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Confronting the Intelligence Fiasco of the Yom Kippur War

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Zvi Zamir and Efrat Mass, *Be-‘enayim pekuhot: rosh ha-Mosad matri’a: Ha-im Yišra’el maqshivah?* [With Open Eyes] (Or Yehuda: Kinneret, Zmora-Bitan, Dvir, 2011), 251 pp. ISBN 978-96-55-52134-4 [Hebrew]

Arieh Shalev, *Kishalon ve-hatslahah be-hatra’ah: ha‘arakhat ha-modi’in likerat milhemet Yom ha-Kipurim* [Success and Failure in Vigilance: The Israeli Intelligence Assessments Towards the Yom Kippur War] (Tel Aviv: Ma’arachot, 2006), 318 pp. ISBN 965-0513183 [Hebrew]

Eli Zeira, *Mitos mul metsi’ut: milhemet Yom-ha-Kipurim: kishlonot u-lekahim* [Myth versus Reality: The October 1973 War: Failures and Lessons] (Tel Aviv: Yedioth Ahronoth, 2004), 351 pp. ISBN 965-5118150 [Hebrew]

Yoel Ben-Porat, *Neila* [Locked-On] (Tel Aviv: Idanim, 1991), 175 pp. ISBN 965-2481173 [Hebrew]

Agranat Commission, *Dua’h Va’adat Agranat* [The Agranat Report] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1975). [Hebrew]

Abstract

At the center of Israel’s most traumatic event, the Yom Kippur War of October 1973, stands an intelligence failure. Since the early 1990s, when senior intelligence officers who were involved in this fiasco started writing their memoirs, this event has become a source of major controversy in Israeli historiography. In response to the 2011 publication of the memoirs of the Mossad chief in 1973, Zvi Zamir, this article traces, describes and analyzes three aspects of this controversy: the personal and institutional responsibility for Israel’s lack of preparation at the outbreak of the war as well as the causes of the intelligence failure and the consequences it had on the Israeli Defense Force’s ability to confront the Arab attack.

Keywords

Yom Kippur War; Israeli military intelligence; intelligence failure; AMAN; Mossad; Ashraf Marwan

The Yom Kippur War (or the Ramadan War or October War of 1973) is the most traumatic event in the history of the state of Israel. On the eve of the war, Israel was complacent, sure of itself, and fully convinced of its military superiority over its neighbors. Israel was largely preoccupied with domestic affairs, mostly concerning its upcoming general elections, which were scheduled for the end of October 1973. The main campaign slogan of the ruling Labor Alignment underscored that Israel's security and diplomatic position were stable and that "Israel was fully ready to fulfill its national and social obligations more than it had ever been in its history."¹ Major General (Res.) Ariel Sharon, who only a few weeks earlier had retired from active military service and initiated the establishment of the right-wing Likud party, noted, "Israel is now facing very quiet years from a security point of view ... We are in the best security situation. With our current borders, we actually do not have any security problems."²

None of this remained relevant when, at around 2 p.m. on October 6, 1973, on the afternoon of Yom Kippur (the Jewish Day of Atonement, the holiest day on the Jewish calendar), the war began. Within less than 24 hours, Israel's Bar-Lev defense line along the Suez Canal collapsed, and its Sinai division, the main force entrusted with averting an Egyptian crossing of the Suez Canal, lost close to two hundred out of the three hundred tanks at its disposal. The Israel Defense Force (IDF) suffered 405 casualties. Another 162 soldiers were taken prisoner.³ In the north, Syrian forces invaded the Golan Heights, capturing its southern sector. Twenty-four hours after the war began, Syrian tanks took over the center of the Golan Heights, surrounding Camp Nafah, the headquarters of the IDF's Division 36. From there, they were able to block Israeli military reserve forces from reaching the Golan Heights through the main axis, the Benot Ya'akov Bridge, and complete their takeover of the

¹ Yosi Belin, *The Cost of Unity: The Labor Party until the Yom Kippur War* (Tel Aviv: Revivim, 1985), p. 134. [Hebrew].

² Uzi Benziman, *Does not Stop on Red: A Biography of Arik Sharon* (Tel Aviv: Adam, 1985), p. 135. [Hebrew].

³ Emmanuel Sakal, "The Regulars Will Hold!?: The Missed Opportunity to Prevail in the Defensive Campaign in Western Sinai in the Yom Kippur War" (Tel Aviv: Ma'ariv, 2011), p. 174. [Hebrew].

entire Golan Heights within a few more hours. In those battles, around 200 Israeli soldiers were killed and close to 50 were taken prisoner.⁴

During those hours, the Israeli Air Force (IAF) suffered two hard blows: its attempts to destroy both the Egyptian anti-aircraft layout along the Suez Canal and the Syrian anti-aircraft installations, which began a few hours later, failed completely. Twenty-four hours after the outbreak of the war, Arab anti-aircraft layouts remained intact, while the IAF had lost not only a significant number of planes and pilots, but also much of its self-confidence.

Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan indicated, in a somewhat exaggerated manner, the deep distress of those early hours when he started to talk about a war to defend “the Third Temple.” In Jewish history, the destruction of the first Temple by the Babylonians in 586 BCE and the destruction of the Second Temple by the Romans in 70 CE—which ended Jewish sovereignty in *Eretz Israel* (the land of Israel) for over 1800 years—resonates deeply. In hindsight, it is clear that Dayan’s anxiety was exaggerated and reflected the tremendous shock that he experienced following the IDF’s defeats. In reality, Israel did not face an existential threat at that stage. However, there is no doubt that during the war’s first 24-hour period, Israel experienced the hardest and most painful military blow in its history.

