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The Warning that Came from the Sea: Naval Intelligence in the Yom Kippur War

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In the nearly fifty years since the Yom Kippur War, there have been numerous studies about how Israeli intelligence was caught by surprise and failed. The overwhelming majority of them have focused, quite rightly, on the IDF Intelligence Directorate (AMAN), the largest organization in the Israeli intelligence community, which is responsible for issuing warnings about impending wars and the national intelligence assessment.² In later years, following the exposure of the identity of Mossad's high-ranking source, Ashraf Marwan, studies, memoirs, and media reports began to focus on the role of Mossad in the run-up to the war.³

In fact, however, it was a relatively small intelligence organization, the intelligence department of the Israeli Navy, that assessed—contrary to the position of the IDF Intelligence Directorate—that war was imminent. The late Col. Avraham (Rami) Lunz, who commanded the Israeli Navy's intelligence department at the time, claimed that on September 30, 1973, six days before the outbreak of the war, naval intelligence concluded that war was on its way. In his comprehensive study of Israeli intelligence and the surprise of the Yom Kippur War, Uri Bar-Joseph briefly mentioned Lunz as an exceptional case of independent thinking within the intelligence community. Lunz's deputy, Uri Meretz, wrote a short paper subtitled "The Consensus that Silenced the Alarm" and presented a nuanced and less unequivocal picture of the naval intelligence's assessment/warning and how it was received.⁴ To date, no comprehensive academic study, however, has yet been written on the subject.

¹ This article is part of a post-doctorate research about the Israeli Navy in the Yom Kippur war written for the Maritime Policy and Strategy Research Center, University of Haifa. The author would like to thank Prof. Shaul Chorev, Dr. Ziv Rubinovitz and Naval Captain (Res.) Shlomo Guetta for their comments and to Nava Reich and the staff of the Library of the Center for Intelligence Heritage for their assistance.

² Aryeh Shalev, *Israel's Intelligence Assessment before the Yom Kippur War* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2008), 1–5; Shlomo Gazit, *Between Warning and Surprise: On Shaping National Intelligence Assessment in Israel* (Tel Aviv: Jaffa Center for Strategic Studies, 2003), 12–23, 28–29 [Hebrew].

³ Uri Bar-Joseph, *The Watchman Fell Asleep* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), pp. 1–7; Uri Bar-Joseph, *The Angel: The Egyptian Spy Who Saved Israel* (New York: HarperCollins, 2016); Ronen Bergman and Gil Meltzer, "[Who are you, Agent Babel?](#)" *ynet*, May 5, 2005 [Hebrew].

⁴ Daniella Ran, "Fifth Interview with Rami Lunz", *Israeli Navy Heritage Documentation Project*, June 22, 1995 [Hebrew]; Yossi Omessi and Itzik Azar, "I concluded it was war six days before it broke

This study seeks to fill the gap and examine how it was possible that of all Israel's intelligence entities, it was the naval intelligence branch that read the writing on the wall and formed an independent assessment that war was coming. How was this assessment received by the IDF Intelligence Directorate and the Israeli Navy? How, if at all, did this assessment influence the Israeli Navy's readiness for war?

By analyzing testimonies and using a range of other sources, we can paint a more detailed picture of how Israeli naval intelligence formed its assessment that war was imminent; additionally, we can also draw methodological and theoretical lessons from this, which may also be relevant for other cases.

Naval intelligence

Is naval intelligence defined by unique characteristics or is it simply a subsector of intelligence? And from an organizational perspective, is it simply the branch of intelligence that focuses on the maritime domain? A U.S. Navy study in 1994 defined and characterized naval intelligence from an American perspective, focusing on its role in serving the U.S. Navy and supporting its naval and joint operations, but it specified that because of its international reach, naval intelligence is important in times of peace. Navy vessels, ships, and submarines regularly carry materiel, radars, sonar, and more, which also serve for reconnaissance and can carry special intelligence-gathering technologies.⁵

In times of war, the more offensive the enemy's fleet, the greater the chance of naval intelligence picking up on clues of war and sounding the alarm, whereas while the enemy fleet is geared toward defense, it becomes less likely that opposing forces will be able to identify clear signs of war.

