



The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center
at the Israeli Intelligence & Heritage Commemoration Center

Crucial Warning Goes Unheeded

The Story of a Forgotten Intelligence Episode, October 5, 1973

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Preface

Brigadier General (res.) Amos Gilboa has served in a variety of senior intelligence positions, one of which was head of the Research Division of Aman (Military Intelligence) (1982-1984). He has conducted many studies on intelligence issues (some of them still classified), some of which deal with the Yom Kippur War.

In this publication Gilboa takes a new look at a very old episode from the difficult period that preceded the Yom Kippur War of 1973.

Even though those turbulent days have little in common with our own, the lessons to be learned from what happened are relevant to any period and are worth noting by those who work in intelligence and by decision-makers of all ranks.

As Gilboa points out, the episode illustrates “how vital it is that the head of Aman and the chief of staff conduct an ongoing dialogue...without such a dialogue the highest quality intelligence will come to nothing.”

The evening in honor of the late Lieutenant General Amnon Lipkin Shahak, which was devoted to the subject of “Leadership in Intelligence,” also focused on the topic of relations between the head of Aman and the chief of staff.

Dialogue does not cost a penny; it only requires goodwill, understanding, and attentiveness. Perhaps, even in our frenetic days, that is not too much to hope for?

Amos Gilboa concludes:

The cornerstone of intelligence assessment is that one must never settle...for any one course of action by the enemy. Assessment requires choosing two or more basic possibilities...examining them...and selecting one of them. That will be the possibility that is chosen. This possibility will be examined all the time.... Meanwhile the other possibilities that “competed” with it must be examined as well.

Brigadier General (res.) Ron Kitri
Head of the Institute

Introduction

The great debates about the intelligence failure in the Yom Kippur War have highlighted the episode of the “special means.” Important as it is, it offers no particular lesson for intelligence. Another episode, however, was overshadowed, and many in the intelligence community are not aware of it. Known as the “roebuck item,” it occurred during the afternoon of Friday, October 5, 22 hours before the war broke out. It constituted a crucial warning of a very rare kind. Everything that occurred with regard to this warning reflects very clearly and painfully what happens when the intelligence research is under an “entrenched conception,” and what is likely to happen when there is no ongoing, intensive, intimate intelligence discourse between the intelligence leadership and the top decision-maker.

This event occurred over 40 years ago amid security, political, and technological circumstances that were completely different from those of today. Its lessons, however, are relevant both now and in the future because it concerns the essence of intelligence work, where nothing has yet changed: the mind of the human being and its tendencies. I saw fit, then, to expound on the episode and to try and make it as interesting to readers as possible. For our purposes, readers comprise anyone working in an intelligence capacity, anyone interested in the subject of intelligence, decision-makers, and academics dealing with the intelligence and decision-making field.

I would like to thank those who contributed and helped me, and particularly Pesach Meluvani and Reuven Yardor, who worked in Unit 8200 at the time the event occurred.

Background

The first week of October 1973 saw growing indications that Egypt and Syria were preparing for war. The Syrians were completing an emergency deployment with offensive characteristics, and the Egyptians were doing the same at the Suez Canal front. The military operations in Egypt were seen as part of a large exercise involving multiple commands and diverse forces (Tahrir 41), while the military operations in Syria were explained as a defensive maneuver stemming from Syria's fears of an Israeli attack.

In the late evening of October 4, items began arriving from Unit 8200 sources indicating that the families of the Russian advisers and experts in Syria and Egypt were about to be evacuated to Moscow, and that 11 Russian transport planes had been flown to Syria and Egypt for this purpose. The evacuation was carried out in great haste. At about the same time, Russian naval ships began leaving the port of Alexandria. The main question was: why were the Soviets making these moves? An immediate intelligence report on October 5, as well as the head of Aman in secret statements to the political-security top echelon, raised three possible explanations for the families' evacuation: first, that the Soviets feared that the IDF was about to attack; second, that there was a rift between the Soviet Union and Syria and Egypt; and third, that the Soviets thought Syria and Egypt were about to attack Israel. Regarding the third explanation, the head of Aman said: "The possibility of a Syrian-Egypt attack is totally unlikely, but maybe the Russians think anyway that they are about to attack because they do not know the Arabs well." That same day, the decipherment of a surveillance sortie pointed to an Egyptian deployment at the Suez Canal. It was a deployment of unprecedented dimensions, particularly with regard to artillery. Yet Aman, despite all that, and despite a long series of additional signs that the Egyptian and Syrian armies were in an offensive deployment, remained firm in its opinion that the probability of war was low.

