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DECISION-MAKING IN ISRAEL: PARTNERSHIP AND INTERACTION BETWEEN THE POLITICAL AND MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT

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Policy vs. Intelligence

A state's political and military decision-making processes depend a great deal on the proper functioning of the intelligence system and the nature of its relationship with the political and military leadership.

In practice it is totally legitimate for a prime minister, a minister of defense, or military commanders not to accept what their intelligence analysts tell them, when there are other factors that must also be considered. These sometimes involve a basic policy or strategy. For example, in 1982 Israel undertook the Peace for Galilee operation in Lebanon not because of the intelligence which was supplied, although intelligence played an important role, but because of the basic policy of

the political leadership of Israel at the time. With a different political leadership such as that which Israel had two years later, we probably would not have started the war in Lebanon. In fact, both decisions would have been perfectly legitimate, but the example shows that with one set of leadership -- Prime Minister Menachem Begin, Defense Minister Ariel Sharon, and Israel Defense Forces Chief of Staff Rafael Eitan -- we would have had one decision, while with a different leadership in the same positions -- Shimon Peres, Yitzhak Rabin and Moshe Levy -- we would have had a very different decision based on the same intelligence.

There are internal considerations that have nothing to do with the

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enemy. How do you rate your own forces -- their morale, training, state of alertness, state of readiness? There are internal political considerations. The prime minister considers how a decision would affect his position as a political leader. Will it disrupt the coalition or, on the contrary, will it strengthen it? To decide not to go to war or to go to war because of internal political or party politics in a country, be it Israel or any other country, is a totally legitimate consideration.

There are also economic considerations. Can the country afford this military operation at a certain moment? On the contrary, should we do it in order to solve some economic problems? The continuation of the Lavi project was clearly a decision of this type.

Intelligence Analysts, Journalists, and Scholars

Intelligence analysts have two other counterparts doing very similar work -- journalists and scholars. There is really no major difference between the Israeli intelligence desk dealing with Lebanese-Syrian affairs and Tel Aviv University's specialist in Lebanese-Syrian affairs, or Yidiot Ahronot's Middle Eastern Arab expert. These three people may write very similar reports, but for different purposes and thus for different target audiences. Perhaps the journalist's influence on decision-makers is greater than that of the military intelligence expert.

Yet there are major differences between these three. The military intelligence officer prepares his analyses for a single customer. His findings are not for public consumption. No one hears his name or knows what he writes. Another difference is that if a university expert is wrong, nothing will happen. He will be invited again to comment on Israel radio or television or he will write a new paper to be published by his university. At best, someone will write a footnote in reporting on what he has written in the past, saying that he was proven wrong. A journalist has it even easier. He will always have a

new headline and nobody remembers what was in yesterday's paper. However if the intelligence officer writes a paper which proves to be wrong on a major cardinal issue, he is going to be "hanged" -- in some regimes literally. In Israel he is only fired.

This illustrates the special nature of the relationship between the decision-maker and his intelligence analyst. The prime minister has to work with all of the ministries and once a year he may need a paper on the social problems of Israel, on the growth of Aids cases in Israel, and many other subjects. No special relationship is required between the prime minister or the minister of defense and those people in the various ministries who would provide this type of information. There is only one exception and that is his relationship with the intelligence community; there the character and shape of relations is as important as the opinions, the analyses and the evaluations themselves. In this area the informal relationship is no less important than the formal relationship between the two.

The Marketing of Intelligence

As in any other sphere of life, intelligence has to be marketed. It has to reach the consumer. Intelligence is good only if it is being delivered, and delivered in time; if it is up-to-date and reaches the right consumer. The secretary to the prime minister is not good enough; it has to get to the prime minister in person. In addition, it has to be presented in the right way so that the consumer is capable of comprehending and evaluating it.

In order for intelligence to reach and to be understood and accepted by the decision-maker, there are three major problems to overcome. First, the decision-maker has to understand the importance of an intelligence report, something which is not always so obvious. Second, the director of intelligence has to develop a kind of relationship where the decision-maker will feel that something is missing if he leaves his office without having received

his daily intelligence report. He should feel that this is something vital to him, and it is bad if he does not. The third problem involves the personal chemistry between two individuals -- the decision-maker and the director of intelligence.

The Education of Decision-Makers

Such relationships are less of a problem for a military commander. Beginning with his first NCO course, the military decision-maker has learned the importance of working closely with intelligence officers. As he continues his military career, he goes through many more courses where people are trained to appreciate the importance of intelligence and, no less important, to understand normal routine staff duties. They learn how to work with a staff involving people who are experts in different areas who all supply the commander with information.

When considering the political leadership, once in a while there is a prime minister, such as Mr. Rabin, who came up the military ladder. Such political leaders do not have a problem from that perspective. I know because I served under three prime ministers, one of whom was Rabin. The other two did not have such training. So the civilians are not used to it, they do not know and appreciate its importance. They grew up in a totally different system. Their values and interests are totally different and all of a sudden they have to face responsibilities which they may not be properly trained or prepared for.