The naval intelligence branch is part of the state's intelligence community. In maritime powers such as the United States and Britain, which operate all over the world with navies that are often the first military branch to reach crises and warzones, naval intelligence

out", *Between the Waves*, 2003, 20–26 [Hebrew]; Rami Lunz, "The Yom Kippur War in the Maritime Domain", in Haggai Golan and Shaul Shai (eds.), *Studies in the Yom Kippur War* (Tel Aviv: Ma'archot, 2003), 390 [Hebrew]; Brig. Gen. Rami Lunz, in Benny Michaelson (ed.), *The Yom Kippur War: Seminar in Issues in Israel's Security 1998* (Reut: A. Meltzer, 2013), 475–476 [Hebrew]; Bar-Joseph, *The Watchman Fell Asleep*, 99–100 ; Yoav Gelber, *Rahav: Israel's Road to the Yom Kippur War, 1970–1973* (Modi'in: Kinneret Zemora Bitan, 2021), 534–535 [Hebrew]; Shay Levy, "The Israeli Navy in the Yom Kippur War, the Untold Story", *Pazam*, October 11, 2016 [Hebrew]; Uriel Meretz, "Naval intelligence in the Yom Kippur War: the consensus that silenced the alarm", *Mabat Malam* 67 (November 2013) [Hebrew].

⁵ [Naval Doctrine Publication 2: Naval Intelligence](#), Department of the Navy Office of The Chief of Naval Operations (September 30, 1994): 3–11.

plays a critical role. During the Cold War, in light of the importance of submarines in nuclear weapons systems, naval intelligence played a strategic role. Both the United States and USSR deployed their navies on a massive scale to gather intelligence on each other.⁶

The situation is different in countries like Israel that are not maritime powers and have waged mainly land wars, and whose navies are regarded as secondary branches of the military, of lesser importance than ground and air forces.

The Naval Intelligence Division: historical background

Israel's naval intelligence was established in April 1948, on the eve of the declaration of independence, and in May 1949 the naval intelligence branch was officially formed.⁷ Until 1972, it was based at the Israeli Navy's headquarters at Stella Maris in Haifa. The Israeli Navy's HQ was subsequently relocated, along with naval intelligence, to the General Staff's HQ in Tel Aviv. Israeli naval intelligence has two roles: one, as the Israeli Navy's chief intelligence body and the second, as the IDF Intelligence Directorate's chief naval intelligence organization. It is answerable in the chain of command to the commander of the Israeli Navy and professionally to the head of the IDF Intelligence Directorate. Israel's naval intelligence started out as a small agency manned by inexperienced officers; gradually, over the years, it evolved into a professional and established body, but it remained a relatively small intelligence agency, certainly in comparison with the Intelligence Directorate.⁸ The Naval Intelligence Directorate serves two simultaneous functions: it provides general intelligence to the Navy and naval intelligence to the broader intelligence community and the State of Israel (Fig 1.)

⁶ For background on naval intelligence around the world, see: Marcus Fualkner, "Naval Intelligence and Innovation: A Historical Perspective", in Alessio Patalano and James A. Russell (eds.), *Maritime Strategy and Naval Innovation* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2021): 90–104.

⁷ In this chapter, I will use the terms "naval intelligence" and "the naval intelligence branch" to refer to the period of the Yom Kippur War. The IDF Intelligence Division used the term "naval intelligence" to refer to the naval intelligence branch. Nowadays the organization is known as the Naval Intelligence Division.

⁸ For more on the history of Israeli naval intelligence, see: Avi Uval, "The Bond of Silence", *Between the Waves* 176 (December 1988), 21–25 [Hebrew]; Daniella Ran, "Interview with Reuven Ashkenazi", *Israeli Navy Heritage Documentation Project*, December 25, 1998, 7–8 [Hebrew]; Ephraim Lapid, *Clandestine Warriors in Israeli Intelligence: An Inside Look* (Rishon LeZion: Miskal and Hemed, 2017), 120–124 [Hebrew]; Aryeh Oren and Shlomo Guetta, "The Sea of Information in IDF Naval Intelligence", in Amos Gilboa and Ephraim Lapid (eds.), *Israel's Silent Defender: An Inside Look at Sixty Years of Israeli Intelligence* (Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing House, 2012), 267–274.

