



ARGAMAN



Principles and Reforms for Israel's Intelligence Community

Roi Tamir

The Paradigm Project: A New Strategic Agenda for Israel

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Publisher: Amiad Cohen

Original Hebrew version published in September 2025

Published in Jerusalem

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Herut – The Center for Israeli Liberty, 5 Aholiav St., Jerusalem 9446778

Printed 2026

English Edition © Herut – The Center for Israeli Liberty Publishers

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Printed in Israel



Chapter 6

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Roi Tamir

Executive Summary

To create genuine security, Israel's security establishment, including the intelligence community, must adopt a strategic posture of readiness at dawn. This posture reduces the extent to which operational preparedness is dependent upon specific intelligence information and instead focuses on the enemy's capabilities independent of assessments of its intentions.² This approach should be pursued in parallel with a sustained and broad effort to preserve the strength and qualitative superiority of Israel's intelligence community and its ability to provide effective strategic, operational, and tactical intelligence.

An "intelligence paradigm" is the manner in which a state chooses to develop, organize and employ its intelligence bodies so that their intelligence outputs address the requirements of national security. A sound intelligence paradigm is critical to national security.

The changes that have taken place in Israel's security concept over the past three decades have also led to a fundamental transformation in the national intelligence paradigm, which contributed to the formation of the Iranian "ring of fire" around Israel and to the catastrophic intelligence failure of October 7th, 2023.

1 All content in this chapter is unclassified and based on open-source publications.

2 This does not mean that intentions are ignored, but rather that the military builds its forces and prepares based on the potential of the enemy's military threat.

The changes in Israel's security concept have increased the relative weight of Israeli intelligence, making it the most dominant element. The shift toward over-reliance on "counterfire," "precision," "influence," and "interwar campaigns" raised the reliance on the intelligence community.

The existing intelligence paradigm embodies several fundamental problems, including:

- There is no formal regulation governing the operation of the intelligence community at the national security level.
- The Heads of Services Committee (VaRash) has no statutory basis.
- There is a lack of systematic guidance and oversight by the political echelon over the intelligence organizations.
- The Israeli cabinet is highly dependent on the intelligence establishment for "reality assessment," particularly regarding strategic evaluation.
- Intelligence activity is primarily oriented toward interwar campaigns, with excessive reliance on technological collection sources and the marginalization of "classic" collection capabilities that are not perceived as technologically cutting-edge.
- Units and collection capabilities intended mainly for wartime have been closed.

The Required Reforms: The changes needed in Israel's intelligence paradigm involve establishing conceptual clarity, regulating the intelligence establishment through the enactment of a National Intelligence Law, granting statutory authority to the Heads of Services Committee (VaRash), creating a dedicated framework for political-strategic research and assessment outside the military, establishing a guiding principle of maintaining diversity and balance among collection sources, ensuring continuous preparedness and readiness for wartime, shifting the operational concept toward emerging threats, and creating new balances in "peace arenas."³

3 Ittai Baron, *Intelligence Research – Reality Assessment in an Era of Transformations and Changes*, updated edition, The Institute for the Study of Intelligence Methodology, The Center for Intelligence Heritage and The Institute for the Study of Intelligence Methodology, January 2021.

Introduction

An intelligence paradigm is the way in which a state chooses to develop, organize and employ its intelligence bodies so that their outputs address the requirements of national security. This includes the types of intelligence organizations, the division of responsibilities among them, their relationships with other state institutions, the scope and allocation of technological resources and human resources, the types of required intelligence products and their prioritization. In order for an intelligence paradigm to truly meet national security needs, it requires continuous assessment of its suitability in light of the constantly changing reality and the human influences of psychology and organizational culture.

The changes that have occurred in Israel's security concept over the past three decades have also affected Israel's intelligence community. The catastrophic intelligence failure that allowed Hamas' invasion into Israel to occur is a warning sign indicating the need for a reassessment of Israel's intelligence paradigm. These events present a significant opportunity to revise the concept and adapt it to the current needs of the State of Israel. Within the scope of this chapter, we will not be able to address every aspect of the intelligence paradigm; instead, we will focus on several topics of significance based solely on open-source information.

One of the enduring foundations of Israel's security concept over the years has been the warning component. The limited economic capacity of the young state necessitated reliance on a reserve army, which would allow continued economic growth on the one hand and provide a military response in the event of a large-scale invasion on the other. Israel's small territory and narrow borders made time a critical and decisive factor, requiring the ability to rapidly mobilize reserves and deploy forces. As Ben-Gurion described: "Our enemies can attack us with their full force from land, sea, and air, and if, heaven forbid, they reach Tel Aviv before we have organized and mobilized our full strength—we are lost."⁴ This challenge required intelligence warning capability regarding an expected invasion and attacks before they materialized. If warning did not occur and reserve forces were not mobilized quickly and on time, it would likely lead to a lengthening of the military campaign, whereas at the core of Ben-Gurion's approach was the need to shorten the duration of the campaign to minimize casualties on Israel's side and reduce the impact on the economy.

Since 1979, and in light of the peace agreement with Egypt, the warning effort acquired an additional dimension, whereby Israel's intelligence community was required to provide warnings of a "strategic shift." In this context, a strategic shift means a

4 David Ben-Gurion, *Army and State*, 1953. [Hebrew]

change in Egyptian policy (due to a change in government or other circumstances) contrary to the peace agreements, with the intention of taking offensive action against Israel. The purpose of such a warning was to allow sufficient preparation time in terms of force development and the reallocation of resources in response to the potential Egyptian threat.