While it is impossible to send our civilian political leadership for training at a national staff college, it might be possible to at least create such training facilities for the prime minister's staff. In many cases these are civil servants who, when younger and serving at a lower echelon, could take the time for such training and benefit greatly.

Second, the civilian decision-maker and his staff should be invited to visit the intelligence community, its different institutions and installations. Such a visit should not wait for an emergency.

Third, it is important to ensure that a representative of the intelligence community is on the decision-maker's intimate staff. Usually the decision-makers very much want such people because they are so good, and it is the director of intelligence who is reluctant to give up such people. Unfortunately, sometimes the director does not understand the incredible importance and value of having the right man there, who can be of great service to both parties.

On his part, the decision-maker has to understand his very important responsibility towards his intelligence system. Intelligence cannot work in a vacuum. The intelligence community must know what the decision-maker's concerns and interests are so as to better know what to look for. Information gathering is not an overnight process. In many cases it takes a year or more to establish the collection mechanism required to supply the answers, so it is important to know the main interests of the decision-makers as soon as possible.

Furthermore, the prime minister as decision-maker must realize that he too is a source of information. He must never assume that if he knows something already, that his intelligence chief knows it too. For example, prior to Sa'adat's visit to Jerusalem in November 1977, there was the Dayan-Tohami meeting in Morocco. The intelligence analyst dealing with Egyptian affairs needed to know about such a meeting because otherwise he might provide incorrect analyses. Or when a European foreign minister holds meetings with the Israeli prime minister or foreign minister, it should be remembered that he has very close relations with some very major Arab countries. What he said must be disseminated back to the intelligence community.

Questions asked of the intelligence community must be very clear and specific. The community tries to pinpoint the EEI -- the Essential Elements of Intelligence -- the real problems that are bothering the political and military establishments. If these are not clearly

explained, the answers can never be successfully provided.

Intelligence is a process that requires constant feedback. The decision-maker should ask the intelligence analyst for broader explanations if his two-line summary was not clear enough. I have known prime ministers who would ask two or three questions about our reports almost every day, and others who did not ask one single question all year. Something is very wrong if we are not asked any questions.

The Rewards of Being an Intelligence Analyst

It should be remembered that intelligence analysts are people. They work for very modest salaries. They do not catch the public eye like journalists or academics. Their primary source of satisfaction is to feel that they are doing good and important work and to hear a word of appreciation once in a while, not only from their immediate superior but from the highest authority. If asked to prepare a special report, they will grumble: "I had to spend the whole night preparing this document for the prime minister," but this is exactly what makes them the happiest. Decision-makers should never hesitate to ask for more work from their intelligence people, because this is perhaps the only source of satisfaction they may have.

During my five years as director of intelligence, almost once a month we had some sort of crisis on a Saturday. It became almost routine that I would get a phone call at 8 o'clock in the morning informing me that something had happened. Then I would call my personal aide and ask him to convene a meeting at 10 o'clock in my office and have the staff prepare all the documents for the briefing. I would always insist, "please remember, it is Saturday, it is summer, people are going with their families to the beach. I don't want you to invite anyone else but Colonel A, B, and C -- those directly involved with this briefing." Yet when I arrived at my office at 10 o'clock, I would find some twenty-five people present. Why?

Because it is one of the proudest moments of their lives to say they had to cancel their Shabbat plans because they were called up for a meeting. So the decision-maker should never hesitate or have any reservations about ordering extra work from the intelligence community.

The Personal Chemistry Factor

Finally there is the question of personal chemistry. Between two people who should have a close relationship, chemistry is of extreme importance, and there is no way of solving this problem if there is no chemistry. You may be the best intelligence expert or analyst, but if the personal chemistry is wrong, the boss will not want to see you. But this is not just a personal problem, the whole decision-making process is affected. So if that chemistry does not exist, both sides should have the courage to understand it and arrange for the replacement of the director of intelligence.

The most important feature of that chemistry is direct personal contact. No relationship should be based only on written reports. Chemistry also means access to the military or political leadership literally 24 hours a day. If there is something really important, you should not be worried by his reaction if you wake him at 3 a.m. It means always having the right and the possibility to speak directly to the prime minister, to the minister of defense, or to the chief of staff, and not have to go through an intermediary, through one of his personal aides who may misrepresent the case or the problem.

Finally, the director of intelligence should be at least the one person who has the right to raise negative or unpopular opinions. If you have a political or military leader who will not allow so-called opposition positions coming from his intelligence service, then the whole system will be in trouble. If I would be afraid to say something which the leader may not like and worry that I may be fired or replaced, then this is a catastrophe. It could be

agreed that I would only speak this way in a very intimate meeting, or even just between the two of us, and not to speak up when the full government is sitting and you have twenty-five ministers in the room. But the intelligence director must have the full right of expressing his opinion in some way.