On that same morning of October 5, the chief of staff raised the IDF's alert to the highest level and ordered a series of measures to bolster the regular army's forces on the Golan Heights and at the canal front. These measures did not include a reserve call-up. The chief of staff still assessed, like Aman, a low probability of all-out war. He was, however, plagued by doubts, and he saw the high alert level as a kind of insurance. He assumed that if the Arabs did decide to launch an all-out war, intelligence would be able to convey the indications to him beforehand.

As Yom Kippur eve arrived, the tension reached its peak. Intelligence still did not have reliable information on the reason for the evacuation of the advisers' families, only unfounded assumptions. The chief of Mossad, Zvi Zamir, went to London for a meeting with Ashraf Marwan. A day earlier Marwan had already reported about an upcoming war. According to the Mossad's planning, the results of the meeting were supposed to be reported back to Israel toward midnight on the night between October 5 and 6. The head of Aman asked Zamir to have his bureau chief report to him immediately when the results arrived.

The Event

On Friday, October 5, at around 15:00 as Yom Kippur was approaching, Unit 8200 took in an encoded telegram from the Iraqi embassy in Moscow (its codename was "roebuck"). Lieutenant Colonel Reuven Yardor deciphered it and hurried to the room of Colonel Yoel Ben Porat, commander of the unit. Also in the room was Colonel Aryeh Bentov. Yardor, agitated, said: "Here is the telegram on the war." Ben Porat scrutinized the item, which was still in Arabic, and reached immediately for the "white" (protected) telephone to the office of the head of Aman, Major General Eli Zeira.

Three days earlier, on October 2, he had called Aryeh Shalev, head of the Research Division, and read him another deciphered telegram that Yardor had brought him, this one from the Iraqi ambassador in Damascus. Its basic content: the Syrian army had deployed at the front in an unprecedented manner and Syrian officers were talking about a conflict with Israel. Shalev mollified Ben Porat by saying there was nothing new in that. The item itself was not even included in the research publications for that day. A short time earlier the Iraqi embassy in Cairo had announced a long series of Egyptian military reinforcements. It was clear to the Unit 8200 people that the Iraqis, who were not in on the secret of the war, were making an intelligence-gathering effort because they wanted to know why Syria and Egypt were making unprecedented military preparations.

The language of the telegram from the Iraqi ambassador in Moscow, as Ben Porat read it to Eli Zeira, was as follows:

It is known to us from Soviet sources that the Soviet Union has decided to evacuate its experts from Syria, and that planes have begun transferring them from Damascus to Moscow. These sources said that even the families of the Soviet diplomats have started coming from Damascus. These sources added

that the Syrians explained the evacuation by the fact that Syria and Egypt intend to go to war against Israel.

(Years later it turned out that, on October 3, Sadat had told the Soviet ambassador in Cairo that he had decided to go to war, and on October 4 Assad had told the Soviet ambassador in Damascus about the war that would be launched on October 6. That evening Gromyko, the Soviet foreign minister, convened his ministry's highest officials and announced that the war would begin on October 6 at 14:00, and that the Soviet leadership had decided to evacuate the Soviet civilian staff and their families out of fear for their lives. Their hasty evacuation on the night of October 4-5 was what Unit 8200 detected.)

