The wave of protests that began in December 2010 and swept the Arab world ended dozens of years of regime stability in the Middle East. The spontaneous outpouring of the masses into the streets in protest of numerous years of dictatorship, tyranny, and corruption, for instance, in Egypt, took by surprise even those who allegedly understand the Egyptian street: journalists and academic experts active in this field; Western intelligence services, particularly in the United States and Israel, two countries that perceived Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak as an essential ally and an island of stability; and even among the Egyptian security and intelligence services, which, as in other dictatorial regimes, had invested considerable efforts into the regime’s preservation.

The earth-shattering intelligence surprise demonstrated the difficulty encountered by intelligence services in predicting changes of a social nature. Indeed, the field of intelligence regarding social developments (“Social Intelligence”), having over the years earned the reputation of being a “stepchild” among the various fields of Intelligence research, is considered the most difficult to predict. The “classic” intelligence arena,
entrusted with military aspects, is considered the least complex among the different types of intelligence, since its research focuses primarily on “intelligence regarding capabilities,” hence, the assessment of an enemy’s military capability of going to war based on a series of parameters and on “indicative signs” collected in the military arena and related areas, such as technological and economic. Intelligence regarding political issues, which investigates an enemy’s intentions, or more narrowly, the intentions of the leader and his circle of close associates, is more intricate. Social Intelligence is similarly entrusted with the investigation of intentions—not those of a small number of individuals—but the intentions of a mob, which is often leaderless. Thus, that predicting changes of social nature is considered one of the most demanding Intelligence tasks should come as no surprise.

CASE STUDIES OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENTS

My focus is on the Intelligence Community’s task of tracking social developments and its attempt at predicting political changes of a social nature, with special emphasis on the Israeli experience in this field, beginning with a review of the unique characteristics of intelligence research (and collection) in the social arena, and a brief description of the American experience in this field. The heart of this study is a review of the way the Israeli intelligence has been coping with the social research challenge throughout the years, while focusing on three case studies—the onset of the violent events of 1987 (the Intifada) in the Palestinian Territories; the victory of Hamas in the 2006 Palestinian elections; and the recent wave of protests and uprisings in the Arab world.

The common thread connecting the study of those events is the fact that all three are—or were supposed to be—a top priority for the Israeli Intelligence organizations. Thus, for instance, Israeli intelligence, concomitantly with its “classic” tasks of providing warning on the imminence of war (as well as peace), investigation of Iran’s nuclear program and the rocket threats on Israeli territory, and the prevention of terror, is also entrusted with investigating undercurrents in the surrounding countries, including Arab countries with whom the State of Israel has signed peace agreements, and the stability of their regimes. Undermining of that stability could result in the rise to power of new regimes that may be more hostile towards Israel and may intensify the various types of threats against it, such as unconventional weapons, missiles, conventional armies, and terror.

Israel’s failure to predict the recent wave of protests and uprisings in the Arab world looms large on the horizon of Social Intelligence, an area that suffers significantly, not only from an objectively substantial difficulty in
producing assessments, but also from the lack of a distinct intelligence discipline, a necessity due to the uniqueness of Social Intelligence research.

THE UNIQUENESS OF INTELLIGENCE RESEARCH REGARDING SOCIAL DEVELOPMENTS

A primary challenge of intelligence research regarding social developments is the requirement to explore intentions. Unlike intelligence regarding political issues, where research is focused on the leader’s intentions (a challenging task in itself), the focus of Social Intelligence is on exploring the masses’ intentions, an even more challenging task. This gives rise to unique difficulties in intelligence collection: the types of sources highly regarded and routinely used for intelligence regarding political issues or for military intelligence, such as SIGINT (the interception of signals, including audio communication, for instance, of states’ leaders or military radio communications) or VISINT (visual surveillance, primarily of military capabilities, for instance, by use of satellite or aerial photography), are ineffective in the attempt to follow trends in societies.

A relevant and useful collection method in Social Intelligence is Human Intelligence (HUMINT), but not in its “classic” sense, where the objective is to follow a particular individual or become part of a small and usually closed group of people, an environment which makes recruitment of sources a difficult task. Instead, Social Intelligence strives to explore the mood on the streets by achieving access into a society, its masses. The potential of recruiting sources for this task is therefore nearly unlimited. Thus, these sources are often referred to, not as HUMINT agents (or “spies” in vernacular speech), but rather as informants or collaborators. Furthermore, the method for recruiting and operating these agents is less complicated than that of “classic” HUMINT sources.

Open Source Intelligence (OSINT) can also be beneficial to Social intelligence—this includes newspapers, television, radio, and the newest types of sources (the Internet and its various social networks). Yet, the Intelligence profession still tends to downplay these sources, as do a state’s leaders, who often prefer to consume raw, unprocessed intelligence. These officials may be blinded or overly fascinated by information collected by covert methods and thus inclined to assign lesser importance to publicly available information, particularly when this material is concerned with long-term social-economic processes and not current and immediate threats.1

In addition to challenges in collection, Social Intelligence faces processing difficulties, mainly in the research and assessment phase. Social Intelligence requires detailed and in-depth research; but this task is often neglected by intelligence agencies in favor of work on current and more urgent issues, and on issues which are supposedly more understandable and less
speculative. Intelligence agencies often struggle to intuitively sense the “social pulse,” particularly in cases of societies of different cultures and values. Hence, when following foreign societies, for instance the Egyptian society, the intelligence researcher, even if experienced, is inferior, in many aspects, to the average Egyptian, who is exposed, on a daily basis, to that society’s fundamental processes and is therefore able to more intuitively and naturally forecast their expected results and timing.

The difficulty in studying foreign nations was addressed by Major-General Yehoshafat Harkabi, who served in the 1950s as the Director of AMAN (Israel’s Directorate of Military Intelligence, which is not entrusted solely with military intelligence). Harkabi claimed that

studying foreign nations is somewhat of an anthropological research. However, in this case, it is twice as difficult, in light of the fact that there is no limited framework of an exotic and secluded tribe. Studying modern nations is difficult, complicated and highly intricate. Modern nations are open to external influences, and providing a balanced description of what constitutes fundamental, authentic and their own [on one hand] and what is borrowed from others [on the other hand] breeds a great deal of difficulty.

Harkabi further noted that the task of an anthropological study of Arab nations is even more complex, in light of the researchers’ accessibility problem (amplified in the case of Israeli researchers), as well as “the cultural gap between them [the researchers] and the object of their study.”

Intelligence agencies are required, in all intelligence fields, to both describe the present state of affairs and to assess future developments, with emphasis on the timing and the way in which the present situation will change. According to retired Major-General Aviezer Ya’ari, former Director of AMAN’s Research Division:

The difficulty embedded in the term “Intelligence Assessment” stems from the fact that making an assessment is a forecast and a prediction of the future. As of yet, for the execution of its assessments, the Intelligence has no precise instrument or one that can be defined as “scientific” for assisting in identifying turning points in processes’ patterns and the risks and likelihoods involved. There is merely a method, and if one correctly follows it, it may result in a decrease in errors and submission of more reliable assessments. . . . The problem is particularly acute when one needs to correctly identify turning points that will take place in the future. This was labeled by the academia as “breakdown” or abrupt turning points in familiar reality; the instruments available for forecasting [these turning points] are minute . . .

In support of his pessimistic statement on intelligence’s ability to predict turning points, Ya’ari provided three instances when the American
Intelligence Community was caught by surprise, two of which were military-security related events: the 11 September 2001 (9/11) terror attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C., and the Japanese air strike on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941; and the third, a political one, that had both social and economic roots: the fall of the Soviet Union in December 1991.4

Indeed, social and economic developments are often interlaced; economic problems breed social restlessness, and vice versa—economic stability may contribute to social order and, as a result, to the regime’s stability. But economic intelligence research does not usually produce a detailed social analysis, but rather mainly assists either military intelligence research (such as addressing the question as to whether an enemy has the economic ability to wage war), or political intelligence research,5 particularly on matters pertaining to intelligence for peace, such as the existence of economic hardships that may drive the enemy towards peace.6

Political Foundations of Surprise

Political vicissitudes stemming from social and economic circumstances—the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution and the fall of the Soviet Union—constitute two of the biggest strategic surprises encountered by U.S. intelligence in the twentieth century.