Structural Problems in the System

In Israel, unlike other countries, military intelligence is responsible for preparing the national intelligence estimate. One of the handicaps of this system is that the director of military intelligence comes under the minister of defense who comes under the prime minister. This means that theoretically he should have no access to the prime minister. But can we allow that the man who is responsible for the national intelligence estimate does not have access to the prime minister? I had two or three cases when I presented a certain position to the chief of staff and my position was not accepted. Then I had a similar discussion with the minister of defense and I was overruled again. Now I had a big dilemma -- to brief the prime minister or not. I knew that it was quite possible that when this problem was brought up before the prime minister, not only would I not be present, but I was afraid that my position would not even be considered and the prime minister would not even be informed of those aspects about which I was concerned. I remember that I used the intelligence man on the prime minister's staff at least two or three times by alerting him that "if this issue is brought up before the prime minister, be aware that: a) I was against it, and b) I was against it for the following reasons." In all of those cases my position prevailed, largely because the prime minister's way of looking at things was already comprehensive and different. I did not like the fact that I had to do it, but this is an inherent part of our very special Israeli system.

Because of the importance of the position, I believe that the director of military

intelligence should be nominated by the government or at least, like the chief of staff, the nomination should be approved by the government. In all recent cases the nomination has been the decision of the minister of defense, who brought it before the prime minister. But it may be different tomorrow. Legally the chief of staff may fire the head of intelligence and replace him with the commander of a tank corps, because he is a good friend of his, and we may have the worst possible man for the job.

Open Channels to the Leader

The head of intelligence, the head analyst, is never the real expert. He is the director of the whole system. I would bring the real expert with me to every meeting dealing with a certain subject. One reason I did this was because I thought that this was the most important reward I could offer to that staff specialist, to have a chance to go back to his family and tell them that yesterday he was at a cabinet meeting with the prime minister. Another reason is that when there is a discussion, one can never know what problems may be raised. Someone may ask a question that I would not be able to answer, but the expert there could provide the right information. A third reason involves the kind of input such an expert may give. He may see things during the discussion that no one else sees, that an important point is being overlooked.

Just before the collapse of the Shah's regime in Iran, while I was still the director of intelligence, I met our ambassador to Iran at the time, Uri Lubrani, in March 1978. He told me that he was extremely worried about what was going on in Iran. It so happened that a few weeks later I had a meeting with some CIA people and told them that our ambassador was extremely concerned about the situation there and that unless the Shah took the right steps, it was going to be too late. They thanked me and promised to bring it up to their own experts. At a

later stage I met the Iranian desk officer of the CIA and asked him if it was his advice that President Carter had accepted. He said it was not, that he briefed the head of the Middle Eastern desk, who briefed Admiral Turner, the head of the CIA, who briefed the President. He was not even present at Admiral Turner's briefing. He had never seen the President and was totally against what had been decided. This is something I have never forgotten. Not every director feels strong and confident enough to bring his experts because he may have the feeling that by doing so people will think that he is not good enough.

There is also another side to this problem. Not every decision-maker will allow such experts from the lower echelons to be present. He may limit the meeting to only cabinet ministers.

The Limitations of Intelligence Analysts

The limitations of intelligence analysts must be recognized. While it is certainly true that they are all experts and specialists on their respective countries, as long as they are dealing with facts, they are wonderful. But when it comes to analyzing decisions that the other side would make, we are asking a young Ph.D., a young 30-year-old major, who has never done anything except read books and papers, who has never been responsible for anything, to put himself in the shoes of a king, a president, or a prime minister. Can his reasoning mirror the reasoning of Mr. Sadat?

We once had an officer who was the number one expert on Jordan. He was a legend. There was very little that this man did not know about Jordan. Once there occurred a time when he faced a terrible tragedy. In Jordan the military had lost a stock of mines -- maybe 20,000 mines. And they brought the officer responsible for it to trial, they thought

that he had sold them or something. Now our analyst knew exactly where those mines were and he was in a dilemma as to what to do about it. But he was a terrible analyst when it came to reading King Hussein's decisions because that was a level of experience and imagination which he could not reach.

What to Do with a Pollard

During my five-year term of service, I encountered some twenty potential Pollards. A report would arrive saying that someone was offering his services and, in all the cases that reached me, as a volunteer. This involved both Jews and non-Jews. There were several cases when the offer came from a non-Jew who was a very strong supporter of Israel, who believed, in one case, for very strong Christian religious considerations, that it was his responsibility to help Israel. My answer was always: "Don't touch it." Perhaps if someone offered me access to the personal file of President Assad I might have given it a second thought, but the answer was always to stay away. Now there is, of course, a grey zone. For example, if someone comes and says that he works for a private foreign company doing the plumbing work at an airfield in Saudi Arabia and here is a photocopy of the plans, I would take it. I would make sure to tell this man that we do not want him to take any risk, but if it involved a civilian company and without any risk, I would take it.

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