Ben Porat finished reading and requested permission from Eli Zeira, head of Military Intelligence, for a massive reserve call-up in Unit 8200; Zeira declined to give it. The hour was 16:15. Ben Porat, along with Yardor and Bentov, was convinced that the unit had come up with a "nugget" that gave the long-awaited explanation for the urgent removal of the Russian experts' families: Syria and Egypt were gearing up for war. Meanwhile the item was translated, examined, and sent, at 17:00, by Captain Pesach Meluvani (then head of Unit 8200's reporting center) to the reporting center of Aman. The formal step of reporting had been implemented. The ball was now in the court of the Research Division and the head of Aman. What would now be done with the nugget?

At that hour the whole top brass of the Research Division was at home, as was the head of Aman. In the Syria and Egypt departments and in the superpower department as well, a department chief remained on duty. The reporting center was reinforced with Major Ilan Tehila from the superpower department. On the floor below Aman's reporting center, the chief of staff stayed in his office until nine in the evening. When he went home, he naively thought he had done everything that the intelligence picture called for. He did not have an inkling about the roebuck item.

It was Ilan Tehila who received the item from Pesach Meluvani and reported it by telephone to Head of the Research Division Aryeh Shalev, to his aide for assessment Gidon Gara, and to the chiefs of the Egypt (Yona Bendman), Syria (Avi Yaari), superpower (Haim Yaavetz), and other departments, also including, of course, aerial and naval intelligence. Shalev decided that the item was worth an immediate intelligence report. From that moment (a little after 17:30) until close to 23:00, all of those individuals engaged in writing the report and in arguing—all by telephone. As

the report was being formulated, the different research officials made several claims and reservations:

- The subsource (the Iraqi ambassador in Moscow) was not credible. His past reports had contained inaccuracies. In short, he should not be relied on excessively. Incidentally, all of the publications on the topic, including those of the Agranat Commission, refer to him as “a source.” This is an error. The source was a very credible technical source. The ambassador was, in intelligence jargon, the subsource.
- Several inaccuracies in the item aroused suspicion about it. For example, it spoke about an evacuation of the Soviet experts and not an evacuation of the families, on which there was information. In addition, one could deduce from the item that it was the Syrians who had requested the evacuation, but it was known to have been a Russian decision.
- In addition, the item did not add much with regard to assessment, because it had already been reported that among the three possible reasons for the evacuation was the Russian fear that Syria and Egypt were about to go to war.
- According to Tehila’s testimony, the most extreme stance was taken by Yona Bendman, chief of the Egypt department, who took part in the telephone debates and staunchly opposed issuing the immediate report. Toward 23:00 the report was ready. He brought the item and the Research Division’s interpretation of it. The interpretation posited two possibilities:

The first was that the Russians knew that the Syrians and the Egyptians were taking steps toward war on their own initiative, and because the Russians saw this move as fraught with danger, they had decided to evacuate their people from Syria and Egypt so as to deter the Egyptians and the Syrians while also demonstrating their consternation and their opposition to the irresponsible Arab behavior.

The second was that, on the background of the Russian opposition to the Syrian and Egyptian military move, severe friction had erupted between the Arabs and the Soviet Union, and in this context the Syrians and the Egyptians had on their own initiative demanded the evacuation of the Soviets and had used the war issue as a pretext for their removal.

After Tehila read the report to the head of Aman at about 23:00, the latter ordered that its issuance be postponed and did not report to the chief of staff. His reason, as he explained to the Agranat Commission and repeated in a wide-ranging and revealing interview with Aviram Barkai in 2014 (published by the Intelligence and Policy Studies Institute) in a special booklet called “Mashak Kanfei Hata’ut” [An Error’s Flap of Wings]), was that the Research Division had explained to him repeatedly that the source of the item (that is, the Iraqi ambassador in Moscow) was unreliable and it was not his practice to report unreliable information to the chief of staff. The report was finally issued at 6:35 on Saturday, October 6. The chief of staff saw it at 7:05.

