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ABSTRACT
Many intelligence services around the world maintain mechanisms intended to help minimize the risk of erroneous intelligence assessments. One of the best-known mechanisms is the ‘devil’s advocate’ whose goal is to present – sometimes artificially – an intelligence assessment that contradicts the prevailing view. The goal of this practice is to try to encourage doubts, both among intelligence assessors and among decision-makers. This paper will describe the importance and function of the ‘devil’s advocate’ mechanism in intelligence. Using Israel as a test case, the paper will seek to draw conclusions regarding the desirable format of operations of this mechanism.

Israel’s withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000 ended a tragedy that had lasted for 18 years, beginning with an unrealistic and baseless strategy, and continuing in a futile reality that contributed nothing to security and cost the lives of over 1,000 young people over the years. (Ehud Barak, former prime minister of Israel, June 2015)

Countless examples throughout the twentieth century and into the current century show that intelligence organizations around the world frequently make mistakes. Some mistakes involve a failure to predict an imminent military attack, as in the examples of the failure of Soviet intelligence to anticipate the German invasion in the summer of 1941 (Operation Barbarossa); US intelligence and the attack on Pearl Harbor (1941); or Israeli intelligence and the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Other instances involve a failure to predict socioeconomic upheavals, as in the case of the CIA and the Islamic Revolution in Iran (1979); the CIA and the fall of the Soviet Union (1991); Israeli intelligence and the outbreak of the first intifada in the Palestinian Territories (1987); or the Arab Spring (2010 onward), which all the Western and Arab intelligence agencies failed to anticipate.

Understanding emerging reality and predicting the future – the central task of intelligence – is certainly an exceptionally challenging and complex task. In recent years, various processes have rendered this task even more challenging and complex. These processes include changes in the character of war, from conventional war to protracted confrontations with sub-state players, such as terror and guerilla organizations; the rising phenomenon of global and transnational Jihad, presenting a threat to the security of many nations; and technological changes, such as the invention of the internet and the flourishing of social networks, that enhance the power and influence of the masses, even in dictatorial countries.

In light of this complex and changing reality, many intelligence experts, including both practitioners and academics, argue that the ability of intelligence agencies to predict the future is relatively limited and that intelligence errors are inevitable. The best that can be done, they suggest, is to attempt to reduce such errors, both by improving intelligence collection processes and by enhancing the research process of formulating intelligence assessments. A common technique for improving the intelligence research process and reducing the chance of errors in intelligence assessment is the ‘devil’s advocate’ mechanism, which seeks to challenge the dominant intelligence conception and reexamine its validity.
This article will explore the ‘devil’s advocate’ mechanism on the basis of the Israeli experience, focusing in particular on the intelligence assessments preceding Israel’s withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000.

The ‘Devil’s Advocate’ mechanism in intelligence

The research process designed to create intelligence assessments is based on two main pillars: reading pieces of raw intelligence information collected by the intelligence collection agencies; and analyzing and processing the raw information in order to produce an intelligence picture and an understanding of its significances and to formulate an assessment of the future. In the second part of this process, great importance is attached to the group thought process, reflecting an assumption – and one that is certainly accurate as far as it goes – that this will minimize the risks of intelligence errors. Naturally, each of the individuals in the group is liable to make an error, but group brainstorming may help optimize the chances of formulating an accurate and complete intelligence assessment.

However, group thinking also embodies inherent disadvantages and risks, such as the risk of conceptual collectivism, i.e., – a tendency of all the members of the group to fall in line with the opinions, assessments, and statements of the head of the group. This phenomenon is common even when there is a clear guideline inviting full freedom of speech and an unequivocal undertaking that no-one will be penalized for presenting an opinion that deviates from the consensus position or that of the head of the group. Shlomo Gazit, who headed the Israeli military intelligence agency AMAN following its colossal failure in the 1973 Yom Kippur War, commented on this phenomenon:

Having sat at the head of the table for many years, I watched as others looked and tried to guess, from a chance remark or perhaps even body language, what my position was, how I was planning to sum up the deliberations and which of the positions offered I would choose. Often one or another would change his mind after it seemed to him that my opinion was different from his.5

The phenomenon of conceptual collectivism is recognized in almost all organizational frameworks, public and commercial alike. Academic researchers have paid considerable attention to this phenomenon, particularly in the context of decision-making processes on security and intelligence issues. Their studies have raised a series of proposals for overcoming the failings of conceptual collectivism and for encouraging dissenting opinions. One of the most frequent proposals is to establish organizational shortcuts enabling any researcher, officer, or official, particularly from the lower echelons, who holds a dissenting opinion to present his case in writing or orally to the heads of the system. Another proposal is to encourage an atmosphere of conceptual openness and the constant questioning of dominant conceptions. A further suggestion is to involve external experts in group brainstorming, as well as individuals who have no expertise in the subject under discussion but have commonsense and strong analytical and deductive skills. Intelligence pluralism, reflected in the presence of different groups working separately on the same issues on the basis of the same intelligence information, may also help encourage diverse opinions and thereby minimize the risk of error.6

Another proposal intended to encourage a focus on dissenting opinions supports the operation of various independent groups and bodies that can highlight opinions that deviate from the consensus. One of the best-known and commonest ways to highlight dissenting opinions is through the ‘devil’s advocate’ mechanism.