On the eve of the Islamic revolution in Tehran, social–economic problems headed the list of hardships borne by Iran’s citizens. As the Shah’s regime gained power over time, and the internal reform process gained velocity, so did the hardships (some as a result of rapid population growth), in sharp contrast with the wealth of the oil-rich state. The dictatorial methods implemented by the Shah’s regime constituted an additional cause for resentment. This was coupled by the Shah’s attempts to diminish the importance of Islam and to nurture, in its place, loyalty to the monarchy, as well as the ever-growing presence of Western powers in Iran, principally the U.S. These processes ultimately led to unrest among the Iranian people. But this unrest remained largely hidden from the American intelligence services, or was, at the least, underestimated by them—perhaps out of self-delusion, or even a reluctance to displease the White House, in light of the wide-ranging U.S. economic activity in the country and Iran’s centrality in America’s Middle East policy. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) experts believed that the probability of a revolution in Iran was slim.7 Even after the Shah began losing ground, they assessed that he would be able to hold on and suppress the uprising.

The flawed assessments of CIA researchers regarding the level of Iranian social frustration, the steadfastness of the Shah’s regime, and its keenness to use force, constituted the basis for the American assessment failure.
These factors were coupled with the CIA’s superficial familiarity with the Iranian opposition, particularly the Islamic one, and the scarcity of CIA Farsi speakers. The lack of sufficient knowledge of the local culture and the Iranian way of life and a Western ethnocentric view of the Iranian situation—a phenomenon known among Middle East academic researchers as “Orientalism”—became an obstacle for U.S. intelligence. Its failure to perceive the severity of events in time resulted in Washington’s entanglement in the U.S. Tehran embassy hostage crisis and constituted a significant reason behind President Jimmy Carter’s failure to be reelected to a second term in the White House.8

The CIA’s inability to predict the fall of the Soviet Union is even more resounding, in light of the USSR’s position as the principal threat to U.S. global interests over a period of dozens of years. In this case, too, Soviet economic and social circumstances joined forces, and resulted in the fall of the Communist empire. Nevertheless, these circumstances were misinterpreted by the U.S. intelligence services, as well as by those of the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Israel, and all other Western countries. Notably, in their defense, the Russian KGB was also surprised by the events’ intensity, despite the early signs of crisis during Mikhail Gorbachev’s tenure, his internal weakness, and national awakenings in the Soviet republics.

Until the Soviet Union’s final days, many, if not most, CIA Sovietologists maintained what might be termed a dogmatic conception—possibly the foremost foe of the intelligence assessment process. They continued to perceive the Soviet Union as a superpower, and Communism as an ideology, that sought to change the status quo and act against Western interests. Instead, Gorbachev had by then already made desperate pleas for integrating Moscow into the international community in compliance with Western conditions.9

A principal reason for the American failure was overestimation of the Soviet economy’s performance during the 1970s and particularly during the 1980s. Indeed, CIA analytical papers continuously reported the constant deceleration of the Soviet economy, but, even then, they tended to present it as stronger than it actually was. Their analyses of Soviet economic data—collected mainly from open sources—failed to adequately comprehend the Soviet culture of deceitful reports made by Communist Party secretaries in the different regions to the headquarters in Moscow that resulted from the Communist regime’s guiding principle that the individual who admits failure bears the consequences. These economic hardships had a substantial effect on both the level of internal consolidation in the Soviet Union and the regime’s stability.10

American assessments regarding the Soviet Union’s military power and military spending were actually overestimations. In this context, too, claims
of the politicization of U.S. intelligence were voiced, according to which the CIA and the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) sought to encourage the White House to accelerate the arms race and take more resolute steps against the Soviet Union, based on knowingly biased assessments.¹¹

Numerous other national intelligence services, including Israel’s, have experienced similar failures in predicting political vicissitudes stemming from social and economic circumstances during recent decades.

THE ISRAELI EXPERIENCE

In light of Israel’s historical circumstances and unique geo-strategic situation, the structure of the state’s Intelligence Community is quite exceptional. Unlike other Western states, Israel’s military intelligence entity, AMAN, does not deal solely with collection and research regarding military intelligence. Instead, AMAN handles most intelligence research areas, including political intelligence and its derivatives. Within this framework, one of AMAN’s ongoing tasks is tracking economic and social developments in the Arab and Muslim world. These aspects are included in AMAN’s annual intelligence assessment, whose preparation Israel uniquely entrusts in to its military intelligence entity.

Yet, Israel’s foreign intelligence agency, the Mossad, also executes intelligence research on political, economic, and perhaps even social issues, as part of the country’s “Pluralism in Intelligence”—a policy recommendation made by the Agranat Committee. Commissioned to examine the roots of AMAN’s intelligence failure in the 1973 Yom Kippur War, it concluded that AMAN’s inflated dominance constituted the foundation of its failure.¹² Despite the Agranat Report, optimal intelligence pluralism was not established, and AMAN’s premier status remains firm. The nation’s internal intelligence and security agency, Shabak,¹³ also began tracking political, economic, and social developments in the Palestinian arena with the onset, in 1987, of the Intifada in the Palestinian Territories. But here, too, AMAN benefits from an advantage in collection, and possibly one in research, as a result of the large number of personnel at its service that includes the low-cost resource of soldiers in mandatory military service. In addition, it benefits from a higher level of attentiveness on the part of decisionmakers.

Further, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’s intelligence research entity, which has undergone many transformations throughout its existence, is perceived as extremely inferior by Israel’s Intelligence Community, as well as by the state’s leaders. This reality stands in contrast to the recommendation of the Agranat Committee (and other committees in the past) to substantially reinforce the ministry’s entity in such way that will make its assessments suitable to counterbalance those of AMAN regarding
political issues and their various derivatives. Its various publications have only limited influence and effect outside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’s borders. Nonetheless, some of these publications—during the Israeli state’s first years and later on—dealt with a relatively detailed analysis of social phenomena in the Arab world, namely, the development of Communist movements and the Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt. Some of these publications were issued within the framework of a series titled “Society and State in the Middle East.”

Issuing Reports

The Intelligence Academy, established in the state’s early days by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), probably served the entire small Israeli Intelligence Community at the time and ascribed importance to research regarding social developments. Thus, a booklet published by the Academy in 1950 (based on a draft compiled in 1945 during the British Mandate, and “based on all cumulative experience of superpowers in World War II”) highlighted the importance of “the sociological intelligence, that deals with demographical and psychological aspects of societies,” as well as economic intelligence.

Accordingly, AMAN’s research department (later division) has published, mostly under the aegis of the General Staff/Intelligence Directorate, without mentioning the research entity, analysis papers on social processes in the Arab countries carrying a low classification and therefore enabling their broader distribution. These AMAN papers point to the social–economic areas in which the service was interested during its early days and later: namely, youth in Arab countries (January 1967, based on Arab newspapers and academic studies) and prominent personae in the Arab world, including public persons and journalists, as well as others in the fields of economy and science. Other AMAN papers have studied the social and internal aspects of specific countries, including Iraq, Jordan, and Turkey. Some of these papers, published in the 1970s as part of the “Series of In-Depth Studies,” were not written directly by AMAN’s soldiers, but rather by “university experts and others, under the Intelligence Directorate’s guidance.”

AMAN assigned special attention to following internal issues in Egypt, Israel’s arch enemy until the end of the 1970s—though research regarding Egypt has, obviously, continued since the two countries signed a peace treaty in 1979. AMAN’s papers on Egypt have dealt with issues such as the middle-lower classes in the Egyptian society (“based on interviews with captive Egyptian soldiers” during the Sinai War in 1956) and problems faced by the Egyptian society (reflecting data published in newspapers).
Issue Dominance

Along with these and other papers that dealt with social–economic issues, a reasonable assumption is that the majority of AMAN’s research papers throughout the years have dealt with those military and political issues that are always perceived as more important, or at a minimum, more pressing. The structure of AMAN’s research division, designed after the 1973 Yom Kippur War, was divided into geographical departments (themselves subdivided into military and political branches) and departments that specialize on a specific cross-border field. Among the latter are the Superpowers Department (which most likely focused for many years on the former Soviet Union) and departments or branches entrusted with the task of assisting military and political research, among which are the Technological Department and the Economic Branch. Because nothing indicated that the latter has consistently dealt with social research, a reasonable assumption is that this task was relegated to the political branches, whose task is to conduct research on foreign policy and internal politics in the neighboring countries. Social research was quite possibly included in the past within the framework of the In-Depth Research branch that was already active in the research department. (The department’s status was upgraded to a division after 1973.)