The Agranat Commission, the official Israeli state inquiry commission tasked with examining the events of the Yom Kippur War, concluded that the root of this military failure was an intelligence failure. Until the very last hours before the war’s outbreak, Israeli military intelligence (AMAN) assessed that an Arab attack was unlikely. The Commission also determined that the personal responsibility for this intelligence failure was to be placed on AMAN’s director, AMAN’s research department director, and AMAN’s chief Egyptian affairs analyst.

In 1993, AMAN’s director during the war, Major General Eli Zeira, published his account of the events and challenged most of the Agranat Commission’s conclusions concerning intelligence.⁵ The publication of this book, along with the publication of other memoirs written by former military commanders of that period (including the head of AMAN’s signal intelligence [SIGINT], Brigadier General Yoel Ben-Porat, and AMAN’s director of research in 1973,

⁴) This is the estimate of Aviram Barkai, an expert on the fighting in the Golan Heights during the first stage of the war (private correspondence).

⁵) Eli Zeira, *Mitos mul mets’ut: milbemet Yom-ha-Kipurim: kishlonot u-lekəḥim* [Myth versus Reality. The October 1973 War: Failures and Lessons] (Tel Aviv: Yedioth Ahronoth, 2004).

Brigadier General Arie Shalev⁶) reignited and refueled an on-going debate concerning the reasons for the intelligence failure, those responsible for it, and the impact of this failure on the military lapse at the start of the war. In late 2011, Zvi Zamir, the former director of Mossad, published his own account of the events. Zamir is probably the last senior intelligence figure to do so. His account directly opposes Zeira's. In many ways, it is the closing act of the debate between Israel's former intelligence chiefs who held office during the Yom Kippur War. For close to twenty years, this debate has been on-going in Israel.

In the aftermath of the recent publication of Zamir's book, this article will present the different approaches in the above-mentioned debate. This discussion has been carried out almost exclusively in Hebrew and as such, is not well known to non-Hebrew speakers. At the crux of the article will be the different approaches of senior intelligence figures concerning three questions: the personal and institutional responsibility for Israel's lack of preparation at the outbreak of the battles; the impact that the intelligence failure had on the IDF's ability to confront the Arab attack; and the causes for the intelligence failure. Along with these questions, the fascinating story of Ashraf Marwan, Egyptian President Nasser's son-in-law and President Sadat's close adviser, will also be detailed. From late 1970, Marwan became Israel's central agent in the upper echelons of the Egyptian government. His last minute message that "the war will begin tomorrow" provided Israel with several hours of warning and saved it from a more painful military defeat.

The First 20 Years

The Agranat Commission's public report, which was published shortly after the war ended, largely focused on the intelligence failure. Regarding the question of personal responsibility for this failure, the Commission determined, based on the testaments it had heard, that

The Egyptian and Syrian attack on Yom Kippur (October 6, 1973), at around 14:00 hours, surprised the IDF. Its senior command, along with Israel's political leadership did not estimate that a general war is likely to break out until the very early morning

⁶ Yoel Ben-Porat, *Neila* [Locked-On] (Tel Aviv: Idanim, 1991); Arie Shalev, *Kishalon ve-hatslahab be-hatra'ah: ha'arakhat ha-modi'in likerat milhemet Yom ha-Kipurim* [Success and Failure in Vigilance: The Israeli Intelligence Assessments towards the Yom Kippur War] (Tel Aviv: Ma'arachot, 2006); Zvi Zamir and Efrat Mass, *Be-enayim pekuhot: rosh ha-Mosad matri'a: Ha-im Yisra'el makshivah?* [With Open Eyes] (Or Yehuda: Kinneret, Zmora-Bitan, Dvir, 2011).

hours of that day, and even that morning when it was already clear to them that the war was inevitable, they erroneously assumed that it would begin only at 18:00 hours. The responsibility for these assessment errors must be placed first and foremost on the director of AMAN and his main assistant in charge of AMAN's research department, which is the country's exclusive agency entrusted with intelligence research. These [individuals] failed completely to provide the IDF with sufficient warning.⁷

Along with Eli Zeira and Arieh Shalev, the Commission also decided to dismiss two other intelligence officers: Lieutenant Colonel Yona Bandman, the head of branch 6 of the research department, who was directly entrusted with assessing Egypt's war intentions, and Lieutenant Colonel David Gdalya, the IDF's southern command intelligence officer, who was dismissed from his position because of his tampering with an intelligence document written by one of his officers and not because of his responsibility for the intelligence failure. The other three, especially Zeira and Bandman, were dismissed because the intelligence assessment with which they provided decision makers did not reflect all of the information at their disposal, but rather their own conviction that Egypt did not see itself as ready for war.