The term ‘devil’s advocate’ (in Latin: Advocatus Diaboli) has its origins in the Catholic Church. The term referred to an official whose ostensible position was to represent the devil in discussions concerning the awarding the titles of ‘blessed’ or ‘saint’ to candidates due to enter the church’s pantheon. The devil’s advocate, who consistently opposed every candidate, was faced by a second official who played the role of ‘God’s advocate’ (Advocatus Dei) and spoke in favor of the candidates.7

In modern times, the term ‘devil’s advocate’ is used metaphorically to refer to a person who presents – often artificially – a contrary position to the dominant position in a given discussion. The purpose is to prevent the emergence of unanimity and to stimulate fresh thought regarding the accuracy of the dominant position. The Great importance is attached to the ‘devil’s advocate’ mechanism by intelligence
research agencies in formulating intelligence assessments, as well as by politicians in strategic decision-making processes based on these assessments.8

Several intelligence organizations around the world maintain a ‘devil’s advocate’ mechanism. In some cases, one of the intelligence researchers is charged on an ad hoc basis with artificially presenting a contrary opinion on a given subject. In other cases, a permanent mechanism is involved – a person or group of people responsible on an ongoing basis for challenging the consensus opinion. The assumption is that this mechanism can help locate mistaken intelligence conceptions and serve as an intellectual exercise, encouraging the intelligence researchers to ‘think outside the box’.

Within this framework, the ‘devil’s advocate’ may genuinely and honestly believe that the prevailing intelligence conception is mistaken, and may formulate a well-grounded alternative position. Far more commonly, however, the ‘devil’s advocate’ seeks to encourage the intelligence researchers to examine their own assessments by artificially creating a contrary assessment. The intelligence researchers are then required to challenge the counter-hypothesis and, if they are unable to do so fully, the validity of the original intelligence assessment must be reexamined.

A ‘devil’s advocate’ mechanism can indeed help minimize the inherent risks of collective thought and can provide a response, albeit a partial one, to the natural tendency of many intelligence researchers to adhere to certain conceptions while convincing themselves that these are correct. However, the ‘devil’s advocate’ mechanism is not without potential disadvantages. For example, the artificial presentation of contrary opinions may create inherent antagonism among the intelligence researchers toward the ‘devil’s advocate’, leading them to negate automatically the opinions presented (a ‘cry wolf’ syndrome). Thus, the ‘devil’s advocate’ may actually contribute to the entrenchment of the intelligence researchers in their position, and hence to the reinforcement of mistaken conceptions.9

A possible solution for this disadvantage is a measured approach, presenting the ‘devil’s advocate’ position only when it is genuinely believed that the intelligence assessment may be mistaken. In addition, it is important that the officer appointed as ‘devil’s advocate’ should be outstanding, experienced, honest, objective, and gifted with commonsense in order to ensure that he enjoys the full confidence of the research officers. It is imperative that the research officers should not perceive the ‘devil’s advocate’ as their enemy or as someone whose entire purpose is to find faults in their work. Human nature dislikes criticism, and accordingly the ‘devil’s advocate’s’ criticism must be substantive and well grounded, and it must relate to the matter at hand and not to the individuals involved.

The ‘devil’s advocate’ mechanism has a further potential disadvantage that may be found in any review mechanism. Since the intelligence researchers are aware of the existence of a structured mechanism protecting them from errors, they may tend to take uncalculated risks in formulating their intelligence assessments. The solution to this challenge lies in fostering a modest approach to intelligence work among the researchers and in encouraging self-criticism and an organizational culture that emphasizes the great responsibility borne by intelligence assessors.

As noted, several intelligence organizations around the world maintain some version of a ‘devil’s advocate’ mechanism. In Israel, the mechanism was established following the colossal intelligence failure of the 1973 Yom Kippur War.

The Israeli case

The 1973 Yom Kippur War is rightly considered the most serious failure of Israeli intelligence, and especially of AMAN, the military intelligence agency. Just before the war, the AMAN researchers insisted that Egypt was not ready for war with Israel and was aware that any attack would end in defeat. No-one outside AMAN could challenge this analysis of the enemy’s mindset since AMAN was the only intelligence agency in Israel involved in intelligence research in any field (including political intelligence). AMAN maintained this assessment even at the beginning of October 1973, when its information collection agencies brought countless reports suggesting increasing activity by the Egyptian and Syrian militaries. Under the influence of its own conception, which had by now become fossilized, AMAN interpreted
these preparations as a military exercise rather than evidence of impending war. Isolated voices in AMAN that attempted to challenge the dominant assessment were quickly suppressed.