Over the years, the intelligence community has attained a dominant role in matters of national security, and in decision-making. A healthy system uses the crises it experiences for learning and improving performance. This holds true for routine crises, and all the more so for colossal, unique national-level crises, which demand an honest examination of fundamental concepts and adaptation as needed. October 7th represents an eruption at the surface-level of deep currents that altered the national intelligence paradigm and contributed to the outbreak of war. The State of Israel and must reassess its intelligence paradigm. This chapter will present the principles and necessary reforms to Israel's intelligence paradigm.

The Current Concept and Its Problems

Israel's intelligence paradigm is interwoven with Israel's broader security concept and has evolved along with it. Israel's security concept adopted new assumptions, such as the end of the era of major wars, conflicts being limited and primarily against non-

state organizations, the absence of a conventional threat, and the belief that terrorism can be controlled across borders and contained.

October 7th represents an eruption at the surface-level of deep currents that altered the national intelligence paradigm

The change in Israel's security concept was reflected in practice in the IDF force structure and operational employment, including: the weakening of the concept of decisive action in military operations; investment in standoff and precision strike capabilities, reliance on intelligence, reduction of the ground forces, and a weakening of maneuver capability and reserve readiness; a significant increase in active defense measures (such as the Iron Dome and technological border fences); a focus on interwar campaigns below the threshold of full-scale war; the development of influence and awareness efforts; and the avoidance of implementing Begin's doctrine regarding Iran's nuclear program for many years.

The changes in Israel's security concept greatly increased the relative weight of Israeli intelligence, making it overly dominant. The shift toward reliance on standoff and precision fire, influence operations and interwar campaigns positioned the intelligence community in a more central role for implementing the new ideas.

The Intelligence Establishment at the National Security Level⁵

Several models exist for organizing a country's intelligence establishment, with variations usually stemming from differences in forms of government (presidential, parliamentary, or republican systems). Nevertheless, there is a common basic pattern in most countries, in which the intelligence establishment is divided into three main areas: military intelligence, foreign intelligence, and domestic intelligence. In Israel, this is reflected in the division among AMAN, Mossad, and Shin Bet, respectively. The head of AMAN reports to the Chief of Staff, who in turn reports to the defense minister, while the heads of Mossad and Shin Bet report directly to the prime minister. There is also the Heads of Services Committee (VaRash), which includes all intelligence agency heads and the prime minister's military secretary, and whose role is to coordinate activities among the agencies. This committee has no formal status and operates based on the goodwill of its participants. When the Prime Minister attends a VaRash meeting, the National Security Council (NSC) head joins him. In Israel's system of government by coalition, the Security Cabinet is often crowded with political interests and subject to leaks; VaRash has occasionally become, informally, a kind of alternative cabinet.

This Reality Creates Several Essential Gaps in Israel's Intelligence Paradigm at the National Level:

1. There is no statutory definition of how Israel's intelligence establishment should operate, its responsibilities toward the government and other state bodies, or the manner in which it produces intelligence and resource integration.⁶ This situation leaves too much to goodwill, undermines the ability of the NSC to exercise its responsibilities and leaves intelligence and resource integration efforts without proper oversight. The Intelligence System Investigation Committee, established following the Iraq War and headed by Knesset member Steinitz, phrased it well:

The committee finds that, in practice, the intelligence organizations and secret services enjoy considerable autonomy, and the degree of control and oversight exercised by the political echelon over them is insufficient. The committee asserts that this situation is unhealthy and does not serve the long-term ability of the organizations to achieve the objectives for which they exist. The committee believes that the Prime Minister lacks the optimal tools and conditions both for operating and guiding the heads of services, for examining their approaches and monitoring their activities, and for

5 In the Israeli context, this term refers to the core of Israel's intelligence community—AMAN, Shin Bet, and Mossad.

6 The only body for which a dedicated law exists is the Shin Bet—the General Security Service Law (2002).

determining important intelligence assessments and long-term force development. Prime Ministers throughout Israel's history tended to rely on the services and generally adopt their positions and act according to their recommendations. This reality is the result of historical development in a state constantly at war for its survival, and the need to maintain the high level of secrecy characteristic of the services' work, through compartmentalization and limiting the circle of those who know the secret. The committee agrees that operating intelligence services under a heavy veil of secrecy is a necessary condition for their success. However, the **committee determines that this legitimate need does not exempt the intelligence services, on the one hand, and the government, on the other, from exercising the necessary control and oversight to ensure the correctness, efficiency, and success of the services' work.**⁷

2. There is no entity that coordinates the ongoing dialogue between the intelligence establishment and the Prime Minister, but rather the service heads

report directly to the prime minister. This arrangement has advantages in terms of the direct dialogue it allows; however, given the prime minister's numerous responsibilities, it significantly undermines routine oversight. This is also true in the broader context of VaRash. "However, despite these facts, known to all, the state has never regulated by law the operation of its intelligence system and secret services, nor has it solved the problems of oversight, coordination, and management that arise from the heads of services reporting directly to the Prime Minister without any intermediate authority."⁸

3. The Israeli government is highly dependent on the intelligence establishment for "reality assessment,"⁹ with particular emphasis on political situation analysis and strategic evaluation. This stems from the concentration of this function within AMAN's Research Division and, in some arenas, within the Mossad's research body. Currently, there is no civilian body that can provide the political echelon with an additional perspective on the intelligence assessments produced by the IDF. Such a body could enrich the understanding available to political decision-makers and enable more informed, evidence-based decision-making.