In AMAN’s collection units, entrusted with the task of providing raw intelligence materials to the research division, the social aspect was not granted a special status. Moreover, it was seemingly pushed to the back burner. Most likely, a substantial part of the social information collected through the years was obtained by AMAN’s open collection unit, the Hatzav. This unit also issues, from time to time, information clusters from open sources which are subsequently distributed outside the Intelligence Community, and part of which deal with social–economic issues. In the Palestinian arena, the Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories’ Unit, under IDF and Ministry of Defense subordination, also provides materials of low classification level on social and economic issues, despite the fact that this unit is not an intelligence entity in the classic sense.

SURPRISES AND FAILURES

During its first three decades of existence, AMAN was taken by surprise numerous times by various events and developments in the Arab world. The majority of those surprises were related to either military intelligence (regarding capabilities)—e.g., the “Rotem Affair” and the Six-Day War—or to political intelligence (regarding intentions), such as the Yom Kippur War, Israeli intelligence’s biggest failure. Moreover, in the field of intelligence regarding intentions, AMAN has failed in all aspects of
intelligence regarding intentions for peace, when, in 1977, it did not predict Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat’s dramatic announcement of his willingness to go to Jerusalem. Notably, however, in AMAN’s favor, the Israeli leaders who were involved in the secret contacts that preceded Sadat’s historic visit chose to exclude AMAN. Nevertheless, this AMAN failure focuses on political intelligence; but it also interfaces with economic intelligence, since Egypt’s economic hardships during the first half of the 1970s were some of the reasons that motivated Sadat to opt for peace.

As were the American intelligence services, so were their Israeli counterparts—AMAN and Mossad—taken by surprise by the swiftness of the collapse of the Iranian Shah’s regime that occurred in late 1978 and early 1979. Yet, the consensus is that the Israeli intelligence had accurately read the political map and issued a warning on the possibility of a revolution, even though it was unable to accurately predict its timing. Thus, Professor Uri Bar-Joseph of the University of Haifa, one of the most prominent researchers on the Israeli intelligence, has referred to this event as an Intelligence success, certainly in comparison to the American failure. Bar-Joseph explained that the difference between the Israeli and American assessments stemmed from the better familiarity of AMAN—and particularly of the Mossad and the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs—with the Iranian culture and society, which are unique in the surrounding Arab environment. This resulted from, among other things, a good command of the Farsi language. As a result, Israel was able to extricate its people from Iran in good time, and to minimize the economic damages it suffered as a result of the revolution.

Still, although Israel was not strategically surprised, it was tactically taken by surprise. The evacuation of dozens of remaining Israelis from Tehran was delayed due to a misguided assessment regarding the ability of the Shah’s soldiers to delay the country’s takeover by the Ayatollah Khomeini’s people. (These Israelis were finally evacuated in an American aircraft.) This assessment may have been influenced by a sense of denial among decisionmakers, in light of the strategic significance of the relationships between Jerusalem and Tehran. In addition, the Israeli assessment was likely influenced by the indifference of the United States which still had some fifty thousand of its own people in Iran when the revolution started.

The “lessons learned” process that was most likely undertaken by Israeli intelligence after the Iranian revolution did not prevent it from facing substantial difficulties through the succeeding years in predicting the results of social processes in the Arab world in general, and more particularly in the Palestinian arena. Two of the three cases are studied here.
THE ONSET OF THE FIRST INTIFADA (1987)

The IDF’s military occupation of the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem during the 1967 Six-Day War presented Israel with a complex challenge, centered on governing the lives of approximately one million Palestinians (by 1987 the Palestinian population was approximately 1.5 million). In the absence of a political solution, and despite the fact that the Israeli government had never annexed the West Bank and the Gaza Strip Territories or made a clear decision on their future, the IDF’s presence in the Territories had become permanent. The IDF had formed a unit named “Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories” (it later included a subunit named “The Civil Administration,” or more precisely, a military unit in charge of civil administration) for the purpose of governing the Territories’ people. This unit’s task was to execute the government’s policy in the Territories (and it was therefore, in principle, directly subordinated to the Ministry of Defense, despite the fact that, for all intent and purpose, it actually remained a military unit) on matters pertaining to employment, social services, economy, development, and more. Israel’s policy strived to achieve minimal intervention in the lives of the Palestinian people and encourage economic activity, out of the belief that normalization would facilitate the prevention of terror and attempts at civil uprisings.35

Nevertheless, violence quickly emerged. According to partial data from the IDF’s history department, the number of violent protests in the Territories sharply increased from 91 incidents during 1967/1968,36 to 410 incidents during 1970/1971, 558 incidents during 1975/1976, and 4,850 during 1982/1983. Indeed, in the following three years a substantial decline in the number of violent protests in the Territories was recorded, but it started rising again a year prior to the onset of the Intifada, as somewhat of a warning sign for future events.37

Although the ever more frequent displays of restlessness during the end of 1986 and throughout 1987 should have set off alarm bells in Israeli intelligence circles, the lack of clarity surrounding the distribution of responsibilities regarding the Palestinian issue was detrimental. Retired IDF General Amram Mitzna, who served during the onset of the Intifada as the head of the Central Command which is entrusted with operating IDF forces in the West Bank, later wrote:

On the eve of the first Intifada, there was no Intelligence entity that assumed responsibility for the Intelligence assessment regarding issues pertaining to the Palestinian society and its consequences on events. The Shabak was active in terror prevention and was not prepared to deal with issues surrounding Palestinian public opinion and attitudes; however, the military Intelligence was not active in this area, too.
Essentially, Civil Administration officers dealt with these issues, and made attempts to generate Intelligence regarding Palestinian public opinion and to formulate assessments regarding the situation, based on meetings held, naturally, with traditional leaders and not with decision makers on the Palestinian side.\(^{38}\)

Nonetheless, the Civil Administration and the Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories unit did not in itself constitute a “classic” intelligence entity, and its personnel did not perceive themselves as responsible for issuing an intelligence warning on a possible outburst of civil uprising. Moreover, various IDF actions during the first twenty years of its control over the Territories, such as communication with the local leadership, arrests, curfews, and reinforcement of the military forces in the area, were effective most of the time, and in general kept the violent protests as sporadic events.

Various officials external to the security community have cautioned that maintaining control over another nation for an extended period of time would eventually breed a wide-ranging civil uprising. Thus, for instance, retired Major-General Shlomo Gazit, who served prior to his 1977 military retirement as, among others, the first Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories and as AMAN’s director, wrote in 1985:

Even today, there is no political solution for the “Territories Problem” in sight. The feeling among all parties involved is of a dead-end situation, almost hopeless…. This state of dead-end is unbearable, and sustaining it throughout time is impossible. Sooner or later—and nearly inevitably—a radical course of action will transpire accompanied by a wide-ranging explosion.\(^{39}\)

A similar warning was issued by retired Brigadier-General Arye Shalev, head of AMAN’s research department during the Yom Kippur War, who was subsequently dismissed from his position in light of his accountability for the intelligence failure. During 1974–1976, in his last military position, he served as the Martial Governor of the Judea and Samaria region. In 1982, Shalev wrote: “It is definitively reasonable that a future risk will develop, perhaps gradually, in the direction of a civil uprising.”\(^{40}\)