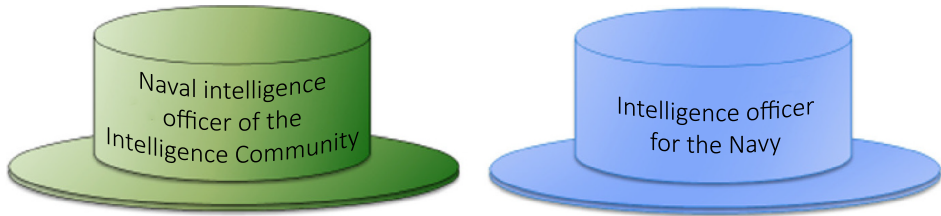


Fig. 1: Illustration of the double role of Israeli naval intelligence: it provides general intelligence to the Navy and naval intelligence to the broader intelligence community.

Courtesy of Shlomo Guetta

The Six-Day War

Lt. Col. Reuven Ashkenazi was appointed the commander of Israeli naval intelligence in 1964. According to Ashkenazi, on the eve of the 1967 Six-Day War, Israel's naval intelligence was the first to detect that the Egyptian Navy was ready for war and issued an assessment to this effect to the Intelligence Directorate. Brig. Gen. (res.) Amos Gilboa wrote about this in his biography of the commander of the Intelligence Directorate, Aharon Yariv: "On the morning of May 30, Reuven Ashkenazi, the head of naval intelligence, told Aharon Yariv: sir, we have a paper on the way concluding that the Egyptian Navy is ready for war; whether it will go to war, that's not for me to say, but for you". According to Gilboa, Yariv remembered this phone call on the morning of Tuesday, May 30 to Ashkenazi's credit.⁹ During the war, the Israeli Navy missed opportunities, did not execute operations it had planned, and experienced several failures. According to Ashkenazi, part of the reason that the Israeli Navy disappointed in the war was its failure to act on its excellent intelligence.¹⁰

A position paper that Ashkenazi presented following the Six-Day War served as a blueprint for the development of naval intelligence, boosting its manpower, assigning intelligence officers to a variety of units, establishing a sigint unit including tactical intelligence teams that joined voyages on warships and submarines and listened to radio communications (this would eventually become Unit 663), and developing the field of technical intelligence and analysis of enemy fighting techniques.¹¹

⁹ Ran, "Interview with Reuven Ashkenazi", 8 [Hebrew]; Amos Gilboa, *Mr. Intelligence – Ahrale Yariv* (Tel Aviv: Miskal and Hemed, 2013), 283 [Hebrew].

¹⁰ Ran, "Interview with Reuven Ashkenazi", 4–5 [Hebrew]; Arie Rona and Cochavi Azran, "The Navy during the war", in Avraham Zohar and Pesach Malovany (eds.), *The Six-Day War: 50 Years Later* (Institute for the Study of Israel's Wars, 2018), 527–570 [Hebrew].

¹¹ Ran, "Interview with Reuven Ashkenazi", *ibid.* [Hebrew]. For more on the sigint unit: Amir Bohbot, "From a small and secret cell thousands of kilometers from Israel: the secret unit of the Israeli Navy revealed for the first time", *Walla!*, April 23, 2022 [Hebrew].

According to Gilboa, soon after the war, the head of the IDF Intelligence Directorate, Aharon Yariv, met with Israeli Navy Commander Shlomo Erell and Ashkenazi. "On the agenda was the allocation of more resources to the Navy for naval intelligence and strengthening the link between naval intelligence and Unit 848 [now Unit 8200]. It was agreed that the naval intelligence branch, like air force intelligence, would be attached to operations 24 hours a day and would build itself accordingly, with the required organization and equipment; thorough research would be conducted into the Egyptian Navy and its available weapons, and into Russian fleet in the Mediterranean Sea".¹²

The sinking of INS Eilat

On October 21, 1967, the INS *Eilat* was drowned off the coast of Port Said as the result of a Styx missile attack from an Egyptian Komar missile boat (Fig. 2). Forty-seven crewmen were killed. The IDF's commission of inquiry found that on October 21, Unit 848 had received two pieces of information that warned that the Egyptians were about to do something. The unit was unaware of the INS *Eilat's* voyage and location opposite Port Said. According to the duty officer in Unit 848, a telephone report was transmitted to the duty officer at the naval intelligence branch at Navy HQ in Haifa. This naval officer subsequently denied having received such a report. The commission of inquiry did not settle the conflict between these two accounts. Its report concluded that the fundamental failure lay with the General Staff and the Israeli Navy's treatment of the warship's sorties off the coast of the Sinai as routine patrols, not combat activities. It also exposed the coordination problems between the Israeli Navy and the General Staff, which had already arisen before, and this contributed to the Navy HQ's relocation to the General Staff's base in Tel Aviv in 1972.¹³

