

Intelligence in the Prime Minister's Bureau: A Proposed Change

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Introduction

There has been marked progress in the intelligence community's work and its connection to the political echelon, and particularly the prime minister, since the Yom Kippur War. In strong contrast to the events of 1973, all elements of the intelligence community and their respective opinions, including the disagreements among them, receive a hearing in the decision making process.

The security cabinet, led by the prime minister, is the forum that in routine times and during emergencies connects the intelligence picture with the political decisions and the military-security responses that derive from the intelligence assessment. For this reason, it is important that this forum be given complete, up-to-date, and precise intelligence, as well as an integrative intelligence assessment that is based upon information and insights from all segments of the intelligence community (the community's "collective wisdom").

At present, the prime minister and the ministers of the security cabinet receive ongoing and periodic intelligence assessments from the heads of the intelligence community: the Mossad, the Military Intelligence Directorate, and the General Security Services (GSS). This is a substantive and significant advance from the period preceding the Yom Kippur War, with the element of pluralism, which then was so badly lacking, now ostensibly part of the intelligence assessment. However, in practice, this amounts to little more than an exchange of situation assessments – "pluralism on paper and in assessment surveys." The element of shared pluralistic debate is still lacking, in terms of reports and what they mean on the one hand, and in

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terms of the assessments and the necessary operations that derive from them on the other. Thus although the current situation is an improvement over former dynamics, what transpired during the military conflicts that occurred after 1973 (mainly in Lebanon and Gaza) shows that there is still much room for improvement in the potential of the prime minister and the security cabinet to use the high quality intelligence provided by the intelligence community as a whole to the fullest possible extent.

During the Yom Kippur War, four main obstacles hampered the intelligence community's ability to serve the prime minister and the decision makers in the political and military echelons. These obstacles, some of which resurfaced after the Yom Kippur War and could recur in the future, were as follows:

- a. *The Prime Minister lacked the necessary tools* (such as a directly subordinate intelligence staff, as well as binding work procedures with the intelligence community) to draw independent conclusions regarding the significance of the intelligence that reached her desk. Instead, there was nearly complete dependence upon the Defense Minister and the tools at his disposal (his staff forum, the IDF General Staff).
- b. *The Military Intelligence Directorate had complete exclusivity in making Israel's national intelligence assessment.* It was, for all practical purposes, the sole basis, in terms of intelligence, for decision making at the leadership level. Any element with a different assessment, such as the Mossad, was shut out from the discussions in the group known as the Defense Minister's Forum/the Minister's Staff (the main forum for discussing security and intelligence problems at the time). These differing opinions were not heard and they had no opportunity to influence the intelligence assessment.
- c. *No basic, binding work procedures existed* between the Prime Minister, the Defense Minister, the chief of staff, and the head of Military Intelligence. Consequently, no critical reports were provided in their raw state for the leadership's review and consideration (without interpretation from the Military Intelligence research division, which in many cases robbed them of their meaning), thereby denying the leadership the opportunity to form insights of their own regarding the reports. Military Intelligence commentary, together with the interpretation of its researchers, was what dictated, exclusively, the decisions and preparations that preceded the war.

- d. *There was a severe gap between the intelligence picture (reports and assessments) and the decisions regarding preparation for war and management of the war in the first stages* (in addition to the failure of advance warning of the war, a failure that could have been avoided) – for example, between the intelligence received about Egypt's plans for war and the Southern Command's operational plans, which were supposed to provide an effective operational counter response to them.

In Light of Lessons from the Past

I believe that the lessons learned from the Yom Kippur War until today demand changes that will ensure three main principles.

The first principle is the need to increase the prime minister's ability to plow independently through the abundance of intelligence reports and assessments (regarding incidents about which there is an overabundance of data). He must have the ability to examine the situation comprehensively, as well as to direct preparations and actions to counter trends that could develop into a threat to Israel's security. In other words, he must be capable of supervising and ensuring that the operational agencies provide a suitable and effective response to threats and dangers that stem from the intelligence information, and prepare for them politically and in terms of military strategy.