An example of such a voice was Lieutenant Binyamin Siman-Tov, who served before the war as a junior intelligence officer in the Southern Command. Siman-Tov’s exposure to the unusual activities of the Egyptian military motivated him to attempt to warn of imminent war, but his commanders immediately silenced him. He was not allowed to present his opinion to his superiors in the senior military or political echelons, and his commanders even sought to punish him for his ‘disobedient conduct’.

On the morning of Yom Kippur, 6 October 1973, AMAN suddenly and dramatically changed its assessment. The change came after a report from a senior source in the Mossad, the foreign intelligence agency, stated that war would break out within a matter of hours. However, the short timeframe remaining before the outbreak of hostilities at noon on the same day did not allow the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) to prepare properly. As a result, the Israeli forces suffered severe losses during the early days of the war. Although the war ended in an Israeli military victory, after 19 days of bloody combat, this did not compensate for the massive failure in Israeli intelligence.

The Agranat Committee – the official committee of inquiry established in Israel following the war – found that the roots of the intelligence failure lay in a fossilized intelligence conception held by AMAN, and in the fact that this agency held a monopoly over intelligence assessments in Israel. The Agranat Committee recommended that this monopoly be broken and that an element of pluralism be created in the Israeli intelligence community. It suggested that this could be achieved by establishing an intelligence research agency in the Mossad and by upgrading the Foreign Ministry’s intelligence department. It is beyond the scope of this article to examine in detail why this central recommendation of the Agranat Committee was only implemented in a very partial manner, and why AMAN essentially continues to enjoy a monopoly over national intelligence assessment in Israel. We should only note briefly that the implementation of this recommendation – which was reiterated by later committees of examination and inquiry – would require a thorough reform of the Israeli intelligence community. Unsurprisingly, both the IDF and AMAN oppose such a reform.

Thus, the division of the power bases within the Israeli intelligence community remained essentially unchanged following the Yom Kippur fiasco. Following the war, however, structural reform and changes in methods and conceptions were introduced in AMAN, and particularly in its Research Department. The goal of these changes was to foster an atmosphere of openness and self-criticism that would encourage conceptual pluralism and the presentation of minority opinions.

By way of example, and in the spirit of one of the recommendations of the Agranat Committee, AMAN established intelligence research departments after the war in the IDF’s three regional commands – the Northern, Southern, and Central Commands. The idea was that these departments would compete with AMAN’s Research Department in the field of military intelligence only. Changes were also made within the Research Department, including the possibility for any officer holding a minority opinion to turn to the director of AMAN, without his immediate superiors being able to prevent this. The Research Department also formalized a practice of ‘Another Opinion’ documents presenting the minority position in the department. Like other AMAN documents, these are also circulated to the decision-making echelon.

A further change introduced by AMAN following the war was the establishment of the Revision Department, which is responsible for auditing the agency’s actions in general, and the outputs of its Research Department in particular. In 1975, on the first anniversary of the establishment of the Revision Department, the AMAN director published a document defining its purpose: ‘To serve as a body encouraging repeated self-examination of the intelligence assessment [by the research officers] following the auditing of the research outputs [by the Revision Department]. The approach that should guide the auditing is the desire to prevent an error that could lead the system to fail to provide prompt warning [of war].’ The document also defined the routine tasks of the Revision Department: ‘Examination by invitation; responses and ad hoc opinions on ongoing intelligence output; retroactive examination of the assessments of the Research Department; and presenting alternative views on key issues, on an infrequent basis.’
The term used in this context for ‘alternative views’ is ‘ipcha mistabra’. This is an Aramaic phrase meaning ‘the contrary is probable’. The term essentially refers to a ‘devil’s advocate’ mechanism – the formulation of a contrary position to the dominant position in AMAN with the goal of challenging the research officers and presenting them – and the political leaders – with the possibility that a scenario they consider improbable will actually transpire.

At the time of its establishment, the Revision Department was allocated just two officers. This situation has not changed since, and the department continues to include two officers: a department head with the rank of colonel and a deputy with the rank of lieutenant colonel, along with administrative staff. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the department’s ability to exercise control is relatively limited and it is obliged to select carefully the issues it examines. The founders of the department were aware of this issue and emphasized that the Revision Department did not exempt AMAN’s officers from their constant obligation to undertake ‘mutual self-control in the framework of the Research Department’.17

The main object of the Revision Department’s examination and auditing is the Research Department of AMAN (which was expanded to the scale of a division following the Yom Kippur War). The new department initially functioned as part of the Research Division, but in 1983 the head of the department was placed under the direct authority of the AMAN director, reflecting an understanding that this would help him to perform his task faithfully. The initiators of this change also sought to broaden the powers of the Revision Department to include the supervision of other functions within AMAN and even in the intelligence community in general. In practice, however, the department continues to devote most of its efforts to supervising the outputs of the Research Division.

