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SURPRISE ATTACK
THE CASE OF THE YOM-KIPPUR WAR

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INTRODUCTION

The issue of strategic surprise and specially the subject of surprise attack are some of the most complex problems that policymakers, militaries and intelligence analysts have to face. This is particularly true for states such as Israel, as it was demonstrated during the Yom Kippur War in 1973. Israel was taken by surprise which effected the beginning of the war, as well as the final results.

From the Israeli perspective the basic problem was rooted in the imbalance between the size of the Arab and the Israeli military and the asymmetry seen from a geographical perspective. The IDF (Israeli defense forces) is primarily based on reserve forces, whereas the Arab militaries are mainly active. Therefor the deployment of the Israeli reserves depends on early warning, a decision of mobilization and its execution. Moreover, Israel has no strategic depth and its vital objectives are very close to the borders. These factors indicate the significance of the surprise attack and the need for intelligence warning, as a fundamental issue in the national security doctrine.

This paper discusses the theoretical components of this subject, using the Yom Kippur War as a case study. It examines the subject from the victim's standpoint and seeks to establish the reasons for failing to predict the oncoming war.

The discussion about prediction of imminent war is probably one of the most difficult and complex issues in the field of strategic estimation. It involves the process of gathering information, evaluation, assessment and decisions. It is

influenced by perceptions, the interpretation of data, organizational conflicts and military and policy constraints. This paper does not suggest that there is only one basic explanation to the surprise attack at Yom Kippur, because there is not just one cause which describes the problem in all its dimensions and complexities. This paper analyzes the evaluation and estimation process before the war in relation to the main theories of strategic surprise.

THE ESSENCE OF SURPRISE

The essence of surprise is a very complex subject. First, it is an act or development that takes place contrary to our expectations, thus proving our assumptions to be wrong. Second, the surprise comes without a sufficient warning and therefore catches us unprepared, hence our inadequate response. Finally, the sudden occurrence provokes our emotions which may throw us off balance, at least for a while.

Zvi Lanir distinguishes between *situational surprise* and *fundamental surprise*.¹ The situational surprise exposes errors in assumptions and predictions, but does not undermine the basic conceptions; its existence is limited and narrow. The fundamental surprise is essentially a national problem and not just an intelligence failure. Its intensity is much stronger exposing very basic conceptual flaws.

¹Lanir Zvi, Fundamental Surprise : The National Intelligence Crisis, Tel Aviv: Hakibutz Hameuchad, 1983, pg. 40-44 (Hebrew).

The concept of surprise attack appears to contain three main elements²: first, it is a military act that is not consistent with the victim's expectations and assumptions. From this viewpoint the strength of surprise depends on the nature and depth of these assumptions. Second, a surprise attack implies a failure of advance warning. In this sense the strength of the surprise is in reverse proportion to the timing and clarity of the early warning. Last, a surprise attack indicates the victim's failure to adequately meet the threats. In this sense, the degree of surprise can be deduced from the victim's level of preparedness at the moment of the attack.

Obviously there is a clear connection between these three elements. Assumptions and expectations regarding a possible attack determine the timing and clarity of any advance warning. The preciseness of the warning determines both the speed of the response and the extent of preparedness for war. The wider the range of the victim's erroneous assumption, the more vague and late the advance warning is and consequently the more inadequate the level of preparedness.

SURPRISE AND MILITARY PREPAREDNESS

Military preparedness is an outcome of a series of measures - alertness, mobilization and redeployment - designed to counter an attack.

²Kam Efrain, "Surprise Attack - Obstacles and safeguards", in Intelligence and National Security, Maarachot, Tel Aviv, 1988, pg. 322-323 (Hebrew).

The state of military preparedness at the time of attack is the outcome of two main factors³:

1. The core of preparedness consists of those *basic measures* taken by the state as minimal precautions against potential future attacks.
2. Additional *emergency measures* which are determined largely by the strategic warning itself.