The second principle is the institution of an intra-community procedure and working method that demands joint discussion (ongoing professional dialogue) among all the relevant entities to ensure that the prime minister receives a pluralistic intelligence picture containing the views of all relevant elements in the intelligence community, including their agreements and disagreements.

Third is a work method that ensures that the prime minister and the security cabinet bear actual weight in making decisions regarding the development of security threats (or, alternatively, political prospects) that are critical to the security of the State of Israel.

To ensure this, a proposal of principles is detailed below that will likely require adaptations to the existing organizational reality. The foremost change will be the establishment of a small staff body, to be called the Pluralistic Desk, which is directly subordinate to the prime minister and part of the Prime Minister's Bureau (unlike previous recommendations,

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which suggested the appointment of an adviser for intelligence affairs – a position for one person to synchronize the work of the various intelligence agencies). This entity would be responsible for the ongoing assessment of the intelligence information that has implications for national security and its relay to the prime minister and the security cabinet. It would include representatives from all the elements in the intelligence community (as detailed below), and provide an ongoing and permanent intelligence presence in the Prime Minister's Bureau, for the prime minister and for the security cabinet, alongside the continued regular functioning of the existing bodies in the intelligence community in carrying out their routine tasks and responsibilities.

The Pluralistic Desk would deal with the analysis and assessment of accumulated information in all the bodies within the intelligence community, and would participate in their discussions and threat assessments. This would provide the leadership with an intelligence picture – ongoing and independent on the one hand, and integrative and comprehensive on the other – of the security risks and threats as a basis for making decisions. Its purpose would be to assist the prime minister and the security cabinet in two areas:

- a. Putting together a comprehensive and independent political-security perspective based on the information and the assessments provided by the intelligence community as a whole, with emphasis on issues of early warning – in other words, anything that could develop into a threat that has ramifications for Israel's security in the medium and long term.
- b. Providing the prime minister with the ability to ensure advance planning and preparation for dangers and threats that arise from analysis of the intelligence – in other words, ensuring a close relationship between intelligence, decisions, and implementation of preparation and response processes. The staff would also participate and assist the prime minister in discussions of recommendations from the operational echelons (such as the IDF, the GSS, the Mossad, and the Foreign Ministry) about dealing with and responding to the threats that arise from the intelligence assessments.

The synthesis presented to the political-security echelon will highlight the reports about the matter in question, the assessments of the various entities, potential future scenarios, and military-political weak points that allow for the exploitation of political and military opportunities – alongside emphasis on the agreed-upon assessment, the reservations regarding it,

and the alternatives that emerged in the discussions. Emphasis should be placed upon the importance of having the conclusions of the discussions clear and focused and avoiding vague and ambiguous language, although there can be more than one agreed-upon recommendation for action. The Pluralistic Desk will help the prime minister and the security cabinet make decisions regarding political or operational measures and directions that in principle should be taken as a result of the information and the intelligence assessment (without going into operational detail, which will remain the responsibility of the operational agencies). In order to enable the members of the staff to analyze and assess the advance warning information independently in its broad sense, as detailed above, it is very important to allow them access to the relevant reports.¹

The director of the Pluralistic Desk would be appointed by the prime minister. The staff would include a small number of high ranking people with experience in intelligence work, mainly from a research-assessment standpoint, and who represent the entities in the intelligence community as a whole – Military Intelligence; the Mossad; the GSS; the intelligence agencies of the IDF's various branches (ground, air, sea, and cyber); the Foreign Ministry; and the National Security Council, as well as high ranking and experienced people with experience in operational command. Such a group would ensure that the team connect the intelligence picture with the response – in other words, in principle help the prime minister and the security cabinet make decisions, as derived from the information and the intelligence assessment. Each member of the team would have a strong background, a conceptual approach, and a connection to the organization that he came from, but would not be subordinate to it. The result would be a forum of shared integrative thinking, reflecting all the relative advantages of the agencies of the intelligence community, the branches of the IDF, the Foreign Ministry, and the National Security Council, alongside independent thought and reduced influence of extraneous interpersonal and other considerations.