7 *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Intelligence System Following the War in Iraq*, Knesset, Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, Nisan 5764 (March 2004). Emphasis added.

8 Ofer Shelah, Yaakov Perry, and Meir Cohen, *Explanatory Notes to the Proposed Law on the Secret Services*, 2017. [Hebrew]

9 Ittai Brun, *Intelligence Research*. [Hebrew]

The Conceptual Layer

One of the central components of Israel's security concept over the past fifteen years has been the idea of prevention and influence, a key element of the "Campaign between the Wars" (CBW). The CBW (mabam) became the central framework for Israel's actions against the threats in its environment. Israel's intelligence agencies have played a key role in shaping and implementing this concept. Over these years, the CBW has been defined as the sum of routine efforts aimed at reducing, delaying, and preventing the enemy from acquiring weapons and capabilities that disrupt the balance against the IDF. In the IDF Strategic Document drafted during Gadi Eisenkot's tenure as Chief of Staff, the objectives of the Mabam were defined as follows:

To reduce existing and emerging threats, to postpone the next war and create better conditions for victory in it, to preserve and strengthen deterrence, to increase the security of the State of Israel in general and of the IDF in particular, to maintain the IDF's freedom of action and reduce that of the enemy.¹⁰

In the context of the CBW, there is a difference between the IDF and AMAN within it, and the Mossad and Shin Bet². Israel's two civilian intelligence agencies, Mossad and

Shin Bet, operate by their nature within a CBW framework, by definition, they do not play a central role during wartime. In contrast, the IDF and AMAN are required, as part of the army's fundamental definitions, to be the primary entity prepared for war. Despite this, the CBW concept has gradually attained a central position within the operations of Israel's intelligence establishment. By its nature, the CBW depends on extensive intelligence activity.¹¹

CBW absorbed the bulk of attention and led to the erosion of engagement in some essential functions, such as preparedness for war

Over the past decade and a half, the Israeli intelligence establishment, and particularly AMAN, has been drawn into the CBW, which served as a convenient arena for demonstrating its capabilities, with an emphasis on real-time intelligence and creativity. Operations within the interwar campaign thus enhanced the status of the intelligence establishment and gave it an aura of omnipotence. According to foreign-media publications, the Israeli campaign over the years has dealt with attacks on "high-value" weapons transfers from Iran to Hezbollah via Syria, disruption of the Shiite axis's entrenchment in Syria, delaying and disrupting Iran's nuclear program,

¹⁰ Gadi Eisenkot, *IDF Strategy* (2018, 2015).

¹¹ Ibid.

elimination of centers of expertise, assistance to Egypt in fighting ISIS in the Sinai,¹² and more.

The increasing reliance on intelligence collection based on advanced technology has created a cultural and conceptual “overdependence,” which has led to a systemic disinterest in efforts that are not perceived as being sufficiently sophisticated and hence not valuable

The CBW differs in its nature from war in many respects. Activity within the CBW is conducted primarily against time-bounded incidents, real-time developments, some of them eruptive and unexpected, and the intelligence required is tailored accordingly. The CBW is carried out almost entirely at the General Staff level. By contrast, war by its nature requires a constant, broad, and sustained system of preparations, conducted across all echelons. The intelligence required for war relates to multiple dimensions, including comprehensive knowledge of the adversary—its locations, doctrine of warfare, forces and their readiness, weapons and capabilities, as well as delivering intelligence to operational forces. The CBW

does not seek absolute victory, but rather focused, point-specific disruption; in this sense, it is in tension with the concepts of victory, maneuver, and decisive outcome.

Alongside many operational successes, CBW absorbed the bulk of attention and led to the erosion of engagement in some essential functions, such as preparedness for war.¹³ CBW and war are two distinct conceptual frameworks; the transition between them is complex, and the impact of the CBW on the central bodies engaged in it has often been described in the following terms:

Those same bodies (such as AMAN and the Air Force) also experienced an erosion of capabilities, a diversion of attention, and even distortions of reality that were aligned with Mabam activity. Phenomena such as prioritizing the urgent over the important, and using intelligence intended for war for Mabam purposes, blurred the distinctions between Mabam and war and created distorted perceptions of the adversary.¹⁴

It should be recalled that, by its very nature as a dynamic campaign with a dominant reliance on real-time intelligence, the CBW

12 See, for example, an update on YNET regarding an interview given by the President of Egypt to the American program *60 Minutes*, in which he addressed the matter: Ynet, “President of Egypt: Israel Cooperates with Us in the War Against ISIS in Sinai,” Ynet, January 4, 2019. [Hebrew]

13 Preparedness for war in the intelligence context has many dimensions, some of which will be described in the paragraphs on the required corrections.

14 Dana Freizler-Sweiry, “The Transition from the Interwar Campaign (MABAM) to the ‘Iron Swords’ War,” *Bein HaKetavim*, 41 (January 2024). [Hebrew]

required the investment and allocation of very substantial resources—including intelligence manpower, collection assets, and the attention of senior commanders.

Thus, over the years, the CBW has become detrimental to the intelligence establishment and its assessments. Although the intelligence community knew that it did not prevent the emergence of threats around Israel, but only delayed and disrupted them, it clung to CBW activities as proof of its action against these threats. As a result, the capabilities of Iran, Hezbollah, Hamas, Shiite militias, and the Houthis continued to develop and strengthen. Similarly, regarding both Hamas and Hezbollah, a policy of restraint evolved: these organizations grew stronger, yet Israel refrained from acting against them. The justification given was that Israel was “detering” the enemy, preventing it from initiating a full-scale war against the state.