The IDF cannot keep its units in full readiness for a long period of time, and normally its basic preparedness is far from sufficient to face a massive attack. Thus, the warning should enable the armed forces to bring their state of preparedness up to the required level. In this sense the lack of preparedness of the IDF in the Yom Kippur War was more due to the lack of emergency measures rather than the basic measures.

The second problem of preparedness refers to the *warning span*. The intelligence community is often required to assess the length of time before an attack, that it may be able to issue an advance warning. Such an assessment is very helpful in planning and setting the desired level of basic preparedness.

The Israeli contingencies in 1973 were based on the assumption that there would be an advance warning of more than 48 hours. The director of military intelligence assured the general staff, that he would be able to give advance warning of enemy intentions to launch an attack in adequate time, thus

³Eylon Avraham, "National Readiness - The Primary Solution To Surprise Attack", by Offer and Kover (ed.), *Intelligence and National Security*, Maarachot 1988, pg. 379-380, (Hebrew).

allowing for the orderly call-up of the reserves.⁴ Consequently the mobilization of reserve forces was not included among readiness measures until the last day before the war. Reliance on the director's promise was a fatal error.

The Agranat Inquiry Commission - (a governmental commission) concluded that there were no grounds for such an absolute guarantee.⁵ The problem is that nobody outside the intelligence community has the knowledge and experience to check the capability of intelligence agencies to issue a strategic warning. Moreover, according to General Barak, even within the intelligence community itself, the estimate of the warning span is to a large extent a speculative. It is based on many factors, some of them exclusively under the enemy's control and some related to an assumed capability of analyzing a developing situation which can never be relied on.⁶

On October 5th., 1973, the Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, approved a "C" alert, the highest level of alert for the regular army and the air force, but he did not approve the mobilization of reserves. Moreover, in the morning of October 6th., when it was obvious that Egypt and Syria were going to attack, Israel decided to reject a preemptive attack by its air force. This decision derived from multiple causes. According to Michael Handel, the primary reason was the international environment.⁷ Golda Meir and

⁴Bartov Hanoach, Daddo - 48 Years and 20 more Days, Tel Aviv: Maariv, 1978, pg. 278-279, (Hebrew).

⁵Agranat Commission, The Agranat Report, Am Oved, 1975, pg. 19-20 (Hebrew).

⁶Barak EHUD, "Issues in Intelligence", by Offer and Kover (ed.), Intelligence and National Security, pg. 493, (Hebrew).

⁷Handel Michael, "The Yom Kippur War Inevitability of Surprise", International Studies Quarterly, 21, 1977, pg. 473

Dayan later admitted that the Israeli government feared losing the support of the United States, Israel's only ally. The desire not to make the first hostile move and the world's opinion were very important to Israel.⁸ But to the issue of readiness, it may be concluded that the Israeli decision to delay any additional preparations was heavily influenced by the high confidence in its ability to absorb an Arab attack without excessive cost. Obviously, the safer the leaders feel with basic preparedness, the more they are willing to take risks and to postpone further moves.

DIMENSIONS OF ERRONEOUS ESTIMATES

Surprise can be achieved on several different levels: in timing, the place of the attack, rapidity of movement, the use of new technologies delivery and weapons system, the frequent appearance of new doctrines and innovative tactics to match the new technologies, as well as in the choice of political-military goals for war itself.⁹

From Arab reports, it is clear that the planning and timing of the attack were very pedantic. Early October was chosen as the best time to attack for a variety of reasons: first, the autumn climate was most suitable for the attacking forces; secondly, it assumed that because of the Jewish Holiday the Israeli level of alert would be lower, and more than the usual number of soldiers would be on leave; the third reason was the approach of the Israeli elections in early November, which diverted the attention of Israeli leaders

⁸Nakdimon Shlomo, *Low Probability*, Tel Aviv: Revivim 1982, pg. 71, (Hebrew).