Analysis: First Stage

On Friday, October 5, before noon, taking the lack of information into account, Aman presented three explanations/hypotheses for the evacuation: a fight between the Russians and the Egyptians and Syrians; the Russians had assessed that the IDF was preparing to attack; the Russians had assessed that the Syrians and Egyptians were preparing to attack. The third explanation was accompanied by the claim that a Syrian-Egyptian attack was completely improbable, and in any case “the Russians do not know the Arabs well” (Eli Zeira in a meeting held by Golda Meir on Friday morning with a small number of officials). Apparently, the God of the Jews had decided to provide the Jews with the real explanation in the form of the roebuck telegram.... Perhaps the telegram was not precise enough (it spoke of experts being evacuated and not about the experts’ families). But in the general context, however, of items about the Syrian and Egyptian preparations for war, and the moves that could be seen on the ground, and in the more limited context of the speedy evacuation of the experts’ families and the question marks it posed for Aman—the roebuck item was seemingly easy to understand and should have been considered a wakeup call, a harsh shofar blast about the war that, in reality, was imminent:

- First of all, it explained simply that the reason for the evacuation was that the Syrians had told the Russians that they and the Egyptians were going to war. That constituted an item, not an assessment by the Russians. Indeed, no date was given for the start of the war. Yet the rushed evacuation, the dispatch of transport planes, and the military preparations on the ground made clear that the date was imminent.
- When the Soviets told this to the Iraqi ambassador, no Arab state other than Syria and Egypt was yet aware of the evacuation of the families. Here the

Soviets made an unusual gesture toward their ally, Iraq, when they revealed to it that an Egyptian- and Syrian-initiated war was about to break out. The question of the reliability or unreliability of the Iraqi ambassador in Moscow was irrelevant.

- The substance of the ambassador's report was accurate and reflected the reality: the Soviet Union was evacuating its people from Syria and Egypt, and had sent planes for this purpose that had begun ferrying them to Moscow.
- Moreover, the ambassador was none other than Lieutenant General Salah Mahdi Amash. Before his appointment as ambassador in Moscow (1971-1974) he had served as chief of staff, defense minister, interior minister, and vice-president of Iraq. Yes, this was the "unreliable source" because of whom Eli Zeira did not report the item to the chief of staff!
- This was an item from a credible subsource on the most senior level, which confirmed Aman's conjectural explanation (which it presented to the prime minister and the political and security leadership—in written reports and orally—on that same Friday, October 5, in the late morning) that, in the Soviets' assessment, Syria and Egypt were going to war. There had been no such item before that, nor was there one after that. It was a very rare nugget!!!

But despite all that, we see that the Research Division attempted to impugn the subsource and find as many faults as possible with the item so as to diminish its value. Moreover, when one reads the immediate report that they worked on for five hours, one finds that it actually repeats two of the explanations that were given on the morning of that day (before the arrival of the roebuck telegram) and omits the explanation that the Russians thought the IDF was about to attack. And, most important, it does not contain one word about the fact that Syria and Egypt were about to attack as imminently as possible, and that the probability of them doing so had changed from low to high. In other words, no connection was drawn between the nugget and all the huge military preparations at the Syrian and Egyptian fronts. Broadly speaking, this item not only supplied the reason for the evacuation of the Soviet experts' families but also a clear-cut answer to the great question: what was the meaning of the military moves and preparations, the likes of which had never been conducted by the Syrian and Egyptian armies? And the answer: that they were about to launch an offensive against Israel! In other words, this was a heaven-sent item from a completely credible source, which preceded the Ashraf Marwan item by more than 10 hours.

Analysis: Second Stage

Why did it happen?

The Item and the Understanding of the Item

A person who reads an item, or sees a certain event (which actually constitutes an intelligence item), understands it in light of what he has in his “head” (opinions, beliefs, a store of knowledge, prejudices, various emotions such as hate or love), in keeping with the item’s contexts and the overall situation in which it is received. When people read a certain item, they are not a tabula rasa. What was in the “head” of the Research Division’s top brass and the chief of Aman? A conception according to which: the Egyptians would not initiate a war so long as they lacked the aerial capabilities to hit the Israeli airbases; Sadat would not take a chance with a war he knew he would lose, so long as the balance of power did not change in his favor; and Syria would not go to war alone, only with Egypt. Because this conception was based on very reliable intelligence, it was reinforced and gradually became entrenched, meaning that items contradicting it were rejected.