A second question that the Commission dealt with in the intelligence context had to do with the consequences of the intelligence failure on the army's readiness for war. In this, the Commission determined that "the director of AMAN promised the IDF an early warning of the enemy's intention to embark on a comprehensive war that would allow the organized mobilization of military reserve forces. This promise was a fundamental part of the IDF's defense plans." The Commission contended that there was no basis for making such a commitment. In reality, AMAN's short warning

... did not allow the organized mobilization of reserve forces and prompted a hasty recruitment of ground reserve forces, not according to the planned time table and mobilization regulations. The additional four hour mistake shortened even more the time period between mobilization of reserve forces and the enemy's opening of fire. This second mistake led to additional disruptions in the standing army's state of alert on both fronts and their deployment, especially along the Suez Canal front.⁸

Finally, concerning reasons for the intelligence failure, the Commission determined that this failure did not stem from a lack of information. On the contrary: "In the days that preceded the Yom Kippur War, AMAN's collection

⁷⁾ Agranat Commission, *The Agranat Report* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1975), p. 18 [Hebrew].

⁸⁾ Agranat, pp. 18–19.

department had numerous warnings that were provided to it by its own sources and by other state intelligence agencies.” The root of the problem, according to the Commission, was “the stubborn adherence to what Israeli intelligence referred to as ‘the conception,’ according to which Egypt would only go to war if it could guarantee for itself aerial ability to attack Israel and especially Israel’s main airports, in order to neutralize the Israeli Air Force.” Syria, according to “the conception,” would attack Israel only if Egypt would attack. The Commission also concluded that the adherence to “the conception” led Zeira, Shalev, and Bandman to explain the unprecedented Egyptian and Syrian military preparations as merely reflecting “Syrian defense activity and a widespread Egyptian military exercise.” For that reason, AMAN’s director was also “excessively cautious in utilizing other intelligence tools that were at his disposal, which could have exposed important complementary information.”⁹

These conclusions were widely accepted by the Israeli public in the two decades that followed the war. Most of the books about the war that were published during those years—including Hanoch Bar-Tov’s biography of David Elazar, the war’s military chief of staff,¹⁰ which remains today the best history of the war at the supreme command level—did not challenge them. Bar-Tov, who received open access to the IDF’s archives, which contained most of the relevant documents, extensively described the debates during the days preceding the war. These debates clearly reflected Zeira and Shalev’s oral assessments, and Bandman’s written ones, which ruled out the possibility that Egypt intended to go to war. They attributed Egyptian activity along the Suez Canal front to the “Tahir 41” military exercise, one of a series of exercises for crossing the canal and occupying the Sinai Peninsula, which the Egyptian army had carried out since 1968. And since Syria was unable to go to war without Egypt, Syrian preparations were interpreted as plans for a limited military reaction to the Israeli downing of twelve Syrian fighter jets in air fights that occurred on September 13, 1973.

The academic studies concerning the Yom Kippur surprise—studies that were largely grounded in the theories built around of similar strategic surprises such as the German attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 (Operation Barbarossa), or the Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941—corroborated the Agranat Commission’s conclusion that the root of

⁹ Ibid., pp. 19–20.

¹⁰ Hanoch Bartov, *Dado: 48 shanah ve-’od 20 yom* [Dado, 48 Years and 20 Days: The Full Story of the Yom Kippur War and of the Man Who Led Israel’s Army] (Or Yehuda: Zmora-Bitan, 2002).

the problem was the adherence to “the conception.” Different scholars raised numerous hypotheses about what was behind this adherence even though these were largely speculative, since most of the relevant archival material was not yet at their disposal.

The conclusion that the root of the military failures in the early stages of the war was largely the result of the intelligence failure was also rarely challenged. Lieutenant General (Res.) Chaim Bar-Lev, the IDF’s chief of staff until early 1972 and the commander of the southern front during the war, summed it up by saying “Everything was a result of the surprise.”¹¹ Major General Avraham Adan, commander of one of the three divisions that fought on the Suez Canal front, wrote in his memoirs, “I have no doubt that if we had received an early warning, the picture would have been completely different.” Major General (Res.) Yitzhak Hofi, the commander of the northern front, argued, “If we [in the northern command] had been able to mobilize our reserve troops, at the very least one additional armored brigade, the entire battlefield of the first two days would have been different.” Professional scholars reached a similar conclusion. Lieutenant Colonel (Res.) Zvi Ofer, who studied the Golan Heights battles for the IDF’s history department, concluded that if the available units had been deployed for war and not for a small-scale Syrian attack, even they would have been sufficient to contain invading Syrian troops.

The Agranat Commission’s conclusions received a clear and authoritative reinforcement in the book *Locked On* by Brigadier General (Res.) Yoel Ben-Porat, who was the commander of AMAN’s SIGINT unit during the war. The book describes, for the first time, the dynamics among AMAN’s senior officers in the days that preceded the war and highlights how critical warnings, some from SIGINT sources, were disregarded by Zeira, Bandman, and Shalev. The most important information in Ben-Porat’s book is what he was told by the chief of staff, David Elazar. In the week preceding the war, Elazar asked Zeira twice if AMAN’s special means of collection had been operated, to which Zeira replied in the affirmative. In reality, he forbade their operation. Since Elazar was aware of these means’ abilities, since he believed that they were operating, and since they did not indicate a pending war, his own confidence that the Arab preparations were not for attack purposes increased.¹² This testimony underscores that part of Zeira’s actions prior to the war’s outbreak were not only professional mistakes but bordered on criminal behavior.

¹¹ Karmit Gai, *Bar-Lev: Biographia* [Bar-Lev: A Biography] (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1998), p. 256 [Hebrew].

¹² Ben-Porat, op. cit., pp. 102–104.