⁹Handel Michael, "Intelligence and The Problem of Strategic Surprise", *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 1984, pg. 231-232.

from security matters and foreign affairs to domestic affairs and political campaigning. Finally, the holiest Arab Holiday, the Ramadan, fell in October, and it was hoped that Israel would assume that no Moslem country would initiate a war during that month.¹⁰ The Israeli intelligence estimated during 1973 that the Arabs would not be in a position to carry out their threat of war until sometimes in 1975, while Moshe Dayan even claimed in July 1973 that no general war expected during the next ten years.¹¹

The Egyptians and Syrians surprised Israel not only in the timing of the attack but also in another important area - technology. The effectiveness of some Arab weapons, in particular Soviet anti-air missiles (Sam 6,7), anti-tank missiles (Sagar and Swatter), and bridging equipment - came as a great surprise to Israeli troops on the battlefield. Although the supply to the Arab armies of these weapons were known to the IDF, the way in which they were used and its full impact under combat conditions came as a surprise.¹² Finally, Egypt's decision to change its tactics and methods of warfare, abandon the search for long-range aerial attack capability, and reliance on the neutralization of Israeli aerial superiority with a massive anti-aircraft system was apparently made shortly before October. This change in doctrine was unknown to the Israeli intelligence, and it surely had a large impact, at least in the first week of the war.¹³

¹⁰Sadat Anwar, *In Search of Identity*, New York: Harper and Row, 1977, pg. 244

¹¹Herzog Haim, *The War of Atonement*, Tel Aviv: Steimatzky, 1975, pg. 41.

¹²Handel Michael, "Crisis and Surprise in Three Arab-Israeli Wars", by Knorr and Morgan (ed.), *Strategic Military Surprise*, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1983, pg. 13.

¹³Shlaim Avi, "Failure in National Intelligence Estimates", *World Politics*, 28, 1976, pg. 348.

INFORMATION, INTENTIONS AND CAPABILITIES

Analysis of surprise attacks suggest that the intelligence community seldom fails to anticipate them as a result of a lack of relevant information. In most cases the victim possesses plenty of information indicating the imminence of the attack.¹⁴

Preparation for war generally produce early warning indications. They indicate the state of the enemy's military readiness and the build-up of its capability for war. At the same time early warning indicators should give some indications of the enemy's intentions and implicitly, point to its direction, objectives, and decisions behind them.

Undoubtedly, the enemy's perceived capabilities and intentions are the key to predicting his future behavior. But there is a long-standing debate over whether the enemy should be evaluated mainly in terms of his capabilities or in terms of his intentions.¹⁵ On one hand it can be argued that concentrating on the enemy's capabilities is more sound, since it produces evaluation based on "facts" and "measurable data", rather than guesses as to what the enemy has in mind. On the other hand, if we always respond according to the enemy's capabilities - how can we keep our forces below our own maximum capability?

¹⁴Ben-Zvi Avraham, "Hindsight and Foresight: A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of Surprise Attack", *World Politics*, 28, 1976, pg. 494.

¹⁵Handel Michael, "Intelligence and the Problem of Strategic Surprise", pg. 239-241.

Estimates of intentions differ from those of capabilities in terms of both the data and the material involved, as well as the difficulties those estimates entail. Intentions are very difficult to follow, particularly in the single leader's regime; They can be changed at the last minute and estimating them as not as capabilities may result in total failure.¹⁶

The case of Yom Kippur demonstrates the interdependent relations between estimates of intentions and capabilities. An erroneous estimate of the enemy's intentions may lead to an erroneous estimate of his capabilities. When the analyst estimates the enemy's capabilities as insufficient for launching a successful attack, he will tend not to take seriously the enemy's intentions.¹⁷ In 1973 Israel assumed that Egypt lacked the military capability needed for a successful attack across the Suez Canal, and therefore did not pay much attention to Sadat's threats of war.

ESTIMATING INTENTIONS - THE ENEMY'S CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

A logical evaluation of the enemy's intentions is not enough. Sometimes, the enemy may evaluate his own capabilities and options according to different criteria, and he may reach different conclusions and act in an unexpected way. Looking at the reality through the enemy's eyes means not only an understanding of his *ideology*, but also studying his *cultural-identity* and

¹⁶Handel Michael, "Intelligence and the Problem of Strategic Surprise", pg. 240.