Little is known about the exact methodology of work taken by the Revision Department in its capacity as the ‘devil’s advocate’. However, it stands to reason that the department uses the technique of raising alternative assumptions and attempting to refute them. This contrasts with the methodology of work traditionally taken by AMAN’s Research Division, which strives to formulate a dominant assumption.18

Former senior figures in AMAN, including those who served as head of the Revision Department, the Research Division, or as AMAN director, are unanimous regarding the importance of the Revision Department in general and its function as a ‘devil’s advocate’ in particular. Shmuel Even, for example, who headed the department, believes that ‘the Revision Department is an important tool for reducing lapses in assessment’.19 Amos Gilboa, who headed the Research Division in AMAN in the 1980s, defined the Revision Department as ‘the watchdog of the Research Division’. Gilboa offered his opinion as to why the department’s activities are effective and are admired in the Research Division and elsewhere, including in the decision-making echelon:

> Firstly, the Revision Department has rights that enshrine its independent and autonomous status. No-one can force it to write something that is contrary to its opinion, or to change its papers while they are being written; no-one can forbid it to issue a revision paper; it has the right to choose any subject for review; it has free access to all the publications of all organizations; it has access to almost all the raw material sent to the AMAN director and the head of the Research Division; it is entitled to participate in all intelligence discussions and meetings; it is effectively freed of liability; and last but not least – its review documents on serious issues are forwarded to the nation’s leaders.20

Former senior figures in AMAN expressed similar opinions at a special workshop organized by the Institute for the Study of Intelligence and Policy in the Israel Heritage and Commemoration Center, a body that brings together senior veterans of the Israeli intelligence community. The workshop was devoted to the subject of intelligence revision and the ‘devil’s advocate’ mechanism. However, the participants also mentioned the limitations of revision activities, and the fact that they do not obviate the obligation for intelligence officers to review their own work on a constant basis. Yaacov Amidror, who headed the Revision Department in the 1980s and later headed AMAN’s Research Division, warned at the workshop against ‘seeing the Revision Department only in terms of its successes and failures. Its role is to encourage and stimulate openness in the Research Division’.21

Indeed, an attempt to locate clear instances in which the opposing opinion of the Revision Department later proved to be correct yields just as handful of examples over its first forty years of operations. This was also claimed in 2008 by the head of the department at the time, in a newspaper interview in which he was identified only by his first name – Rani. In response to a question about cases
when the department’s ‘devil’s advocate’s’ assessment had proved correct, Rani replied: ‘There aren’t many examples of that, because after all it [i.e. AMAN] is a professional corps with extremely high-quality personnel.’ It is possible, however, that this is the picture that can be presented openly, while there may also be unexposed cases when the Revision Department made an important contribution to balancing or even correcting the intelligence assessment.

Cases that have been exposed include three key examples, two of which date to 2006. At the beginning of that year, Hamas participated for the first time in the elections for the Legislative Council in the Palestinian Authority. Israel and the US encouraged this development, arguing that Hamas’s inclusion in the political game would lead it to moderate its positions. AMAN’s assessment ahead of the elections predicted that Hamas might score an impressive achievement but would not win the contest. Conversely, the Revision Department argued that the rising popularity of Hamas among the Palestinian public, combined with widespread disappointment with the corrupt rule of Fatah, could lead to a Hamas victory. Indeed, to the surprise of everyone concerned – including Hamas itself – the organization won the elections, completely changing the character of the Palestinian political system.

Later the same year, just before the 2006 Lebanon War erupted between Israel and Hizballah, the Revision Department suggested, contrary to the position of Israeli naval intelligence, that Hizballah was in possession of Iranian-made surface-to-sea missiles. As in the previous instance, this alternative opinion was not accepted, but subsequently emerged to be correct. On 14 July 2006, on the third day of the war, Hizballah fired an Iranian C-802 missile at the Israeli naval vessel Hanit, which was sailing off the coast of Lebanon. Due to the intelligence assessment negating the presence of such a threat, the ship’s anti-missile system had not been activated and the missile struck its target, killing four Israeli navy personnel and seriously damaging the ship.

These two examples show that it is not enough for the Revision Department to perform its work faithfully. It is also important that the intelligence evaluation bodies, decision-makers, and consumers of intelligence on the command and combat level in the IDF carefully examine its opinions.

The third and most significant example when the allegedly improbable came to pass concerns the Revision Department’s assessment ahead of the withdrawal of IDF forces from Lebanon in May 2000.

The Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon, May 2000

Israel’s military entanglement with its northern neighbor Lebanon began in the 1970s following repeated attacks by Palestinian terror organizations against Israeli civilian communities close to the border. The PLO and its affiliate organizations – Fatah and the Palestinian Fronts – moved their base to southern Lebanon after being expelled from Jordan in 1970 in the events of ‘Black September.’ They subsequently began to carry out terror attacks along the border with Israel. These mainly featured incursions into Israeli territory in order to murder Israeli civilians and the firing of Katyusha rockets at Israeli communities in the northern Galilee region. The terror operations intensified further in the second half of the 1970s, after the outbreak of the Lebanese civil war in 1975 and the collapse of political order in the country.

Israel’s response to the terror attacks focused mainly on limited military operations and aerial and artillery bombardments of terrorist targets in southern Lebanon. Since these reactions failed to secure quiet in the long term, the IDF launched a major campaign in southern Lebanon in 1978, known as the Litani Operation. However, this action also failed to secure its objectives. In the summer of 1982 the Israeli government decided to launch a further major military operation in southern Lebanon – Operation Peace for Galilee. The original objectives of the campaign were to occupy a strip approximately 40 kilometers wide into Lebanese territory, and to clear this zone of terrorists. In practice, the IDF advanced further into Lebanon, reaching as far as the outskirts of the capital Beirut, and seeking to establish a new political order in the country that would ensure quiet in the long term. The expanded objectives of the operation reflected advance planning by Defense Minister Ariel Sharon and Chief-of-Staff Rafael Eitan, both of whom apparently concealed this plan from the government and from Prime Minister Menachem Begin.
The original objectives of Operation Peace for Galilee were achieved within a few weeks and the Palestinian terror organizations were forced to leave Lebanon. However, Israel's grandiose plans to establish a new political order in Lebanon failed.27 Worse still, Israel was dragged into a bloody war against an array of Lebanese players, particularly Amal and Hizballah (the latter organization was established following Israel's invasion of Lebanon). Thus, Operation Peace for Galilee, with its limited timeframe and goals, was transformed into Israel's First Lebanon War, a three year guerilla war that lasted until 1985 and cost the lives of hundreds of members of the Israeli security forces.28 In the same year, the Israeli government decided on a partial withdrawal of the IDF forces in Lebanon, which realigned in a narrow security zone extending a few kilometers into Lebanese territory along the entire length of the border. Israel's control of the security zone was based on around 12 outposts (the number varied over the years) staffed by several hundred combat soldiers at any given time. The security zone included a Lebanese population of over 150,000, mainly Shi'ite Muslims living in 67 villages and towns. Israel was assisted in this task by the South Lebanon Army, a Lebanese militia established by the IDF in the late 1970s that was funded and controlled by Israel.

Israel's decision to remain in the security zone, rather than withdraw fully from Lebanon, was based on the assumption that this was the only way for Israel to protect its northern communities against terror attacks. This basic assumption was maintained for many years and few Israelis challenged it, despite the fact that the IDF presence in the security zone led to almost daily clashes with Hizballah forces, leading to heavy Israeli casualties. Between 1985 and 2000, 265 IDF soldiers were killed and almost 900 injured in clashes with Hizballah.29 The cycle of bloodshed reached a peak in February 1997, when a collision between two Israel Air Force helicopters carrying IDF combat soldiers to outposts in southern Lebanon led to the death of 73 soldiers and crew.

The helicopter disaster strengthened support among the Israeli public for the demand to withdraw IDF forces from the security zone in southern Lebanon. Following the disaster, four mothers of soldiers serving in Lebanon formed a non-party political movement called ‘Four Mothers’ to encourage an Israeli withdrawal. The movement had a crucial impact on Israeli public opinion, and polls at the time showed that a large majority of the public supported the idea of a withdrawal.30 Ehud Barak, the Labor party's candidate for prime minister in the 1999 elections, took heed of the polls and based his campaign on a public promise to withdraw IDF troops from Lebanon, under the slogan 'bring the boys home'.31 Following his victory in the elections and the formation of a government, Barak sought to implement his promise to withdraw from Lebanon. However, the IDF strongly opposed the plan, arguing that it would not be able to defend the communities of northern Israel from the international border.32 This position was reinforced by AMAN's intelligence assessment that the withdrawal would lead to massive and daily terror activities by Hizballah against Israeli communities. Numerous media reports at the time claimed that AMAN had presented the political leadership with catastrophic scenarios regarding the situation along the northern border on the day after the withdrawal.33