Since in the intelligence sphere and in the political sphere the facts regarding the advance of the Egyptian missiles into the Suez Canal zone were known before the war, it appears that the proper conclusions were not drawn. An integrative staff group of the intelligence community, such as a Pluralistic Desk operating close to the prime minister, could have reached those conclusions in real time.

This proposal does not detract from or change anything regarding the current roles, organizational patterns, and work of the existing agencies. The Pluralistic Desk will not have supervisory or intermediate rank, nor will it obstruct access by the prime minister to the various agencies.

Construction of this system and introduction of the change requires time and leadership from both the prime minister and the person appointed as the first director of the forum. It is vital that the person chosen for the post be respected professionally and personally by the entire intelligence community and have the ability to create a system with clear powers and significant added professional value, which generates a low level of opposition and friction. One issue that the director of the Pluralist Desk would have to deal with is the “fight over the prime minister’s ear” – in other words, the natural tendency of intelligence community agencies to create a channel that circumvents pluralistic discussion and gain a position of exclusive or principal influence.

Thus, this would be a compact group comprising seven or eight members (each one high ranking, of excellent quality, and possessing knowledge and experience) representing the various agencies in the intelligence community and with command-operational experience. Their role as a staff agency close to the prime minister would focus on ongoing handling of all short and long term threats and warnings as a whole. The group’s main contribution would be integrative assessment, combining its members’ disciplines, perspectives, and areas of expertise as a basis for decision making by the prime minister and the security cabinet.

The Pluralistic Desk would not have allowed the issue of the Hamas tunnels to fall through the cracks among the leadership or other cabinet members, Military Intelligence, or the GSS.

Two Illustrative Incidents

To illustrate the value of this proposed entity, two of the many instances from the sphere of political-military decision making – in which the presence of an intelligence agency close to the prime minister might have led to different decisions from the ones that were ultimately taken – are examined below. The first deals with the advance of Egyptian surface-to-air missile batteries into the Suez Canal zone at the end of the War of Attrition (on the night of August

7, 1970). This act by Egypt – a blatant violation of the ceasefire agreement reached between Egypt and Israel with United States mediation – took place before the ink on the agreement was dry. The second and more recent

example deals with the way the Israel handled the issue of Hamas's attack tunnels before and during the start of Operation Protective Edge.

*Egypt Moves Surface-to-Air Missile Batteries into the Suez Canal Zone*²

The move of Egyptian-Soviet missile batteries eastward into the Suez Canal zone immediately upon the signing of the ceasefire agreement at the end of the War of Attrition (August 1970) had system-wide military implications. The purpose of the missile battery was to protect Egyptian troops at the Suez Canal, and in hindsight, it was an essential preliminary measure for Egypt's attack and crossing of the Suez Canal at the start of the Yom Kippur War. In her speech to the Knesset on June 29, 1970, Prime Minister Golda Meir mentioned Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser's speech in Benghazi four days prior, in which he said that his country would be able to establish a complete aerial defense system in the canal zone, and that this aerial superiority would determine if and when the war would resume in full force. If the Egyptian army were able to gain comparable power in the air, he said, no element on earth could prevent it from crossing the canal. President Anwar Sadat, Nasser's successor, was also told by the senior military command that no plan for crossing the canal could be talked of, nor could a line of defense on its eastern bank be established, without effective protection against the Israeli Air Force.

In addition, during the period preceding the war, the Egyptian command gained increased confidence in the missile battery's ability to neutralize the Israeli Air Force. This confidence arose from Israel's loss of five Phantom aircraft during a preemptive strike on the missile battery toward the end of the War of Attrition. From the Egyptians' perspective, this opened the way to preparations for putting Sadat's war plan into practice.

From a retrospective analysis of the intelligence picture that the Israeli leadership possessed (after the threat of stationing missile batteries in the canal zone appeared on the agenda), and regarding the staff work and the interaction among the various bodies toward decision making, it is clear that in the intelligence sphere and in the political sphere, the facts were known even before the war. Thus it appears – and this is not merely postwar wisdom in hindsight – that the proper conclusions were not drawn in this incident. An integrative staff group of the intelligence community, such as a Pluralistic Desk operating close to the prime minister, could have reached those conclusions in real time.

