon, Ehud Olmert	Before military secretary position: head of Operations Branch in the General Staff (brigadier general). Promoted to rank of major general while serving as military secretary. After military secretary position: OC Central Command, military attaché in Washington.
Major General Meir Kalifi	2007-2010	Ehud Olmert, Benjamin Netanyahu	Before military secretary position: deputy commander of Ground Forces with rank of major general. After military secretary position: left the IDF.
Major General Yohanan Locker	2010-2012	Benjamin Netanyahu	Before military secretary position: chief of staff of the IAF. Promoted to rank of major general while serving as military secretary. After military secretary position: left the IDF.
Major General Eyal Zamir	2012-	Benjamin Netanyahu	Before military secretary position: chief of staff of Ground Forces. Promoted to rank of major general while serving as military secretary.

Notes

- 1 State Comptroller, "Audit Report, Implementation of the NSS Law and Handling of the Turkish Flotilla," June 2012. The report deals with 2009 through 2011.
- 2 According to a letter from Prime Minister Netanyahu to the state comptroller in June 2010, as noted in the state comptroller's report "Procedures for the Appointment of Senior Officers in the IDF," August 2010.
- 3 "Recommendations of the Steering Committee on Implementing the Recommendations of the Winograd Commission Interim Report" (Lipkin Shahak Commission), June 26, 2007.
- 4 State Comptroller, "Audit Report, Procedures for the Appointment of Senior Officers in the IDF."
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 In March 1992, there was an amendment to the Basic Law: The Government, which stated, inter alia, that "there will be a ministerial committee on security issues in the government that will be headed by the prime minister."
- 7 Minutes No. 46, Meeting of the Knesset Committee for State Audit Affairs, January 17, 2007, Knesset website. The committee discussed the state comptroller's report on the National Security Council from September 2006. The prime minister's comments were apparently intended to support resolution of the issues with the functions of the NSS.
- 8 State Comptroller, "Audit Report, Procedures for the Appointment of Senior Officers in the IDF."
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 For example, the opinion of former Mossad head and NSS head Efraim Halevy. See State Comptroller, "Audit Report on the National Security Council," September 2006.
- 11 Rinat Avigur, "Man in the Shadows," *Bamahaneh*, No. 6, February 3, 2010, IDF Spokesman's website.
- 12 Azriel Nevo in an interview with Tom Segev, Channel 10, June 26, 2012.
- 13 State Comptroller, "Audit Report, Implementation of the NSS Law and Handling of the Turkish Flotilla."
- 14 According to the state comptroller's report of June 2012, the office of the military secretary includes the deputy military secretary for intelligence (colonel), the bureau head (major), bureau manager (captain), and a number of soldiers doing regular army service. The fact that the size of the military secretary's office has remained limited over the years could indicate that there is broad agreement that the position does not require a large staff.
- 15 State Comptroller, "Audit Report, Implementation of the NSS Law and Handling of the Turkish Flotilla."
- 16 From a draft of Uzi Arad and Limor Ben-Har, *The National Security Council: The Struggle to Regulate Decision Making at the Top*, June 2013.

- 17 State Comptroller, "Audit Report, Implementation of the NSS Law and Handling of the Turkish Flotilla."
- 18 By "consulting" the intention is direction for activities in which the military secretary himself formulates a professional, well-grounded position, sometimes while gathering data and assessments from various institutions, and the prime minister feels confident in relying on it in his decisions by virtue of his assumption that the military secretary is an authority and a senior figure in the defense establishment. This does not mean expressing a non-binding opinion in a conversation taking place with close colleagues, which could also have a considerable impact.
- 19 Avigur, "Man in the Shadows."
- 20 "Recommendations of the Steering Committee on Implementing the Recommendations of the Winograd Commission Interim Report."
- 21 State Comptroller, "Audit Report, Implementation of the NSS Law and Handling of the Turkish Flotilla."
- 22 Ibid. According to the law, the description is an internal document written by Military Secretary Major General Meir Kalifi in 2009, which was also adopted by the military secretary who succeeded him.
- 23 In 1986, the military secretary was included as an observer and a representative of the prime minister on the committee. See State Comptroller, "Audit Report on Implementation of the NSS Law and Handling of the Turkish Flotilla."
- 24 Arad and Ben-Har, *The National Security Council: The Struggle to Regulate Decision Making at the Top*.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 In a book in memory of Nehemia Argov, Yigael Yadin writes about the role of the first military secretary: "Sometimes, Nehemia had to convey orders and commands on delicate issues that had not been clearly defined and to coordinate the position of subordinates who were not comfortable with the orders given. It was his job to mediate between the prime minister and the defense minister and the military leaders." See Yigal Yadin, *Nehemia Argov* (Yedidim, 1959).
- 27 Brigadier General Gadi Eizenkot was the exception in this group. In 2001, he returned to the IDF chain of command as a brigadier general, and today he serves as deputy chief of staff.
- 28 Major General Moshe Kaplinsky, who was the first to be promoted to the rank of major general while serving as military secretary, later served as OC Central Command and as deputy chief of staff.
- 29 The defense establishment is not a strong supporter of improving the standing of the NSS, which was among the reasons for the NSS Law.
- 30 NSC head Giora Eiland stated in 2005 that while the prime minister has the National Security Council, which is an institution with capabilities and depth, although it is at least partially distanced from the circle of decision makers. In addition, there is a group of very close advisers near the prime