In 1969, the Israeli Navy's intelligence branch, officially known as Sea Branch/4, became an intelligence department, containing two branches—a reconnaissance branch and a research branch—in addition to a field security section and a technical services section. The head of this intelligence department was Reuven Ashkenazi, who had headed naval intelligence since 1964 and was now promoted to the rank of Navy Captain. The naval intelligence branch had been subordinate to the operations department and gradually became an almost independent department subordinate to the commander of the Israeli Navy. In 1971, Navy Captain Avraham (Rami) Lunz, the former head of the reconnaissance

¹² Uval, 23 [Hebrew]; Ran, "Interview with Reuven Ashkenazi", *ibid.* [Hebrew]; Gilboa, *Mr. Intelligence*, 348 [Hebrew].

¹³ Gilboa, *Mr. Intelligence*, 347–349 [Hebrew]; Shlomo Erell, *Before You, the Sea* (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense, 1998), 291–297 [Hebrew]; Yossi Melman, "The last secret of INS Eilat", *Haaretz*, 8 March 2005 [Hebrew].

branch in Israeli naval intelligence, was appointed the head of the Israeli Navy's intelligence department. In the summer of 1973, its research branch was split into two: a naval research branch, which dealt with Arab states' navies, and a target research branch, which investigated maritime infrastructure on enemy shores. Navy Captain Uri Meretz, who had previously served as the head of the research branch, was appointed a research aide to the head of the intelligence department, with responsibility for both research branches, as well as the technical research section and the operations section (Fig. 3).¹⁴

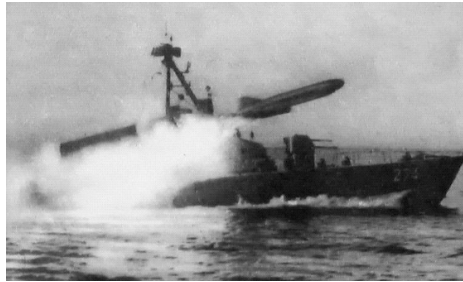


Fig. 2: The Komar missile boat launching a Styx missile (source: Naval Intelligence Directorate, Wikipedia)



Fig. 3: Israeli Navy Commander Avraham Botzer and Department head Rami Lunz with naval intelligence officers, summer of 1972 (source: Naval Intelligence Directorate, Wikipedia)

¹⁴ Ran, Ashkenazi, *ibid.* [Hebrew]; Ran, Lunz [Hebrew]; [Naval Intelligence Directorate](#), Wikipedia [Hebrew].

Intelligence about the maritime domain ahead of the Yom Kippur War

Reconnaissance

Most of the information about the maritime domain came from Unit 848's interceptions, with the involvement of a maritime network intelligence section manned by naval intelligence officers, trained in tracking Egyptian naval communications. The Navy also made use of visual intelligence and information from foreign agencies, including Italian intelligence, with which Israeli naval intelligence had good relations, and the British and American intelligence services.¹⁵ According to Lunz, he had received some paraphrased snippets from Mossad top agents about the maritime domain.¹⁶ Israeli naval intelligence's main focus was the Egyptian Navy, seen as its primary enemy. The Syrian Navy was a smaller, a secondary threat; reconnaissance coverage of its activities was deficient, and information about it was sparse.¹⁷

Research

According to Meretz, Israeli naval intelligence did not have good information about the enemy's intentions, and its research focused on two areas: 1) basic intelligence, technical intelligence, and analysis of enemy navies' routine activity; 2) warning intelligence, identifying signs of impending war.