Ben-Porat's book, along with a book written by Defense Minister Dayan's military aide during the war, reflects that in several critical instances, Zeira did not pass on vital warnings to the Defense Minister and the Chief of Staff. A Mossad source's warning, which was received on September 30th—shortly before the beginning of the Egyptian military exercise that served as a cover for war preparations—was not delivered to the Defense Minister on time. The warning conveyed that the military exercise could turn into a war. When Dayan heard about this, he was enraged and demanded explanations from Zeira. Another critical information item, which was deciphered by Ben-Porat's Unit 21 hours before the war began, detailed that the Soviet foreign ministry informed the Iraqi ambassador to Moscow that the emergency airlift to evacuate Soviets from Syria and Egypt, which the Kremlin suddenly began a day earlier, was the result of an official notice from Syria and Egypt that they intended to attack Israel. The chief of staff heard about it, for the first time, only after the war. He then said that if he had received it in time, he would have mobilized reserve troops, some of which would have reached the front in time, and also deployed the regular army for war. Under those circumstances, the war would have turned out completely different. The decision not to disseminate this information was made by AMAN's director.¹³

The Revisionist Account: Zeira and His Supporters

On the 20th anniversary of the Yom Kippur war, Zeira published his account of the intelligence failure. The book appeared in a new and slightly more updated edition in 2004.¹⁴ Zeira's first contention dealt directly with the Agranat Commission's conclusions, which placed direct responsibility for the intelligence failure on him. In his opinion, the Commission was completely wrong. Not only did he never pledge to deliver a warning of a pending war, but on the eve of the war he also provided his superiors with all of the information required to assess that war was approaching. He conceded that AMAN, indeed, was wrong in its assessments of the probability of a war, but argued that most of the responsibility for that error was not his: the decision makers, including the prime minister, minister of defense, and military chief of staff, not only pos-

¹³ Arie Braun, *Mosheh Dayan be-Milhemet Yom ha-Kipurim* [Moshe Dayan and the Yom Kippur War], (Tel Aviv: Idanim, 1993), pp. 45–46; Ben-Porat, pp. 65–66, 103.

¹⁴ Eli Zeira, *Mitos mul mets'ut: milhemet Yom-ha-Kipurim: kishlonot u-lekahim* [Myth versus Reality. The October 1973 War: Failures and Lessons] (Tel Aviv: Yedioth Ahronoth, 2004).

sessed all of the raw data, but also had information that was not available to AMAN, such as King Hussein of Jordan's warning during his meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir ten days before the war. Since the decision makers' diplomatic and security experience did not differ from Zeira's, he asserted that they were directly responsible for the failure to conclude that war was approaching.¹⁵

This allegation was received somewhat positively by the Israeli public, mostly since Golda Meir and Moshe Dayan were perceived as being directly responsible for failures during the war. Zeira's contention that AMAN's raw data provided a warning was significantly corroborated by the deputy chief of staff during the war, Major General (Res.) Israel Tal. Tal contended that "there was a forewarning according to our security doctrine ... [one] should hope that the intelligence will always provide effective warnings, such as the warnings which it gave throughout the entire year preceding the Yom Kippur War."¹⁶

The second allegation Zeira presented in his book addressed the link between the intelligence assessment failure and the battles that raged during the war's first few days. While the Agranat Commission established a clear consequential link between them, Zeira contended that the root of the problem were two unrealistic components of the IDF's war plan: First, the assumption that the Suez Canal front could be defended only by the regular army; second, the reliance on massive air support at the outset of the war, even though the Air Force announced in advance that it would not be able to provide it before destroying Egypt and Syria's anti-aircraft layouts. These two massive air operations were expected to last 48 hours.

Zeira's allegations were endorsed by quite a few researchers who studied the war, mostly in military settings such as the IDF's Command and Staff College and the National Security College. They also identified the source of the military setbacks at the beginning of the fighting in the IDF's incorrect war preparations rather than a lack of intelligence warning. For example, one study conducted by Colonel Emmanuel Wald, which received a great deal of public attention, argued that on the southern front the problem was the effective Egyptian use of anti-tank missiles, while on the northern front the problem was incorrect deployment of troops at the outbreak of the war. Wald's clear conclusion was that "in both cases, it was not the surprise that was the decisive

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 81, 89, 95–97, 182.

¹⁶ Maj. Gen. (Res.) Yisrael Tal, "The Warning in the Yom Kippur War," A lecture to MI officers in Gelilot camp, July 12, 1993.

factor through which one can explain the failure.”¹⁷ The wartime deputy chief of staff, who as mentioned determined that there was no intelligence failure, found that the root of the problem was not the lack of an intelligence warning but rather the decision of the Prime Minister and Defense Minister to refrain from a pre-emptive strike, leaving the initiative at the outbreak of the war to Egypt and Syria.¹⁸