¹⁷Shlaim Avi, "Failure in National Intelligence Estimates", pg. 362.

operational code.¹⁸ It means understanding his motivation, expectations, fears and his dynamics and pressures. The Israeli assessments relied upon the physical and qualitative balance of forces. Judging the balance to be in its favor, and assuming that the Arabs would not be so foolish as to attack in the face of such superiority - the Israeli government chose not to respond to early indications that Egypt was preparing for a war. In doing so they failed to assess the Egyptian need for a "psychological recovery", and the possibility that Sadat would initiate a war of limited objectives, designed to achieve a political victory far short of the military defeat of Israel.¹⁹

Israel's military logic was "western" in the sense that war did not appear to be a viable option, unless victory was assumed. Unlike Israel, the Arab states could lose a war and still exist. Moreover, they assumed that they could lose the battle and still win the war politically. This was the reason for Israel's failure to perceive the Arabs willingness to accept high risks in order to change the political status-quo.

ESTIMATING CAPABILITIES

At a meeting of the General Staff on September 17th. 1973, the Israeli Director of Military Intelligence announced that for the moment, because of Israeli air superiority, the Arabs were unable to go to war.²⁰ This assertion took into considerations not only the enemy's absolute capability, but as related to Israel's capability to block it. It raises the question about the criteria

¹⁸McCormic G., "Surprise, Perceptions and Military Style", *Orbis* 26, 1983, pg. 833-835.

¹⁹Ibid, pg. 836.

²⁰Bartov Hanoach, Daddo - 48 Years and 20 More Days, pg. 278.

which is used in order to define accurately what is within the range of enemy capability and what is beyond it.

According to Handel, one of the methods to draw a general conclusion, with regard to the enemy capabilities, is based not only on comparing weapons inventories, but also using the experience of his past performance.²¹ In 1973 Israel partly based its assessment of Arab capabilities on the poor performance of the Arab armies between 1967-1970.

"The Six Days War and the various postwar clashes between Israeli and Arab units in the air and on the ground led us to the judgment that if war broke out it would not be difficult for Israel to win",²² wrote Dayan in his book. In this sense the Arab armies surprised Israel by manifesting a higher degree of motivation and an improved combat capability in the 1973 war. Under estimation of the enemy was not the only problem. It also involved the overestimation of the Israeli capabilities that contributed to the belief in military superiority. Dayan expressed such a belief two months before the Yom Kippur War: "The overall balance of power is in our favor, and this fact is overwhelmingly decisive in the face of all other considerations and prevents the immediate renewal of war... Our military advantage is the outcome of both the weakness of the Arabs and our increasing strength. Their weakness arises from factors that I do not suppose will quickly disappear... Our superiority can, in my opinion be maintained in the coming years as well."²³

²¹Handel Michael, "The Yom Kippur War and the Intelligence Surprise", *International Studies Quarterly*, 21, 1977, pg. 165.

²²Moshe Dayan, *The Story of My Life*, Tel Aviv: Steimatzky, 1976, pg. 509.

²³Nakdimin Shlomo, *Low and Probability*, pg. 68,81.

The belief in military superiority is closely linked to the belief in deterrence.²⁴ When decision makers believe that their armed forces have an overwhelming superiority, they tend to be overconfident about their deterrent posture. As their confidence in deterrence rises, they may ignore early warning indicators of imminent war.

"As long as the deterrence is not openly challenged, the defender is inclined to assume that deterrence is working."²⁵ Thus, within the Israeli leadership in 1973 nobody questioned the assumption that the IDF's overwhelming superiority over the Arab armies guaranteed, at least in the short term, that the Arabs would be deterred from getting into military adventures.

