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Military Intelligence and Controversial Political Issues: The Unique Case of the Israeli Military Intelligence

EYAL PASCOVICH*

ABSTRACT Contrary to intelligence services in other democracies worldwide, the activity of the Israeli Directorate of Military Intelligence, AMAN, is not merely centered around collection and research regarding military intelligence matters. Instead, AMAN covers the majority of intelligence activity arenas, including intelligence regarding state-related issues. This field of activity presents a situation where AMAN’s officers, and predominantly, its research division, are compelled to deal with sensitive issues embedded well within Israeli political and public controversy. This is commonly illustrated in the field of ‘Intelligence for Peace’ in general and more specifically in the Palestinian arena. Intelligence research surrounding the question of Palestinian commitment to peace throughout the Oslo Process and following the onset of the al Aqsa Intifada – activity classified as ‘Intelligence on Intentions’ – placed AMAN at the heart of political debate in Israel and resulted in bitter internal disagreements in AMAN as well as tensions between the intelligence service and the political leadership. Throughout the years, numerous recommendations have been repeatedly voiced to end AMAN’s monopoly over Israel’s national intelligence assessment (including aspects of intelligence regarding state-related issues). These recommendations were based predominantly on hindsight evaluations, such as AMAN’s repeated failures in intelligence assessments. This paper calls for gradual termination of AMAN’s activity of intelligence regarding state-related issues, in light of its contradiction with the appropriate military–political separation in a democratic society. Moreover, it places AMAN at the heart of the political debate dividing Israeli society.

Freedom of Thought and Disciplinary Action are the cornerstones of internal military discipline. (David Ben-Gurion, Army and Security)\(^1\)

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\(^1\)David Ben-Gurion, Army and Security (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: IDF, Maa’rachot 1955) p. 142.
One should avoid introducing the extra-military political and ideological divide into the military. (David Ben-Gurion, *When Israel was in Battle*)

As Israel approaches its seventh decade, it seems that Israeli society is divided more than ever on issues pertaining to Israeli policy and its relationship with neighbouring countries. Election results during the last 15 years and the composition of the Israeli Parliament, the Knesset, in addition to the leadership profile, indicate on a central shift of the Israeli public towards the right-wing of the political spectrum. At the same time, the strength of left-wing political parties has gradually diminished. Furthermore, the latter have often been accused in recent years – by both political factions and non-parliamentary groups – of ideological association with international groups, mostly European, that criticize Israel’s national policy. This criticism is often perceived as a challenge to the very existence of the State of Israel, and its identity as the state of the Jewish people. Furthermore, these issues have become more acute as the Palestinian national struggle for independence and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict have approached critical crossroads when decisions have to be made on the conflict’s core problems.

Recently, AMAN – the IDF’s Directorate of Military Intelligence – and more specifically AMAN's research division, reportedly began investigating ‘Foreign left-wing organizations and organizations that engage in anti-Israeli activity in the west with the intent to generate de-legitimization of the state of Israel’, organizations active for ‘boycotting, redirecting investments, and sanctioning Israel’ and those ‘running a legal battle against Israel and promoting lawsuits against high ranking Israeli officials’. This new initiative triggered criticism from the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the press, according to which ‘individuals in uniform should not be active in issues of political nature’. Furthermore, critics asserted that there was, and is, no consensus on the definition of the term de-legitimization; they also raised the question as to where valid criticism of governmental policy ends and de-legitimization and anti-Semitism begins.

This is only one of many examples for Israeli military intelligence activity regarding controversial political issues in Israeli society, a phenomenon nearly unparalleled in other western democracies. In the light of the political nature of intelligence activity and particularly that of intelligence assessments and the fact that the role of the intelligence service is to serve the political echelon’s state policy, other democracies worldwide have assigned the role of national intelligence assessor and intelligence activity regarding state-related issues to civilian intelligence entities, such as the CIA in the US or the MI6 in the UK. Thus, military intelligence is restricted from activity on political


affairs – meaning that the risk of political influence on their activity, assessments and outputs is significantly reduced. These problems don’t entirely disappear, of course – but, nonetheless, the sacred principle of democracy is sustained; the military retains its independence from controversial political issues, and remains the ‘People’s Army’.

Similarly, the people of Israel agree, possibly even more strongly than other nations, with the notion that the IDF is the people’s and the state’s army and as such its activity and roles should be entirely separated from any political affinity or controversy. This idea had already been outlined in the early paths of the newly established State of Israel, paved by its first Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, David Ben-Gurion, whose vision constituted the basis for the nature of the newly formed state and its army. Accordingly, Israeli military decrees specifically state:

A soldier shall act in such a manner that excludes from his military activity his personal opinions on issues external to his areas of responsibility, authority and profession, and particularly his personal opinions on public controversies of political, social or ideological nature.4

Nevertheless, for various reasons (the circumstances surrounding the establishment of the state, IDF and its intelligence corps, and the dire military threats against the new state), separation between military and politics has been violated since the very earliest days of the nation. Indeed, the Jewish underground organizations that operated prior to the state’s establishment and served as the basis for IDF have been disbanded, at times even forcefully, and IDF has been established as the people’s and the state’s army and fully subordinated to the elected political echelon. Concurrently, IDF has assumed a central role – some may say too central – in the development of the new state’s identity and in directing the state’s political strategies on areas overstepping pure military boundaries. Various geopolitical developments in Israel’s history, most notably the results of the Six-Day War and the occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, hand-in-hand with the onset of the peace process between Israel and its neighboring countries, triggered daily IDF activity on issues surrounded by harsh political controversies threatening to divide Israeli society.

This difficulty may be partially resolved under the pretext that the military is an instrument of the political echelon which was elected by the people – and, therefore, the military serves the people. Moreover, the military’s political- and state-related activity is limited mainly to high ranking military officers, who are partners as well as leaders in the process of forming Israel’s security and foreign policy, in somewhat of a monopoly.

However, the activity of Israeli military intelligence regarding controversial political issues is not limited only to higher ranking officers and the task is delegated to lower ranking officers and soldiers in compulsory service, principally to those serving in AMAN’s research division. The process and reasons by which AMAN and its research division became the central intelligence assessment entity in the State of Israel for the majority of assessment areas, including those pertaining to neighboring countries’ state policies, are further described in this paper. AMAN’s activity involves engaging in the daily formation of assessments regarding controversial public and political issues, with emphasis on the peace process between Israel and its neighboring countries in general, and specifically with the Palestinians.

This paper’s objective is to describe the unique case of Israeli military intelligence activity regarding controversial political issues, with special emphasis on the Palestinian issue and the peace process. In addition, broader perspectives on intelligence–Cabinet relations as well as the relationship between the military and the political echelons are addressed. First, broader perspectives are discussed, along with a review of the relevant literature on this topic. Next, we review major milestones in the Israeli state’s history, when military intelligence was called upon to make assessments regarding controversial political issues, specifically during the last two decades. Finally, an analysis of the difficulties in the Israeli case and an evaluation of the benefits and disadvantages of the various alternatives for changing the status quo are offered.

Some Broader Perspectives

The problematic relationship between intelligence (in general, not only military) and the political leadership and the fear of politicization of intelligence services has been a subject of research for many investigators. Research has been executed on the theoretical aspects of these issues as well as on case studies in Israel and in other countries. In the US model, distortions in the intelligence–Cabinet relationship and politicians’ over-involvement in intelligence activity or intelligence officials’ involvement in the work of the political echelon resulted, on different occasions, in the diversion of intelligence activity in favor of the political leadership; it also occasionally led to failures in intelligence assessments. The most prominent examples are the American intelligence assessments regarding the Communist fighting forces during the Vietnam War, the USSR’s military power during the 1970s, and the strength of the Iranian Shah’s regime during the late 1970s. During the 1980s, the CIA became more active and more involved in US policy-making,

6Harry H. Ransom, ‘The Politicization of Intelligence’ in Johnson and Wirtz (eds.) Strategic Intelligence, pp.177–178.
7Ibid., pp.178–179.
crossing the already blurred line separating intelligence from politics, as well as between enemy assessment and US military activity.\(^8\)

In effect, there is no consensus over the matter of the absolute sanctity of the line separating intelligence from policy-making. Nonetheless, a wide consensus is upheld on maintaining a general separation between the two in democracies; as Isser Harel, one of the founding fathers of the Israeli intelligence community, wrote: ‘Intelligence in a democratic state should not be setting state policy, under no circumstances. It should serve only as an instrument providing information in addition to ongoing and strategic assessments’.\(^9\)

Similarly, Israel’s leaders have expected its intelligence services, and especially the military intelligence, to exercise a high level of professionalism and objectivity, maintaining the line separating intelligence from politics. Israel’s Prime Minister during the 1980s and early 1990s, Yitzchak Shamir, who served in the Israeli intelligence prior to his term in office and was familiar with its ways, said:

> I expected [from intelligence leaders] absolute loyalty to the state’s supreme interest, loyalty free of partisan motives or political affiliation of any kind, as well as a meticulous maintenance of the factual truth without compromise of any kind. I must further emphasize that in my experience in working with heads of intelligence services, I was never disappointed in this respect. Even in times when I knew of a political inclination of one person or another, I never encountered any incidence of disloyalty or divergence in reports or work methods of any director of the intelligence services.\(^10\)

Failure to maintain proper separation between intelligence and politics may result in distortions of intelligence perspectives, conscious or otherwise, and the intelligence’s enlistment to the task of gratifying the political leadership’s desires. Striving for objectivity and professionalism – the cornerstones of intelligence work – may be compromised when intelligence assessments regarding the capabilities and primarily the intentions of the state’s enemies are expected to include recommendations on possible responses, particularly regarding controversial political issues. From this point on, the path is short towards the manipulative use of intelligence assessments by the state’s leadership or by its political opposition, positioning intelligence in the midst of a political storm.

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\(^10\) The Israeli Intelligence Community – Where To? A Balance of Fifty Years of Activity – Leaders and Intelligence (in Hebrew; Ben-Gurion University and The Israel Heritage and Commemoration Center 1998) p.12.
Nevertheless, there are those who postulate that hand-in-hand with the required separation between intelligence and politics, intelligence does not need to entirely steer clear of influencing the decision-making process, even with regards to politically controversial matters, just so long as this influence is as professional and objective as possible. According to this approach – termed ‘intelligence activism’ – intelligence should strive to be relevant and influence state decision-making processes. In recent years, a heated debate has developed in Israel between supporters of the activistic approach and those opposing it, supporters of the traditional approach. This debate will be further discussed in this paper.