The outbreak of the civil unrest, known as the Intifada, started abruptly on 9 December 1987. Overnight, the violent protests, until then local (albeit intensifying in preceding months), were transformed into a wide-ranging and continuous civil uprising in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The incident that served to provoke it was a traffic accident in Gaza Strip a day earlier. An Israeli truck driver hit a local car, killing four Palestinian workers. Rumors of its being a premeditated car crash, supposedly as revenge for the murder of an Israeli citizen in Gaza Strip two days earlier, quickly spread and stirred up emotions.\(^{41}\)
But the Intifada was based on much deeper causes, resulting from social and economic processes and underground currents boiling beneath the surface for years. These causes included, among others, the Palestinians’ deep frustration from continued political futility and their disappointment with the Palestine Liberation Organization’s (PLO) leadership and its failure to realize Palestinian national aspirations; the harsh living conditions in the refugee camps, predominantly in Gaza Strip; a deterioration in their economic situation; the continued and growing sensations of humiliation, injustice, frustration, and discrimination experienced by hundreds of thousands of Palestinian workers in Israel; the strengthening of Islamic religious fanaticism, mainly in the Gaza Strip; and anti-Israeli Arab-issued propaganda. A new generation of young people, some ex-detainees in Israeli prisons, believed they no longer had anything to lose. Therefore, the flag of resistance would clearly have been raised in the Territories sooner or later, even without the Gaza Strip traffic accident.42

Surprise Nevertheless
Israel’s intelligence and national security services, despite their high accessibility to information on Palestinian society, were completely surprised by the outbreak of the events, as well as their scope, and their duration. The delay in grasping the uprising’s implications, even after its outbreak, impaired the IDF’s deployment; the IDF was delayed in reinforcing its forces, and its responses exacerbated the unrest.

The ambiguity surrounding the distribution of responsibilities within Israeli intelligence regarding the Palestinians was only one of the reasons behind the surprise. Another was the spontaneous nature of the events, which also surprised both the Jordanian security services and the PLO leadership then in exile in Tunis, Tunisia. Indeed, the PLO under Yasir Arafat later attempted to assume command over the events, as did the Islamic Hamas movement that was established concurrently with the Intifada’s outbreak. Nonetheless, the uprising that persisted for a long period of time as a people’s protest was characterized by a medium-to-low level of organization. The need for meticulously surveilling not only the Palestinian leadership but also the general population was a lesson learned by the Israeli intelligence after this failure. Yet, even the new intelligence and organizational arrangement that developed post-1987 did not prevent, further on, the Intelligence Community’s continued difficulty in understanding the undercurrents of Palestinian society.

HAMAS’S ELECTION VICTORY IN THE TERRITORIES (2006)
Following its failure in forecasting the Intifada, a research department (later, a division) was established in the Shabak during 1988, for the purpose of
studying the internal Palestinian arena, including the Palestinian society. Concurrently, in the spirit of pluralism in intelligence, AMAN’s research division intensified its activity on this topic. Yet, even then, which intelligence body was responsible for research regarding internal Palestinian developments—including the prevention of terror which was Shabak’s responsibility—remained unclear. In light of its position as the National Intelligence Assessor, AMAN continued to claim precedence over the Palestinian arena.\textsuperscript{43} This ambiguity was resolved, at least formally, in two “Magna Carta” agreements signed between AMAN and Shabak (the second was signed in 1998) that were designed to clarify and organize areas of responsibilities and cooperation between them on the Palestinian question.\textsuperscript{44}

Twenty years after the Israeli failure in predicting the Intifada outbreak, another dramatic development, once again of a social nature, took place in the Territories, when Hamas achieved a landslide victory over Fatah in the 2006 elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council. This victory positioned Israel in a complex political entanglement, unresolved to date. Once more, AMAN allegedly made another mistake in predicting a critical development, although opinions on this matter differ.

Retired Brigadier-General Yossi Kuperwasser, who served until June 2006 as Head of AMAN’s Research Division, claimed that AMAN’s assessments foresaw this development:

We have completely rejected the possibility of a Fatah victory and instead we proposed two main alternatives: A tie, or an impressive Hamas victory resulting in the establishment of a “Hamas-tan.” We have attempted to convince decision-makers to prevent the movement from participating in the elections, or even cancel them, in order to prevent a Hamas victory. All pre-elections discussions were conducted under the premise that the Hamas movement will attain a substantial achievement and possibly a victory.\textsuperscript{45}

An internal AMAN inquiry in 2008 concluded that all position papers issued by the Research Division had predicted a tie between Hamas and Fatah in the elections, or at most, a negligible advantage for Hamas.\textsuperscript{46} In contrast, the claim may be made that Hamas’s landslide victory challenged AMAN’s success in predicting the election results. Furthermore, as has been often claimed in the past, so too in this case AMAN’s assessments might have been ambiguously worded, postulating several potential scenarios: e.g., “a fine achievement for Hamas or perhaps a victory”; “We assess that X will occur; however, we do not reject the occurrence of Y.”

Moreover, remaining unclear is when AMAN began to assess that Hamas might surprise and when it issued assessments along these lines to the state’s
leadership. If AMAN issued its assessments after the election date was set and after Hamas’s participation in the elections was approved, then, perhaps at the time, these assessments (such as postponing the elections or preventing Hamas’s participation, as AMAN allegedly suggested) were no longer useful. The Israeli and American decision on allowing Hamas to participate in the elections was most likely made many months prior to the elections, so a reasonable assumption is that, at the time, AMAN’s assessments had not yet indicated the possibility of a Hamas victory.

At any rate, whether AMAN’s pre-election assessment may be considered a partial achievement or a failure, predicting election results is emphatically a most difficult task, and even more so when the relevant intelligence prediction is issued many months prior to the election date. Even statisticians and academic experts on the Palestinians struggled with the task of accurately predicting a Hamas victory. Moreover, the election results surprised both the Fatah and Hamas.47

In addition, AMAN’s internal inquiry, which had claimed the relative accuracy of the Research Division’s assessments, had determined that the division’s researchers, in light of their young age (and other reasons), had tended to focus on specific events and had difficulty identifying such ongoing social and political processes as Islamization.48 Retired Colonel Ephraim Lavie, who served as Head of the Palestinian Department in AMAN’s Research Division until 2002, years later also pointed to AMAN’s difficulty in following social processes in the Palestinian arena:

During the first few years of the Palestinian Authority, AMAN lacked collection and research capabilities regarding the Palestinian society. The in-depth social research was mainly reliant on reports of the Civil Administration’s officers, who are not Intelligence professionals. Social research was neither recognized nor received a special stance as an independent field next to the ongoing research regarding military and political issues. This fact hindered the ability to follow social undercurrents for providing warning on a possible outburst or identifying trends such as Islamization. The principal Intelligence attention was given to the Palestinian Authority’s [PA] leadership and its security forces. . . . Arafat [Yasser Arafat, the PA’s chairman] played a leading role in the Research Division’s publications, as if he was the sole entity that dictated developments in the Palestinian arena. The population’s and political opposition’s contribution to the events seemed marginal and insignificant. The research activity’s tendency to deal with the immediate context of developments and to avoid strategic analyses necessary for predicting middle-long term process, perpetuated well after the Arafat era. The result: formation of difficulties in predicting developments such as . . . the regime shift that resulted in the rise to power of Hamas . . . and Hamas’s seizure of the Gaza Strip in June 2007.49
Yossi Kupperwasser promptly responded to Lavie’s allegations; the two had
publically debated in the pages of the journal of the Intelligence and
Terrorism Information Center that brings together former high-ranking
officers in the Israeli Intelligence Community. According to Kupperwasser,
until the outbreak of the Al Aqsa Intifada in September 2000 AMAN’s
social research had indeed suffered from failures, adding that “the
Research Division executed during 2003–2004 conceptual and structural
changes designed to enable better coping with this problem.”

Regardless of which side in the Lavie-Kupperwasser debate was correct,
Hamas’s victory in the elections undoubtedly illustrated, once again, the
difficulty the intelligence services face in following social processes. This
would hold true even if in reference to AMAN’s assessment of the elections
case were termed a relative success). The foundations of Hamas’s victory
were (a) prolonged social processes, (b) centered around Islamization, (c)
sentiments of disgust with Fatah, and (d) a generational change in the
Palestinian society. The governmental shift symbolized a deeper social
change that generated a transformation in the social character of the
Palestinian leadership. This transformation’s magnitude was difficult to
predict for both academic experts and intelligence and national security
entities, despite their increased surveillance, during the last two decades, of
the Hamas movement in general, and its social–civilian infrastructure in
particular. In light of this fact, the question arises as to whether expecting
the Intelligence agencies, as comprehensive and thorough as they may be,
to accurately predict social vicissitudes is realistic.