But when the items contradicting the conception keep mounting, the growing gap between belief and reality creates a cognitive dissonance. How can one overcome this dissonance? The human mind achieves peaks of creativity when it wants to nullify contradictory items, diminish their value, attend only to the elements in them that fit the conception, or simply ignore them. That is what happened with the roebuck item. The minds of the chief of Aman and the top research officials had a very hard time accepting the item as it simply was; it would have meant dethroning the conception—a difficult, traumatic, and even impossible situation. Hence they started looking for flaws in the content of the item and in its subsource. For the head of Aman (as I will show below), the unreliable subsource was ostensibly the reason he did not report the item to the chief of staff. As a result, the immediate report that was issued again presented conjectures that had no basis in the information; that way one could keep espousing the conception of a very low probability of war. The research leadership clung to its conception even on Saturday morning, October 6, when the information came from Ashraf Marwan that the Egyptians and Syrians would go to war that same day.

I would like to note some factors that served the Aman leadership in clinging to their conception:

- The large Egyptian exercise, Tahrir 41. In the last week of September, information flowed from Egypt that on October 1 it would begin a large-scale exercise in which all its armed-forces commands would take part, and that this drill would end on October 7. This was one of the Egyptians' deceptive moves. From that moment, and particularly starting on October 1, Aman understood and interpreted all the Egyptian military actions and the massive reinforcement on the canal front as part of the great exercise, and in no way as preparations for war. Aman conveyed this view to the IDF and the political leadership; the leadership absorbed it and based its considerations on the assumption that such an exercise was taking place. But then October 1 arrived, and in fact there was no such exercise. That whole first week of October, Aman spoke about the exercise—but there was no exercise. In an exercise there are judges and oversight, there is a sequence of events and many other indications. But there were none of these. What was actually the case was that the Egyptians had set their forces in motion and made all the preparations for war. It was not the Egyptians who deceived us; we deceived ourselves that there was an exercise. My view is that it was convenient to do so because the conception was preserved—if there was an exercise then there was no war!

Moreover, this self-deception clearly affected how the Syrian front was viewed. If, on October 1 or even October 2, Aman had turned to the political and security leadership and told them, "I was wrong, there is no large exercise in Egypt," then all the Syrian military preparations on the Golan front would have been rightly interpreted, obviating all at once the entirely mistaken construal that: there was an exercise in Egypt, Syria would not go to war without Egypt, hence all of Syria's military preparations were defensive.

- In the interview published in "An Error's Flap of Wings," Zeira remarked to Barkai: "The Egyptians and the Syrians made an excellent move of deception. Could we have seen through it then?... Yes we could have, no we couldn't have, they carried out a deception and succeeded at it." On a different occasion, Zeira told the Agranat Commission that the Egyptians and the Syrians had kept the date of launching the war secret, and that only very few knew about the war at all. Others stated as well that the Egyptians and the Syrians were very successful in their deception. In my opinion, these are only excuses. I will begin with Syria, about which I am knowledgeable, having devoted some time to investigating its moves on the way to the Yom Kippur War and during it.

Well, actually there was no Syrian deception. All the Syrian documents and maps related to the war were given the heading “Exercise 110.” We only knew about this after the war, when we saw the seized documents. The Syrians carried out regular and efficient field-security work according to the Russian playbook. A large proportion of the Syrian commanders were let in on the secret of the war beforehand (according to a Syrian document seized from the headquarters of Infantry Division 7, which attacked on the northern Golan; it details all the field-security measures taken during the run-up to the war). Brigade commanders and some of their staff commanders were let in on the secret on September 16, and began to do the planning; commanders of the different support units (antitank and anti-aircraft) began the planning on October 1, as did the battalion commanders. Presumably the division commanders and their staff commanders were informed about the secret of the war a considerable time before September 16 (by then they had to finish the divisional planning so as to begin the brigade-level planning). It is no surprise, then, that agents of Unit 154 (the human collecting unit of Military Intelligence) on the Golan front, as well as the Iraqi ambassador in Damascus, reported that they had heard from Syrian officers about the war to be initiated against Israel.