The debate surrounding the appropriate and optimal relationship between intelligence and the Cabinet constitutes, to a certain degree, a portion of a broader debate surrounding the nature of the relationship between the military and the civil–political echelons. The centrality of the military in Israeli politics and society, and the close interaction between military and political leaders – issues further discussed in this paper – have been a subject of investigation for many researchers (predominantly Israeli – i.e., Yoram Peri\textsuperscript{11} and Kobi Michael).\textsuperscript{12} Their studies shed light on the uniqueness of the Israeli case, where the line between the civil and military echelons is blurred, in times of military conflict as well as in more peaceful times (which in Israel are characterized by a continuous situation of security tensions and alertness).

The most significant researcher of Israeli intelligence and its failures throughout the years is Uri Bar-Joseph from the University of Haifa, Israel. According to Bar-Joseph, the reason behind this series of failures in assessment, starting with the 1973 failure in assessment prior to the Yom Kippur War, is the fact that Israeli military intelligence is the central – and until 1973 also the sole – intelligence assessment entity in Israel. Among Bar-Joseph’s papers, we refer to an article important to our discussion, published in 2010, ‘Military Intelligence as the National Intelligence Estimator: The Case of Israel’.\textsuperscript{13} Whereas the goal of Bar-Joseph’s article is to examine the effectiveness of the unique Israeli structure, and its research conclusions are based on a hindsight evaluation of what happened (particularly on matters pertaining to the military), the focus of the present paper is slightly different. Instead, it offers a description of the principal problem in AMAN’s activity regarding issues pertaining to neighboring countries’ state policies (with


\textsuperscript{12}See for instance Kobi Michael, \textit{Between Militarism and Statesmanship in Israel: Military Influence on the Transition Process from War to Peace} (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University 2008).

\textsuperscript{13}Uri Bar-Joseph, ‘Military Intelligence as the National Intelligence Estimator: The Case of Israel’, \textit{Armed Forces and Society} 36/3 (2010) pp.505–525.
special emphasis on ‘Intelligence for Peace’), focusing in particular on the Palestinian problem.

It should be further emphasized that this paper does not intend to discuss intelligence-related conspiracies, where (or so the stories go) intelligence deliberately distorts its assessments for the purpose of influencing state policy. In fact, this situation has occurred only once in the history of Israel (the 1954 ‘Unfortunate Business’, when an intelligence operation was undertaken in Egypt without proper political authorization, and diametrically opposed the Minister of Foreign Affairs’ policy), as well as a number of times in British history (during the 1920s) and American history (the ‘Bay of Pigs’ episode of 1961, when central CIA officers overestimated the operation’s likelihood of success in order to elicit presidential support for this venture).  

The picture depicted in this paper is of a military intelligence entity, AMAN, that has been called upon to make intelligence assessments regarding issues at the heart of Israeli political debate throughout the years, predominantly since 1967 and more vehemently over the last two decades. However, despite AMAN’s efforts to remain true to the principals of professionalism and objectivity – and its overall success in doing so – the current situation is flawed, both in principal and in practice, as further described in this paper; and, being so, it therefore calls for change and reform.

The Early Years

The State of Israel was established in the midst of war. The newly established state’s first and foremost mission was to maintain its survival and its independence. The state’s policy on various issues, such as foreign and internal affairs, was dictated, for the most part, by security-related considerations. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Israeli military became the dominant force in the state’s decision-making process. The persistence of security threats has perpetuated this situation which, to a great extent, perseveres today. Many retired military leaders immediately cross over to Israeli politics, and some have climbed up the ladder to the most influential political positions, in terms of Israeli national security (i.e., they have become the Minister of Defense or the Prime Minister). In light of a general lack of competition, the IDF serves, de facto, as almost the sole professional entity in the State of Israel in charge of decision-making with regards to matters of national security and foreign affairs.

Similarly to the Israeli military’s dominance and exclusivity, AMAN, IDF’s intelligence corps, too, is given precedence among Israel’s intelligence and assessment bodies and, in most areas of intelligence activity, it constitutes the national intelligence assessor. Moreover, despite the alleged abolishment of AMAN’s monopoly and the establishment of competitive intelligence bodies such as various assessment divisions in the Mossad (the Israeli Institute for

Intelligence and Special Operations Abroad), Shabak (the Hebrew acronym for the General Security Service) and in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, AMAN’s dominance has remained untouched. Yitzchak Shamir, Israel’s Prime Minister during the 1980s, admitted retrospectively:

The main sources from which I derived my assessments were AMAN’s materials, without excluding information from all other sources. This was not out of disqualifying other sources’ credibility, but mainly out of my familiarity with the difference in the amount and quality of resources and contacts available to AMAN as opposed to the other services.15

AMAN’s precedence stems predominantly from historical–structural causes related to processes that took place during the state’s early days; in time, these became deeply rooted. Similar to the circumstances of war surrounding the establishment of the Israeli state and its military, such was the case during the establishment of the new state’s intelligence services. The dire circumstances surrounding IDF’s and AMAN’s establishment offer an explanation for some of the earliest structural failures, as detailed by Isser Harel:

The new structure of Israel’s intelligence and national security services was established in the midst of war, hurriedly, and lacking any design and planning. The distribution of responsibilities was unreasonable and evident of lack of knowledge and understanding. Thus, for instance, military intelligence regarding counterespionage... activity that includes surveillance on foreign representatives including diplomats, was assigned to the military intelligence. Were advisors and decision-makers aware of the fact that they assign this role to a distinct military entity – the military intelligence?16

However, soon after the establishment of Israel, counterespionage activities were assigned to the internal security service, the Shabak. Removing counterespionage from military responsibility coincided with a common perception amongst democratic states, according to which internal issues should lay outside of the military’s scope, largely in order to eliminate military activity regarding issues of a political nature. Shabak’s work in these areas, as a civil espionage entity, is perceived as more democratically ‘accurate’; it was subjugated to Israel’s state laws and was required to act, first and foremost, in accordance with state laws and not according to national security needs.

At the same time, throughout the years, the delicate balance between national security needs and state laws have been occasionally – callously – interrupted. An example of this is when the Shabak was required, during the early 1950s, to monitor the activities of Knesset members of Mapam, the

15The Israeli Intelligence Community – Where To? p.12.
16Harel, Security and Democracy, p.103.
Communist political party in opposition to Mapai, the governing political party at the time and David Ben-Gurion’s party.\(^{17}\) Another example is the incident that earned the title ‘The Shabak Affair’ (or the ‘Bus 300’ Affair) and shook the country in the 1980s, when high ranking Shabak officials were involved in killing Palestinian terrorists who were captured alive and knowingly lied – to protect both themselves and their organization – to the investigation committees appointed for investigating the affair.\(^{18}\)

Shabak’s fields of activity and geographical areas of activity – inside the State of Israel (and the Palestinian Territories) – render it the most exposed to public scrutiny of all Israeli intelligence entities.\(^{19}\) In contrast, the focus of IDF’s main activity in its early days was directed towards external threats, as part of IDF’s definition as the ‘People’s Army’, positioned at the center of national consensus. Furthermore, IDF’s intelligence division, much like the British model on which it was based, was cautious, in its early days, to avoid dealing with intelligence research regarding surrounding countries’ state policies. In fact, IDF’s research activity – at the time not clearly separated from the collection activity – was restricted in the early days of the state mainly to the area of military intelligence. In line with the British approach, the military intelligence tendency, during its early days, was to narrow down intelligence officers’ freedom of action in interpreting intelligence information, and particularly to avoid assessments pertaining to political- and state-related issues. A separate research entity – AMAN’s research department – was only established in 1953 (and subsequent to the Yom Kippur War, it became a division).\(^{20}\)

Despite all of the above, during the 1950s and 1960s an alliance began to form between AMAN’s research officials and the military and political echelons. AMAN positioned itself as a funnel, an obligatory point of passage, in a network through which all outputs of various collection efforts flow. The network of intelligence expertise created by AMAN researchers turned, in

\(^{17}\)Eitan Glaser, ‘How the Israel Security Agency Came into Being’ in Amos Gilnoa and Ephraim Lapid (eds.) Masterpiece: Inside Look at Sixty Years of Israeli Intelligence (in Hebrew; Ramat Hasharon and Tel Aviv: The Israel Intelligence Heritage an Commemoration Center and Yedioth Ahronoth Books/Chemed Books 2008) pp.42–47. It should be noted that the Shabak’s existence was made public only in 1957. Years later, Isser Harel stated that this affair was ‘a bitter crisis, whose roots and consequences touched the state’s political and social structure’. See Harel, Security and Democracy, p.199.


\(^{19}\)See the statement made by former Shabak director, Yaakov Peri: ‘The Shabak directly touches and deals with issues that concern us all, the citizens of the State of Israel, on a daily and hourly basis and touches personal interest areas of each one of us, our political opinions, debates and differences of opinion in the heart of the Israeli society and the different way each one of us perceives our future in Israel…’. See The Israeli Intelligence Community – Where To? p.18.

essence, into a monopoly, leaving the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ research body far behind, and despite the fact that it was initially intended to become the central assessment body on matters pertaining to foreign affairs, its activity was actually limited to internal ministry-related affairs.21

With the dearth of competition, AMAN, de facto, became the ‘national assessor’ of Israeli intelligence; this status received a quasi-official seal of approval in 1970. Since then, AMAN in effect has served not only as IDF’s intelligence agency, but also as the government’s and the entire country’s intelligence agency. Accordingly, AMAN research division handles almost all areas of intelligence research and assessment, excluding internal Israeli state aspects. Thus, contrary to military intelligence entities in other democracies worldwide, AMAN’s activity also covers, on top of military research and military-related intelligence areas (technological, maritime and aerial research), research regarding neighboring countries’ state policies (including intelligence regarding the intentions of enemy countries’ leadership, and ‘Intelligence for Peace’) and its various derivatives, such as economic research.