The main lessons that may be learned from the introduction of Egyptian-Soviet missile batteries into the canal zone can be summed up in the following points:

- a. There was a pan-Egyptian agreement during the time of President Nasser and his successor Sadat that defense using the missile batteries was essential for neutralizing Israel's aerial superiority and a means of protecting Egyptian troops, in the sense that this was a necessary condition for going to war.
- b. This explains the weight that the Egyptians and the Soviets gave to moving the missile batteries close to the Suez Canal, as well as their absolute refusal to withdraw them. The senior Egyptian command was firmly opposed to going to war without defense by missiles or some other "umbrella of protection" against the Israeli Air Force.
- c. Despite the reports that the senior Israeli political and military echelon possessed, Israel dealt with the issue of the missile batteries on several different fronts. The ability to make full use of the understandings and the assessments on the basis of the reports and to make decisions on the matter was weakened among the decentralized senior political echelon, the top echelon of the IDF, the Israeli embassy in Washington, and the intelligence community. The Foreign Ministry and the Mossad were conspicuous in their absence in the decision making process. The Foreign Ministry was a source of knowledge and expertise, and its voice on the issue, which had many significant political aspects, went almost unheard. The Mossad was not consulted on the issue except for an inquiry as to sources, and it did not develop accessible sources of its own. As stated, the extent of cooperation among these agencies was unclear, and in any case, was not institutionalized and did not produce joint results, even if their representatives happened to sit together in meetings or there were joint discussions in various forums.
- d. The Egyptian-Soviet act of moving the missile batteries into the canal zone, its long term implications in the context of a comprehensive Israeli-Egyptian war, and the option that this move presented to the Egyptians for carrying out attacks that involved crossing the canal seem to have been treated as minor issues in intelligence assessments,³ which focused on portraying the significance of the new surface-to-air missile threat in a limited scenario of a war of attrition. Senior members of Israel's political echelon, backed by the intelligence picture that was given to them, viewed the significance of moving the missile batteries

- toward the canal zone in the limited perspective of the model and scope of the War of Attrition.
- e. Israel, which suspended its participation in the talks under the sponsorship of UN envoy Gunnar Jarring in September 1970, saw Egypt's violation of the demand to freeze the placement of the missile batteries as a sign of Egypt's lack of credibility in honoring political agreements. In any case, the long term military-strategic implications of moving the missile batteries eastward were a low priority for Israel, even though Israel insisted (until December 29, 1970) that it would not return to the talks until the situation in the canal zone was restored to its previous format. On the issue of the Egyptian violations, the political and military topics were intertwined with one another extremely clearly. Nonetheless, the main point of handling the issue "drifted" from the military to the political sphere according to the ongoing matters of interest that occupied the leadership, and not necessarily according to the topics' order of importance in a comprehensive view.
 - f. In the absence of a complete intelligence picture, the pressure that Israel put on the United States at various levels did not delineate in clear fashion the fact that the deployment of the Egyptian-Soviet missile batteries was the key to the question of whether there would or would not be a war. This affected the extent of the US willingness to work toward changing the situation, and much of its efforts took the form of political pressure upon Israel and an attempt to calm it by providing advanced military weaponry.
 - g. The feeling amid the ranks of the Israeli Air Force at the time was that they lacked an effective response to the missile threat precisely at the concluding and decisive stage of the War of Attrition.⁴
 - h. Indeed, while the Egyptians felt that the Israeli Air Force carried decisive weight in making decisions regarding war, it was not in fact an influential factor in making decisions, and its voice was hardly heard.
 - i. The Israeli side did not believe that the issue of moving the missile batteries eastward was a response to the demand of the Egyptian army or a necessary condition for starting a comprehensive war (if limited in scope) from the Egyptian side. The issue was pushed from the center of the political agenda, and the Israeli side examined only one proposal by the Defense Minister for a preemptive Israeli strike against the missile batteries in order to prevent war. The government rejected the proposal, and no other options, such as a change in the general deployment in

Sinai or a more complete development of the method of bombardment by the Air Force, which Air Force Commander Maj. Gen. Mordechai Hod suggested at the time, were brought before it for a decision.