The gap created regarding the threat to the State of Israel can be illustrated through the use of the CBW versus wartime action, as a distinction between the concepts of “sense of security” and actual security. A “sense of security” is a soft concept that reflects the psychological stance of an individual or public, shaped by a representation (whether true or false) that generates a “security provider”. In contrast, actual security represents a clear and measurable standard, based on professional parameters, indicating the existence or non-existence of a threat and the capability to address it.

The Capabilities Layer

In recent decades, the world has experienced enormous technological development across multiple fields: computing capabilities, communications, optics, data storage, algorithms, and more. This development has not bypassed the Israeli intelligence community, creating deep-level processes that transformed how intelligence efforts are implemented. Sensors, observation systems, computing and communication networks, and a range of technological innovations have been integrated into intelligence operations, enhancing their outputs. The intelligence community has entered the era of big data, which has challenged some traditional methods of work in the field. The vast volumes of information provide significant intelligence potential but simultaneously generate new challenges: storing and retrieving information, separating the intelligence “wheat from the chaff,” and prioritizing data processing.

The increasing reliance of the Israeli intelligence community on advanced technology for its operations, alongside changes in the nature of threats and in the assumptions underpinning Israel’s security concept, has led to several negative phenomena, including:

1. Marginalization of “classic” collection capabilities that are not perceived as technological.
2. Closure of units and collection capabilities primarily intended for wartime operations.

3. Erosion of core skills in intelligence professions.¹⁵

Marginalization of “Classic” Collection Capabilities that are not Perceived as Technological

A fundamental principle of intelligence is the pursuit of the broadest possible diversity of collection sources. This is required to form an accurate picture of reality, the enemy, and threats, as no single source provides all the required information. The greater the number and variety of sources—such as satellites, signals interception, human intelligence, and others—the richer, corroborated, and more complete the intelligence picture. The higher the quality and completeness of the intelligence picture, the greater the ability to analyze threats, assess them, and act against them. Naturally, a national intelligence effort always operates within some resource framework. The aspiration to maintain the widest possible portfolio of collection sources is always in tension with the capacity to sustain them, both in terms of human and technological resources.

Over the past two decades, reliance on technological collection sources has steadily increased, particularly on cyber collection capabilities.¹⁶ Cyber collection is highly

attractive because, in many cases, it allows a glimpse into the enemy’s core secrets and enables the extraction of vast amounts of information. Cyber collection operations often require advanced technological capabilities and significant state resources. Israel is recognized as one of the three leading cyber powers in the world.¹⁷

However, the increasing reliance on intelligence collection based on advanced technology has created a cultural and conceptual “overdependence,” which has led to a systemic disinterest in efforts that are not perceived as being sufficiently sophisticated and hence not valuable.¹⁸ One likely contributing factor was the leadership of Israel’s intelligence establishment in recent years by operational officers (as opposed to intelligence analysts), particularly in Aman and the Shin Bet (the head of Mossad has consistently been an operational officer). This reality has led, in recent years, to a reduction or cessation of reliance on basic yet crucial collection efforts within the intelligence apparatus, including collection from open-source information and communications “OSINT” and even human intelligence “HUMINT”.

In the field of OSINT, in 2021 the “Hatzav” unit, which had operated for decades and

15 For more information, see Roi Tamir, “AMAN – Outlining the Nature of the Breach,” *HaShiloach*. [Hebrew]

16 This refers to the capability to penetrate adversaries’ computer systems and collect information from them.

17 Metania Rapaport, *Cyber Mania*, Kinneret Zmora Publishing, 2021. [Hebrew]

18 see Roi Tamir, “AMAN – Outlining the Nature of the Breach.” [Hebrew]

served as the primary framework within Israel's intelligence community for collecting information from open sources—including Arab media networks and social media—was closed. As noted: “Hatzav’s significant achievements were highly appreciated by field commanders, but, as in the case of the signals specialists within Unit 8200, they were disregarded internally; automated systems were introduced, and later positions for language experts were reduced.”¹⁹ Moreover, as part of the reliance on technology:

The Israeli intelligence community’s rush into the technological and cyber era led to a decline in the status of HUMINT efforts

...at the top of Aman, artificial intelligence—the ‘machine’ that translates content in various formats and at large volumes—was preferred over human processes, which provide insights and depth that the machine can never replicate. Some of the criticism among Aman veterans focuses on the loss of basic capabilities of the Hatzav unit...²⁰

Historically, the ability to gather intelligence from individuals on the enemy’s side—civilians, security personnel, and those with visible freedom of movement in enemy territory—has been one of the basic intelligence activities. HUMINT has both advantages and limitations, yet it remains a foundational element of intelligence operations. Israel’s intelligence community has historically invested significant effort in collecting intelligence from human sources. In certain intelligence organizations, such as the Shin Bet, HUMINT has been the primary area of specialization.

However, the Israeli intelligence community’s rush into the technological and cyber era led to a decline in the status of HUMINT efforts. This occurred alongside the inherent difficulties of recruiting sources within major terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah and Hamas, which maintain very high information security awareness and ongoing counterintelligence efforts.²¹ For example, during a crisis affecting Aman’s HUMINT Unit, “there were voices calling for the unit to be closed, along the lines of ‘HUMINT’s time has passed. The world has moved to digital, to ‘SIGINT.’”²²

19 Guy Asif, “Our Nickname Is ‘Audio Monkey’: The Dangerous Disregard for 8200’s Radio Operators,” *Ynet+*, May 31, 2024. [Hebrew]

20 Roy Kaiz, “If the Hatzav Intelligence Unit Had Not Been Closed – Would October 7 Have Looked Different?”, *Kan – Israeli Broadcasting Corporation*, October 9, 2024. [Hebrew]

21 Israel’s withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005 made recruiting sources there even more difficult.