In over 60 years of activity, AMAN has faced a long line of intelligence assessment failures, of which the most prominent was the 1973 Yom Kippur War failure. The investigation committee appointed following this war, the Agranat Commission, and similarly other committees before and after it, repeatedly stated their recommendation to put an end to AMAN’s monopoly over intelligence assessment and to create pluralism in intelligence. Accordingly, the Agranat Commission’s report stated:

The actual situation on the eve of the Yom Kippur War, and years beforehand, was that one entity alone in the entire intelligence community, namely AMAN, was actively performing intelligence assessment, research and evaluation. This intelligence assessment was, therefore, the only one brought before the Chief of General Staff, the Minister of Defense, the Prime Minister and the government. This structure of assessment roles in the intelligence community had severe consequences on intelligence assessments available to the government on the eve of the war.22

Recommendations of the Agranat Commission reinforced those made by an earlier one, the Yadin-Sherf Committee, appointed in 1963 by David Ben-Gurion, who was displeased with the ambiguity surrounding the intelligence community’s subordination and assessment roles. The Yadin-Sherf Committee determined that:

... it is essential that the Prime Minister will have assessments regarding political, national security and other issues – that are balanced and based on different perspectives and not necessarily derived from one channel... Therefore, the committee recommends to examine the

21Ibid., pp.189–197.
possibility of reinforcing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ research department, in a way that will qualify this department to submit independent political assessments, both regarding Middle East issues and other state-related issues, as required… [and thus] a certain balance will be generated for national security- and state-related assessments, that are currently executed nearly exclusively by AMAN’s research department.23

The Agranat Commission recommended that ‘AMAN’s focus of research and assessment should be on military, strategic, operative and tactic intelligence’, and further added that:

… a special intelligence advisor for the Prime Minister should be appointed… [accompanied by the work of] a small, yet superb, team, enabling the Prime Minister (and the entire government as a result) to execute independent intelligence assessments regarding strategic–state-related issues, based on the cumulative information collected by the various collection agencies.24

Similarly to its predecessor, this recommendation, too, was only partially and temporarily implemented. A senior intelligence advisor was, indeed, periodically working with the Israeli Prime Minister. Nonetheless, the recommended ‘small, yet superb, team’ never formed;25 and despite the fact that the Ministry of Foreign Affair’s research department was revamped and renamed ‘The Center for Political Research’ (of foreign countries), it never fulfilled its purpose and its outputs are used mainly for internal Ministry of Foreign Affair requirements. Similarly, a research department established in the 1970s by the Mossad did not yield the desired pluralism in intelligence regarding state-related issues.26

As previously described, all later investigation committees that were appointed in the light of other AMAN failures repeatedly made the same recommendations – in vain.27 The Steinitz Committee, for instance,

23Ibid., pp.29–30.
24Ibid., pp.32–33.
25The National Security Council was established in 1999 with the intent of fulfilling this recommendation. However, due to reasons that are discussed in this paper, this never transpired.
26See, for instance, comments made in the 1980s by Meir Amit, former AMAN and Mossad director: ‘There is no other entity in Israel capable of generating assessments similar to those generated by AMAN, or questioning and disagreeing with these assessments. All past attempts to establish a research entity that will be active in this direction have been futile…’. See ‘The Intelligence Community in Israel’ in Zvi Offer and Avi Kober (eds.) Intelligence and National Security (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Maa’rachot, IDF, the Ministry of Defense publication 1987) pp.126–127.
27The limitation set by this paper’s length prevents us from detailing all the reasons leading to the status quo’s perpetuation. Nevertheless, many of these reasons are associated with the military’s dominance in Israeli politics and society, as previously described. Many believe that
commissioned to investigate the intelligence failure prior to the 2003 US Invasion of Iraq – where similarly to other western intelligence services, AMAN incorrectly assessed that Saddam Hussein possessed unconventional weapons (to date, evidence to support this assessment was never found) \(^{28}\) – stated:

The Committee recommends redefining the framework of intelligence responsibility of the military intelligence and limiting its activity to matters of traditional military intelligence … There is no intention of preventing military intelligence from conducting intelligence research in the widest sense, including in political areas, as necessary pursuant to fulfilling its military intelligence function … \(^{29}\)

Each one of these investigation committees detailed similar reasons with reference to the need for organizational change in the Israeli intelligence community in general and with particular regard to AMAN. While some of these detailed reasons have included shortcomings unique to AMAN (i.e., the relatively young age of AMAN’s workforce and its high turnover rate), the Steinitz Committee was the only one that emphasized an additional reason that necessitated a structural change. This reason is presented verbatim: ‘It should be ensured that military intelligence will desist in the future from engaging in political research that has no military derivates and that touches on the civilian–political arena’. \(^{30}\)

IDF and AMAN, directly or indirectly, hindered the recommendations’ implementation efforts for avoiding loss of their strength. Yossi Sarid, then member of Knesset and former Cabinet minister who served over two decades as member of the Knesset’s Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defense, wrote in 2005: ‘In Israel, intelligence as a whole is in the hands of national security bodies, predominantly the military. In this way, IDF strength further increases, and every decision is shaped according to its recommendations … The military will not readily relinquish the intelligence strength. This is the exact reason behind the fact that the military did not allow, throughout the years, for the development of additional intelligence bodies in Israel, and in the event that such bodies did emerge, it took action to narrow down their activities, making them inactive. This is also the reason why the National Security Council never spread its wings and never made its mark … The military will not readily surrender its monopoly over the national intelligence assessment … The IDF has no interest in competition on assessments, which requires investment of a tremendous amount of intellectual reasoning and convincing effort’. Sarid refers to this situation of Intelligence ownership as ‘a Tyrannical Democracy’. See Yossi Sarid, ‘Civil–Military Relations – A Personal View’ in Pinchas Yehezkely (ed.) Reciprocation between The Civil–Political and the Military Echelons (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: The Ministry of Defense Publication 2005) pp.136–137.

\(^{28}\) An additional failure investigated by this committee was AMAN’s surprise as to the existence of a Libyan Nuclear Program and the American–Libyan public announcement (December 2003) on its disarmament.


\(^{30}\) Ibid., p.70.
At the same time, it should be emphasized that contrary to allegations that intelligence failure on the American side stemmed from the politicization of intelligence (the American intelligence assessment provided a stamp of approval for the military action against Saddam Hussein), the Steinitz Committee emphasized the following in reference to the Israeli intelligence failure:

Israel’s intelligence services acted on the Iraqi matter according to their best professional discretion, and their position was formulated on the basis of a business-like analysis and was innocent of any attempt to reflect state or political moods… The Committee did not discover any findings supporting the suspicion of a decision to conceal or add information other than in good faith, and did not identify any signs pointing to intentional distortion of the intelligence picture in order to support the necessity of the war.31

Nonetheless, the Committee was not pleased, as stated earlier, by the activity of the military in generating assessments regarding political- and state-related issues. Indeed, in this instance the main damage to the State of Israel was economic (the erroneous intelligence assessment invoked an instruction to the Israeli public to open all protective kits against weapon of mass destruction; the cost of this instruction was estimated as over 280 million US dollars), and the harsh debate that stormed American politics and its public did not develop in Israel. However, in other instances, mainly surrounding the Palestinian issue, Israeli intelligence has been thrown into the center of the public debate dividing politics and society in Israel. The Palestinian issue has borne, more than any other issue, the tension between public opinion and political leadership on the one hand and the duty of intelligence to generate objective assessments on the other.

AMAN and the Palestinian Issue

The Six-Day War and its consequences constituted a turning point in AMAN’s activity (and IDF’s activity in general) regarding controversial political issues – although it’s true that AMAN was undeniably called upon to make assessments regarding issues of this kind during the state’s first 19 years. A example of this kind would be the ‘German Scientists Crisis’ in the early 1960s, when AMAN and the Mossad were in disagreement as to the question of whether Germany was aiding Egypt in the development of a nuclear program (the Mossad thought they were, and AMAN fervently disagreed). The German Scientists Crisis broke in conjunction with the Reparations Agreement between Israel and West Germany, which was signed a decade earlier and gave rise to a heated political debate on the question as to whether the Israeli state should agree to reparations from Germany for the Holocaust, due to Israel’s economic circumstances.32

31Ibid., p.27.
32The assessment of the Mossad director at the time, Isser Harel, was not accepted by Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, who was one of the leading forces behind the Reparations
However, the onset of AMAN’s real involvement in controversial political issues occurred after Israel’s conquest of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and a population of one million Palestinians at the time (current population estimates are of over four million Palestinians). Prior to the Six-Day War these territories were, respectively, under Jordanian and Egyptian control. Intelligence activity regarding these territories and their residents was part of the political, military and social–economic research (as much as such research existed) surrounding these two countries. The introduction of the Palestinian issue, or more specifically its renewal, post the Six-Day War\textsuperscript{33} necessitated a new intelligence alignment.

However, the formation of a new alignment was delayed, explicitly due to the political debate. As long as ‘there was no Palestinian nation’ – as Golda Meir, then Israeli Prime Minister, stated – intelligence activity was dedicated mainly to the Palestinian terror threat in the Territories and along the borders (first from Jordan and later from Lebanon). Subsequent to the PLO chairman, Yasser Arafat’s 1974 UN address, an internal AMAN proposal was made to form a research entity that would focus on Palestinian state-related affairs (including the execution of surveillance over PLO’s external leadership and local leadership in the Territories). Nonetheless, in light of the Israeli political stance, this was only accomplished a decade later, in the second half of the 1980s, and was accompanied, even then, by internal AMAN debates. Some of AMAN’s high ranking officials – similar to a large portion of the Israeli public and leadership – found it hard to acknowledge the existence of a Palestinian entity that utilized terror as a means in the struggle to achieve its national goals.\textsuperscript{34}

Nevertheless, immediately after the Six-Day War, IDF was required to intensively engage in activities in the Territories and to maintain contact with local residents and leadership in the Territories on a daily basis. In light of the fact that the Territories were never annexed to the State of Israel and the Palestinian residents in the Territories never received Israeli citizenship, the Palestinian issue was, in principle, never defined as an internal Israeli issue; because of this, the military was assigned the task of governing over these territories as a civil administration. Specifically for this reason, IDF formed

\textsuperscript{33}This was an additional issue under political debate, due to the Israeli government’s refusal to publicly acknowledge – at least until the end of the 1960s and to a certain degree even after – the existence of a Palestinian nation.