*The Handling of Hamas's Tunnels (2014)*⁵

Military Intelligence and the GSS had a great deal of detailed information about Hamas's attack tunnels in the Gaza Strip in the years preceding Operation Protective Edge. Indeed, the reality that came to light raises many questions whether the significance of the available intelligence was gleaned fully, and in turn, whether Israel's military deployment was adequate. Hamas used an attack tunnel leading into Israeli territory to kidnap Gilad Shalit in 2006, and from 2009 to 2012, Hamas's military wing, under the leadership of Mohammed Deif, worked on the attack tunnels project, which Deif saw as a strategic project, alongside the development and expansion of Hamas's rocket supply. Several days before Operation Pillar of Defense in November 2012, a tunnel rigged with explosives was detonated near IDF troops involved in searches west of the border fence. Miraculously, no Israeli troops were hurt. Over the eighteen months preceding Operation Protective Edge, the IDF discovered three tunnel openings on the eastern side of the fence, inside Israeli territory. When IDF troops crossed the fence to demolish one of them, an explosive device planted in the tunnel was detonated, and six combat soldiers were wounded.

With the discovery of those tunnels (which were spacious and deep, with concrete-lined walls, lighting, and communications infrastructure, and some of which reached up to 300 meters beyond the fence), IDF officials realized the power and scope of the threat. Hamas had the ability to bring large numbers of troops, secretly and using the element of surprise, to the rear of the IDF deployment (the Gaza Division) and to the communities along the Gaza periphery, changing the rules of the game with a large scale, coordinated terror strike (attacks, ambushes, kidnappings) against several targets, military and civilian, simultaneously. On the eve of Operation Protective Edge (on July 6, 2014), the Air Force attacked a tunnel that had been discovered in the area of Kerem Shalom (as far back as April 2014, but the exit shaft in Israeli territory had not been found; the GSS believed that Hamas planned to use the tunnel to attack Israel in order to break through the siege around Gaza). Seven Hamas operatives were killed in the attack. Hamas responded by firing a barrage of rockets, and that was the start of Operation Protective Edge.

Hamas could not hide the large scale tunnel excavation project or the construction and infrastructure work. Since early 2013, Israel's leadership and the heads of its security branches received detailed periodic intelligence reports containing a survey of the known tunnels, with the routes of each one marked. The Israeli leadership, then, was aware of the existence of more than 30 tunnels inside the Gaza Strip, of which between one third and one half (according to the assessment) extended as far as the border fence, crossed the border, and were intended for use in an attack inside Israeli territory. As reported several times, the issue was brought up for discussion to the Prime Minister, who gave a team headed by his National Security Adviser the task of dealing with the issue. How the matter was handled is not known. It is clear that the series of technological methods for finding tunnels that was tested by the Defense Ministry's Administration for the Development of Weapons and Technological Infrastructure did not yield an effective solution by the time the conflict broke out. Resources were allocated to the Southern Command – intelligence gathering methods and troops for dealing with the tunnels – but practically speaking, not much was done in time. In any case, Israel's policy ruled out a preemptive or preventive military strike, by ground or by air, on the western side of the border, evidently out of a desire to avoid escalation and an additional round of fighting. Thus when the fighting broke out, Hamas had a fully functioning tunnel complex at its disposal, ready and fit to carry out terror attacks in Israeli territory. Indeed, 11 IDF troops were killed in three encounters with Hamas units that infiltrated into Israeli territory through the tunnels during the fighting, and miraculously, no civilians were killed as a result of the tunnels threat.

Based on the events and the information that was released, we can point to several major lessons in the context of the tunnel complex challenge.

The first lesson: The strategic significance of the tunnels – beyond their being a means of penetration for an attack in Israel – was not emphasized. The use of the tunnels as means for force movement within the Gaza Strip to and from fortified areas, while neutralizing IDF superiority and capability in observation and elimination of forces moving on the ground, was not made clear. Intelligence does not complete its job in describing the tunnels without furnishing information on their purpose and intended use.