The third allegation Zeira raised in his book dealt with the roots of the warning failure. Here Zeira provided a new and original argument. He revealed that during the years which preceded the war, Mossad had an unusually high-quality source in the Egyptian leadership. This source provided the information that led to the conception that Egypt would not go to war so long as it had not obtained the ability to effectively attack the Israeli Air Force’s bases. In his book, Zeira called this source “the information,” and the press later nicknamed him “Babylon.” We now know the identity of that source: Ashraf Marwan, Nasser’s son-in-law and Sadat’s close confidant, who at the end of 1970 offered his services to the Mossad and from that time provided, on a permanent basis, all of Egypt’s secrets to Israel. Zeira argued that Marwan was a double-agent who had duped Mossad and essentially the entire Israeli intelligence community. He passed the information that was the basis for the conception that Egypt would not go to war without a critical mass of fighter-bombers and operational ground-to-ground missiles. In fact, Egypt did go to war without them. According to Zeira, Marwan also provided many warnings of war that did not materialize in order to lower Israeli readiness to increase the IDF’s state of alert in response to real indicators for incoming war (a typical “cry wolf” syndrome). In addition, according to Zeira, Marwan did not provide a war warning until the last minute, although he had to have known long beforehand that Sadat was planning to open fire on October 6th. Consequently, since the entire intelligence community relied on Marwan’s warnings, and since he was the main pillar of Egypt’s deception plan, the explanation for the war’s surprise is not Zeira’s, Bandman’s and others’ adherence to “the conception,” but rather Mossad’s failure to understand that they were being misled by a double-agent who successfully managed to diminish his operators’ and, indeed, the entire state of Israel’s alertness.¹⁹

¹⁷ Emanuel Wald, *Kilelat ha-kelim ha-shevurim: dimdume ha-‘otmah ha-tseva’it v’eha-medit ha-Yisre’elit* (1967–1982) [The Wald report: the decline of Israeli national security since 1967] (Tel Aviv: Shocken, 1987), pp. 100–101.

¹⁸ Tal, “The Warning in the Yom Kippur War,” pp. 7–8.

¹⁹ Zeira, pp. 109–122, 155–163.

Zeira's explanation for the warning failure reverberated across the Israeli public. Journalists and authors to whom he had personally spoken and disclosed many details concerning the identity of the senior source were delighted to discover this information. Although Zeira's image as the primarily person responsible for the intelligence failure was not significantly transformed, his allegation that Marwan was a double-agent who had effectively anesthetized Israel dominated the public debate because only those who promoted this allegation—most of whom were briefed by Zeira—made their voices heard in public. Those who thought that this account was baseless—dozens of intelligence officers who were involved in operating and assessing Marwan's contribution—preferred to remain silent rather than expose the identity of this excellent intelligence source. The outcome was that Israelis largely believed that Marwan (or "Babylon" as he was known until his identity was exposed in 2002) was a double-agent who fooled Israel and significantly contributed to the Yom Kippur surprise.

Throughout the rest of the 1990s, the war and the intelligence failure ceased to be an appealing topic to the Israeli public. One example of this could be seen on the war's 25th anniversary, when very few new books about it were published. The most significant publication concerning the intelligence fiasco was a chapter in a book published by the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Israeli Ministry of Education, which presented the main points of Zeira's thesis concerning the intelligence failure's lack of influence on the battles.²⁰ This situation would significantly change in the years that followed.

The Recent Decade: Back to the Agranat Commission's Conclusions

The decline in the Israeli public's interest in the Yom Kippur War turned into a growing interest in the last decade. Around the war's 30th anniversary, the Israeli newspaper *Yedioth Aharonoth* published a series of articles about the war written by Ronen Bergman, some of which were based on material and sources that had not been publicly available until then. These articles became major

²⁰ Hanan Schwartz, "The Surprise in the Yom Kippur War," in: Ufaz, Hayim and Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov (eds.), *Milhemet Yom ha-Kipurim: mabaṭ me-ḥadash: mivḥar hartsa'ot mi-yom 'iyun le-tsiyun 25 shanah le-Milhemet Yom ha-Kipurim she-ne'erakh bi-Yerushalayim. 27 Oktober 1998*. [The War of Yom Kippur: A New Look: Selected Lectures at a Conference Marking the 25th Anniversary of the Yom Kippur War Taken in Jerusalem] (Jerusalem: The Leonard Davis Institute for International Relations at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Ministry of Education and Sport, 1999), pp. 79–88.

headlines and attracted a great deal of attention. They were later published in a volume that became a bestseller.²¹ Concurrently, other books were published, mostly memoirs or depictions of specific battles. Two years before the 30th anniversary, *The Watchman Fell Asleep*, my own book concerning the intelligence failure, was published in Hebrew. A more condensed English edition was published in 2005.²² In 2006, Arie Shalev, AMAN's head of the research department during the war, published his book.²³

The Watchman Fell Asleep was the first comprehensive academic study of the intelligence failure. It presented the information that was at AMAN's disposal in the year that led to the war and specifically the days that preceded it, and attempted to explain why this excellent information was not transformed into a high quality, strategic warning. The explanation was on two levels: first, at the *personal* level, Zeira and Bandman, who continued to adhere to the calming conception, ignored, consciously, critical pieces of information that indicated that they might be wrong. Zeira, moreover, lied to his superiors with regard to the operational status of AMAN's most important means of collection, leading them to believe that they were operational while at the same time refusing to operate them. He thus increased their estimate that war was indeed, unlikely. Bandman and Zeira's psychological motivation to act in such a strange and ultimately catastrophic manner is an issue addressed in another study.²⁴ Then, on the *organizational* level, the failure was an output of the dynamics within and between a number of relevant organs: the Egyptian and Syrian desks within AMAN's research department; the dominant role of Zeira within AMAN; the structure of the intelligence community according to which Mossad functioned as a human intelligence (HUMINT) collection agency but had no role in shaping national intelligence estimations; and finally, the decision makers, who had to rely, as the Agranat Commission determined, almost exclusively on AMAN's assessments since this agency monopolized Israel's national intelligence estimations.