In a recently published book34 based in part on the transcripts of the discussions regarding the decision to withdraw from Lebanon, the former senior AMAN figure Amos Gilboa claims that these media reports were exaggerated, and that AMAN's assessment was far more balanced, presenting several possible scenarios following a withdrawal. Gilboa also claims that AMAN's ability to formulate an accurate assessment on the issue was impaired due to a lack of knowledge regarding the prime minister's specific plans for the withdrawal – for example, whether the withdrawal would form part of an Israeli-Syrian-Lebanese agreement or would be unilateral, and whether any Israeli military presence was to remain in Lebanon after the withdrawal. This situation was the result of the unprecedented alienation between the nation's leader and the military and intelligence echelon during this period.35 However, despite Gilboa's attempt to present a more nuanced picture, he admits that AMAN's assessment regarding Hizballah's conduct following the expected withdrawal highlighted factors that would encourage terror rather than those that could be expected to restrain it.36 By contrast, AMAN's Revision Department predicted that an IDF withdrawal would have the opposite effect, and would actually restrain Hizballah's terror activities. Shlomo Kashi, who headed the department at the time, had argued for years in his previous functions in AMAN that, contrary to the prevailing assumption and contrary
to Hizballah’s declarations, it did not want Israel to withdraw from southern Lebanon, fearing that this could undermine the very reason for its existence.  

The Research Division in AMAN implemented a further ‘devil’s advocate’ process that produced a similar conclusion to that reached by the Revision Department. This led to a brainstorming process in AMAN, but the agency ultimately maintained its previous assessment.

Despite the warnings by the IDF and AMAN, Barak persisted with his withdrawal plan, which was implemented in May 2000. His initial preference was for a withdrawal from southern Lebanon by agreement with the governments of Lebanon and Syria (the latter country exercised a large measure of control over developments in Lebanon at the time). Such an agreement might also include the disarming of Hizballah. However, the failure of the contacts with Syria led Barak to order a unilateral withdrawal to the international border, without leaving any Israeli presence in southern Lebanon. The objective was to receive official confirmation from the United Nations that Israel had met the terms of Resolution 425, which called for a full Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon.

The date for the withdrawal was brought forward by several weeks to the night of 23–24 May 2000. All the IDF forces left Lebanon overnight without encountering any hostility. The early withdrawal surprised Hizballah, which had been planning to launch attacks on the retreating forces. It thus emerged that the pessimistic predictions of the IDF and AMAN had been mistaken, and that the Revision Department, in its capacity as ‘devil’s advocate’ had offered the correct assessment. With the exception of sporadic and localized incidents, the border between Israel and Lebanon remained quiet for years after the withdrawal, and calm returned to the Israeli communities along the border.

**Conclusion and recommendations**

Israel’s withdrawal from Lebanon is a classic example of an instance when the ‘devil’s advocate’ mechanism in intelligence was successful while the official intelligence assessment proved to be incorrect. Although the alternative assessment offered by AMAN’s Revision Department failed to change AMAN’s assessment, it certainly influenced the decisions of the political leader. Although Ehud Barak decided to withdraw from Lebanon prior to his election as prime minister, his adherence to the decision despite fierce opposition from the IDF and AMAN was encouraged by the opinion he received from the Revision Department.

As this example shows, the ability of the ‘devil’s advocate’ mechanism to correct errors in intelligence assessments or to minimize the damage they cause depends primarily on the support and attention it enjoys among the producers and consumers of intelligence. If they regard the alternative assessment as an important control mechanism, rather than as a footnote or an intellectual exercise, the status of the mechanism will be enhanced and the risk of intelligence errors reduced. However, those responsible for the ‘devil’s advocate’ mechanism must use it wisely and moderately, confining their intervention to critical cases, in order to prevent its erosion. The professional integrity of the ‘devil’s advocate’ is also extremely important, and it should be universally evident that it is motivated solely by a desire to reveal the truth in the intelligence process. In addition, as with any supervisory or control mechanism, the mechanism should ideally be external, or at least independent, and its head should not be motivated by the desire for future promotion within the system that he critiques.

In the Israeli context, former senior figures in AMAN, including some who served as head of the Revision Department, argue that the department should be made responsible for supervising the entire intelligence community, as opposed to the current format, in which the department focuses primarily on AMAN’s intelligence assessments. The removal of the Revision Department from AMAN and the extension of its powers could enhance the attention it enjoys in the senior decision-making echelon.

This article has highlighted the importance of the ‘devil’s advocate’ mechanism in intelligence as a tool for minimizing the risk of intelligence errors. Implementing the recommendations presented above may help secure this goal. At the same time, it is important to recall the inherent limitations of this mechanism, and to recognize that it cannot constitute a sinecure for the substantive difficulties that face intelligence assessors in predicting the future.
Israeli experience also confirms the potential contribution of the ‘devil’s advocate’ mechanism in identifying errors in the prevailing intelligence assessment. Israel’s withdrawal from Lebanon in 2000 is a clear example of this. At the same time, it is problematic to evaluate the importance of this mechanism solely on the basis of its successes. It is certainly true that the ‘devil’s advocate’ is wrong more often than it is right. This may explain, for example, why the Revision Department’s success in 2000 did not lead AMAN to adopt the department’s alternative assessments in 2006 regarding both Hamas’s prospects in the Palestinian elections and the possibility that Hizballah possessed Iranian surface-to-sea missiles.