In Egypt, as Colonel Menachem Digli, head of the Intelligence Corps’ Collection Department, testified to the Agranat Commission, many in the army knew about the war. Two Egyptian commando soldiers who were captured by the IDF three days before the war were able to tell their Shin Bet interrogators that it would start on October 6. It is convenient in retrospect to give the Arabs high grades for the deception. In reality, we deceived ourselves much more than the enemy did.

- The Arabs’ fears of Israel. This is one of the main ways for the adherents of the entrenched conception to explain a reality that does not suit it. Regarding the Syrians, from the moment they began massively reinforcing the front, an interpretation given was that they feared an Israeli offensive and so were building a defensive deployment. The problem is that the more these reinforcements grew, the clearer it became that it was a classic offensive deployment, and the “fears” explanation no longer held water. And then the creative imagination kicked in and “sold” the Jews this explanation: according to the Soviet doctrine, a defensive deployment was also an offensive one—which was not right at all. Just to give one notable example, in an offensive deployment all the artillery is

directed “forward,” and therefore so are its ammunition stockpiles. In a defensive deployment, the artillery is arranged at the rear.

- On October 5, when Aman’s top brass saw that it was already impossible to provide an excuse for all the Egyptian moves in the large exercise, the “fears” excuse was tapped. It was explained that based on an exercise in Sinai by a paratroopers’ brigade, our own surveillance flights, statements in the media about Arab fears, the fundamental Arab fear of Israeli belligerence—for all these reasons the Egyptians were afraid and were deploying defensively. None of this had any foundation, not even an iota of a foundation, in credible intelligence information.

Along with the entrenched conception and all its accoutrements, it must be emphasized that the research leadership was plagued by a major methodological failure. It seems to me that any reasonable person would have raised the simple question: how is it that the Research Division, or the head of Aman, did not come up with the simplest question: if we keep touting the notion that, for various and sundry reasons, the probability of an Arab-initiated war is very low, why do we not test the opposite notion that actually there is a probability of war? Here I will not delve into the research doctrine, but I will just say this: the cornerstone of intelligence assessment is that one must never settle for any one possibility, any one course of action by the enemy. Assessment requires choosing two or more basic possibilities (whether in the inductive method, which is based on information, or in the deductive method, which raises hypotheses), examining them in light of the information and the general context, and selecting one of them. That will be the possibility that is chosen. This possibility will be examined all the time in light of the information (confirming or contradicting) and the circumstances. Meanwhile the other possibilities that “competed” with it must be examined as well.

At that time this basic method was not followed in the research. One would think the Research Division would at least have gathered all the items that supported a war and contravened the opinion that there would not be one. Indeed, the “disproof method,” where one raises a hypothesis and tries to disprove it (not confirm it!), is well known in this context. In my opinion, it is a very good method in extreme crisis situations. For instance, in the week before the outbreak of the war, the Research Division (or a special team appointed for this purpose) should have raised the hypothesis that all of the Syrian and Egyptian moves were aimed at starting a war against Israel. There should then have been an attempt to disprove that hypothesis. If

within a few days the information was unable to disprove it, then this hypothesis should have become a basic element of assessment. Namely: Egypt and Syria were going to war, so long as that statement was not disproved.