²¹ Ronen Bergman and Gil Meltzer, *Milhemet Yom Kippur: Zeman Emet* [The War of Yom Kippur—Moment of Truth] (Tel Aviv: Yedioth Ahronoth, 2003).

²² Uri Bar-Joseph, *The Watchman Fell Asleep: The Surprise of Yom Kippur and Its Sources* (Albany: SUNY, 2005).

²³ Arie Shalev, *Kishalon ve-hatslahab be-batra'ab: ha'arakhat ha-modi'in likerat milhemet Yom ha-Kipurim* [Success and Failure in Vigilance: The Israeli Intelligence Assessments of the Yom Kippur War] (Tel Aviv: Ma'arachot, 2006).

²⁴ Uri Bar-Joseph and Arie W. Kruglanski, "Intelligence Failure and the Need for Cognitive Closure: On the Psychology of the Yom Kippur Surprise," *Political Psychology*, 24(1) (March 2003), pp. 75–99.

The Watchman Fell Asleep also addressed the impact of the intelligence fiasco on the course of the war in its first days. It upheld the Agranat Commission's position, proving that the IDF's failed containment effort was primarily the outcome of a lack of war warning until the very last minute. As a result, there were insufficient forces to contain the Syrian attack in the Golan's southern sector. In the north, where a stronger force was deployed, the Syrian attacks were repelled. Lack of deployment according to war plans also facilitated the Egyptian crossing of the canal, which faced almost no resistance. Out of the three hundred tanks in the Sinai division, only three were in combat positions when fire broke out. The others reached their positions only hours later, and had to confront Egyptian anti-tank missile teams that had meanwhile crossed the canal; many were destroyed. Moreover, since the Bar-Lev line was held by low-quality reserve forces and not by high-quality regular army units, as it should have been if advance warning was provided, the Bar-Lev strongholds hardly participated in the defense effort battle. Instead, these reservists' calls for help, which were answered by the tanks that managed to reach the canal, diverted the tanks from carrying out the counter-attacks that were supposed to repel the invading forces.

The surprise also led to the Air Force's failures. Operation "Tagar" (Challenge), which started on the morning of October 7th, was aimed at destroying the Egyptian anti-aircraft installations in the south. It was stopped shortly after it began following the Defense Minister's and Chief of Staff's order to move the Air Force activity to the north due to the dire situation there. Most experts have assessed that if the operation had not been stopped, most of the Egyptian anti-aircraft layout would have been destroyed within hours. But due to the havoc created by the surprise, the IAF was sent to carry out the operation "Dugman" against the Syrian anti-aircraft installations in an improvised manner, without the necessary support and up-to-date aerial photos. Under these circumstances this operation also ended in failure. In hindsight, it is clear that confusion, loss of control, and incorrect orders—all an outcome of the shock of the surprise—and not insufficient Air Force preparations led to this fiasco.²⁵

Brigadier General (Res.) Arie Shalev's account of the military intelligence's pre-war activities did not touch upon the consequences of the surprise attack.

²⁵ Shmuel Gordon, *Sheloshim sha'ot be-Oktobar: haḥlatot harot goral 'al hafalat hel ha-avir bi-teḥilat Milḥemet Yom Kippur* [Thirty Hours in October] (Tel Aviv: Ma'ariv, 2000); Uri Bar-Joseph, "Strategic Surprise or Fundamental Flaws: The Causes of Israel's Military Defeat at the Beginning of the 1973 War," *The Journal of Military History* 72 (April 2008), pp. 509–531.

Rather, Shalev focused mostly on the intelligence matters, and accepted most of the Agranat Commission's conclusions, including his personal responsibility for the failed assessment. He opposed the Commission's conclusions in three areas: first, three days before the outbreak of the war, he presented decision-makers an intelligence picture which delineated the ability of the Egyptian and Syrian armies to attack. The Commission, he contended, disregarded this important achievement. Nevertheless, unlike Zeira, Shalev did not try to argue that by presenting this analysis, AMAN fulfilled its duty and that the responsibility from that point on was shifted to the decision-makers. Second, Shalev noted that the Commission did not understand how complicated military intelligence's assessment work is, and how much it is prone to failure. He quoted one of the Commission members, who wondered why AMAN did not issue warnings of a war the minute such information was received, as an example of the Commission's misunderstanding of military intelligence work. Third, Shalev, like many others, alleged that the distinction the Commission made between the professional responsibility of military commanders and intelligence officers and the responsibility of the politicians was artificial, and created a situation in which central figures who were responsible for the catastrophe, first and foremost Dayan, were left untouched.