THE “SPRING” OF ARAB NATIONS (END OF 2010 AND ONWARD)

As with the American intelligence services, the Israeli security personnel have
failed to predict the wave of revolutions that began sweeping the Arab
countries toward the end of 2010, as well as the pivotal event, the fall of
Hosni Mubarak’s regime in Egypt. This inability to foretell these events
came despite the fact that the political stability in the Arab countries in
general, and in Egypt in particular—in light of the strategic significance of
the peace agreement between Cairo and Israel—is a principal issue of
interest to Israeli intelligence, and specifically to AMAN.

Just a few weeks prior to the outbreak of riots in the Arab world, a new
AMAN director was nominated: General Aviv Kochavi. In his first
appearance before the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee of the
Knesset, the Israeli Parliament, on 25 January 2011—after the civil
protests had begun spreading to different countries in the area, including
Egypt—Kochavi stated that the Egyptian government’s stability was not at
risk. Simultaneously, the civil protest in Cairo intensified and, only a few
days later, Mubarak was forced to resign from office and Egypt entered a
lengthy period of instability, during which calls were made to examine the possibility of abolishing the peace agreement with Israel.

Kochavi later claimed that his statements before the Committee were taken out of context. But some Committee members had by then already demanded an investigation of what they claimed was “an Intelligence failure.” Accordingly, a Committee member, Member of Knesset (MK) Eitan Cabel, asserted that “the assessments issued by AMAN regarding Egypt are extremely troubling. Others, greater than AMAN’s Director, including the Egyptian Intelligence, have been wrong and did not foresee the events. However, in hindsight we discover that time and again we learn about events in retrospect only and again find ourselves surprised.” Similar statements were issued by another Committee member, MK Arie Eldad:

This matter requires all recipients of assessments issued by various national security entities to acknowledge the latter’s limitations. Intelligence entities are skillful in identifying facts and are weak in identifying trends, therefore their ability to predict social, economic and political developments is nearly nonexistent. This obliges the heads of [Intelligence] services to exercise ample modesty when they make assessments regarding this type of developments, whereas it requires decision makers who listen to them to bear in mind the limitations and lessons learned from past experience.

Ephraim Kam, who served during the early 1990s as Assistant Director of AMAN’s Research Division for Evaluation, similarly believes that making assessments regarding the stability and survivability of regimes is an extremely difficult task, particularly in the Middle East arena, for three main reasons:

First, since 1970, no Arab regime has been overthrown from within—except the regime in Sudan that was overthrown in 1989. Mubarak ruled Egypt for 30 years. This stability created the impression that Arab regimes have become more legitimate and found ways to defend themselves. The perception of the regime’s continuity has made the task of identifying the fracture difficult. Second, there is no real information on upcoming turmoil. The information problem is critical also in other strategic issues, such as assessments regarding the likelihood of war. On these issues there is usually information that provides alert. However, it is insufficiently good and reliable, or can be interpreted in different ways. Nevertheless, when the issue at hand is a regime’s stability, there is nearly no early information. Third, in the absence of actual information, Intelligence is left with attempting to assess a regime’s survivability according to indicative signs. However, the latter do not point out what will occur, and there is no formula that determines when will those come together to form a critical mass that threatens the regime.
The Impact of Social Networks

But, unlike in the past, current revolutions are actually perhaps slightly less difficult to predict in light of the new role played by online social networks—which are relatively easy to follow—in recruiting the masses. Facebook, Twitter, and the like can teach a great deal about the public’s pulse and provide specific warning on the expected timing of popular protests.

Accordingly, an early AMAN surveillance of the Syrian Facebook network (which was most likely not very widespread in that country) might have predicted the serious event that occurred in the Golan Heights on the Israeli–Syrian border on 15 May 2011, the ”Nakba Day.” Influenced by the wave of uprisings in the Arab world in general, and in Syria in particular, hundreds of Syrian people, most of whom are probably Palestinian in descent, had pre-congregated through use of the Facebook network and arrived in an organized manner to the border area. They then destroyed the fence, crossed the border, and protested for hours on Israeli territory for the Palestinian refugees’ ”right of return.” The IDF’s poor deployment, given the lack of intelligence warning, reduced its deterrence and damaged the IDF’s image. It perhaps also provided the Palestinians in the Territories with ideas for a similar, but larger, future course of action.

In conjunction with the intelligence sector’s failure to provide a tactical warning about the Syrian uprising’s likely spillover on the Israeli border or on the timing of the Egyptian revolution, AMAN’s former Director, retired General Aharon Zeevi-Farkash, claimed that under his command AMAN had predicted a possible weakening of the various regimes in the Arab world. According to Zeevi-Farkash, “AMAN provided a clear and precise strategic warning regarding the process. We couldn’t have known when it would take place; this we can never know.” But the question remains as to whether AMAN’s assessments were stated clearly and decisively, or were instead perhaps ambiguously worded to leave plenty of room for error. In addition, the fact that Zeevi-Farkash had completed his AMAN directorship in early 2006, nearly five years prior to the realization of his alleged assessment, probably led to its being drowned out by other, more pressing events, that Israel dealt with in the intervening years.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF INADEQUACY

The three case studies reviewed here illustrate the difficulty faced by intelligence organizations in following social developments and predicting their political consequences. Despite some accurate assessments, as AMAN has claimed, their phrasing and timing have sometimes actually hindered the political leadership’s ability to optimally utilize them in forming their policies. Producing ambiguous statements and simultaneously providing a number of possible scenarios may help overcome the difficulties stemming
from the intelligence fog regarding social developments, but they are definitely not the most effective means of guiding policymakers.

**Considerations in Suggesting Change**

Prior to attempting to offer other, more effective methods, to cope with the challenge of intelligence research regarding social developments, the question should be raised as to whether intelligence organizations should even be expected to predict, for instance, popular revolutions in the Arab world, particularly when neither the Arab governments nor academic researchers—who are free to make a more comprehensive study than are the intelligence services—predicted the outbreak of events and their consequences. Routinely, intelligence organizations often fail to predict military changes (intelligence’s top mission) as well as political vicissitudes; both require discerning the unknown intentions of an enemy state’s leadership and its military capabilities. But attempting to follow the masses’ intentions—especially in regard to social developments—presents an even more complicated challenge to intelligence organizations.

Understanding the complexity of this challenge by the state’s leaders—the principal consumers of intelligence—and the setting of expectations early on between them and the intelligence providers are prerequisites for minimizing the damage of erroneous intelligence assessments regarding social developments. In addition, an immeasurable importance rests on the political leadership’s willingness to accept an Intelligence assessment that declares—in the spirit of “Intelligence modesty”—that it is unable to predict precisely the possibility of the outbreak a popular protest such as the Intifada, or one that may result in the overthrow of a regime, as occurred in Egypt, and moreover to predict its timing. The attempt to foresee the results of democratic elections, such as those held in the Territories in 2006, should also be accepted with appropriate caution, or possibly should be altogether avoided from the outset.

Indeed, some national leaders do not expect their intelligence services to predict the future, whether in regard social developments or in general. Shimon Peres, a former Israeli Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs, surpassed others in stating:

> Intelligence is an essential branch in management of any type of endeavor. One cannot do without it, however, one cannot exclusively rely on it, too. Typically, Intelligence is entrusted with Information, hence, all that happened in the past. And since there is no information pertaining to the future, assigning Intelligence with the task of predicting it would constitute an error, as it would then have to engage in guessing.... One should not expect Intelligence to take into account all events that affect national security incidences: [such as] Nations’ revolutionism, [or] the
Intelligence has great difficulty in reading the language of the people against which we are at war with. The same difficulty that lies in the translation of a poem from one language to another is found in translating the mentality of one nation into that of another. If we are looking for someone to blame, those who overtrust information are in my view the only ones to blame, and not those who supply information. As the state’s leader I have read Intelligence reports the same way I read The Economist, Le Monde, or The New York Times. One can learn plenty from reading newspapers. Open Source Intelligence is sometimes more fruitful than the covert one. Therefore, the state leader should strive for information as diverse as possible, accept things with a grain of salt, and eventually trust his own judgment.