\textsuperscript{34}Gadi Zohar, ‘Dealing with Structural Problems in Israel Defense Intelligence in the Palestinian Arena’ in Gilnoa and Lapid (eds.) \textit{Masterpiece}, pp.116–118.
the unit ‘Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories’, which was later renamed ‘The Civil Administration’; more precisely, a military unit was in charge of civil administration. This unit’s task was to execute the government’s policy in the Territories on matters pertaining to employment, social services, economy, development, etc.\textsuperscript{35}

Concomitantly with its main task, the civil administration acted, and is still active, as a semi-intelligence entity. This semi-intelligence task entailed following the attitudes of the Territories’ population regarding political issues, as well as their social–economic conditions, by relying on human sources, which are mostly non-covert (and are not defined as ‘intelligence sources’, rather as ‘collaborators’).\textsuperscript{36} A portion of this unit’s outputs qualified to some extent as research and assessment documents and preceded AMAN’s papers on the subject. Shabak’s activity regarding the Palestinian issue after 1967 was extensive; however, for two decades it focused predominantly on operational activity and the prevention of terror, rather than on executing true intelligence research and assessment work.

Israel’s presence in the Territories, together with the responsibility imposed on IDF to govern the Territories’ residents, placed IDF well within the heart of political debate, which intensified during the 1980s when the PLO presented a conciliatory and restrained strategic approach and called upon the State of Israel for (1) PLO recognition, and (2) to join them – the Palestinians – around the negotiation table (this despite the fact that terror attacks against Israel continued). Concurrently with the intensification of the debate in Israeli society, AMAN had initiated its focused activity regarding Palestinian state-related issues.

AMAN’s intelligence research regarding state-related issues during the mid 1980s, and especially from the 1990s onwards, can be primarily classified as ‘Intelligence for Peace’. Thus, for instance, AMAN was required (similar to the civil administration) to analyze the Palestinian National Charter, PLO’s constitutive document that called for the annihilation of the State of Israel, in light of the seemingly moderate strategic approach led by the PLO at the time. The intelligence’s interpretation of this kind of issue interfaced the political debate that had begun to drive a wedge into Israeli society.\textsuperscript{37}


\textsuperscript{36}The civil administration and its commanding unit – the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories – gained additional significance after the Oslo Accords, when these units received responsibility for ‘designing and implementing the network of contacts with the Palestinian Authority, civil entities and the international community’. See the Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories website, <http://www.cogat.idf.il/1049-he/Cogat.aspx> (accessed 14 December 2012).

\textsuperscript{37}Eyal, pp.215–24. Eyal mentions that Israeli academic experts on Middle East studies were also invited to offer their opinions on this subject. According to Eyal, the academics who aided
During the 1984 National Unity Government, in which Shimon Peres (the left-wing Avoda party) and Yitzhak Shamir (the right-wing Likud party) formed a ruling coalition, ‘Intelligence for Peace’ activity became an instrument in the political battles between the two major parties. Elyakim Rubinstein, who served as the Cabinet Secretary from 1986–1994, had the following to say:

There is difficulty ... in the process of transfer and implementation of an intelligence assessment, particularly regarding processes pertaining to the development of peace. This was predominantly eminent under circumstances of National Unity Government ... Despite the over-cautiousness of the intelligence in its written assessments, Cabinet briefings on this sensitive issue frequently leaked out, at times completely distorted, and became a source for internal political goading, generally on questions regarding PLO ... Nevertheless, the intelligence is instructed to keep on performing its activity, while attempting to take into account difficulties only with reference to the framework within which the assessment is written, and, unquestionably, not in reference to its content.38

The failure of Israeli intelligence to provide a warning on the onset of the violent uprising of the Palestinian people in the Territories, the Intifada, in December 1987 focused the center of attention on the shortcomings in intelligence research in the Palestinian arena, particularly on issues pertaining to social–economic aspects of the Territories’ population. AMAN’s responsibility for the collection and research of information regarding the Palestinian issue was never formally defined and its activity regarding the issue at the time was still in its infancy.39 Following the

the national security system and particularly the civil administration were each identified with a specific political patron. Furthermore, he claims that the civil administration aligned its interpretive approach to the leaders’ identity (particularly after the 1977 dramatic political shift in Israel and the raise of the Likud, a right-wing party).


39 See the statements written in 2006 by retired IDF General Amram Mitzna, who served during the onset of the Intifada as the head of the Central Command, and was in charge of operating IDF forces in the West Bank. According to Mitzna, ‘on the eve of the first Intifada there was no intelligence entity that assumed responsibility for intelligence assessment on issues pertaining to the Palestinian society. The Shabak was active in terror prevention and was not prepared to deal with issues surrounding Palestinian public opinion and attitude, 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 assessments based on meeting they, naturally, held with the traditional leaders and not with those decision-makers in the Palestinian side’. See Amram Mitzna, ‘Civil–Military Relations during the First Intifada’ in Ram Erez (ed.) Civil–Military Relations in Israel in Times of Military Conflict, memorandum no. 82 (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University 2006) pp.55–56.
intelligence failure, a research department (later on a division) was established in the Shabak, the intention being to counterbalance AMAN’s research papers regarding the Palestinian issue. However, in light of AMAN’s position as the national intelligence assessor, actual responsibility over the Palestinian issue remained in its hands, without a clear distribution of responsibilities between AMAN and the Shabak, perhaps in the spirit of pluralism in intelligence.

At the time (and more generally), Cabinet–intelligence relations were influenced by the identity of the state leaders, their attitude towards intelligence and the weight they placed upon intelligence assessments. Thus, Yitzchak Shamir, Israeli Prime Minister from 1986–1992, was against any change in Israel’s attitude towards the PLO – and, because of this, refused to accept any intelligence assessments that contradicted to his political sentiments, or emphasized any opportunity for peace. Shamir’s opinion on all matters pertaining to ‘Intelligence for Peace’ was that:

... when we consider the veracity of a political negotiation of one kind or another, there is no advantage to a director of [an intelligence] service over the Prime Minister... Information is welcomed, but interpretation of this information – the Prime Minister knows, too, how to do it...  

Shimon Peres, Shamir’s political opponent from the left-wing Avoda party, surpassed Shamir when he served from 1992 as Minister of Foreign Affairs in Yitzchak Rabin’s government. Peres, a patron of the Oslo Process, excluded the intelligence service in particular and IDF in general (and the US, too) from the secret negotiations that led to the historic agreement between Israel and the PLO (September 1993). According to Peres, the Oslo Accords would have never been achieved if Israel had acted in accordance with intelligence assessments, which tend to be pessimistic, pointing out risks and dangers rather than opportunities. Furthermore, Peres added that military intelligence was:

... restricted merely by the nature of the military organization, blindness to the ramifications and consequences of the decisions that are based on information provided by it... One cannot survive without

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40 Excluding the task of providing warnings on terror attacks that exclusively fell under Shabak’s responsibility.
41 Zohar, ‘Dealing with Structural Problems’, pp.118–119. Years later, two ‘Magna Carta’ agreements were signed between AMAN and the Shabak (the second was signed in 1998) that were designed to clarify and organize areas of responsibilities and cooperation between the two entities on the Palestinian issue. See Shmuel Even and Amos Granit, *The Intelligence Community – Where To?*, memorandum no. 97 (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, The Institute for National Security Studies – INSS 2009) p.38.
42 *The Israeli Intelligence Community – Where To?* p.23.
intelligence, however, one should be extra cautious from relaying solely on intelligence.\textsuperscript{43}

Nonetheless, despite its early exclusion from the Oslo Process, AMAN was asked, after the Declaration of Principles between Israel and the PLO was signed, to actively join in and offer support to the peace process and to collect intelligence information regarding the newly established Palestinian Authority. Once more, AMAN was positioned at the center of a fierce Israeli public and political controversy, this time surrounding the Oslo Process. This controversy intensified in light of the onset of the Hamas and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad suicide attacks, and peaked with the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzchak Rabin in November 1995.

IDF’s highest ranking officers, some in uniform (headed by the then Deputy Chief of General Staff Amnon Lipkin-Shahak, who had served in the past as an AMAN director), led talks with the Palestinians regarding national security matters, as well as state-related matters. This was not the first instance in Israeli history of ‘Diplomacy in Uniform’ (additional cases are further discussed in this paper). Supporters of ‘Diplomacy in Uniform’ claimed that, in reality, IDF was the only entity with the ability to lead a political process of this kind, in which national security played such a central part. In contrast, others pointed to the perilous breach of the fine line between intelligence and policy-making; they claimed that AMAN had fallen in love with its subject of research, to the extent that AMAN’s desire for the success of the political process had led to distortions of its intelligence assessments, and to disregarding any potential risks in the process. Accordingly, for instance, Knesset member Benny Begin wrote in August 1995 to the AMAN director, in response to AMAN’s paper which stated that there was no evidence for the fact that Arafat was not displaying commitment to the peace process with Israel, and that the purpose of his provocative remarks in the media was only to appease his people:

The writer’s words are so unfounded, that they suggest the unfortunate conclusion that his interpretation is severely biased by his political view. I seek to clarify to you the severity of penetration of such tendencies to AMAN’s research division. I am well aware, of course, of the possible claim that my letter to you is biased by my own political view and that it is a callous attempt to repress the freedom of expression of AMAN’s researchers. Nevertheless, I shall take the risk by saying the following, there is no reasonable person to be found that shall be able to accept the poor analysis provided in this paper.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{43}Shimon Peres, ‘The Advantages and Disadvantages of Intelligence in the Eyes of the Leaders’ in \textit{Leaders and Intelligence} (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: The Ministry of Defense Publication 2004) pp.97, 100, 103.