These assessment failures by AMAN, which occurred despite alerts from its Revision Department, should have led AMAN to reexamine its attitude to this mechanism and the methodology employed by AMAN officers in producing intelligence assessments. AMAN does invest substantial efforts in training its personnel, including courses and internal publications dealing with the methodology of intelligence research. However, these courses and publications should also focus on different structured analytical techniques, such as Team A/Team B or Red Team Analysis, which are used by intelligence agencies around the world. These techniques have indeed been introduced in AMAN in recent years in response to the rapidly changing reality in the Middle East. These buds of change in AMAN’s conceptual approach and work procedures should certainly be continued and expanded.

In addition, AMAN should take more seriously the outputs of its Revision Department. By their nature, the assessments offered by the ‘devil’s advocate’ will only rarely prove to be correct. However, due to the great importance – and low cost – of this mechanism, it is important that it be maintained and its counter-assessments be carefully examined. As one of the former heads of the Revision Department in AMAN commented:

Given the principled importance of the ‘devil’s advocate’ mechanism, its existence is justified even if none of its assessments prove to be correct over a lengthy period. It is sufficient for the ‘devil’s advocate’ to be right in just one instance in order to justify its existence.

Notes

2. For a detailed analysis of the main surprise military attacks of the twentieth century and the failure of intelligence to predict the attacks, see the excellent book by Ephraim Kam, formerly a senior figure in Israeli intelligence: Kam, \textit{Surprise Attack}.
3. On the difficulty to predict political upheavals against a social background, see Pascovich, “Intelligence Assessment.”
4. On this subject, see the seminal article by Richard Betts, a well-known scholar of war and peace studies at the Columbia University and a former staff member of the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence: Betts, “Analysis, War, and Decision.”
8. – On the importance attached to the ‘devil’s advocate’ mechanism in decision-making processes by leaders, see Jervis, \textit{Perception and Misperception}, 415–417.
   – The ‘devil’s advocate’ mechanism is also found in other public systems, including the legal system. In this context, see the following interesting article based on the premise that ‘expanding the Devil’s Advocacy concept and improving its methodology by implementing some of the best practices from the legal world could help the Intelligence Community prevent intelligence failure and improve the quality of its analytic products:’ Spivey, “The Devil,” 632.
   – An earlier committee of inquiry, the Yadin-Saraf Committee, established in 1963 by Prime Minister and Defense Minister David Ben Gurion, reached a similar conclusion and discussed the possible reorganization of the intelligence community. Due to Ben Gurion’s resignation later the same year, among other reasons, the recommendations of the Yadin-Saraf Committee were never implemented.
11. A Research Department was established in the Mossad following the war, but it has never managed to compete with AMAN. The intelligence department in the Foreign Ministry was upgraded during the years following the war, but soon returned to its status as a purely internal body with no influence on intelligence assessments on the national level.
12. For further discussion of this aspect, see Pascovich, “Military Intelligence.”
13. This procedure became known informally as the ‘Siman-Tov Procedure’ in honor of the above-mentioned Lieutenant Binyamin Siman-Tov. The procedure was initiated by Shlomo Gazit, who was appointed AMAN director after the Yom Kippur War. See Gazit, “Problems with Collective Thinking,” 317.
14. A further change in AMAN’s theoretical approach introduced after the war was a shift in emphasis from ‘intentions intelligence’ to ‘capabilities intelligence.’ In other words, the focus is less on what the enemy is planning to do and more on what the enemy is capable of doing. In addition, since 1973 AMAN has emphasized the need to avoid rigid and dogmatic conceptions that do not adapt to changing reality, as seen just before the war.
16. In this context, it is worth quoting the following comments by a former head of the Revision Department who identified himself by his first name only – Shmuel: ‘Good control does not mean that it addresses all issues simultaneously, alongside the regular research into these issues, but that it is capable of focusing on a small number of selected problems. Its expansion with additional staff positions would, perhaps, add critical output, but would also create undesirable competition between the audited research body and the auditing body.’ See Shmuel, “The Obligation of Criticism,” 260.
18. See in this context a methodological article by Itai Brun, former head of AMAN’s Research Division. Brun suggests that the alternative assumptions technique (also known as analysis by competing hypotheses) should replace the traditional research methodology adhered to by many intelligence agencies worldwide: Brun, Intelligence Analysis, 62–81. According to Brun, AMAN has begun to assimilate this methodological shift in recent years. As part of this trend, the Hebrew translation of former CIA official Richard Heuer’s classic work Psychology of Intelligence Analysis, which developed the idea of analysis by competing hypotheses, is widely distributed among AMAN officers.
22. Gur, “The Other Intelligence.”
26. See Parkinson, “Israel’s Lebanon War,” 63–84; and Freilich, Zion’s Dilemmas, 122–140.
27. Israel’s plan was based on a mistaken conception that saw the forging of an alliance with the Christians in Lebanon as the key to ensuring stability. This alliance, which had its origins in the mid-1970s, was nurtured by the Israeli Mossad. However, the head of the Mossad at the time, Yitzhak Hofi, expressed reservations about Israel’s cooperation with the Christians. AMAN and its director also raised doubts regarding Israel’s ability to impose a pro-Israeli Christian regime in Lebanon.
28. In addition to IDF soldiers, large forces from the Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet) were also present in Lebanon, involved in intelligence gathering and anti-terror operations. See in this context, the following article critiquing Israel’s intelligence operations in southern Lebanon in the 1990s: Jones, “A Reach Greater than the Grasp.”
29. Kaye, “The Israeli Decision,” 570. It should be noted that alternative estimates suggest a higher number of fatalities and injuries.
30. On the influence of the ‘Four Mothers’ movement on the public mood in Israel regarding the idea of withdrawal, see Sela, “Civil Society.”
32. It should be noted that the idea of a withdrawal from Lebanon was also raised during the government of Benjamin Netanyahu (1996–1999) that preceded Barak’s period as prime minister. However, no progress was made on the issue, in part due to opposition from the IDF and AMAN: Ibid., 577–580; Ami Ayalon, former director (1996–2000) of the Israel Security Agency (Shin Bet), personal interview, 29 December 2015.
33. Thus, for example, AMAN Director Amos Malka was quoted as warning that ‘the war would continue much closer to the border than is now the case and any Katyusha rocket attacks could threaten areas of Israel currently spared’. See “Israeli General Warns.”
34. Amos Gilboa, The True Story.
35. Ibid., 59–73.
36. In this context, it is worth mentioning an impressive collection of articles published in 2000, just before Israel’s withdrawal from Lebanon, by the Washington Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP), in an attempt to evaluate the expected ramifications of the withdrawal. Like AMAN’s researchers, the researchers at WINEP also lacked information regarding the specific diplomatic background to the future withdrawal. In the case of a unilateral withdrawal, their assessment, similar to that of AMAN, was that this ‘could constitute a huge political risk for Barak and a serious strategic gamble for Israel.’ See Luft, “Securing Northern Israel,” 118. See also ibid., 93–95, for an interesting discussion of the anticipated damage to Israel’s intelligence collecting capabilities in Lebanon following the withdrawal — an assessment that proved accurate.