The second lesson: The intelligence about the tunnels that was available for a long period of time and gave the IDF and the security branches time and space for preparations was neither processed nor used to put together

a suitable operational solution. No appropriate combat theory (ground engineering or aerial) was drawn up for this sort of fighting; no weapons, equipment, or suitable methods for finding and demolishing tunnels were developed in advance; no dedicated units (engineering or special forces, for example) were earmarked for dealing with the tunnels; IDF troops (and especially reserve units) trained insufficiently and in structures that were unsuitable for scenarios of tunnel combat (commanders and combat soldiers were quoted after the fact as saying: “We learned to cope with the tunnels while moving”), and their fitness, to put it mildly, left much to be desired; no plans of operation that were suitable for combat in the tunnel infrastructure were drawn up either in the Southern Command or in the divisional echelon, and when they were needed, the plans proved to be partial and had to be completed during the fighting – to name just a few of the lapses..

The third lesson: When the troops ultimately went into Gaza, the IDF improvised and adopted a combat doctrine and solutions that were ad hoc (while receiving assistance from companies and civilian entities) that took roughly two and a half weeks to implement until the tunnels were destroyed completely – a period of time that extended the operation far beyond what was planned. In hindsight, it is clear that Military Intelligence and other groups within the intelligence community could not stop at merely circulating the intelligence information to the consumers. It seems that they should have clarified the meanings and the insights for the commanders and the combat echelon. This would have sparked true involvement in order to arrive at operational responses to the problem and help the IDF implement them, since it became obvious that producing and circulating information to the consumers was not enough.

The fourth lesson: Most of the cabinet ministers, except for the Prime Minister and the Defense Minister, were not at all aware of the threat of the tunnels, and learned of it only on the eve of the operation. The media hardly mentioned the issue, and the debate in the media before the operation and after it began focused upon the rocket fire from the Gaza Strip. The security cabinet held very little discussion about the tunnel threat and its significance until a few days before the operation began, as most of this forum’s discussions then were devoted to the Iranian nuclear threat and the Syrian-Lebanese border. According to media reports, after the war, IDF officials admitted that “information about the tunnel threat very likely did not cross the security cabinet ministers’ threshold of awareness.” The Prime

Minister's National Security Adviser compared the issue of the tunnels to the Sagger missiles that took Israel by surprise in the Yom Kippur War (there was information about them, but the units did not act upon it). In other words, even though the data was provided, most members of the security cabinet, with very few exceptions, were unaware when the war broke out of the significance and implications of the fact that there were more than 30 tunnels close to the border fence. That was one of the reasons why the security cabinet hesitated to approve the operation against the tunnels. In the public debate that took place about the issue, the ministers usually did not distinguish between "occupying the Gaza Strip and overthrowing the Hamas regime" and the more limited and specific goal of "demolishing the complex of attack tunnels." Alongside the security cabinet's hesitation, it appears that both the Prime Minister and the Defense Minister were unaware of the full significance of the threat, and underestimated it. Otherwise, how can we explain the fact that on July 15, 2014, Israel was willing to accept the ceasefire agreement that Egypt proposed (it was Hamas that turned down the Egyptians' proposal), even though it knew of the tunnels' existence, and even though the agreement left the threat of attack via the tunnels in place? Also, how else can we explain the Defense Minister's assessment that it would take only two to three days to demolish the tunnels (at a time when it actually took two and a half weeks to deal with the issue)?

The fifth lesson: Against this background, it is understandable how the topic of the tunnels was hardly included in the goals of the operation as they were defined for the IDF: hitting Hamas hard and bringing calm back to the south. The tunnels were not mentioned specifically in the orders for the operation. During the early days of the operation, Israel responded to the rocket barrages fired into its territory with heavy aerial bombardments and artillery fire at Hamas's headquarters, production facilities, rocket arsenals, and launch sites. The members of the security cabinet learned of the full severity of the tunnel threat only after some exit shafts were spotted near communities and outposts along the line of contact. The turning point in the tunnel issue took place only on July 17, nine days after the operation began, when 13 terrorists from a Hamas elite force were spotted emerging from a tunnel shaft near Kibbutz Sufa. Although the force was attacked from the air, the incident shocked the public, public opinion (mainly among inhabitants of the communities along Gaza's periphery), and decision makers. A demand was made to demolish the tunnels immediately, and that same evening the army received an order from the political echelon

to enter the Gaza Strip and destroy the attack tunnels at a range of up to three kilometers from the border. The media quoted the chief of staff as saying in a private conversation: "The incident in Sufa was what made the penny drop for us."