Minimizing Chances of Error

Yet, most political leaders do tend to rely on their intelligence services, sometimes excessively, and demand precise intelligence predictions with clear-cut conclusions, even regarding social developments. Several recommendations may assist the Intelligence Community minimize the risk of mistakes in this field, too.

First, intelligence services will benefit from establishing ongoing relationships with academia and civil research institutions. Indeed, these two sections may also make mistakes, but their often profound knowledge of the societies under observation may be of assistance to young intelligence researchers—the now-common age range in AMAN—who generally lack sufficient experience and historical perspective. And, indeed, AMAN does occasionally seek assistance from academic experts on Middle Eastern affairs. The possible earlier exposure of the scholars to classified materials (for instance, during their military reserve duty) may also aid in the assessment process, although they should probably eschew the latter in order to avoid their becoming part of the conventional intelligence view.

(In any case, the current information revolution enables general access materials that once were mainly the sole property of national intelligence.)

Seeking the assistance of academic experts from different disciplines—not only experts in Middle East Studies, but also sociologists, economists, political scientists, and others—may address the intelligence services’ need for the multi-professional, multi-disciplinary approach required for the development of an optimal assessment. Increasing the cooperation among a nation’s different intelligence agencies, as well as intelligence pluralism, also constitutes a good recommendation for maximizing the chances of accurate assessments regarding social developments.

As indicated, Israel’s Intelligence Community still suffers, even after the Yom Kippur War failure and the Agranat Committee’s recommendations, from the hyper-dominance of AMAN, although some pluralism has been
achieved in a few areas, such as the Palestinian question, AMAN should increase its level of cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, whose embassies, for instance those in Egypt and Jordan, can “get a feel for the field” and relay impressions from meetings with local players, such as politicians, government officials, journalists, and academics. In addition, AMAN can also be aided by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’s research unit, The Center for Political Research, which now receives additional resources, as recommended by the Agranat Committee. In light of AMAN’s high personnel turnover, its counterparts—Mossad, Shabak, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs—now have an advantage over it in the ability to develop more experienced researchers. Therefore, AMAN should consult with them for help in forming integrative assessments. Similar consultation should be conducted with the intelligence services of friendly states to effect a mutual exchange of information and assessments on shared interests.

Personnel Education

AMAN has been making attempts to overcome the disadvantage of its young and inexperienced staff through enhanced personnel development procedures and prolonged training courses, especially in familiarity with, or even expertise in, the region’s languages—an essential tool for intelligence research and understanding of enemy societies. Perhaps even more can be done in this field. The recruitment of officers who complete their Bachelor’s studies within the pre-military academic studies program (“The Academic Reserve”) is another means of upgrading staff, and, in addition to students of Middle East Studies, graduates of the social studies and humanities faculties should be recruited. AMAN must strive to nurture a new generation of better educated officers, who know and learn from mistakes made in the past; they should also read current academic studies, not just intelligence materials. AMAN should also consider ways to extend the length of the average term in office of a research position in order to achieve a higher level of intelligence professionalism in each and every position.

Re-focusing from the ‘Now’

An additional recommendation is to separate the research of current events from in-depth research. This is advisable in light of the fact that current events always overshadow prolonged developments. This may be accomplished by establishing departments or desks conducting only in-depth research—as AMAN’s Research Division had done in the past. And these should not be understaffed, whether in numbers or quality of personnel, despite the fact that their products might perhaps be considered
less attractive. In-depth research is invaluable, as stated by a former head of AMAN’s Research Division, retired General Aviezer Yaari:

In my view, there is a way to reduce the amount of mistakes via in-depth and profound research regarding basic processes, in light of their potential for possible future developments. … Basic processes that require profound research and investigation are Islamic radicalization …, Arab states’ economic development, the industrial infrastructure and its potential, the level of resilience and stability of the Arab regimes … and the level of development of the Arab society and the influence of modernization and advanced technology on its ability to change ways of life and thought patterns. …

Yaari’s comments, written in the late 1980s, long before the introduction of the Internet and Facebook, constitute, in fact, a self-fulfilling intelligence prophecy. Yaari continued:

Based on the in-depth researches, which describe the centers of expected problems, one could and should take preliminary steps, part of which may be “contingency plans” and part steps in the fields of politics, military or organization of forces. Undoubtedly, the focus of intelligence collection and research should be directed towards them [in-depth researches].

Open Sources and Social Developments
Another recommendation indeed refers to directing collection efforts toward in-depth social and economic processes. Here, open sources are highly important, although they receive little attention from both intelligence researchers and the political leadership. Hatzav, the AMAN unit entrusted with open collection, should receive many more human resources. Although the cost of recruiting and training personnel—especially in light of the decrease in the number of Arab-language students in Israeli schools—may be high, the process of open intelligence collection is considerably easier and less expensive than it used to be. Arab newspapers that, in the past, required much effort and time to acquired, are now readily available online. Even television and radio broadcasts are now transmitted online or via open satellite broadcasts. Following social networks online (in addition to blogs, forums, YouTube clips, and Internet sites in general), has become a task whose cost to the IDF is in merely personnel training, due largely to the fact that most Israeli soldiers are in compulsory service and therefore do not receive a salary.

An additional recommendation refers to the attempt to formulate a unique discipline for intelligence research regarding social developments. Accordingly, AMAN’s Research Division has long pondered on the
question of whether qualitative research methods (anthropological in nature) should replace the allegedly unsuccessful quantitative forms (such as public opinion surveys in the Territories) on all matters pertaining to the formation of assessments regarding social developments. Perhaps a combination of the two and finding the proper balance between them will contribute to the formation of a better assessment methodology, although the results will always be limited given the fact that societies and people do not necessarily act according to scholarly models.\footnote{73}

\textbf{Warning Indicators}

Moreover, as with the Indicative Signs Theory developed by AMAN for military alerting after the Yom Kippur War, an attempt to form a list of indicative signs for social developments might be advisable as a means of warning about a possible danger to a regime’s stability in Arab countries, as was previously executed in AMAN after the Islamic revolution in Iran.\footnote{74} Among the possible indicative signs included in such a list are a worsening of a country’s economic circumstances, changes in its military’s attitudes, the level of public dissatisfaction, the street’s power, the opposition’s estimated power, and the level of a regime’s determination to oppress and suppress its opponents. These signs and others can be divided into (a) general indications, that may suggest a future revolution (for instance, indications of the existence of a “frail state”), and (b) concrete indicative signs, that may suggest the approach of a revolution. Naturally, concrete indicators are the most difficult to collect and process.\footnote{75}

\textbf{MINIMIZING FLAWED ASSESSMENTS}

Implementation of these recommendations may help minimize the risks of flawed assessments regarding social developments, although it would certainly not eliminate them entirely. The difficulties in predicting dramatic events that stem from social developments will continue to hamper intelligence agencies’ work worldwide, including those of the U.S. and Israel. Acknowledging the limitations of assessing social developments—whether by the political leadership (“expectations’ setting”) or by the Intelligence Community (intelligence modesty)—may assist in the taking of more calculated risks when relying on intelligence assessments regarding this challenging field.

\textbf{REFERENCES}

\footnote{1} Alex Fishman, “The Failure of Intelligence—Reality [is] under the Streetlight,” \textit{Yedioth Ahronoth}, 26 June 2011.


4 Ibid.

5 Economic Intelligence is also sometimes used as an instrument of the state as part of its competition with other economies, such as protecting economic secrets and obtaining information regarding rival economies. See on this topic: Minh A. Luong, “The Challenge of Economic Intelligence,” in Loch K. Johnson, ed., Handbook of Intelligence Studies (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 163–170.

6 Accordingly, the acute economic hardships experienced by Egypt subsequent to the 1973 Yom Kippur War with Israel drove Egyptian President Anwar Sadat to, several years later, the alternative of peace with Israel. The substantial economic dividends gained by Egypt following the peace agreement, and principally the generous American aid, facilitated the process of stabilizing economic conditions in Egypt. Similarly, the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty of 1994 stemmed from, among other things, Jordanian King Hussein’s wish to stabilize his kingdom’s economy. Jordan’s economy was devastated by the Gulf crisis of 1990–1991 due to the King’s support of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, a decision that resulted in the swift return to Jordan of hundreds of thousands of Jordanian workers who worked in Gulf countries that were members of the Western coalition during the war.