The response of the AMAN director (Moshe – Bogie – Ya’alon) was not long in coming: ‘These remarks constitute a political interference in the work of AMAN officers’.45

Thus, AMAN took its place at the very heart of Israeli political controversy. Politicians from every end of the political spectrum made use, at times cynical and manipulative, of AMAN’s assessments for promoting their agenda (while exposing AMAN’s assessments in the media). Binyamin Netanyahu, the then head of the political opposition, who also led the opposition to the Oslo Accords, stated in a speech before the Knesset in December 1993 that ‘AMAN has generated a report detailing threats stemming from the implementation of the Oslo Accord’.46

During Netanyahu’s first term in office as Prime Minister from 1996, the Cabinet–intelligence relationship deteriorated and reached an unparalleled low point. In his 1998 paper, the researcher Uri Bar-Joseph presented a distressing portrayal, according to which, at least during his first two years in office, Netanyahu callously breached the most basic norms concerning the relationship between the Cabinet and intelligence, and the relationship between the military echelon and the civil echelon.47 Netanyahu, who suspected that IDF and AMAN and the other national security and intelligence entities had a political agenda and had ‘fallen in love’ with the prospect of peace, began displaying public distrust and even contempt towards the national security community in general – and, more specifically, towards intelligence leaders. Netanyahu rarely held meetings with these entities; he also seldom read intelligence outputs. For a period of time, too, Netanyahu even went so far as to prevent military officials from taking part in diplomatic contacts with the Palestinians; furthermore, he threatened to replace ‘disloyal’ intelligence officers – perhaps insinuating that they should

45Ibid. In retrospect Ya’alon claimed, as did his predecessor, Uri Sagie (who served as AMAN director until June 1995), that AMAN did provide warnings on the perils embedded in the Oslo Process. However, according to Sagie, ‘it is not the intelligence role to tell the Cabinet what is good and what is bad... In my opinion, discussions like this constitute a moral corruption of intelligence’. See Yossi Melman, ‘The Suspenders’ Culture’, Haaretz, 9 August 2002 (in Hebrew) <http://www.haaretz.co.il/hasite/pages/ShArtPE.jhtml?itemNo=195852&contrassID=2&subContrassID=4&sbSubContrassID=0> (accessed 14 December 2012). This article’s title hints to the fact that AMAN’s papers, during the first years of the Oslo Process, were ambiguous and inconclusive, to avoid being mistaken or ridiculed (similarly to the use of suspenders for keeping one’s pants on).
46Colonel Shmuel, ‘Intelligence Research in the Middle East Peace Process (From the Madrid Conference to the Peace Treaty with Jordan)’ in Hesi Carmel (ed.) Intelligence for Peace: The Role of Intelligence in Times of Peace (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Miskal – Yedioth Ahronoth Books and Chemed Books 1998) p.170, footnote no.15. It should be emphasized that AMAN’s assessments were also presented in a less classified version for the use of members of the Knesset’s Foreign Affairs and National Security Committee. Members of this committee included representatives of all political parties in the Knesset, including those in opposition. This reality was most likely one of the reasons behind leaders’ reluctance to include the intelligence in secret diplomatic activities for peace.
provide intelligence evidence for his political view. Occasionally, Netanyahu deliberately leaked intelligence materials to serve his own political needs.48

The intelligence’s response to Netanyahu’s political pressure ranged between upholding its professional ethos (Shabak under the leadership of Ami Ayalon)49 and yielding to the pressure from above and matching intelligence assessments to Netanyahu’s political agenda. Allegations with regards to the latter were made against some of AMAN’s and the Mossad’s highest ranking officers, such as the AMAN director, Moshe Bogie Ya’alon, and head of the Mossad’s research division, Uzi Arad (perhaps unsurprisingly, Arad became one of Netanyahu’s close associates upon his retirement from the Mossad).50

Nevertheless, one should make a distinction between the heads of the intelligence community, who were highly influenced by the Cabinet in light of the responsibilities of their roles (and as such, were often accused of politicization – although it is reasonable to assume that their professional views matched, from the outset, the Cabinet’s views)51 and between professional intelligence officers who needed to observe unbiased professionalism and objectivity (and therefore, on occasion, held views in opposition to those held by their commanders). This harsh situation nearly led the relationship between AMAN’s leadership and the professional officers in AMAN’s research division into a state of clash after the onset of the Al-Aqsa Intifada in the following decade.

Unlike the first Intifada (began in December 1987), which was an uprising of the people in the full sense of the word and therefore caught AMAN by surprise, the onset of the second Intifada, the Al-Aqsa Intifada, in September 2000 came as no surprise to Israeli intelligence services (although some may portray a somewhat different picture).52 The latter predicted that the failure of the Camp David Summit (July 2000)53 would drive Arafat towards a reactivation of violence, and herald in a new era of ‘terror’. A fierce debate took place inside AMAN over the following questions:

48For further details on the acrid relationship between Netanyahu and the IDF leaders at the time see Peri, Generals in the Cabinet Room, pp.77–90.
49Ayalon was quoted saying the following in response to ministers who argued that Yasser Arafat avoided fighting terrorism: ‘Don’t expect me to report what you want to hear’. See Bar-Joseph, ‘A Bull in a China Shop’, p.154.
50Ibid., pp.168–170.
51It should be emphasized that, at least up until the 1980s, state leaders methodically appointed AMAN directors (and heads of other intelligence entities) whose political views were aligned with their own. See Uri Bar-Joseph, ‘State–Intelligence Relations in Israel: 1948–1997’, The Journal of Conflict Studies 17/2 (1997) pp.137–138.
53AMAN also sent an intelligence delegation to Camp David, although some claim that the delegation was kept on the ‘outside’ and was not a partner in the decision-making processes. See Zohar, ‘Dealing with Structural Problems’, p.120.
Did Arafat initiate the violent upraising?

What was the level of Arafat’s control over the uprising’s intensity (when the violent events persisted)?

Was the violence merely an instrument for Arafat, giving him the upper hand at the negotiation table with Israel; or was it irrefutable proof of Arafat’s unwillingness for a peaceful resolution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict?

The failure of the Camp David Summit and the failure of negotiations held – in the midst of violent events – at the Taba Summit (February 2001), led Prime Minister Ehud Barak to declare that Arafat and his party were not fit partners for negotiation. The ‘No-Partner on the Palestinian Side’ approach became firmly rooted when Ariel Sharon became Prime Minister (March 2001); this was only exacerbated by the Intifada’s persistence, the intensification of violence, and finally the entry of Fatah (the largest faction within the PLO) to the circle of suicide bombing attacks. AMAN’s leadership, too, supported the ‘No Partner’ approach and provided intelligence support to Israeli state leaders. However, professional intelligence officers’ views on the matter was much more hesitant. Retired Colonel Ephraim Lavie, head of the ‘Palestinian Arena’ at AMAN’s research division until 2002, wrote:

The Division determined in its publications during the first few months of 2001 that Arafat refrains from encouraging a drop in the violence out of the expectation that the clash will result in internationalization of the conflict, as an alternative to the cessation of the diplomatic process. The Division assessed that Arafat will have difficulty in commanding full control over time on the ‘flames’ intensity’, particularly in light of lack of political achievement or expectation, and further points out that this entails a potential for deterioration and escalation. Nevertheless, in an oral presentation before the military and political echelons as well as in public statements, a different picture has been portrayed. According to which, Arafat rejected Israel’s proposals in negotiations and launched a war he masterminded as part of a deceitful plan aimed at defeating Israel via the Palestinian Right of Return and the demographic advantage and to establish the Great Palestine. The escalation in the violent confrontations was presented as turning towards an all-inclusive war where all events are controlled and directed by Arafat. This depiction of events matched the political echelon’s vision, and in addition was perceived as reliable and was utilized as a basis for the Cabinet and IDF’s policy in upcoming years... [However] assessments on Arafat’s malicious intents were made retrospectively, and as previously mentioned, were not included in the research division’s publications.54

54High-ranking Shabak officials have also claimed that the Intifada events broke out as an uprising of the people; they were not instigated by Arafat. See Ephraim Lavie, ‘Israel’s Coping with the Intifada: A Critical Evaluation’ (in Hebrew), Adkan Astrategy (Strategic Update) 13/3 (2010) p.100, footnote no.1.
This, in effect, constituted, to a certain degree, cultivation of a conception that transformed into a dogma and contributed to guiding the Cabinet to engage in forceful acts and, at least in theory, expropriated from it a number of policy-making alternatives. [However] the intelligence’s professional integrity, as expressed in its research publications, was that there is some basis for a permanent arrangement according to Palestinian conditions...

Other former high-ranking AMAN officials aligned themselves with Lavie’s harsh accusations regarding the politicization of AMAN’s leadership. One of AMAN’s former directors, Amos Malka (1998–2001), strongly criticized retired General Amos Gilad, Director of Policy and Political–Military Affairs in the Israel Ministry of Defense (since 2003; Gilad served during the 1990s and at the beginning of the new millennium as the head of AMAN’s research division under Malka’s command). According to Malka, on the eve of the 2001 elections, Gilad rewrote his intelligence assessment to match the leadership’s and the military’s sentiments. Malka himself attempted to present, to government, the assessment of Gilad’s subordinates at AMAN’s research division; this assessment refuted the conspiracy theory that the Oslo Process was a plot to destroy Israel. However, according to Malka, ‘Mofaz, the Chief of General Staff, and his deputy Ya’alon ignored what I said. Gilad’s assessment was more beneficial to them, and therefore they have accepted it’. Gilad replied that ‘everything I have said was based on firm intelligence information and on intelligence reports prepared by the research division’.

This public dispute between the two – taking place in daily newspapers, while Arafat was still governing the Palestinian Authority and the violent events continued – garnered a good deal of attention from the public, the media, and academia, as well as in the political arena; thus, AMAN was

55 Lavie, ‘Intelligence Activity in the Palestinian Arena’, pp.31–32. Yossi Kuperwasser, head of AMAN’s research division since 2002, completely rejects Lavie’s allegations and claims that the Al-Aqsa Intifada did not spontaneously break out but rather happened in a planned manner; that the ‘Strong Hand’ policy implemented by IDF (according to Lavie) was not the source of Palestinian rage; and that Lavie represents a ‘one-sided political orientation that ignores question marks and numerous events in contradiction to this approach’. See Yossi (Yossef) Kuperwasser, ‘On the Intelligence Assessment On the Eve of the Second Intifada: A Response to Lavie’s Article’ (in Hebrew), MABAT MALAM 52 (2008) p.36.