BIASED ESTIMATES

The possibility of surprise is inherent in the limitations of human perception. Surprise is essentially a psychological phenomenon that has its roots in human nature. Images, beliefs, ideological bias, wishful thinking - all play a part in the process of intelligence analysis.²⁶ Moreover, human beings are also influenced by other cognitive impediments such as framing and anchoring, consensus seeking, stress avoidance, optimism or pessimism, etc.²⁷

²⁴Kam Efraim, Surprise Attack, Harvard University press Cambridge, MS, 1988, pg. 114

²⁵George and Smoke, Deterrence in American Foreign Policy, New York: Columbia University, 1974, pg. 567

²⁶Shlaim Avi, "Failure in National Intelligence Estimates", pg. 356-357.

²⁷Janis and Mann, Decision Making, New York: Free Press, 1977, pg. 107-110.

Interpretation is partly based on preexisting systems of knowledge which includes beliefs, theories, assumptions and schemes. Because of limits in mental capacity, the human mind can not cope directly with the confusing reality. In order to deal with the complexity of the world, the individual has to form simplified, structured beliefs about the nature of the world. These beliefs provide the individual a coherent way of organizing and making sense out of the information he possesses.²⁸

The basic problem is the persistence of that inevitable and indispensable set of conception that guides the analyst in selecting and interpreting the information. Psychologists have found that people's theories, beliefs and images have an extraordinary persistence despite a wide range of evidence, that should invalidate or at least change them. In general, people are apt to resist a change in their beliefs and they may too quickly reject discrepant information.²⁹

The Agranat Commission of Inquiry stated explicitly that such persistence was the root of the Israeli failure in October 1973. Sadat's failure to go to war, as he had asserted he would by the end of 1971, convinced Israel's leadership that threats by the Egyptians president need not be taken seriously. Moreover, his expulsion of the Soviet advisers was also read as a crucial indicator of Egypt's military weakness and as a proof of Sadat's determination not to become involved in a war with Israel, at least for several

²⁸Bonham, Shapiro and Tumble, "The October War: Changes in Cognitive Orientation Towards the Middle East Conflict", *International Studies Quarterly*, 23, 1979, pg. 17.

²⁹Jervis Robert, Perception and Misperception in International Politics, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976, pg.176-177.

years.³⁰ What became known as "the conception" was the dogmatic belief in a political and military preconception, which maintained that:

1. Egypt would not initiate a war as long as it did not have the capability to neutralize the Israeli air force.
2. Arab leadership would have to be strengthened and united.³¹

"The conception" had been vindicated only a few months before October. In May 1973, The Israeli intelligence assessed correctly the Egyptian-Syrian military build up near the borders. General Zaira estimated that these activities were just another move to the brink and subsequently the threat would then subside. The Chief of Staff, General Elazar, did not accept this evaluation and ordered a partial mobilization, which was severely criticized at the time, as costly and unnecessary.³² This crisis was not part of Sadat's plan of action. But at that time it had an impact on decisionmakers' belief in "the conception".³³

But as the Agranat Commission stated, on the evening of the war a vast body of data was accumulated, indicating an unprecedented deployment of enemy troops along the front. It should raise the question how did analysts treat this information and how did they explain its discrepancies?

³⁰Brecher Michael, Decision in Crisis: Israel, 1967 and 1973, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980, pg. 53-54.

³¹Agranat Commission, The Agranat Report, Am Oved, 1975, pg. 19-20.

³²Shlaim Avi, "Failure in National Intelligence Estimates", pg. 358.

³³Ben Porat Yoel, "The Yom Kippur War - A Mistake on May and a Surprise on October", Maarachot, 8/1985, pg. 2-9, (Hebrew).

First, the interpretation of incoming information is affected not only by the belief system, but by expectations as to the enemy's behavior, which are largely based on past experience. Since expectations are rooted mainly in beliefs and images, they tend to persist even in the face of disconfirming information.³⁴

Secondly, psychologists have noted that individuals tend to perceive what they expect. In conditions of uncertainty they have a tendency to increase the subjective probability of those events that are regarded as more desirable.³⁵ This phenomenon, known as "*wishful thinking*", means that when there is a great preference for a particular outcome, ambiguous *signals* will be misinterpreted, even when people realize that they are *signals* rather than *noise*.