22 Commander of the IDF Special Operations Division in a first interview, Ben Caspit, *HaGvura* website, February 4, 2017. [Hebrew]

Even in the Shin Bet, which is by its nature a HUMINT organization, a change has occurred in recent years, reflected in the observation that: “In general... the Shin Bet’s ‘ship’ has increasingly shifted toward technological directions, rather than HUMINT.”²³ This has resulted in “an imbalance developing within the Shin Bet between different intelligence sources... the organization moved increasingly toward technological domains—data mining, SIGINT, VISINT, cyber, etc.”²⁴ This assessment does not imply that Israel’s intelligence community has ceased HUMINT operations; rather, it highlights that at the conceptual level, a perceptual shift has occurred over recent years regarding this domain.

The Closure of Units and Collection Capabilities Intended Primarily for Wartime

One of the primary national tests for any state is its readiness for war and its performance during conflict. The effectiveness of various intelligence efforts and their preparedness has a significant impact on the quality of this readiness and performance. One of the corollary outcomes of the broader shift in Israel’s security concept has been the closure of intelligence frameworks

and collection capabilities whose primary purpose is wartime operations.

To illustrate the consequences of this change, one can cite the decision to close the Technical and Captured-Material Collection Unit (Amshat) and the dismantling of the organic collection arrays of the Combat Maneuvering Division.²⁵ It should be emphasized that these developments are a tangible outcome of an organizational and cognitive mindset that regards war as largely obsolete.

The technical and captured-material intelligence effort (Amshat) constitutes a fundamental component of warfare worldwide. It involves the ability to extract intelligence from all material seized in the enemy’s territory and infrastructures—both military and civilian—during and after hostilities. This includes written and printed materials (operation diaries, maps, schematics, etc.), digital media (mobile phones, computers, communication systems, etc.), and weapons (from which technological intelligence can be derived). This unit operated within AMAN for many decades and influenced various wars and operations.²⁶ The organizational framework responsible for the Amshat effort in AMAN underwent numerous transformations

23 Itai Ilnai, “Service Awareness: From Complete Intelligence Blindness to the Valor of the Operatives – What Happened to the Shin Bet on October 7 and in the Months Before?”, *Israel Hayom*, December 5, 2024.

24 Ibid.

25 This mainly refers to observation and visual collection units.

26 Noam Shapira, “The DOCEX Unit: Then and Now,” *Unit 8200 Association Website*, March 1, 2024. [Hebrew]

over the years until it was closed several years ago.²⁷ The clearest evidence of the capability's importance was its immediate re-establishment at the outbreak of the Iron Swords War.

In every maneuver by ground forces into enemy territory, several widely accepted fundamental military efforts are involved, such as fire, logistics, and intelligence collection. These efforts are intended to enable the maneuver of divisions, brigades, and battalions, and to ensure the highest possible degree of functional independence and flexibility for the maneuvering formations. In this domain as well, as part of a prolonged, multi-year process of erosion in the concept of maneuver and the ground forces, the organic intelligence-collection capabilities of the maneuvering divisions were closed. This “resulted in severe damage to the competence and readiness of the ground forces.”²⁸ In contrast to this process of erosion, fixed, overt combat intelligence collection along the borders became increasingly entrenched as part of a defensive concept of border security. “Border collection relies on the capabilities of fixed collection, which is responsible for detecting the enemy in the area adjacent to the barrier and for preventing infiltration, using radars and observation means mounted on masts

along the border. However, fixed collection has difficulty dividing attention and collecting information about areas distant from the fence. Moreover, fixed collection tends to be damaged by the enemy during fighting and cannot be relied upon exclusively.”²⁹ The central principle that was harmed by the closure of the maneuvering echelon's combat-collection capabilities was the organic nature and operational independence of these frontline units.

The Principles and Required Changes in Israel's Intelligence Paradigm

Israel needs to **redefine its national intelligence paradigm**. This necessity arises not only in light of the traumatic events of October 7th but also from a pressing need to correct the shifts in the intelligence paradigm that have taken place since the 1990s.

The first and critical step in this change is to rebalance the relationship between intelligence and the political echelon, the military leadership, and the General Staff branches. To create genuine security, Israel must adopt for itself and its defense establishment—including its intelligence community—a strategic posture of

27 See *ibid.*

28 Quote from a 2023 duty summary letter by a Major from the Tashlul Department at the Ground Forces Command, cited in: Guy Hazut, *The High-Tech Army and the Cavalry Army*, Modan Publishing and Ma'arachot Publishing, 2024. [Hebrew]

29 Ofir Avraham, “The Need for Evolving Mobile Combat Collection,” *Ma'arachot*, no. 497, June 29, 2023.

“readiness at dawn,” which reduces the conditioning of operational preparedness on intelligence assessments of enemy intentions and instead focuses on enemy capabilities. This is to be done alongside, and without contradicting, a broad and ongoing effort to maintain the intelligence community’s strength and superiority and its ability to provide strategic, operational, and tactical intelligence.

A central working assumption required of the intelligence paradigm must be that war is a plausible, persistent, and enduring fact within Israel’s national security reality for decades to come. Accordingly, the intelligence paradigm must define processes and actions that will generate continual readiness of the national intelligence system for the outbreak of war.