The sixth lesson: Alongside the issue of the tunnels, there were differences of opinion between the GSS and Military Intelligence during and after the operation as to Hamas's early intentions. In hindsight, the GSS argued that it had been Hamas's intention to start the July war due to its strategic distress, citing the warning that they circulated in April 2014 about Hamas's intention to perpetrate a large scale terror attack via the tunnel in the Kerem Shalom area. Military Intelligence officials say that the term "July war" was used to describe the operation after the fact, since the conflict with Hamas was a consequence of the deterioration and escalation on both sides rather than the result of a deliberate effort by Hamas (which had no interest in a strategic conflict with Israel at that time). The officials said further that the tunnel excavation project was the result of an ongoing process, and was not evidence of any actual plans to start a war at the time that it broke out.

Had a Pluralistic Desk team been available to the Prime Minister and the security cabinet during Operation Protective Edge, the vast majority of the intelligence failures in both the IDF and the security branches, as well as along the seamline between the intelligence community and the political echelon (the leadership and the security cabinet) might well have been avoided. This entity would have conducted an ongoing and independent examination of the issue of the attack tunnels and the movement of forces from the time it emerged and gathered momentum. It would have shown the Prime Minister and the security cabinet the significance and severity of the threat (in contrast to the "relaxed" assessment that the political leadership formulated on the eve of the operation and in its early stages) in time (instead of at the last moment, which was what actually happened), and would have urged them to decide upon a policy of dealing with the matter and devising effective operational, organizational, and logistical solutions.

The Pluralistic Desk would not have allowed the issue to fall through the cracks among the leadership or other cabinet members (who are the main consumers of its products); Military Intelligence; or the GSS (representatives of those groups are members of the Desk, which has the task of resolving differences of opinion within the intelligence community or bringing them to the prime minister's attention); as well as the operational echelons, intelligence, and the operations department (the Desk being a supervisory

agency whose role it is to ensure an operational response to problems that surface in intelligence information, and perhaps also to present the political echelon with, and receive its approval for, a combat doctrine and operational, organizational, and technological solutions for eliminating the threat).

In hindsight, it is clear that the National Security Council is not equipped to analyze and assess intelligence information. Although a senior intelligence figure was its director during the period preceding the operation, it was not the right agency to direct the handling of the issue, which was intelligence-related and operational in essence. The experience, background, and professional authority of the Desk's members, their direct subordination and unmediated proximity to the prime minister, and their being up to date on the intelligence situation (whether from reading raw reports or by virtue of their connection with groups in the intelligence community) and dealing with the issue continuously over time – all these would ensure thorough and comprehensive handling at the political-strategic level and in the military-operational layer.

The Desk would presumably have brought the difference of opinion between Military Intelligence and the GSS as to Hamas's strategic objectives and intentions to the political echelon's attention. It is also possible that it would have called for a discussion in the political echelon in real time in order to devise a suitable response to the various scenarios that were expected (a reasonable possible course of action and a dangerous possible course of action).

In conclusion, had the Pluralistic Desk, in the form proposed in this essay, functioned close to the prime minister in the instances described above, it could have provided a response to the flaws and weaknesses in the political echelon's actions. We might even posit that this agency would have prevented or put off the respective wars, or at least would have changed its development or its results.