Finally, when the incoming information is too discrepant to be disposed of one mechanism for achieving consistency while minimizing the adjustment of the concepts is *differentiation*. The analyst splits the information into two or more parts and adjusts only his beliefs concerning the part that is causing conflict.³⁶ During the first days of October, the Egyptian build up was explained by Israeli intelligence as a part of a major maneuver ("Tachrir 41"), which was taking place at that time. The Syrian build up was not considered sufficiently significant, since it was assumed that Syria could not go to war without Egypt, and this was considered unlikely.³⁷

³⁴Jervis Robert, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, pg. 145-147.

³⁵Handel Michael, "The Yom Kippur War and the Inevitability of Surprise", *International Studies Quarterly*, 21, 1977, pg.472.

³⁶Bonham, Shapiro and Tumble, "The October War: Changes in Cognitive Orientation Towards the Middle East Conflict", pg.17.

³⁷Bartov Hanoach, *Daddo - 48 Years and 20 more Days*, pg. 296.

I mentioned before the overconfidence factor as it affected the Israeli leadership on the operational level. They were willing to take high risks because of their confidence in the IDF capability. But it can also be argued, that this overconfidence had an impact on the conceptual level. The Israeli Intelligence was so overconfident in their ability to predict a war (in particular after their success in May), that they could not recognize the signals and warning indicators. Ben Porat concludes that "the higher the degree of confidence, the lower the analyst will be to accommodate discrepant evidence, and the less willing he will be to accept alternative hypotheses about the enemy's intention".³⁸

THE ENVIRONMENT - GROUPTHINK AND THE SMALL GROUP

Irving Janis defines *groupthink* as "a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members' strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action".³⁹ His main hypothesis regarding groupthink asserts that "the more amiability and esprit de corps among the members of a policy-making in-group, the greater is the danger that independent critical thinking will be replaced by groupthink".⁴⁰

³⁸Ben Porat Yoel, "Why Estimates Collapse?", in Intelligence and National Security, Maarachot, 1988, pg. 224.

³⁹Janvis Irving, Victims of Groupthinking, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1972, pg. 9-10.

⁴⁰Ibid, pg. 12.

Pressure for confirmity can be created not only by the opinion of the majority but also by the opinions of two important members of the group: the *leader* and the *expert*.⁴¹ In late September 1973, the Head of the Israeli Mossad Intelligence Service and the Deputy Chief of Staff, claimed separately that the probability of war was relatively high. But they did not do much to change the intelligence assessment.

Golda Meir, described the outcome of such dependency on experts on the evening of the Yom Kippur War: "How could it be that I was still so terrified of war breaking out, when the present Chief of Staff, two former Chiefs of Staff (Dayan and Bar-Lev, who was the minister of commerce and industry), and the head of intelligence were far from sure that it would? After all, they were not just ordinary soldiers. They were all highly experienced generals, men who had fought and led other men in spectacularly victorious battles".⁴²

In addition to exercising pressures for confirmity, groups tend to be more willing than individuals to accept risky evaluations. Handel argues that Dayan and General Zeira had both been combat commanders and since they were heroic types they suffered from similar perceptual defects. The fact that they reinforced each other's views may have been a major cause of the failure to take seriously the numerous warnings preceding the Yom Kippur War.⁴³

⁴¹Janvis Irving, *Victims of Groupthinking*, Ibid, pg. 3.

⁴²Golda Meir, *My Life*, Tel Aviv: Steimatzky, 1975, pg.357.

⁴³Bar Josef Uri, "Israel's Intelligence Failure of 1973", pg. 606.