A new intelligence paradigm should address the following essential aspects:

1. Conducting all intelligence efforts with conceptual clarity.
2. Regulating the intelligence establishment at the national level.
3. Enhancing and diversifying the political–strategic assessments presented to the political echelon.
4. Establishing a guiding principle of preserving diversity among intelligence collection sources and maintaining balance between them.
5. Continuous readiness and preparation for a state of war.

6. Revising the operational concept vis-à-vis emerging threats.

7. Creating new balances in relation to “arenas of peace.”

There is a clear need for an intelligence staff that does not belong to any of the secret services

Conducting all Intelligence Efforts with Conceptual Clarity

In the field of intelligence, there are efforts of various types: warning intelligence, research on the enemy’s doctrine of warfare, targets, terrain research, collection in its various forms, operations, and more. All of these efforts are intended to address the needs of different consumers, from the political echelon down to the maneuvering battalion. The intelligence establishment must instill conceptual **clarity** in two central issues: first, the inability to predict with certainty how reality will develop, and therefore the understanding that the possibility of surprise is part of the basic patterns of reality; and second, the uniqueness of the religious–cultural component of Israel’s enemies, which defines the destruction of the State of Israel as the essence of their existence, since the very existence of the State of Israel contradicts their religious worldview. Establishing conceptual **clarity** on these issues, alongside uncompromising adherence to the foundations of the intelligence profession, will ensure a higher-quality and more balanced national intelligence product.

Regulating the Intelligence Establishment at the National Level

The challenge

The core of the challenge in this issue relates to two critical aspects of democratic governance: guidance and oversight. That is, how the elected political echelon in Israel exercises its responsibility and directs national intelligence activity (such as determining the national critical intelligence assessments, or defining the reference threat)³⁰ and how it oversees the implementation of this guidance, the utilization of resources, and the existence of inter-organizational synergy. However, despite the immense substantive importance of the issue for national security and the extensive attention it has received over the years, the issues of formal guidance and oversight have not been resolved.

The current situation

This informality, is however, not entirely accidental. Both the prime ministers and the intelligence organizations have preferred the informal status quo to the alternative functional rigidity under the law. Over the years, alternatives have been proposed, such as a Minister for Intelligence who would “supervise, on behalf of the Prime Minister, the operations, organization, and budgets of the secret

services and the appointment of senior personnel in these services... [and would be responsible] for managing the Prime Minister’s daily contact with the heads of the secret services, and for overseeing the actual implementation of the Prime Minister’s policy regarding them.”³¹

Others have proposed an Intelligence Staff: “There is a clear need for an intelligence staff that does not belong to any of the secret services. This staff, headed by the ‘Intelligence Secretary,’ would coordinate the work of the intelligence organizations with the Prime Minister or the Cabinet Committee for Intelligence, review the intelligence outputs, centralize work regarding the determination of the critical issues for Mossad, Shin Bet, and Aman, as well as work with the Prime Minister on intelligence force-building and five- and ten-year plans. The staff would also present integrative working papers to the Prime Minister and ministers, drawing from the full scope of the intelligence organizations’ activities.”³²

Others have proposed appointing a head of the Israeli intelligence community, who would report to the Prime Minister and whose responsibilities would include, among other things: “assisting the Prime Minister in shaping the intelligence

30 These two examples mainly illustrate the political leadership’s ability to define priorities for the intelligence establishment.

31 Shelach, Perry, and Cohen, *Proposed Law on the Secret Services*.

32 Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Intelligence System Following the War in Iraq.

community and formulating policies for its operation in support of national security... developing strategies and work plans for the intelligence community, to be approved by the Prime Minister, the Defense Minister, and the Intelligence Cabinet; as well as preparing an annual and multi-year budget for the community... assisting the Prime Minister in learning, guidance, management, coordination, and operation of the intelligence community.”³³

None of these ideas, or others, came to fruition for various reasons, some of which are related to the political and public culture of institutions in the State of Israel.

Recommended reform

It is clear that this is not an ultimate solution; it should be regarded as a measure to improve the current reality and as a foundation for possible future reforms, should a decision be made.

National intelligence law – Israel should enact a National Intelligence Law that regulates the formal definition of the intelligence establishment’s responsibility toward the state’s various institutions. In this context, the law would transform the conduct of intelligence organizations from a voluntary, “goodwill”-based practice into one grounded in legal obligation and accountability.

The law would define the interface between the intelligence establishment and the state’s institutions, improving the oversight capabilities of the government, the Knesset, and the National Security Council over national intelligence operations and resource utilization. Lawmakers would do well to set only general principles rather than hundreds of detailed provisions that could become a burden. For example, the law could require that the intelligence establishment present, jointly to designated authorities, every six months, its response to the priorities outlined in the national intelligence assessment (Tziyach). Additionally, intelligence organizations would be required to show how they synchronize their resources to achieve maximal efficiency. Properly drafted, such a law would strengthen Israel’s national security, improve the interface between the political echelon and intelligence organizations, enhance the efficiency of the intelligence establishment, and provide better security for Israeli citizens.

Heads of Services Committee (VaRash)

– The VaRash is an existing entity that is not statutorily anchored. It appears that, in order to improve work processes and synchronization between the organizations and the political leadership, particularly the Prime Minister, it is necessary to formalize the VaRash’s status³⁴ within the framework

33 Shmuel Even and Amos Granit, *The Israeli Intelligence Community – Where to? Analysis, Trends, and Recommendations*, INSS, Memorandum 97, March 2009.