59 Similarly, for instance, Emanuel Sivan, an expert on Middle East studies, has also claimed that the Intifada was not pre-organized by Arafat; he instead argues that it spontaneously erupted, and that AMAN’s leaders ignored (and moreover, silenced) their subordinates’ professional views. (‘The Cork Danger’, as it was labeled by former AMAN director, Yehoshafat Harkabi, is a term used to describe a situation where the system’s director positions himself as the system’s sole representative before the government and by doing so seals the
once again thrown into the center of a political storm. Left-wing members of Knesset demanded the appointment of a parliamentary inquiry committee to examine the allegations of AMAN’s politicization, and expressed their concern that ‘professional and unbiased reports fall victim to political conspiracy’. In contrast, right-wing members of Knesset expressed their continued support of Gilad’s stance, although emphasizing that ‘it is reasonable that two high ranking AMAN officers will generate different assessments regarding Arafat’s strategies’.

Another aspect of intelligence activity at the time that triggered disagreement among former high ranking AMAN officers was AMAN’s transformation into an entity that took part, both directly and indirectly, in Israeli public diplomacy efforts, as part of the aforementioned approach of ‘intelligence activism’. One of this approach’s strong supporters was the former head of AMAN’s research division, Brigadier-General Yossi Kuperwasser, who was the subject of Ephraim Lavie’s fierce criticism. Lavie claims that under Kuperwasser’s command during the first half of the last decade, AMAN’s research division was transformed into a propagandist entity; it began to invest considerable energy, including intelligence materials laundering, in tarnishing Arafat’s reputation:

AMAN stepped beyond its designated boundaries of activity by joining the Cabinet’s public diplomacy campaign against Arafat and the Palestinian Authority. AMAN’s leadership (appointed echelon) perceived the act of joining in the government’s (elected body) public diplomacy efforts as a clear national interest and an integral part of war against terror... Research personnel developed the term ‘Intelligence for Incrimination’, and published unclassified documents against the Palestinian Authority and Arafat (such as the ‘White Book’).

AMAN’s public diplomacy efforts in Israel and worldwide were led then – as they still are, today – by the ‘Intelligence and Terrorism Information

bubbling bottleneck on which he is in charge.) See Emanuel Sivan, ‘What is Permitted to a Major-General’, a series of articles, Haaretz, 14 June 2004.


62Lavie, ‘Intelligence Activity in the Palestinian Arena’, p.32. On a different occasion, Lavie said: ‘Public diplomacy activity of any kind is not, under any circumstance, a role of the Intelligence Division. This [activity] is, undoubtedly, instrumental for the Cabinet’s public diplomacy, for instance in condemning Arafat and isolating him, however, this is a severe deviation from the Division’s designation, that harshly severs its credibility as a professional and objective entity. I believed in the past and still believe that it was a mistake to consent to the political echelon’s request to prepare a “White Book” on Arafat within the research division’s framework. I adamantly objected to it. Moreover, it may bring about a dynamic process of mutual distortion between the Intelligence officer and the Political leader’. See Yoav Stern, ‘An Unfounded Conception’, Haaretz, 13 June 2004.
Center’, established in 2001 following the Intifada’s outbreak. On its website, the center is defined as a center specializing in issues pertaining to intelligence and terrorism. The center’s publications are distributed online\(^6\) in a number of languages and via email distribution. However, this center is actually an unofficial and undeclared means of AMAN to disseminate its own messages, together with IDF’s and the State of Israel’s on matters such as Palestinian, Lebanese and global terrorism, worldwide anti-Semitism, the Iranian threat and more – all part of what AMAN labels ‘The Battle for Hearts and Minds’.

The close association between the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center and IDF’s intelligence corps is illustrated by the initial exclusivity the center received in the use of Palestinian documents captured by IDF.\(^6\)

Moreover, the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center is subordinate to the Israel Intelligence Heritage and Commemoration Center (IICC), an association whose members are veterans of Israeli intelligence organizations and which aims to promote (1) the commemoration of its members, and (2) cherish the intelligence heritage.

Among IDF’s intelligence corps, there were those who expressed their resistance to the intelligence’s use of the Information Center as a channel to disseminate information and assessments that IDF did not want to be directly identified with. Opponents among the intelligence corps asserted that the military intelligence should have no connections with an information center that mainly dealt with propaganda, as opposed to an objective and impartial professional analysis free of any political or ideological bias.\(^6\)

Yossi Kuperwasser, who served as the head of AMAN’s research division when the Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center was established, is – as stated before – a strong supporter of the ‘intelligence activism’ approach. Kuperwasser publicly addressed Efrain Lavie’s allegations, as part of their dispute on the pages of the Intelligence Community Veterans’ journal, MABAT MALAM:

AMAN is not an entity that can afford to position itself in an ivory tower of academia and research. It is the State of Israel’s National Intelligence Research Body and as such, hand in hand with the


\(^6\)These documents were used, much to AMAN’s satisfaction (and possibly also as a result of its encouragement and initiative), by newspaper reporters. In this way, for instance, in his 2002 book, ‘Authority Granted’, Ronen Bergman made intensive use of documents captured by IDF in the Territories to destroy Arafat’s and the Palestinian Authority’s image in the Israeli public eye, and to prove their high level of corruption and involvement in terrorism: Ronen Bergman, Authority Granted: Where Did We Make a Mistake? How has the Palestinian Authority Become an Assembly Line of Corruption and Terrorism (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Miskal – Yedioth Ahronoth Books and Chemed Books 2002).

requirement to generate a professional, objective and valuable intelligence assessment... it must provide intelligence ammunition required for warfare, provided that it is reliable and credible and meets proven criteria of quality... AMAN must provide reliable information for the State of Israel's military needs, a matter of highest importance in on-going confrontations, such as the one with the Palestinians. In my view, there is no entity other than AMAN that can do this better... AMAN has conducted an extensive learning process on the matter and made the structural adjustments to ensure that the activity regarding this field shall not be strained by the assessment task.66

Kuperwasser’s approach blended nicely with his ambition to increase intelligence’s relevance by strengthening AMAN’s ties with the political leadership.67 However, it was precisely this approach that led, according to Lavie’s allegation, to additional AMAN failures. This allegation was also confirmed by an internal inquiry committee established by AMAN for examining the intelligence assessments that preceded the unilateral Israeli disengagement from the Gaza Strip (2005), Hamas’ victory in the 2006 elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council and Hamas’ seizure of the Gaza Strip (2007).

The unilateral disengagement plan was formulated by the then Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, without consulting IDF or AMAN. However, once the plan became public, both the military and intelligence were required to offer

66Kuperwasser, ‘On the Intelligence Assessment On the Eve of the Second Intifada: A Response to Lavie’s Article’, pp.36–37. See in this context an article published by the Information Center’s manager, Dr Reuven Erlich (retired IDF Colonel), on the importance of intelligence as part of the ‘Battle for Hearts and Minds’. Erlich is indeed mindful of the difficulty surrounding the issue (i.e., the possibility of harming intelligence sources’ safety and information security, the politicization of intelligence and damaging research officers’ objectivity); however, he also suggests ways to minimize the risks. Erlich writes: ‘Intelligence must ensure that the aid it is offering in the Battle for Hearts and Minds area is intended for promotion of national goals in public consensus, to be cautious of becoming a means for promoting politicians’ political agendas and interests, and to make sure that this aid is focused on providing reliable information for the use of the Battle for Hearts and Minds and not to be dragged into manipulative use of Intelligence information’. See Reuven Erlich, The Contribution of Intelligence for the Battle for Hearts and Minds (in Hebrew), The Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center, 11 July 2007, pp.8–9.

67Accordingly, in 2007, Kuperwasser wrote the following as guest investigator in a Washington DC Research Center: ‘AMAN took steps to strengthen the partnership between the intelligence community and the decision-makers. One step was the development of a learning process that enabled AMAN to become a full-fledged member in the decision-making process. AMAN took upon itself the mission of offering policy recommendations to decision-makers (separate from the intelligence picture) and to enable the decision-makers to be more involved in the overall intelligence assessment’. See Yosef Kuperwasser, ‘Lessons from Israel’s Intelligence Reforms’, Analysis Paper, The Saban Center for Middle East Policy at The Brookings Institution, October 2007, p. XIII. <http://www.brookings.edu/~/media/Files/rc/papers/2007/10_intelligence_kuperwasser/10_intelligence_kuperwasser.pdf> (accessed 14 December 2012).
their support. The internal inquiry committee found that AMAN’s research division matched its assessments to Sharon’s alternating policy. As long as the latter rejected the unilateral disengagement idea by claiming that this would be construed as retreating amid battle, AMAN provided a comparable assessment. Following the political echelon’s decision on proceeding with this plan, AMAN provided reassuring assessments, at least orally. In this context, the committee found that AMAN used a double accounts’ system: AMAN’s written papers were intended for internal committees and future investigation committees, while oral statements of AMAN’s high ranking officers in meetings with the political decision-making echelon were adjusted to suit the audience, perhaps to please and appease them. However, these assessments were later rebutted and Hamas seized the Gaza Strip and considerably intensified the level of rocket attacks on southern Israeli civilian settlements. These turns of events were not anticipated by AMAN, much like Hamas’s victory in the elections (although AMAN did predict that Hamas would attain ‘a nice achievement’).  

### AMAN and Other Arenas of Activity

Although intelligence regarding the Palestinian issue has been the area most prone to political distortion, similar sensitivities have been recorded in other AMAN arenas of activity, predominantly the area of ‘Intelligence for Peace’, and for good reason. ‘Intelligence for Peace’ suffers more than any other area of AMAN activity from the risk of being dragged into political controversies. In the words of former Cabinet Secretary, Elyakim Rubinstein: ‘In war all are, by and large, united, while surrounding the peace process, various opinions exist, along with many differences of opinion’.  

The IDF’s dominance in negotiations for peace (termed ‘Diplomacy in Uniform’) has been a characteristic of Israel since its establishment. This was the case in the political discourse between the State of Israel and its neighboring countries after the War of Independence and the Yom Kippur War, as part of the perception that national security was – and still is – the main consideration in peace agreements and in diplomatic arrangements.  

Similar circumstances surrounded the formulation of the peace agreement between Israel and Egypt in the late 1970s, although both IDF and AMAN (but not the Mossad) were excluded from the secret meetings that

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68 Akiva Eldar, ‘Cast Lead’ [Gaza War], Haaretz, 10 January 2009. <http://www.haaretz.co.il/hasite/objects/pages/PrintArticle.jhtml?itemNo=1053813> (accessed 10 January 2009). According to Lavie’s allegations, another reason behind these AMAN failures was its constant neglect of social–economic research – an allegation also warded off by Kuperwasser.  