ORGANIZATIONAL AND BUREAUCRATIC EXPLANATION

Intelligence analysts work within an organizational framework, which may have interest in the status-quo and thus tend to discourage abrupt changes of beliefs. Much of an intelligence organization's professional integrity depends upon the degree to which freedom of expression and criticism are encouraged.⁴⁴ If the intelligence service is dominated by a group of powerful decision-makers, it will become the prisoner of these decision makers' images, dogmas and preconceptions. "Instead of examining carefully every piece of evidence according to the basic rule that nothing is permanent, it will be reduced to the subservient role of seeking supportive material for already established theory".⁴⁵

Decision-makers are usually committed to their policy. Changing the policy might be difficult, expensive and sometimes risky. This means that the more committed decision makers are to their policy, the less willing they will be to accept warnings that contradict their commitment; and the stronger this commitment is, the stronger the evidence required to bring about acceptance of warnings.⁴⁶

Another obstacle on the interpretation of vital signals is the "*cry wolf*" phenomenon, which is a damaging case of **false alarm**. False alarms have a considerable impact. High costs can be incurred when faulty analysis is

⁴⁴Handel Michael, "Intelligence and the Problem of Strategic Surprise, pg. 258-289.

⁴⁵Shlaim Avi, "Failure in National Intelligence Estimates", pg.366.

⁴⁶Poteat George, "The Intelligence Gap: Hypotheses on the Process of Surprise", International Studies Notes, 3, 1976, pg.15-17.

When it comes to explaining Zeira's behavior, the Agranat Commission concluded that he was a person "who was ready to make himself the final judge in matters of intelligence in Israel".⁵⁰ That conclusion was based on Zeira's testimony in Agranat Commission: "The best support the director of the Military Intelligence can give the Chief of Staff... is to provide him with the clearest and sharpest estimate possible. It is true that if the estimate is very clear and sharp, if there is a mistake it is a very clear and very sharp mistake - but this is the risk of being the director of the Military Intelligence".⁵¹ According to Bar Josef, Zeira was so confident that war was impossible, that he became far more concerned with how to avoid repeating the costly "Blue-White" alert of May 1973 - than his main duty as Israel's number one intelligence officer.⁵²

INTELLIGENCE AND DECISION MAKERS

In her autobiography, Golda Meir suggested that it would have been unreasonable for more civilians like herself to challenge the confidently presented estimates of the military experts.⁵³ But she can not escape from the role and responsibility of the head and leader of the country to accept or reject intelligence assessment. Furthermore, decision-makers influence the content of intelligence assessment and should form assessments of their own concerning the enemy and his likely behavior. They may be able to correct erroneous intelligence assessments because they have at least two advantages

⁵⁰Agranat Commission, The Agranat Report, pg.34.

⁵¹Agranat Commission, Ibid, pg.34-35.

⁵²Bar Jisef Uri, "Israel's Intelligence Failure of 1973", pg.605.

⁵³Golda Meir, My Life, pg. 357-359.

over intelligence analysts: since they are not constantly involved in the process of assessing intelligence, they might detect shortcomings in earlier assumptions and formulations of the assessment; and they are aware of the overall picture concerning the intentions and capabilities of both sides - their own and those estimated to be the enemy's.⁵⁴ "A sound and comprehensive intelligence evaluation is the product not merely of accurate technical data, but also of background political knowledge that helps the analyst to lift the signals out of the confusion of noise. He can then interpret them in the broad perspective of regional and international mutations, that have a bearing on the adversary's perceptions and calculations".⁵⁵

The Yom Kippur failure illustrates the danger of subordinating intelligence to a dominant and centralizing political authority. The main task of the intelligence producer is to portray reality, as precisely as possible and to make sure that the doubts and uncertainties are known. It does not include decisionmaking, despite the powerful temptation.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite the large amount of information that was gathered by the intelligence branches before the war - there was a failure to predict it within a reasonable advance time. As it was described throughout the paper, the surprise attack in Yom Kippur was not the result of any single factor, nor did it occurred because of mistakes committed on any one level.

⁵⁴Shlaim Avi, "Failure in National Intelligence Estimates", pg. 367-371.

⁵⁵Ibid, pg.370.