34 As of today, the head of the Mossad is designated as the head of the VaRash .

of the National Intelligence Law. Likewise, the position of the VaRash head should be formalized as responsible for presenting the joint operations of the organizations in response to priority intelligence requirements and for coordinating resources. Even if this arrangement is not optimal, it would improve the situation and circumvent the challenges inherent in placing an external authority above the heads of the organizations. This step would also strengthen the dialogue between the intelligence establishment and the political leadership, reinforce internal functional commitment among the organizations, and enhance intelligence at the national level.

Enhancing and Diversifying the Political–Strategic Assessments Presented to the Political Echelon

A political–strategic situation assessment contains insights regarding countries and entities in the environment (including those not formally defined as enemies) that influence and are influenced by the state’s national policy. Its components generally include an analysis of the policies, politics, economy, and society of these countries and entities.

Unlike military research and terrorism research, large portions of building a political–strategic situation assessment rely on open or relatively accessible information.

This was true in the past, and it is even more so in the current era, which is rich in online information.

The process of developing a political–strategic situation assessment requires continuous analysis of the interaction between Israel and other actors. As a result, military intelligence (specifically, Aman’s research division) has no relative advantage here as it goes well beyond its primary role of analyzing military and terrorist threats. Furthermore, this overlap can detract from the focus on military research and invite the involvement of military actors in policy-making, which is unhealthy for democracy.

Various actors have dealt extensively with this issue in the past and emphasized the need for change. For example: “The historical development of the Israeli intelligence community assigned to the IDF’s intelligence branch tasks and areas of operation that do not fall within the responsibilities of military intelligence as is customary and accepted in most Western countries. For instance, responsibility for intelligence research in the political realm... in doing so, military intelligence also assumed functions for which it is neither the natural nor the obvious responsible entity.”³⁵

It was further stated: “National intelligence assessment, currently handled by the IDF’s intelligence branch—a body which, in terms

35 Report of the Committee to Investigate the Intelligence System Following the Iraq War. [Hebrew]

of worldview and areas of responsibility, should not be the ‘national assessor.’”³⁶

In light of the above, and to enable the political echelon in Israel to rely on a diverse political–strategic assessment—not only through the security–intelligence prism—it would be appropriate to create a new capability within the national intelligence paradigm to allow for this. In any case, military intelligence can continue to conduct research and political assessment as a derivative of military research. For example, one cannot separate research on Hezbollah from research on the Lebanese state. This differs, for instance, from research and assessment of the policies of Turkey or more distant states.

After seven and a half decades, the State of Israel needs to move to a new stage regarding the structuring of the framework of its national security. Evolutionary developments and reliance on relative advantages that were appropriate in the early years were legitimate until now; the maturation of national development processes, combined with the clarity arising from formative shocks such as October 7, lays the groundwork for the beginning of change.

To provide Israel’s national security echelon and the political leadership at its head with

the full range of tools to make informed policy decisions and reduce the likelihood of errors, it is necessary to establish the capacity for political–strategic research and situation assessment in a civilian framework independent of the military. Regarding possible solutions, the task could (as has been proposed multiple times in the past) be assigned to the Mossad. The advantages of the Mossad include its very nature as a civilian agency, its ongoing involvement in political research and situation assessment in certain arenas, the fact that its head serves as chair of the heads-of-intelligence committee (VaRash), and its built-in accessibility to the Prime Minister. The drawbacks in this context stem from its being part of the broader intelligence establishment, which may contribute to organizational biases, its operational DNA, and its limited research engagement in some arenas.

In light of this, there is another option with significant potential advantages that could provide an optimal solution to the national need. Mechanisms of this type exist in similar forms in various countries, with the most prominent example being the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) in the United Kingdom. We will present the idea and its principles adapted to Israel’s needs.³⁷ The concept is to establish a dedicated, official, civilian framework responsible for

36 Shelach, Perry, and Cohen, Explanation of the *Proposed Law on the Secret Services*.

37 The principles were adapted from: Colonel Richard Kemp, *Integration in British Intelligence – The Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC)*, *Intelligence in Practice*, November 7, 2021. Naturally, it is impossible to

political–strategic research and assessment for the Cabinet. This is not intended to be a reactive or ancillary body (as suggested in the bill proposed by MK Halevi³⁸), but rather the main body responsible for research and for presenting assessments to the national security echelon. This body would be positioned within the Prime Minister’s Office or the National Security Council and would emphasize composition from a diverse pool of researchers with varying professional and social backgrounds, including former intelligence personnel, former officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defense, experienced civilian analysts not from the intelligence establishment, academic researchers, and others. The head of this body would be designated as the head of a national agency.

The agency for political research and assessment will utilize classified intelligence provided by intelligence agencies and foreign intelligence allies, diplomatic reports from embassies around the world, and open-source intelligence.

The agency’s central mission will be to provide assessments regarding strategic matters, events, and situations related to policy and foreign relations, as well as economic and societal issues in the Middle East and worldwide, and other

international matters. In addition, the agency will be responsible for monitoring the development of direct and indirect threats and opportunities on the political level and issuing warnings about them.

The agency’s assessments will be sent routinely, and in relation to special events, to the cabinet ministers and the National Security Council (NSC). The documents will provide government ministers with clear, concise, and straightforward evaluations (regardless of the complexity, scope, or significance of the issue) based on intelligence from all available sources, in order to assist them in formulating policy.

