



Trade Insights, Not Barbs

by Maj. Gen. (res.) Yaakov Amidror

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: The failures found in the wake of Operation Protective Edge in Gaza in 2014 illustrate that in war, nothing is as important as the proper division of roles. The IDF should stay out of politics, and the cabinet should refrain from tactical planning.

State Comptroller Yosef Shapira's report on Operation Protective Edge in the Gaza Strip in 2014, which found fault with the military's conduct as well as in the Diplomatic-Security Cabinet's decision-making process ahead of and during the campaign, stirred controversy for obvious reasons. Those who were criticized want to defend their reputations, while others are eager to use the findings to settle political scores. Israelis are left to wonder how it is that such a grand series of "failures" has resulted in two and a half years of quiet in southern Israel.

I cannot comment on the cabinet's work process, as at the request of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, I headed a committee that formulated recommendations on how that process could be improved. And while my report is not classified, I think it more prudent to present it to the cabinet before discussing it in public.

Nevertheless, two issues can be illustrated, as they do not stem from the committee's work. The first has to do with cabinet members' level of knowledge, and the second with the cabinet's ability to hold effective discussions.

On the level of knowledge cabinet members have on matters of national security: I have been participating in cabinet meetings since 1992, in my

capacity as director of research with Military Intelligence, and I have learned that it is difficult to overcome gaps in the ministers' knowledge. Most of them are preoccupied with the affairs of their offices for many hours of the day, and few have any knowledge or training in national security issues.

I believe it would be best to designate two ministers without portfolio to the cabinet solely for the purpose of being kept apprised of such matters. This would ensure that at any given time, at least two ministers would be prepared for any cabinet meeting. These ministers, who would have to be experienced people, would also serve as a balance against other ministers who are responsible for specific issues, as well as the relevant professional bodies.

The criticism that having two ministers serve in such cabinet roles would "cost money" is dwarfed by the benefit it would entail for the entire forum. As for the cabinet's ability to hold effective discussions, previous prime ministers often put together small fora of individuals with whom they could hold informal consultations.

There was, for example, the eight-minister forum, dubbed "the octet," that served under Netanyahu until the 2013 elections. The secret to this highly effective forum's success was the fact that its discussions were leak-free, as well as minutes-free.

If the Diplomatic-Security Cabinet cannot maintain the absolute discretion required of its sessions, it has no hope of functioning properly. This is not about politics, and it makes no difference who the prime minister is. No prime minister can work with a leaking cabinet.

Everything else aside, we would be wise to focus on implementing the comptroller's findings and conclusions following the Gaza campaign to improve the way future conflicts are managed, instead of bickering and assigning blame.

One of the main issues underscored in Shapira's report was that the military, despite having all the necessary information, failed to outline a proper operational plan to counter the threat posed by Hamas's grid of terror tunnels. This was a fundamental failure, but one for which solutions are already being implemented.

Truth be told, the IDF faced a very similar situation in 1973. The military had information about Syria's arsenal of Sagger anti-tank missiles, including from incidents when IDF tanks had come under Sagger fire in the Golan Heights. In the Yom Kippur War, however, the IDF was taken by surprise and had no

solution to the threat. It had failed to develop technological countermeasures, and the results on the battlefield were dire.

At the time, the weighty question arose of why the military had not been prepared to counter a clear and known threat. It appears that this is a known phenomenon -- when facts are known, but conclusions are not drawn or their significance is not fully grasped by the organization.

To overcome this problem, after the Yom Kippur War, the military decided to name an officer, holding the rank of colonel, whose job was to "sound the alarm" whenever it seemed the enemy was developing a new threat. He was the one tasked with ensuring all relevant operational systems were aware of the threat and working on countermeasures.

It became evident after a while that the role was redundant – or so the General Staff believed at the time – and it was annulled. I am not sure creating the role was the best solution for the problem at hand, but it was a valid attempt to deal with it in a practical way. It is again time to look for a solution so that the IDF does not fail in the same way in the future. One must note, however, that no one expected then-Prime Minister Golda Meir to devise a tactical and operational response to the Sagger threat. That responsibility fell to the defense establishment.

The various challenges must be dealt with in a scaled manner for the system to function properly across the board. If the cabinet is busy outlining operational tactics, it will clearly have less time to outline strategy.

Opting for a tactical approach over a strategic one may be useful when dealing with specific incidents, but doing so undermines the greater objective of military campaigns or full-scale wars. Both call for meticulously maintaining the proper division of roles. The military must focus on tactical and operational issues, and the defense minister must provide the IDF with the necessary tools to devise and apply solutions while prioritizing the objectives formulated by the prime minister and approved by the cabinet.

The cabinet's main contribution to the process is on the strategic level. Its members must not be distracted by other things, interesting though they may be. For the same reason, the military should not concern itself with politics, as it has to remain focused on tactical and operational issues. As for the comptroller's report: the blame game must end, as it helps nothing and no one. All this energy should be focused on bolstering the weak points evident in Operation Protective Edge's execution.

This is an edited version of an [article](#) that appeared in Israel Hayom on March 3, 2017.

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