Three factors seem to be especially significant in creating the surprise:

1. The quality of information and data available for judging and predicting enemy behavior. The lack of direct evidence pertaining to the enemy's intentions and the ambiguous nature of the available warning indicators and critical factors made it very difficult to assess correctly both the intentions and the capabilities of the opponent.⁵⁶

2. The persistence of conception, even in the face of evidence. Again, the ambiguous nature of intelligence material makes it possible for the analyst to easily assimilate incoming information to his beliefs without changing them, even when a change is required.⁵⁷

3. The strong linkages between the analytical process and the environment in which it took place. Intelligence production influences decision making; but at the same time a combination of factors heavily influenced the way in which conceptions were formed and information was read. The intelligence assessment affected the operational concept and vice versa, and strong interdependency was created between the main players.

The Israeli policy-makers excessively relied on assessments of the physical and qualitative balance of forces. Judging the balance to be in their favor and assuming that the Egyptians would not be so foolish to attack in the face of such superiority, the Israeli government chose not to respond to early indications that Egypt and Syria were preparing for a war. Israel's military logic was "Western" in that war did not appear to be a viable option unless

⁵⁶Ben Zvi Abraham, "Hindsight and Foresight: A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of Surprise Attack", pg. 395-396.

⁵⁷Bar Josef Uri, "Israel's Intelligence Failure of 1973", pg. 586-587.

victory was assured. But Sadat was ready to attack, knowing that he would be able to attain his political goals even by limited military objectives.⁵⁸ The success achieved by Egypt and to a limited degree by Syria did a great deal to the cumulative effects that the many previous losses had taken on them; national identity and spirit were restored; the myth of Israel as invincible foe was dispelled; the myth that Arabs could not work together in coordination was dashed. A tradition of leadership in the Arab world was started for Egypt.

To conclude the analysis, it might be said that Israel deceived itself: the adherence to "the conception", the faith in its military deterrence power, the unwillingness to believe that the Arabs would take so great risks and the "wishful thinking" - all of these, rather than deception, contributed to its crucial surprise.

The constant recurrence of intelligence failure has brought many attempts of suggesting safeguards and improvements aimed to prevent future failure. According to Kam, three main categories of safeguards are often suggested, in order to improve the *analytical process*:⁵⁹

1. *Increasing awareness of limitations* - to the nature of judgmental biases and the limitations of the intelligence process.
2. *Improving the formation of hypotheses* - in order to increase the

⁵⁸McCormic G., "Surprise Perceptions and Military Style", pg. 836-837.

⁵⁹Kam Efraim, *Surprise Attack*, pg. 216-221.

perceived likelihood of alternative interpretations and scenarios that may sensitize analysts and decision makers to discrepant information.

3. *Improving information processing* - especially by using quantitative approaches and empirical methods to facilitate the information process.

Intelligence failures also lead to attempts to improve *organizational procedures*. These attempts try to reduce the group influence. Janis suggests that leaders in organizations should avoid setting a group norm that will elicit conformity with their views among the subordinates. They should enable the members of the group to develop an atmosphere of open inquiry and to explore a wide range of opinions.⁶⁰

The intelligence community should encourage spirit of openness, caution, skepticism, imagination and to protect cautious, skeptical junior analysts who raise tough questions and doubts. The fostering of this open and flexible spirit requires a great deal of education, but once it is achieved, it might reduce many of the risks involved in the analytical process.

Lowering the threshold of warning - This approach entails the "cry wolf" phenomenon, which can in turn reduce sensitivity to additional warnings and it may cost a very high price to the nation's economy. But in the case of Israel, which is in a militarily vulnerable position, risks must not be taken and when tactical actualities are at variance with strategic possibilities - the

⁶⁰Janis Irving, *Victims of Groupthinking*, pg. 209-211.

priority should be given to the *capabilities test* and to identify it as sufficient for warning.⁶¹

While surprise attack by definition is one that is truly understood only in retrospect, it is hoped that these steps may help to gain more time for better preparations and for minimizing the damage once a surprise attack occurs.

⁶¹Tal Israel (Gen.), "The Deterrence as a Component Within the Israeli National Security Doctrine", in *Hamanit* 4/1988, pg. 6-8, (Hebrew).

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