As a staff agency close to the prime minister that combined all the intelligence branches and the Foreign Ministry, the Desk would have made the long term military-strategic threat of the Egyptian-Soviet missile batteries unmistakably clear in the context of a scenario of an all-out war between Israel and Egypt, and could have shown the options that this move gave the Egyptians as far as carrying out offensive moves that involved crossing the Suez Canal. It could have done the same vis-à-vis the significance of the threat posed by Hamas's attack tunnels while Operation Protective Edge

was underway. In the first instance, the assessments of the intelligence community as a whole would have prevented a partial intelligence picture in which the meaning of the threat of the new missile batteries was linked exclusively to a limited scenario of a war of attrition. In the second, they could have prevented the gaps in information and assessments between Military Intelligence and the GSS.

A system integrating all the sources of knowledge and assessment would have dealt with this strategic issue of the first order, preventing its being handled in a decentralized and divided manner that did not provide the decision making echelon with a satisfactory intelligence picture. In addition, the Pluralistic Desk, by virtue of its role, would have kept the political and military leadership from postponing dealing with the threat (as in the first instance) or minimizing its importance and severity (as in the second instance).

The intelligence community would have been entrusted with gathering, over time, the reports about the movement of the missile batteries (in the first instance) and the construction of the complex of tunnels (in the second instance). It would have carried out continuous and ongoing surveillance of the development of the respective threats and their meaning. The accumulation of reports and assessments over time would have shown the Egyptian refusal to withdraw the missile batteries from the canal zone, despite the clear violation of the agreement with Israel, as an indication of its intent to start a war, and perhaps even to a sort of limited offensive under cover of the missile umbrella, just as the construction processes of Hamas's tunnel complex would have indicated its true intentions. The voice of the Air Force, as a permanent member of the Desk forum, would have received a great deal more weight in the analysis of the situation's characteristics and the demand for preventive action in the Egyptian example. The Air Force would have arrived at the war that broke out on Yom Kippur in a state of preparedness appropriate for the Sinai sector, whereby at least some of the heavy price of neutralizing the missile batteries in the first stages of the war could have been avoided.

In other words, in both cases the Pluralistic Desk would have made the signs of the enemy's real intentions to start a comprehensive war absolutely clear by using the comprehensive capabilities that it had built and developed over the years to accomplish the goals that it set for itself. By virtue of this forum's responsibility to make the vital reports matters

of the highest priority, the issues on the agenda in each instance would have been handled properly among all the intelligence gathering groups.

Notes

- 1 It is impossible for the Pluralistic Desk to go over all the reports coming into the system and deal with sorting and analyzing them. At the same time, since the circulation of important and vital reports to the Desk team should not be limited, there would need to be a creative solution for the issue of circulation. For example: representatives of the Desk could be integrated in the centers where the reports produced by the intelligence agencies are sorted and distributed, and thus would channel the important reports, according to priority, directly to the Desk.
- 2 The analysis of the incident was written with the help of a friend, a historian by profession and a member of the intelligence community. It is based upon a broad examination of research and documents in the professional literature, as well as on documents from the National Archives.
- 3 Military Intelligence's comprehensive assessment gave no prominent expression to the assessment made by its director, Aharon Yariv, which stated that the eastward movement of the missile batteries was an act expressing far-reaching aggressive tendencies, and that if the balance of power in the air were to change, then it was possible that Egypt would stage a massive crossing of the Suez Canal.
- 4 Israel, which followed a policy of preventing the placing of surface-to-air missile batteries in the canal zone, responded with aerial attacks against them beginning in the middle of May 1970 in order to prevent, or at least delay, the "creeping" of the batteries eastward toward the canal. The aerial attacks continued until just before the ceasefire agreement went into effect. While some of the missile batteries were destroyed or damaged and the entry of the missiles into the canal zone itself was prevented, most of the batteries survived and remained fit for operation on the ground. In addition, five of the Israeli Air Force's Phantom aircraft were shot down during these attacks. It turned out that the Air Force lacked the precise and effective weaponry necessary for attacking the missiles (particularly SA-3 batteries, a system that was unknown in the West), jamming equipment, and ways to detect and track missiles.
- 5 This analysis is based upon openly available material from the press and on lectures given in professional conferences. Yet even if the picture is incomplete, we believe it is sufficient to identify problems that need to be dealt with.