7 In mid-August 1978, merely a few months prior to Khomeini’s takeover of Iran, a CIA analyst reported to President Jimmy Carter, “Iran is not in a revolutionary or even prerevolutionary situation.” See Ronald Kessler, Inside the CIA (New York: Pocket Books, 1992), p. 127.

8 The best book on the CIA failure in predicting the Iranian revolution was written by Robert Jervis, a prominent International Relations researcher. The book was based on research he had conducted for the CIA in 1979. The book also includes memoranda by CIA officials in response to Jervis’s findings. His conclusion was that “although intelligence organizations do not like to recognize it, they rarely have special advantages in understanding revolutions and general political developments. CIA and its counterparts are in the business of stealing secrets, but secrets are rarely at the heart of revolutions.” See Robert Jervis, Why Intelligence Fails: Lessons from the Iranian Revolution and the Iraq War (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), p. 26.


11 Nevertheless, the CIA (and others) claim that the Agency’s assessments on this matter were not so biased after all and possibly even precise. See Douglas J. MacEachin, CIA Assessments of the Soviet Union: The Record versus the...


13 Also known as ISA—Israel Security Agency.


15 Moshe Leshem, The Communist Movement in the Arab Countries, Society and State in the Middle East Series (Jerusalem: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Research Department, February 1953). This paper and those further discussed have been published at low levels of classification—unclassified, restricted or confidential—and therefore were also distributed externally. See also, The Communists in the Arab Countries (Jerusalem: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Research Department, 1967).

16 Yaakov Baham, The Society of the Muslim Brothers in Egypt (Summary until Spring 1952), Society and State in the Middle East Series (Jerusalem: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Research Department—The Arab Research Desk, July 1952).

17 The Strategic Intelligence (Intelligence Academy, 1950), p. 2.

18 Ibid., pp. 8, 12–15, 18–21.

19 Some of these publications can be found in the library of the University of Haifa, Israel, a beneficiary of part of the estate of Yaakov Shimoni, a researcher of Asia and the Arab world. Shimoni was one of the founding fathers of the Information Service of the ha-Hagana (Hebrew term for “The Defense”) organization, a Jewish underground organization operated prior to Israel’s establishment and served as the basis for IDF. During the British Mandate, Shimoni served as the head of the research desk in the Arab Division of the Jewish Agency’s Political Department. Immediately after Israel’s establishment, Shimoni transferred to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where he served in a number of high-ranking positions.

20 Youth in the Arab Countries (Jerusalem: The General Staff, Intelligence Directorate, January 1967).

21 Who’s and Who’s in the Arab Countries (Jerusalem: The General Staff, Intelligence Directorate, October 1966).

22 The Kurd Minority in Iraq, Booklet No. 8 on Middle East Knowledge (Jerusalem: The General Staff, Intelligence Directorate, November 1956).

23 Political Parties in Jordan (Jerusalem: The General Staff, Intelligence Directorate, October 1966).

24 Turkey: Development of Internal Affairs and Foreign Affairs’ Policy, a series of in-depth studies, study 4/72 (Jerusalem: The General Staff, Intelligence Directorate, July 1972).
Ibid., p. 3.

Egypt—Society and Government, a Social–Political Research on Lower and Middle-lower Social Classes in Egyptian Society, based on interviews with Egyptian soldiers, captives of the Kadesh War [Sinai War], 1956–1957 (Jerusalem: The General Staff, Intelligence Directorate, 1974). The research’s goal, conducted in collaboration with the Sociology Department and the New East Department at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, is defined as follows on p. 3: “to enhance our understanding of events in Egypt, and by which to establish a more solid foundation for our assessment of future events that will transpire in this country.”

Problems Faced by the Egyptian Society (according to Egyptian newspapers 1965–1966), In-depth study no. 3/67 (Jerusalem: The General Staff, Intelligence Directorate, August 1967).

Dima Adamsky, “The IDF Intelligence and the Soviet Involvement in the Middle East” (in Hebrew) in Amos Gilboa and Ephraim Lapid, eds., Masterpiece: An Inside Look at Sixty Years of Israeli Intelligence (Ramat Hasharon and Tel Aviv: The Israel Intelligence Heritage & Commemoration Center and Yedioth Ahronoth-Chemed Books, 2008), pp. 142–145.


See, for instance, a guide to the Arab world, published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs but prepared by Hatzav, included basic data on every country in the region on topics such as territory and population, health, education, economy, government, media and military, as well as inter-Arab topics such as oil: A Guide to the Arab World—1975, prepared by Hatzav (Jerusalem: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Political research and planning center, 1975). Additional information clusters, for instance in the Egyptian topic, are: Plans for purification of the Suez Canal and reconstruction of the canal’s cities—Information cluster from open sources (Intelligence Corps, Unit 550 [later Hatzav], May 1974); The Earthquake in Egypt, its damages and consequences—as mirrored in the Egyptian printed press, special publication, source: Egyptian newspapers, 14 October–7 November 1992 (Intelligence Corps, Hatzav, November 1992).

In both cases, AMAN failed to identify the Egyptian’s military immediate ability to attack Israel, despite AMAN’s commitment to provide, at a minimum, a 48-hour warning prior a possible surprise military attack. In the “Rotem Affair” (February 1960), AMAN was surprised to discover in an aerial photograph a great number of Egyptian military forces, including hundreds of
tanks, that had crossed over the Suez Canal and spread along the Sinai peninsula. In light of the fact that the Egyptian intentions were not war-bound, but rather of deterrence and a display of power, among others, due to its fear of an Israeli attack (which was never planned), the affair ended in the retreat of the Egyptian forces. Seven years later, on 15 May 1967 (Israeli Independence Day), AMAN was again surprised by the entry of Egyptian military forces into Sinai, and again, eight days later, by the closing of the Tiran Straits by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser. However, since the war broke out only on 6 June—with an Israeli pre-strike—the intelligence surprise did not play to the Israelis’ disadvantage, and Israel won a crushing victory over the armed forces of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. On the “Rotem Affair,” see Yigal Shefi, *Warning under Scrutiny: The “Rotem” Affair and Israel’s Defense Policy, 1957–1960* (Tel Aviv: Maarachot, 2008).

32 Uri Bar-Joseph, “American Failure and Israeli Success: Intelligence Assessment in the USA and in Israel on the eve of the Khomeini Revolution in Iran,” *Mabat Malam*, a journal of intelligence and security affairs published by the Israel Heritage and Commemoration Center (IICC), No. 59, April 2011, pp. 32–35.

33 For many years Israel and the Shah’s Iran maintained close diplomatic, military, and economic cooperation. See Ronen Bergman, *Point of No Return: Israeli Intelligence against Iran and Hizballah* (in Hebrew) Or (Yehuda: Kinneret, Zmora-Bitan, Dvir, 2007), pp. 28–41, 61–65.

34 The more hesitant approach towards the Israeli Intelligence Community’s success on the Iranian revolution is held by former high ranking officials in AMAN and Mossad who dealt with the Iranian issue and were stationed in Iran; see Roni Cohen, “Intelligence and the Islamic Revolution in Iran: A 30 Years Perspective,” *Mabat Malam*, No. 54, September 2009, pp. 10–13. Furthermore, see in this context an article in response to that by Uri Bar-Joseph (note no. 32) written by Nissim Levi, a former Shabak agent. According to Levi, who was in Teheran during the Iranian revolution as a security guard in the Israeli Embassy, the last-minute evacuation of the remaining Israeli security personnel in Iran was successful thanks only to their own resourcefulness and sheer luck, and despite the wind of indifference that he claimed was blowing from Jerusalem. Levi retrospectively reviewed the ongoing reports from the Israeli embassy to Jerusalem and concluded that, had they been properly processed and analyzed in real time, Israeli preparation would have been better. See Nissim Levi, “Israeli Success—Is That So?,” *Mabat Malam*, No. 60, June 2011, p. 43.