Analysis: Third Stage

This analysis is concerned with the “organizational” aspects of intelligence work. I will begin with research. Discussion is one of the most basic tools of research. Before the Yom Kippur War it was much used, sometimes even in an exaggerated fashion. What, though, happened with the roebuck item on the evening of October 5? For about five hours countless telephone conversations dealt with writing the report, with its wording, with arguments—but there was no guiding hand. The head of the Research Division did not take the trouble to go to his office, summon all the relevant research officials, hold a brief brainstorming session, and formulate the position paper to be sent out to all the top brass. There were, of course, factors conducive to this omission: it was Yom Kippur eve, and the research people were very tired. It appears to me, however, that the explanation actually lies elsewhere: the unwillingness to sit down together and clarify an item that ran completely counter to the conception. And if they had sat, would anything have come of it? Could anything have overcome the conception? Of course, one cannot know, but there is room for doubt.

However, the “organizational” problem, which concerns the fact that the head of Aman did not report the item to the chief of staff, is in my eyes ten times more important than the failure to convene a discussion of the research. It reflected the whole relationship between the head of Aman and the chief of staff, and exemplified it at a fateful moment for the state of Israel. It was, if you will, the climax of the drama. What is the issue here? The head of Aman is first and foremost the intelligence officer of the chief of staff, of the general staff, and therefore of the IDF, its commanders, and its soldiers. He is directly subordinate to the chief of staff, and also subordinate, via the chief of staff and the defense minister, to the prime minister. His role as intelligence officer of the chief of staff comes before his role as the national intelligence assessor of the state of Israel.

Major General Aharon Yariv, who preceded Zeira as head of Aman, said once in a lecture: “If I succeeded to save the life of a single soldier, then I fulfilled my role as head of Aman.” He set the standard for the relations between the head of Aman and the chief of staff: relations of total trust, mutual esteem, an intimate system of

consultation and reporting, ongoing contacts amid mutual deliberations. Three chiefs of staff served during Yariv's tenure: Yitzhak Rabin, Haim Bar-Lev, and "Dado" (David Elazar) (for a year). Yariv would go to the chief of staff's office every evening, peek into his room, sit for a short time to exchange views, to report something new and intimate. At night, when the reporting center of Aman would convey an important item to him that concerned the IDF, Yariv would make sure it was also reported to the chief of staff. On weekdays, in addition to the "personal meetings" and formal "work meetings" with the chief of staff, Yariv would meet with him alone for brief conversations after sensitive and important intelligence information had arrived.

I do not know for certain how the relations between Zeira and Dado were conducted. According to the testimony of Avner Shalev, Dado's bureau chief, the relations between the two were not characterized by an intimate atmosphere. The informal talks that were held each evening in Yariv's time were stopped, and Zeira ceased sending Dado important new items. In the interview with Barkai, Zeira himself described his relations with the chief of staff: "The cooperation between me and Chief of Staff Dado was good cooperation, good work relations, correct, loyal. I did not know Dado from the past." The words speak for themselves. These were not relations at the level of intimacy.

One of the main things plaguing Zeira is that he only told the deputy chief of staff his view that the IDF needed to deploy differently at the Egyptian front. He did not talk about it with the chief of staff. Judging by all of his testimony to the Agranat Commission (see his fifth testimony on page 88 in the IDF archive), the interview with Barkai, and Dado's testimony, it does not appear that Zeira and Dado held even one talk between the two of them during the week that preceded the war. The impression is that Dado only heard from the head of Aman in the formal discussions; likewise, Zeira only heard the chief of staff's misgivings in those formal discussions. One has to read the relevant lines and take in the amazing fact that during this fateful week for the people of Israel, during the 24 hours before the war broke out, the intelligence officer of the chief of staff did not hold even a single personal conversation with his commander.

What was the cause of this relationship, which was so different from those between Yariv and his chiefs of staff? Did it stem mainly from Zeira's arrogance, from the mutual lack of esteem, from Zeira's well-known closeness to the defense minister, who was responsible for his appointment? From the lack of a common past and

personal familiarity? I do not know. What is important is that this relationship formed the background for what transpired on Friday, October 5, between the chief of staff and his intelligence officer, Eli Zeira.