69 Rubinstein, Paths of Peace, p. 240.  


71 As part of the Mossad’s ‘special operations’ (or in its full title – ‘The Mossad (Institute) for Intelligence and Special Operations’), it occasionally maintained secret contacts, state-related and diplomatic too, with countries with which the State of Israel did not have peace agreements, such as Egypt and Jordan. See in this context the testimony of Ephraim Halevy,
led to the 1977 visit of the Egyptian president, Sadat, in Jerusalem and eventually set in motion the entire peace process. In fact, Motta Gur, the then Chief of General Staff, later wrote that because of this exclusion AMAN continued to see Egypt as hostile, and AMAN’s reports alerted the Cabinet against an imminent war with Egypt, raising concerns that Sadat’s dramatic declarations in the days prior to his historic visit to Israel are none other than an Egyptian ploy. On the other hand, Shlomo Gazit, AMAN’s director at the time, portrays in his memoirs a somewhat different picture, according to which AMAN identified, in the months preceding Sadat’s visit, positive signs in the Egyptian arena (these signs being a possible indication of future peace). However, Gazit also put blame on the country’s leaders for impeding AMAN’s activity by excluding it from the process; years later, he said: ‘I knew nothing on this matter. Menachem Begin [the Israeli Prime Minister at the time] excluded me from the contacts, in fact I was kept in the dark’.74

Interestingly, following Sadat’s announcement on his intention to visit Jerusalem, AMAN prepared an assessment paper regarding the Egyptian president’s motivations, considerations and expectations. This assessment paper was accompanied by an additional paper raising options for an Israeli response. Gazit describes this second paper as infuriating Prime Minister Begin, who reportedly said: ‘How is it that the intelligence have the audacity to tell the Israeli government what to do?’ Begin then instructed Gazit, in an unprecedented act, to destroy every copy of the (already distributed) paper.75

In the months following Sadat’s visit, IDF and AMAN involvement in the meetings that led to peace was minimal, and this was possibly down to Begin’s non-military and civilian background.76 In addition, it is likely that in

who later became the Mossad’s director: Efraim Halevy, ‘Intelligence and the Decision Makers’ in Gilnoa and Lapid (eds.) Masterpiece, p. 221.

72Motta (Mordechai) Gur, Chief of General Staff, 1974–1967 (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Maa'rachot, IDF, Ministry of Defense Publication 1998) pp.295–296, 304–305. Apparently AMAN’s reports were the reason behind Gur’s public expression of his concerns of an Egyptian strategic ploy in an interview published in the Yediot Aharonot Newspaper on 15 November 1977, less than a week after Sadat’s dramatic speech before the Egyptian Parliament where he announced on his wish to visit in Jerusalem and only four days before his actual visit. The Prime Minister and Minister of Defense expressed their rage regarding this interview and even threatened to dismiss Gur from office. Nevertheless, they secretly knew that Gur was unaware of the preliminary contacts with Egypt that were mediated by Morocco. See: Gur, Chief of the General Staff, pp.308–321.

73Shlomo Gazit, ‘Intelligence and the Peace Process in Israel’ in Carmel (ed.) Intelligence for Peace, pp.101–118.


75Gazit, ‘Intelligence and the Peace Process in Israel’, p. 112.

76Sources close to Begin claimed that despite his high appreciation of the intelligence and the fact that he used to eagerly read intelligence outputs, Begin was not familiar with the intelligence work, did not know how to effectively benefit from the intelligence system in the negotiation process and did not know how to use it as an instrument for formulating his policy within the framework of the diplomatic process. See Michael, Between Militarism and Statesmanship in Israel, pp.97, 108.
this case, too, the same circumstances that led state leaders to occasionally exclude the intelligence from their work, influenced them here. Such circumstances include the importance of maintaining the objectivity of intelligence assessments; the perception that the military and the intelligence service, accustomed to identifying threats, might be skeptical about any information pertaining to more positive opportunities; and finally, the fear of leaks. The latter is a particular concern, putting at risk the confidentiality of intelligence sources, and also – as illustrated before – opening intelligence to abuse by political parties, who might use it for their own ends.

Nevertheless, later on – when peace negotiations between the two countries entered the defining stages of the process – intelligence involvement and influence gradually increased. Following the completion of the process and signing of the peace agreement, AMAN was asked to pay close attention to the level of the agreement’s implementation, and in particular the Egyptian regime’s stability. AMAN’s failure (similar to all other western intelligence services) to predict the Arab people’s uprising during the Spring of 2011, and consequently the removal of the Egyptian president Mubarak from rule, illustrates, yet again, the shortcomings of intelligence services in predicting social developments.

Again, AMAN was excluded from the talks preceding the second peace agreement that Israel signed with an Arab state, Jordan (1994). In fact, a year prior to this agreement – and immediately after the first Oslo Accord – AMAN’s research division indicated that Jordan would refuse to sign a separate agreement with Israel until there was a breakthrough in the Syrian front and an interim Israeli–Palestinian agreement signed. Efraim Halevie, then a high-ranking Mossad official (who was later appointed Mossad director), wrote, with regards to this:

If Prime Minister Rabin would have considered the intelligence assessment, he would not have allowed the ‘talks games’ with King Hussein to take place at all. And if this should have been the case, it is possible that today we would not have a peace agreement with Jordan. Furthermore, it is doubtful whether Jordan, in the absence of peace agreement with Israel, would have taken the stance it took during the War in Iraq [The Second Golf War]. It is reasonable to assume that the entire course of Middle Eastern history would have been completely different.

AMAN has also produced, through the years, state-related assessments with regards to the Syrian arena, including during the rounds of talks that were held between the countries in the 1990s and 2000s. Similar to the assessments produced regarding the Palestinian arena, internal AMAN disagreements

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emerged regarding the Syrian arena; some of these became public. In recent years, prior to the weakening of Bashar al-Assad’s regime, AMAN (but not the Mossad) assessed that al-Assad’s intentions are sincere, and noted the positive knock-on effect of a possible agreement with Syria on other processes in the region. Thus, AMAN, in effect, recommended the political echelon to make diplomatic overtures to Syria. The political echelon, however, rejected this recommendation. Often, the media played a role in making public this disagreement between intelligence and the Cabinet.

Disagreements between AMAN and the Cabinet have been recorded regarding the Lebanese arena too, when both the IDF and AMAN portrayed horrific scenarios prior to Israel’s retreat from the Israeli Security Zone in Southern Lebanon, an area that was under IDF control for 18 years after the Lebanon War. However, Ehud Barak, the Prime Minister and Minister of Defense at the time, included in his 1999 electoral campaign an explicit commitment to the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon; he adhered to his plan, despite IDF’s fierce opposition. Consequent to this, Barak reduced IDF participation in processes preceding the withdrawal’s implementation (May 2000). At this point in time, IDF and AMAN attempts to influence Israel’s policy had reached an unprecedented climax – particularly regarding matters of heightened political and public sensitivity – as well as the tension surrounding Cabinet–military/intelligence relations. Barak’s active opposition to IDF’s firm position was, too, unprecedented and was possibly

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80For instance, in 2004, AMAN director Aharon Ze’evi-Farkash, and his subordinate, Yossi Kuperwasser, head of AMAN’s research division, disagreed over the sincerity of intentions regarding the peace process of Syrian President, Bashar al-Assad. See: Alon, ‘Mofaz: Major-General Gilad Gave Correct Assessments’.


82AMAN assessed that the situation in the Lebanese border after the planned retreat would be much worse than the situation before, and issued a warning on a high likelihood of frequent terror attacks, these to be executed by Lebanese Palestinians trained by Hizballah against Israel along the border. See Amos Gilboa, ‘Coping with Several Intelligence Challenges: Lebanon as a Case Study’ (in Hebrew), *Iyunim be-Modi’in* [Observations on Intelligence] A/1 (2007) p. 16.

83It should be noted that although Israel’s unilateral withdrawal had negative consequences for Israel (i.e., Hizballah’s massive strengthening and the organization’s establishment along the Israeli–Lebanese border, enabling it to abduct Israeli soldiers in 2000 and 2006), AMAN’s assessments predicting a tense Northern border have been refuted to a great extent. (However, it should be noted, in support of AMAN, that its assessment was flawed by the fact of its exclusion by the Cabinet from the withdrawal plans.)

84The public battle in support of the withdrawal was led by an extra-parliamentary public organization titled ‘Four Mothers’, established in 1997 by mothers of soldiers serving in Lebanon. The organization gained tremendous support, and as such wielded a huge influence on the decision-making process. Nevertheless, the organization’s opponents claimed that its
motivated by his high self-esteem and his rich military and intelligence background (Barak served, inter alia, as AMAN director during the 1980s and as Chief of General Staff in the 1990s during the first Oslo Agreement and the peace process with Jordan).  

Complications with regards to the intelligence–Cabinet relationship regarding Lebanon was already apparent; it had been there since the very beginning of the IDF’s 18-year presence in Lebanon. The massacre that took place at the beginning of the Lebanon War (September 1982) in the Sabra and Shatila Palestinian refugee camps (by Christian Lebanese Phalanges, Israel’s allies at the time) caused Israel to sink deeper into the ‘Lebanese mud’. IDF’s lack of intervention in ending the massacre caused heated public and political debate in Israeli society and resulted in the establishment of a national investigation committee – the Kahan Commission. The latter’s determination regarding AMAN’s activity was that officers of AMAN’s research division:

... did not receive preliminary information regarding the [Israeli] decision to allow the Phalanges to enter the camps. Consequently, this department was unable to prepare the specific assessments that may have been expected of it prior to the Phalanges’ entry to camps.  

However, while AMAN’s professional echelon was pardoned, the committee did not accept the account of AMAN’s director, Yehoshua Sagie, according to which, he, too, was in the dark with reference to the Israeli decision. The committee determined that Sagie exhibited:

... unresponsiveness and utter indifference, and completely closed his eyes and ears regarding the matter for which the head of IDF’s intelligence arm was liable and expected to keep his eyes wide open and to listen carefully to all that was being said and decided.

activity encouraged defeatism and demoralized IDF soldiers. See the organization’s web site <http://www.4mothers.org.il/> (accessed 14 December 2012).