The advantages of establishing a Strategic Political Research and Assessment Agency for the national security echelon are:

1. The assessments intended for cabinet ministers are conducted separately from the intelligence-collecting agencies, taking into account the knowledge added at every stage of the intelligence evaluation process by agency representatives. This means that the assessments are likely not influenced by agency pride, long-term thinking about the collecting agency’s own interests, or effects arising from the enormous efforts, risks, and financial investments involved in obtaining the intelligence itself.

replicate the British mechanism exactly, given the differences in operation across several dimensions.

38 Proposed Law for the Establishment of a Department for Formulating an Alternative Intelligence paradigm (“Ipcha Mistabra”) from the Intelligence Bodies, 2024.

2. Improved diversity of opinions and pluralism in assessments (both inter-agency and in the human composition).
3. Proper democratic functioning.
4. Optimal utilization of unclassified intelligence (open-source information, social media, political information, research).

The disadvantages:

1. Additional resource investment.
2. The strong backing of the political echelon is required for the agency to position itself effectively within the existing framework.

Establishing a Guiding Principle of Maintaining Source Diversity, Their Collection, and the Balance Between Them

A core element of a national intelligence paradigm is the responsibility for implementing a diverse array of collection channels and sources. This ensures the most comprehensive and reliable intelligence picture possible and reduces the likelihood of intelligence failure stemming from overreliance on a single collection channel. Israel's national intelligence paradigm should define and establish mechanisms to monitor the existence and utilization of collection sources, as well as to balance investment across them. Decisions regarding the reduction or closure of collection capabilities should be made at the level of the Heads of Services Committee (VaRash) with presentation

to relevant government authorities as determined. Since Israeli intelligence agencies often operate in overlapping areas and across multiple collection disciplines, it is especially important to maintain a national-level picture of collection sources in relation to various threats. The quality of this picture directly affects decision-making at the political echelon, underscoring the importance of presenting it regularly and effectively. It is recommended and appropriate that the source picture and national intelligence accessibility be regularly presented by the Head of the Intelligence Community to the Prime Minister, Minister of Defense, and National Security Council Chief.

Constant Readiness and Preparedness for Wartime Conditions

The phenomenon of war is real, persistent, and constitutes a supreme test at the national level. Israel's national intelligence paradigm must define its state of readiness for war at all times, the manner in which supporting efforts are implemented in routine and emergency situations, the order of priorities vis-à-vis issues that are not war, and the capabilities required to meet the mission in wartime. Here too, decisions to reduce or close capabilities dedicated to war should be made at the level of the Heads of Services Committee (VaRash) and transparently presented to the relevant political echelon. The advantage of a "war compass" lies in the fact that it draws the system's preparedness toward its highest

threshold, from which adjustments can also be derived for lower or different levels of need. The argument that the frequency of war is very low and that it is therefore preferable to focus intelligence activity on the campaign between wars or on routine security is incorrect. This is because processes of preparedness, readiness, and force buildup for war take a long time and require ongoing maintenance in light of constant changes in force structure, and therefore war preparedness must be at the top of the priority list. Orientation toward war should project onto many dimensions of the intelligence establishment's activity, including influencing collection plans, types of operations and their prioritization, prioritization of research topics, accessibility and depth of analysis, training and exercising of personnel, and more. The existence of a target bank against a specific enemy is not, in itself, a sufficient expression of organization-wide readiness for war. Intelligence organizations must maintain close, joint action in routine times in light of the war compass, so that the capabilities built against the various threats will be optimal, resource-efficient, and synergistic in nature.

Changing the Operational Concept vis-à-vis Emerging Threats – the Intelligence Context

One of the most necessary conceptual changes in Israel's intelligence doctrine is a renewed focus on the ability to identify threats in their formative stages and to lay the intelligence groundwork for their

destruction. This stands in contrast to the CBW, which failed to prevent the military buildup of Hamas and Hezbollah. The CBW, derived from a logic of prevention and influence, demanded extensive intelligence resources, diverted strategic attention, and weakened preparedness for war. In formulating a new intelligence doctrine, it is necessary to shape operating principles adapted to the new Middle Eastern reality in light of the outcomes of the Iron Swords War. This requires continuous tracking and the provision of operational intelligence to strike a spectrum of threats, including at significant geographic distance. In addition, the evaluative component regarding the consequences of Israel's use of force must reflect the substantial increase in the IDF's freedom of action and flexibility in the wake of the war.

War preparedness must be at the top of the priority list

Creating New Balances vis-à-vis "Peace Arenas"

Arenas in which the State of Israel has peace agreements, such as Egypt and Jordan, are strategic assets. However, an updated intelligence doctrine should define the principles and balances required to ensure that potential threats—at both the strategic and operational levels in these arenas, such as a governmental coup, Egyptian military activity in Sinai, or Iranian efforts in Jordan—are properly monitored and reflected to the IDF and the government.

The claim that these arenas can continue to be managed with minimal intelligence investment, collection, and research is mistaken and dangerous. A supervised intelligence outlook on these arenas, which strengthens the intelligence picture and preparedness for changes in the situation, is clearly required.

Afterword

The national intelligence paradigm of the State of Israel is of critical importance to its future and its security. There are moments in the life of a nation when it must seize the reality that has emerged in its historical journey, identify the opportunity for growth and development, and realize it to the

fullest. October 7 is a powerful spotlight illuminating the historic opportunity before the State of Israel across many dimensions. Among them is the need to correct the changes that have taken place over the past three decades and to formulate a sound national intelligence paradigm, properly adapted to the national security needs of the State of Israel. The required change calls for a new and healthier balance between the intelligence establishment and the political echelon and military command, the establishment of conceptual baseline assumptions that correspond to reality, a return to the foundations of the intelligence profession, and continuous preparedness for war.