Shalev rejected Zeira's claim that Ashraf Marwan was a "double-agent," mostly since the information he provided prior to the war turned out to be correct, and also since the Egyptian agent's reliability was checked anew every year, and no flaws in it were found. He surmised that Marwan did not warn about a war until the last minute because he still possessed a degree of internal loyalty, which put a limit on his willingness to disclose his country's greatest secret to Israel. Shalev's book did not include any significant new information about AMAN's activities prior to the war. He did disclose that SIGINT piece of information from October 4th, which reported that Sadat had ordered the urgent preparation of his seat in the operations room, was not transmitted to AMAN's research department on time, and reached his desk only three months after the war. Shalev argued that if that information had been received in time, it could have significantly changed AMAN's assessment concerning the possibility of the outbreak of war.²⁶

Along with the publication of these books, another development led to increased public focus on the surprise of the Yom Kippur War. At the end of 2002, Dr. Ahron Bregman confirmed that the person which he referred to in

²⁶ Shalev, pp. 122–123, 132–133.

his book as the “son-in-law,” the greatest source of Mossad information, and in reality an Egyptian double-agent,²⁷ was none other than Ashraf Marwan. Thus was exposed the true identity of the source known until then as “Babylon.” At first, this disclosure did not cause great sensation in Israel. It was also silenced in Egypt, where the ruling regime, including President Mubarak and his son Gamal (who was a business associate of Marwan’s), sought to avoid the embarrassment and shame that would be their lot if such a distinguished member of the Egyptian elite was exposed as the worst traitor in the history of modern Egypt. The disclosure caused a later scandal in Israel, when the former head of Mossad, Zamir, who was personally involved in handling Marwan, accused war-time AMAN commander Zeira of leaking the Egyptian source’s identity to unauthorized personnel. Zeira sued Zamir for libel. At the end of arbitration process between the two, the arbitrator, former Supreme Court Justice Theodore Orr, ruled that Zeira had indeed leaked the name and thus exposed Marwan’s identity. On June 27, 2007, less than three weeks after the verdict was published, Marwan fell off the balcony of his fifth floor London apartment and died. The British investigation of the death determined that it was neither the result of an accident nor suicide, leaving the possibility of assassination as the only plausible explanation. Apparently it was the result an Egyptian decision to end this embarrassing affair. In order to cover this up, the Egyptians presented Marwan as a national hero who duped Israel, but refused to add any information “due to security considerations.”²⁸

In 2010, my book about the Marwan affair, *The Angel*, was published in Hebrew (an updated edition appeared in 2011).²⁹ The book discussed Nasser’s son-in-law’s decision to offer his services to the Mossad, probed the possible motives behind this decision and outlined the material that he passed on to his operators over the years preceding the war. Marwan’s position as one of President Sadat’s closest aides gave him the opportunity to gain access to every piece of information that was relevant to Israeli intelligence’s estimation of Egypt’s war preparations: the structure of the Egyptian army; its detailed war

²⁷ Ahron Bregman, *Israel’s Wars: A History since 1947* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 112–117.

²⁸ See, for example: CBS *60 Minutes*, “Was the Perfect Spy a Double Agent?” May 12, 2009, <http://www.cbsnews.com/2100-1856underscore/162-4999386.html?pageNum=4&tag=contentMain;contentBody>.

²⁹ Uri Bar-Joseph, *Ha-Mal’akh: Ashraf Marwan, ha-Mosad ve-hafta’at Milhemet Yom Kippur* [The Angel: Ashraf Marwan, Mossad, and the Yom Kippur War] (Or Yehuda: Zmora-Bitan, 2011).

plans; protocols of meetings conducted by the top Egyptian security apparatus (including the minutes of the top secret October 1972 meeting, in which Sadat announced his decision to go to war without waiting for planes and missiles); minutes of discussions between Sadat and Brezhnev concerning Egyptian military requests; personal letters Sadat sent the Soviet president; and protocols of Sadat's secret meeting with other Arab leaders, specifically Saudi Arabia and Libya, in preparation for the war. The depth of penetration to Egypt's top secrets achieved through Marwan was so great that Israel actually knew Egypt's plans for war better than the Syrians. While the Syrians believed that Egypt intended to cross the canal and advance into the Sinai peninsula, the war plans that Marwan passed to Israel outlined an operation of crossing the canal with five infantry divisions and a defense deployment of up to ten kilometers east of the water, in order to leave the Egyptian forces under the protection of anti-aircraft weapons west of the canal. Invading the Sinai peninsula remained a low probability option until the Israeli Air Force would be neutralized from participating in ground military operations. Most important, Marwan passed on to Israel the warning that ultimately ignited the long overdue war preparations on the early morning of October 6th. Without it the IDF's mobilization of reserve forces would have been further delayed until the war began, a four-hour delay that would have led to the capture of the entire Golan Heights by the Syrians.

A Temporary Epilogue to the Debate: The Account of the Mossad's Chief

Unlike the other accounts concerning the intelligence failure of the Yom Kippur War, Zamir's book is more autobiographical. Only its second part is devoted to the war. The first part describes how, at the age of 23, he was appointed commander of the sixth battalion of Harel brigade, which defended the road from the coast to besieged Jewish Jerusalem during Israel's 1948 war; how he later served, among others, as the commander of the IDF's southern command; and how he was appointed Mossad's chief. This part also highlights some of his activities in that position, primarily assisting Jews from distressed countries to immigrate to Israel. He does not discuss clandestine and more significant operations such as Mossad's actions against Palestinian terrorists after the 1972 Munich Olympic Games massacre.

As noted, the second part of the book is devoted to the Yom Kippur War. Zamir repeatedly emphasizes that "the book would not have been written if he hadn't felt that many of the lessons of the war had not been learned." His goal was to present the still relevant lessons from that traumatic event.