A clue to Barak’s future relationship with the intelligence services evident in statements he made in 1998, prior to his election into office: ‘It is not only justifiable, it is possibly required that a political leader will utilize his intuition and understanding, his ability to evaluate circumstances, for the purpose of making decisions on current state-related issues… It is better to do so within an intimate, continuous and trustworthy dialogue with Intelligence officers. Whereas, intelligence officers should be watchful not to be confounded and should keep in mind that they are not politicians and their responsibilities end where political decision-making begins… One should acknowledge that making this distinction is not easily accomplished’. See The Israeli Intelligence Community – Where To? p. 23.

From 1976, the Mossad was responsible for building the alliance with Christian Lebanese leaders, and played a highly important role in the design of Israeli policy towards Lebanon.


Ibid., pp. 96–98.
Thus, criticism is elicited not only in the case of the intelligence’s over-involvement in decision-making processes – and in IDF’s activity – but also in situations where there is too little involvement, and a lack of warning offered on any flawed IDF activity. Sagie claimed that his view on the issue – hence his rejection of cooperation with the Phalanges – was ignored for a long period of time; and, in light of the balance of power in the Israeli leadership, and the elevated level of dominance of Ariel Sharon – who served as the Minister of Defense at the time and favored the Mossad’s stance of attributing high trustworthiness to the Phalanges – he had long since waived his right to voice his opinion. Nevertheless, the committee determined, in this instance, that the right to remain silent did not extend to intelligence officers, and recommended Sagie’s dismissal from office.89

Discussion and Conclusions

We opened this paper by describing the AMAN research division’s recent activity in investigating foreign left-wing organizations which are actively generating de-legitimization of the State of Israel in the west. Although extreme in nature, this is merely one example of many, illustrating the unique Israeli case where soldiers in active service are engaged in intelligence collection and research regarding controversial political and public issues. The new initiative stirred a good deal of criticism, and for good reason. Critics maintained that soldiers should not be active in issues of a political nature and pondered on the following questions:

- Who determines what constitutes de-legitimization, and where is the line separating de-legitimization from legitimate criticism?
- Why aren’t issues of this kind (as well as others) investigated exclusively by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Mossad or academia?
- Does AMAN have any advantage over these entities (even more so in cases when the issue is unclassified, and where there is no advantage for covert collection measures)?90
- Finally, is this a true or fictional threat; is it serving a political–ideological need rather than a national one?

This paper has depicted AMAN’s unique status within the Israeli intelligence community, as well as the unique position of IDF in Israeli society and politics. In addition, we have reviewed a series of examples, in

89Ibid., pp. 99–100, 123.
90See for instance an unclassified however highly specific paper written by an independent research organization (although politically biased) and reviews the main organizations, mostly Islamic and/or Palestinian, active for boycotting Israel in the UK and their modes of action: Ehud Rosen, Mapping the Organizational Sources of the Global De-legitimization Campaign against Israel in the UK (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs – JCPA 2010); <http://www.jcpa.org/text/Mapping_Delegitimization.pdf> (accessed 14 December 2012).
the course of 65 years of Israeli independence, of military intelligence activity regarding controversial political issues. Special emphasis has been placed on the peace process with the Palestinians, predominantly during the last two decades, as well as on the peace process with Egypt and Jordan. The fundamental tendency towards AMAN’s high level of involvement in decision-making processes in Israel, which has been on the rise in recent years, is accompanied by long-established complexities of the intelligence–Cabinet relationship in particular and the military–civilian relationship in general – complexities that have assumed a unique, and on occasion even radical shape, in light of the unique security, political and social reality in Israel.

As previously detailed, similar to every democratic state, in Israel, too, the military is subordinate to the political echelon – an elected stratum with a political agenda that has received the support of the majority of the public (but not the entire public) at the time of the election (but not necessarily afterwards, when popularity tends to wane). In addition, we have discussed the fact that the principle according to which IDF is the people’s and the state’s army and therefore extra-political is sacred – at least in theory – in the Israeli public. The possible contradiction between these two basic principles is expressed in the state’s Basic Law regarding the army (1976): ‘IDF is the army of the state. The army is subject to the authority of the government’. This contradiction is exposed mainly when the military executes lawful, but controversial, tasks. Nonetheless, throughout the state’s history, the number of open military insubordinations has been very small, and the military echelon’s loyalty to the political echelon is usually not in doubt.

A series of military regulations were devised to maintain the separation between military and politics in IDF’s lower military ranks, most of whom are soldiers in compulsory active service (ages 18–21); for instance, political activity in military bases has been banned. Stricter restrictions have been imposed on the political activity of soldiers in active service (and soldiers during active reserve military duty), even when they are away from a military setting (soldiers are permitted to join a political party; however, they are prohibited from participating in political demonstrations or to sign petitions of political nature). Moreover, military decrees have determined that

… a soldier is prohibited from public expression, whether orally or in writing, regarding military or political issues… A soldier shall not sign a petition of political nature or one representing a political party… A soldier shall not initiate any contact with the highest ranking state echelon without Office of Chief of General Staff’s authorization.93

92Yigal Yadin, IDF’s second Chief of General Staff, has defined the citizens of the State of Israel as soldiers who are on vacation from the military 11 months a year.
And finally, as previously mentioned, military decrees have specifically emphasized:

> A soldier shall act in such a manner that excludes from his military activity his personal opinions on issues external to his areas of responsibility, authority and profession, and particularly his personal opinions on public controversies of political, social or ideological nature.\(^9^4\)

However, the activity of the military in general, regarding issues of a political nature and public controversial issues, may elicit misgivings among IDF's soldiers.\(^9^5\) Even Ben-Gurion, whose rejection of military and politics intermingling has been previously discussed, determined that ‘a soldier has the freedom of thought much like any other citizen of the state’.\(^9^6\) For this reason, assigning AMAN soldiers in general and its research division in particular the role of Israel’s national intelligence assessor, including assessments regarding state-related issues, is comparable to placing obstacles in a blind man’s path.

Assigning the role of state-related intelligence research to a civil intelligence entity, such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Mossad (the latter can also be assigned the role of Israel’s national intelligence assessor) may solve this problem. This solution, however, does not entirely preclude the civil entity from coping with similar challenges and those problems currently faced by AMAN’s researchers of state-related intelligence, as previously discussed in this paper. Such problems include fear of political bias; attempts – conscious or otherwise – to justify a political leader’s point of view; failure to maintain the principles of professionalism and objectivity, the cornerstones of intelligence work; and infatuation with the subject of research, particularly regarding ‘Intelligence for Peace’.

These problems may be solved, although not entirely, by the implementation of a list of supervisory and control measures to ensure intelligence research’s independence; by institution-based solutions that will facilitate brainstorming – intra-organizational, inter-organizational (promoting pluralism in intelligence) and extra-organizational (i.e., with academia) – and value professionalism over seniority; by increasing intelligence officials’ awareness to the obstacles in their paths presented by the national assessment task, and to the need for a clear separation between knowledge, assessment and point of view; and lastly by maintaining all other

\(^{93}\)IDF General Staff’s Command no. 8.0105, ‘Public Activity of Military Persons, Public Expressions and Contact with Journalists, the Public and Senior National Leaders’, 30 August 1990.

\(^{94}\)IDF General Staff’s Command, ‘Public Activity of Military Persons, Public Expressions and Contact with Journalists’.

\(^{95}\)For example, relatively few instances of insubordination, when soldiers refused to serve in the West Bank and Gaza Strip or to vacate illegal Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

\(^{96}\)Ben-Gurion, *Army and Security*, p. 141.
qualities of the ideal intelligence officer, i.e., modesty, open-mindedness and the ability to generate ‘out-of-the-box’ solutions.

These recommendations should be implemented – and in part, some are already implemented – even in AMAN. Although, AMAN’s basic characteristics may be to its disadvantage, for instance, (1) the young age of its soldiers – a fact that occasionally impedes the research maturity which is so important for the ‘ideal intelligence officer’ – and (2) the high personnel turnover (resulting from the nature of military service) which hinders their professional development. One should add to these basic characteristics (1) the tendency in the last decade to transform AMAN into an active and involved intelligence entity, which influences decision-making processes in the State of Israel regarding the entire spectrum of national security and state-related issues, and (2) AMAN’s recruitment to the national public diplomacy campaign. AMAN’s senior officers – who are, at any rate, in regular contact with policy-makers and the political echelon – are not sole partners in these tasks. Instead, military intelligence officers and soldiers, whose intelligence outputs have a tremendous influence on decision-making in Israel, are partners in these tasks too. Thus, and in contrast to military decrees and the spirit of IDF’s founders, AMAN soldiers are active on political and state-related issues and are in contact, though indirect, with the high-ranking political echelon and influence their decisions.

As previously mentioned, the call for removing state-related research from the hands of military intelligence – or at least abolishing AMAN’s in-practice-monopoly over this area – is not new. Over the years, inquiry committees have been nominated to examine the issue and investigation committees appointed to examine intelligence failures; and these committees, as well as academia, have repeatedly made the same recommendations. They all list hindsight evaluations – AMAN’s assessment failures – as the main reason that necessitates a structural reform in the intelligence community. The reason given by this paper, on the other hand, is to prevent soldiers from becoming active on issues of political and state-related sensitivities.

Nevertheless, as mentioned before, the high level of dominance of the military (who most likely object to this recommended reform), as well as inertia, has prevented any progress in this direction. Perhaps the time is ripe, and in Israel’s seventh decade of existence – when the threat on the state’s survival has nearly disappeared, and despite the fact that Israel’s national security problems still require intensive activity – the dominance of the military in general and intelligence in particular will be significantly reduced, at least with regards to non-military matters. If executed wisely and gradually, abolishing IDF’s and AMAN’s monopoly may increase the effectiveness of decision-making processes in Israel regarding national security and state-related issues; it may minimize – but not completely eliminate – the probable risk for flawed, state-related intelligence assessments; it may facilitate AMAN’s reinvestment of the major part of its energy, resources and attention into classic military activities; and, returning
to this paper’s focus, it may reduce, and in the long-run abolish, the direct
activity of hundreds of AMAN’s research division soldiers (and indirectly
thousands of others in the entire military intelligence) on state-related issues
at the heart of Israeli political debate. These soldiers loyally fulfill their tasks
– but it is highly recommended that this task be executed by others, those not
in uniform.

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