36 Data were probably collected for a duration of one calendar year (the Jewish year, which is based on a lunisolar calendar and begins in September or October).
37 Arye Shalev, *The Intifada: Cases and Effects* (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Papyrus, Tel Aviv University, 1990), p. 209.

38 Amram Mitzna, “Civil-Military Relations during the First Intifada” (in Hebrew), in Ram Erez, ed., *Civil-Military Relations in Israel in Times of Military Conflict*, Memorandum No. 82 (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, 2006), pp. 55–56.


42 On reasons for the Intifada’s breakout, see ibid., pp. 79–100; Arye Shalev, “Perpetuation of the Current Status or Autonomy?” pp. 19–42. See in this reference the words of Rashad a-Shawa, then Gaza’s Mayor: “One should expect events of this kind after twenty years of harsh occupation. People have lost all hope. They are utterly frustrated. They are not sure what to do. They have adopted a religious fundamental line, which is their last resort. They have lost all hope that Israel will ever grant them rights. They feel that the Arab countries are incapable of any achievement. They feel that the PLO, the body that represents them, was unsuccessful in making any achievement.... All [the events] that transpired are an expression of frustration and pain over a prolonged Israeli occupation.... The current wave of riots is a spontaneous expression of people’s rage, starting with the young pupil in elementary school all the way to the worker returning day after day from Israel, after seeing there the good life, while he is forced to live here (in Gaza) in subhuman conditions.” See ibid., pp. 19–20.


44 Shmuel Even and Amos Granit, *The Intelligence Community—Where To?*, Memorandum No. 97 (in Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, The Institute for National Security Studies—INSS, 2009), p. 38.


46 Ibid.

47 Uri Bar-Joseph, “It’s Not Always the Intelligence’s Fault,” *Haaretz*, 30 January 2006. As suggested by this article’s title, even Bar-Joseph, usually a critic of AMAN’s recurrent failures in assessments, claims that one should not expect from an intelligence entity to predict things that even Fatah and Hamas failed to predict.

48 Akiva Eldar, “Cast Lead.”

Yossi (Yossef) Kuperwasser, “On the Intelligence Assessment on the Eve of the Second Intifada: A Response to Lavie’s Article” (in Hebrew), Mabat Malam, No. 52 (December 2008), p. 37. Both Lavie’s article and Kupperwasser’s response article included an additional debate between the two regarding the reasons behind the outbreak of the violent events in the Territories in September 2000 known as “al-Aqsa Intifada” (or “The Second Intifada”). Lavie claimed that this constituted another AMAN failure in following and predicting social developments. Kupperwasser, in contrast, claimed that the events were a planned tactic orchestrated by Yasser Arafat and not a civil uprising of a social nature (and therefore the word “Intifada,” meaning a civil uprising, was inappropriate in this case), and that AMAN did predict the outbreak of these violent events. Since Lavie’s argument is not commonly accepted, and the general opinion is that the source of the problem, if at all, was not social research, I have chosen not to address this issue here.


See the following articles in reference to the activities through the years of the Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories Unit, AMAN, and Shabak (the latter two starting from the 1990s, hence, somewhat delayed) regarding Hamas’s social–civilian infrastructure, which constitutes main sources of its power: Ephraim Lavie, “Development of the Islamic Palestinian Threat: Study of the Intelligence and Governmental Responsibility Aspect,” Mabat Malam, No. 51, February 2008, pp. 36–39; and Gadi Zohar, “Non-Intelligence Intelligence,” Mabat Malam, No. 51, February 2008, pp. 32–33. Gadi Zohar, a retired Brigadier-General, served as Head of the Terrorism and Palestinian Department in AMAN’s Research Division and as Head of the Civil Administration in Judea and Samaria during the first half of the 1990s.


Arik Bender, “Voices in the Knesset. Investigate the ‘Intelligence’ Failure.”

Ibid.


“Nakba Day” (Arabic for catastrophe, and even holocaust) is the day when the Palestinians commemorate the defeat of the Arab nations in the 1948 Israeli War of Independence and the beginning of the Palestinian refugee problem.

Karma Nabulsi, “Nakba Day: We Waited 63 Years for This,” The Guardian, 19 May 2011, at www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/may/19/nakba-day-palestinian-summer
A distinction must be made between popular revolutions which are difficult to predict and military coup d’ètats which are organized by a small group of rebels. Early intelligence surveillance on the rebels can provide early warning on a revolutionary attempt and perhaps even stop it. Thus, for instance, in 1958 Israel had informed Jordan’s King Hussein about the intentions of Egyptian agents to assassinate him and seize control over Jordan. However, in other cases, AMAN was surprised by military coup d’ètats that were carefully planned and executed by a small group, such as the 1952 revolution in Egypt. See: Oded Granot, “The Intelligence Corps,” p. 34; Udi Golan, “Intelligence and the Stability of Regimes: Coup d’état versus Revolution,” Mabat Malam, No. 59, April 2011, p. 37.

In line with this recommendation, Prof. Yechezkel Dror, a renowned researcher of Political Science at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, wrote on the Islamic Revolution in Iran: “In order to predict the possibility of overthrowing the Shah’s regime in Iran, and perhaps also to set a range of probabilities for it, one would require an analysis based on political sociology and comparative research on modernization processes, as opposed to traditional History and Middle East expertise.” See Yechezkel Dror, “Intelligence versus Uncertainty: A Basis for Policy Risk-Taking—An Initial Examination,” in Zvi Offer and Avi Kober, eds., Intelligence and National Security, p. 142, footnote no. 8.

This type of recommendation was also suggested by former high-ranking AMAN officers who were entrusted with recruitment and development of intelligence personnel. See “The Person in Intelligence,” a symposium mediated by Ephraim Lapid, Mabat Malam, No. 44, March 2006, pp. 4–7.

See in this reference Gidon Gilotz, “Why Don’t We Learn From History?: On the Importance of Quality Writing and Continuous Reading,” Mabat Malam, No.
59, April 2011, pp. 26–29. See in this reference booklets occasionally distributed by the IDF’s Enemy Awareness Unit and intended for field commanders and Intelligence officers. Such booklets published in the 1990s on Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, and the Palestinians included a collection of academic articles on a variety of political, social, and economic topics (all in Hebrew).


69 Ibid., p. 220.


71 Retired Lieutenant-Colonel Michael Segal, former head of the Iranian Branch of AMAN’s Research Division, well described Hatzav’s status in the Israeli Intelligence Community’s collection array in a paper that emphasized the importance of the open Intelligence regarding Iran in light of the wave of civil protests that swept the country in 2009. Segal equated Hatzav—“the flagship of open collection in Israel”—to a “slightly worn out ship that faithfully served for many years; however, it is too small to steer through the open information tsunami and to bring the required valuable ‘bounty.’” See Michael Segal, “Development of Open Collection regarding Iran and the Associated Intelligence’s Dilemmas,” Mabat Malam, No. 54, September 2009, p. 15.

72 AMAN has operated for over 40 years a school of languages (and their associated cultures), primarily Arabic and Farsi. See Hanan Greenberg, “Talk to Me in Farsi: A Quick Peek Into IDF’s Languages School” (in Hebrew), ynet, 3 April 2010, at http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3869978,00.html. In addition, see in this reference the following link from AMAN’s Website (in Hebrew) for a description of AMAN’s recruiting and training programs (including a unique course on open Intelligence in Arabic), at www.aman.idf.il/Modiin/Maslul.aspx?catId=60352&docId=72304

73 Ephraim Lavie, “Intelligence Challenges in the Palestinian Arena,” in Amos Gilnoa and Ephraim Lapid, eds., Masterpiece, pp. 108–109. In addition, Robert Jervis’s interesting proposal should be mentioned in this reference. According to his proposal, which is beneficial for intelligence research regarding all areas, and not only regarding social developments, intelligence assessments should go through a process of peer review similar to the one followed in the academic world before the publication of academic books and articles—that would challenge analysts to marshal their evidence in a systematic way and defend their positions. See Robert Jervis, Why Intelligence Fails, pp. 188–189.


75 Along the same lines, in light of various indicators such as the regime’s weakness and the country’s unique ethnic composition, Lebanon, for instance, is obviously a state at risk of this kind. However, when a dramatic change will occur and what will be its nature is difficult to assess.