minister, a military secretary, a political adviser, and others, who have no ability to do serious work. See "Audit Report on the National Security Council."

- 31 Ibid.
- 32 "Recommendations of the Steering Committee on Implementing the Recommendations of the Winograd Commission Interim Report."
- 33 The Government Law bill (National Security Staff Amendment), 2007. The draft law was proposed by twenty-seven MKs, headed by Amira Dotan and Tzahi Hanegbi.
- 34 National Security Staff Law, 2008.
- 35 Barak Ravid, "Lindenstrauss: I'll Check Arad's Claims that Prime Minister's Bureau Lied in Audit," *Haaretz*, March 13, 2012. Nimrod Busso, "It's a Shame the Prime Minister's Office is Not an Elite Unit," *The Marker*, December 19, 2012.
- 36 State Comptroller, "Audit Report, Implementation of the NSS Law and Handling of the Turkish Flotilla."
- 37 The Yadin-Saraf Commission focused on the adviser's providing the prime minister a picture of activity by the services (including work plans, plans for action, and the like) and assisting him with intelligence assessments, while the Agranat Commission focused only on the need for assessment.
- 38 State Comptroller, "Audit Report, The National Security Council."
- 39 State Comptroller, "Audit Report, Procedures for the Appointment of Senior Officers in the IDF."
- 40 State Comptroller, "Audit Report, The National Security Council."
- 41 State Comptroller, "Audit Report, Procedures for the Appointment of Senior Officers in the IDF."
- 42 The following are comments made by Prime Minister Netanyahu to the Knesset Committee for State Audit Affairs, January 2007: "The (national security) adviser must meet with the prime minister every day, not in a staff meeting, but in a separate meeting. He is not part of the political team; he is in the national security team, every day. The council must be not only the regulator and provider of intelligence; it must be directed by the prime minister to do and to follow up and to lead the staff work for him on issues of national security. An example: Today, this council was supposed to convene daily with the relevant functionaries, whether the head of the Mossad or the head of the Atomic Energy Commission or the chief of staff or the heads of the intelligence agencies. It must convene daily on a master plan to remove the Iranian threat. Removing the Iranian threat is a classic case in which you need a National Security Council because you also need a very large international effort, a political effort, an informational effort, a legal effort, like that which we have begun to initiate."
- 43 State Comptroller, "Audit Report, Procedures for the Appointment of Senior Officers in the IDF."

- 44 State Comptroller, "Audit Report, Implementation of the NSS Law and Handling of the Turkish Flotilla."
- 45 Ibid.
- 46 Ibid.
- 47 Some believe that it is precisely the compartmentalization and the discussions in a small forum that increase the risk of making staff work superficial because "they take away from prime ministers the possibility of relying on high-quality, skillful, and thorough action and enjoying the fruits of orderly and systematic staff work." See Government Law bill [National Security Staff Amendment], 2007, explanatory remarks).
- 48 State Comptroller, "Audit Report, Implementation of the NSS Law and Handling of the Turkish Flotilla."
- 49 See note 7.
- 50 See Shmuel Even and Zvia Gross, *Proposed Legislation on the IDF: Regulating Civil-Military Relations in the Wake of the Second Lebanon War*, Memorandum No. 93 (Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies, April 2008).