39. In this context, Barak later made the following comment: ‘In the absence of a breakthrough with Assad Sr. [Hafez al-Assad, the Syrian president at the time] in 2000, it was clear to me that it was vital to leave Lebanon in coordination [with the UN] and in accordance with the Security Council resolution, up to the border that would be determined by the UN. The return to an agreed border provided an element that made a vital contribution to our international legitimacy’. See Barak, “Special Column.”

40. Barak later wrote: ‘I predicted, and the test of reality proved me right, that there would not be massive firing [by Hizballah] except in the context of a confrontation … The ultimate test was the test of quiet. In the final analysis, for the vast majority of the period between 2000 and 2015 [when the comments were written], there has been total quiet in the north, and life there has improved immeasurably by comparison to the conditions that pertained during the preceding decades:’ Ibid. For an analysis of the reasons that led Hizballah to restrain its military activities following the withdrawal, see Norton, “Hizballah and the Israeli Withdrawal.”

41. Barak later commented: ‘I consolidated my basic position that we should leave Lebanon over a period of years through repeated analyses and reflection, and matured into a decision two years before it was implemented’. See Barak, “Special Column.”

42. Testimony to this effect is offered by Amos Gilboa, who, as noted, was aware of the content of the discussions behind closed doors prior to the withdrawal from Lebanon: Gilboa, *The True Story*, 72.

43. Former senior figures in AMAN agree that the position of head of the Revision Department should be given to a veteran and experienced officer for whom this will be the last post in the agency. However, this recommendation has not been implemented consistently over the years. In some cases, those who have filled the post of ‘Devil’s advocate’ have later moved on to senior positions in AMAN, including the position of head of the Research Division. See “The Contrary is Probable: Summary of a Workshop,” 11.

44. Ibid., 18.

45. Shlomo Gazit, a former AMAN director (during whose period of office the Revision Department was established), even suggested that the ‘devil’s advocate’ function should be included in the Prime Minister’s Office, so that it can easily and discreetly secure the leader’s attention: Ibid., 9.

46. See for example the following paper, which was prepared by the US government for the goal of assimilating the use of structured analytical techniques by American intelligence: ‘A Tradecraft Primer’.

47. See note 18 above.


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**Notes on contributor**

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