Dado was in his office until 21:00. Zeira went home before that, apparently at around 17:00. According to several testimonies, he received the item by telephone from the commander of Unit 8200 at around 16:15. It was a tense evening, everything hanging by a hair's breadth. Yet Zeira did not enter the chief of staff's office to talk with Dado, share concerns with him, give him the most up-to-date information. Even if we accept Zeira's version (and all the signs indicate that it cannot be accepted) that he only found out about the roebuck item at 23:00, in any case there was no contact between him and the chief of staff until that time. It comes as no surprise, then, that even at that hour he did not report the item to the chief of staff by phone.

The question often arises: would Yariv, too, have failed as Zeira did? The answer is, of course, with the gods. It seems to me, though, that I can assume with certainty that Yariv would have reported the roebuck item to the chief of staff, and on that same fateful evening, October 5, would have gone and talked with Dado before leaving for his last meal before the fast. He was, in the end, the chief of staff's intelligence officer, and that had been the practice with the chief of staff for years. With Zeira that practice did not exist.

A further point emerges from the relationship between the head of Aman and the chief of staff: in his testimony to the Agranat Commission, Zeira claimed that even if he had reported the roebuck item (and the source was credible!) to the chief of staff, it would not have impelled the latter to do something. As he explained it to the committee: "I knew that the IDF was on high alert, with 300 tanks in Sinai, 180 tanks on the Golan, the finger on the trigger. That was my feeling and I assume it was also the feeling of the chief of staff." His response to the committee members' questions was that, in his opinion, for this reason the chief of staff would not have done anything. That is, there was no point in bringing the roebuck item to his knowledge.

Of course, Zeira's "knowledge" about the state of the IDF at that time was mistaken, but that is not the point. The head of Aman, whoever it is, at any time, cannot know the heart of the chief of staff, know what is really occupying him, what he fears, what he sees as the current weak points of the military state of affairs, what he expects from intelligence at any given moment, and particularly at critical moments; if the two

are not close, with daily contact, a common language, mutual understanding, then the head of Aman cannot know those things. When Zeira was asked by the Agranat Commission (fifth testimony) if he had ever asked the chief of staff which items he wished to receive, he answered in the negative. Eventually Dado would tell Yoel Ben Porat, head of Unit 8200:

On the floor above me information about the war was placed, and nobody shows me. Why didn't anyone call me on the phone? If I had seen the paper at five, five-thirty, or six [on Friday, October 5], I would have given an order to call up the reserves because Alert C was already in force from the morning, and I and the defense minister were authorized to do that even without a meeting of the government. If we had done that at six in the evening on Friday, the reserve forces of Northern Command would already have reached the lines before the firing started, and the Syrians wouldn't have broken through the front.

No more needs to be said.

Conclusion

We have written much about the relations between intelligence and the top decision-making echelon. Zeira's interview with Barkai touched on some elements of those relations. For example, what does the head of Aman contribute to the making of major decisions by the prime minister in the national-security sphere? Is he an influential actor? Is it his role to be resolute or skeptical? Is the head of Aman or the political leadership responsible for assessing the intentions of the enemy's political leadership? It seems to me that the roebuck episode illustrates how vital it is that the head of Aman and the chief of staff conduct an ongoing dialogue, some of it intimate and informal, as well as the supreme importance of the personality of these two officials, and particularly that of the head of Aman. Without such a dialogue the highest quality intelligence will come to nothing. That is perhaps the important lesson from the roebuck episode, and it pertains to intelligence officers of all ranks whoever they may be.

And the second important lesson: intelligence collection and intelligence nuggets are likely to go to waste when research is afflicted with blindness and self-deception. That was true in the circumstances that prevailed over 40 years ago, and it will also be true in the future. The well-known children's story about Humpty Dumpty, who fell off the

wall, includes the lines: "All the king's horses and all the king's men / Couldn't put Humpty together again." I would add: all of the technology with all its wonders cannot save a closed, stubborn mind.