Nevertheless, it is also clear that two additional factors led Zamir to do what he had refused to do for years: to refute Zeira's claim, which many in the Israeli public embraced, that Ashraf Marwan was a double-agent who fooled the Mossad, and to show that Zeira leaked the identity of "the best source we've ever had" (as Zamir himself terms Marwan), an act that likely led to Marwan's violent death. The fact that Zamir devoted an entire chapter in his memoirs to his relationship with Marwan, along with his sorrow that Marwan was not better protected, is clear proof of that. Nevertheless, Zamir refrained from fully exposing the entire Marwan affair, and sent his readers instead to the book *The Angel*, which in his words told the entire story "in an extensive and fascinating manner."³⁰

According to Zamir, a central cause for the intelligence failure was the distinction which existed in 1973 between the Mossad's role as a collector of intelligence information and AMAN's role as the exclusive estimator of that information. Zamir emphasizes that since Sadat's decision to open fire even without acquiring additional fighter-bombers and ground missiles had become known about a year before war started, Mossad's assessment was that the probability for war was high. This assessment was also based on good knowledge of the Egyptian war plans. Unlike AMAN, which continued to see the Egyptian plan to advance into the Sinai as the main war goal, Zamir listened to what Marwan told him and made it clear to the Prime Minister, already in early 1973, that at the core of Egypt's war concept was the occupation and defense of a ten kilometer territorial strip east of the Suez Canal, from which it could conduct a defensive battle against IDF counter-offensives on the basis of abundant anti-tank weaponry supported by the massive air-defense formation west of the canal. Zamir estimated that this was a reasonable plan that the Egyptians had the ability to carry out. But since the Mossad had no role in national intelligence estimations, all that Zamir could do was to tell Prime Minister Meir, who was in charge of his agency, his own personal estimates. In their regular meetings, Zamir understood that Meir did not intend to challenge AMAN's assessments, which were accepted by Defense Minister Dayan. In Zamir's meetings with Dayan, the Defense Minister made it clear that he endorsed AMAN's assessments rather than Mossad's. Under these circumstances, the chief of the Mossad found himself in a frustrating position in which his intelligence assessment had no influence on top security decisions.

³⁰ Zamir, pp. 129–130.

On a more personal level, Zamir focuses less on his problematic relations with AMAN's director Zeira and more on his triangular relationship with Prime Minister Meir and Defense Minister Dayan. He praises Golda Meir highly, claiming that she listened and demonstrated better judgment than Moshe Dayan. Although he does not personally lash out at Dayan, he describes him as someone who was attentive, above all, to his own forum of close advisers and gave little regard to external assessments such as Mossad's.

As noted, Zamir devotes a special and relatively long chapter to his relationship with Marwan. As he describes it, this was a complicated relationship. The two individuals trusted each other, with Marwan holding Zamir in high regard and Zamir nurturing Marwan's ego. He did this by listening carefully to Marwan's strategic analyses (of which Zamir did not think highly) and by expressing concern about Marwan's security and well-being, hinting that even the director of Mossad took a personal interest in his life. This concern, however, was not entirely for professional purposes, and as Zamir notes, he regarded Marwan as a friend, although not particularly a close one. He was concerned about his safety both professionally and personally. Their fateful meeting in London on the night of October 5th, 1973, the meeting in which Israel received warning that war would begin the next day, is described in detail. It is the most authoritative description of this event. Three people attended that meeting: Marwan, who is no longer with us; Dubi, his case officer, whose written evidence concerning this and other meetings with "the Angel" is safely stored in Mossad's highly guarded files; and Zamir. Thus, Zamir's account is the sole personal evidence of this crucial meeting and constitutes a very important document. It also presents his entire view of the Marwan affair. As he tersely notes, had Marwan indeed been a double-agent, as Zeira argued, he might not have attended the meeting in the first place, or would have attempted to convince Zamir that Egypt did not intend to go to war. Instead, he showed up in order to warn that war would begin the next day, which is indeed what happened. This by itself constitutes the best evidence that Marwan was not a double agent.

Conclusion

Israel's intelligence failure during the Yom Kippur War is a complicated tale that has undergone several twists and turns. The Israeli consensus concerning the Agranat Commission's conclusions in this matter made way, in the early 1990s, for rising support of AMAN director Zeira's account that the fault was neither his own nor AMAN's, but the mistakes of others as well as incorrect military preparations for war. But it was actually Zeira's contentions, which

from their outset were rather weak, that led to the counter-argument that Zeira's responsibility was far greater than anything that was even hinted in the Agranat Commission's report. New testimonies and analyses show even more clearly than before how much the incorrect estimate of Israel's chief intelligence assessor during the war brought on Israel the greatest military catastrophe in its history. Since Zeira did not cease trying to prove the validity of his argument by presenting Marwan as a double-agent, he provided many details about his identity, led to his exposure, and indirectly led to his death. When Zeira's responsibility for the exposure of an agent received legal endorsement, he lost many points in the Israeli public opinion. On July 8, 2012, Israel's Attorney General stated that he had decided not to pursue a legal process against Zeira for leaking the identity of Marwan to unauthorized persons. Acknowledging that the accusations against Zeira were grave, he explained his decision as taking into account the long time that had passed since the legal procedure against Zeira had begun and Zeira's old age.

In October 2013, Israel will mark the 40th anniversary of the war. It is difficult to assess if this event will lead to new and significant disclosures concerning the Yom Kippur surprise. Likely, most of what happened is already known. However, since this is such an intricate and complicated affair, it is also well possible that we have not heard the last word on it.