Israeli naval intelligence kept the Egyptian Navy, along with its activities and exercises, under constant monitoring. It made inferences from Soviet military doctrines and analyzed the technical data about Egypt's ships and weapon systems. This monitoring and research contributed greatly to the Israeli Navy's force buildup and especially to its development of electronic defenses against the Styx missile, led by the electrical engineering officer Navy Captain Herut Tsemach. It also contributed to Israel's understanding of Egyptian military doctrines, which allowed it to perform exercises at sea and at the Navy's tactical training facility, and to build a suitable combat doctrine for Israeli missile boats to stand up to the Egyptian fleet. Israel's naval intelligence also monitored the Soviet fleet operating in the Mediterranean and anchored at Egyptian and Syrian bases.¹⁸

¹⁵ Meretz, "Naval intelligence in the Yom Kippur War", 48 [Hebrew]; interview with Lt. Col. (res.) Uri Meretz, Ramat Hasharon, July 13, 2022 [Hebrew]; Lunz also addressed Unit 848 interceptions as a primary source. See: [Col. Rami Lunz at the Agranat Commission](#), December 18, 1973, IDF Archive, 77 (henceforth: Lunz's testimony) [Hebrew].

¹⁶ Lunz's testimony.

¹⁷ Interview with Lt. Col. (res.) Gil Shapira, Rosh Ha'Ayin, September 21, 2022.

¹⁸ Meretz, "Intelligence", *ibid* [Hebrew]; Amos Gilboa, "Naval intelligence warned: there will be war. Nobody listened", *Maariv*, September 29, 1998 [Hebrew]; interview with Meretz, *ibid*.

"Blue and White" preparedness

In April 1973, Israel received reports about Egyptian intentions to launch a war in May. Consequently, the IDF took steps to improve its readiness for war under the codename "Blue and White", until the state of high alert was cancelled in August. On April 11, Ashraf Marwan (Nasser's brother-in-law and a confidant of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat), who had been a Mossad agent since 1969, sent Israel a detailed report stating that Egypt intended to open fire in mid-May. According to Bar-Joseph, "Marwan also communicated that the Egyptian Navy intended to impose a maritime blockade on the Bab el-Mandeb Straits by laying mines there and positioning two destroyers to prevent any passage of ships carrying Israeli goods". Former Mossad director Shabtai Shavit, who headed Mossad's operations department before the war, spoke in a lecture in 2013 about the large amounts of information that Mossad provided before the war and noted in particular Ashraf Marwan's report about "blockading the Bab el-Mandeb Straits and mining the entrance to the Eilat Gulf—immediately with the commencement of hostilities".¹⁹

In reality, during the war, the Egyptians mined the Straits of Jubal, which led to the sinking of the Siris tanker and surprised Israeli naval intelligence.²⁰ In his testimony before the Agranat Commission, the then-commander of the IDF Intelligence Directorate, Maj. Gen. Eli Zeira, addressed the information about the blockade of the Bab el-Mandeb Straits as a possible scenario mentioned in a document circulated by military intelligence on April 16, 1973, ahead of a situation assessment at the Operations Directorate, which was eventually executed in the course of the war in October. IDF Chief of Staff David (Dado) Elazar indeed addressed the possibility of a blockade of the Bab el-Mandeb Straits when he presented the war plans to Prime Minister Golda Meir on May 9 and noted that the Israeli Air Force was capable of preventing such a blockade.²¹ Elhanan Oren wrote in his

¹⁹ Uri Bar-Joseph, *The Angel*, 206–208 [Hebrew]. The reference to Egypt's mining of the Bab el-Mandeb Straits is apparently an error, of unknown provenance. Shabtai Shavit, "When one is exposed to a critical mass of intelligence that Mossad provided the Intelligence Directorate before the outbreak of the war, does anyone still need research and assessment?", lecture before a senior forum of Mossad officers, June 10, 2013, cited in Effi Meltzer (ed.), *Intelligence in the Yom Kippur War—40 Years Later* (Ramat Hasharon: Israel Intelligence Heritage and Commemoration Center, 2013), 88–89 [Hebrew]. Quoted also in Shavit's book: Shabtai Shavit, *The Director of Mossad* (Rishon LeZion: Yediot Books, 2018), 267 [Hebrew].

²⁰ For more on the mining, see: Shlomo Guetta, "The Egyptian Sea Mining Surprise during the Yom Kippur War (October War 1973)", in Shaul Chorev and Udi Gonen (eds.), *Maritime Strategic Evaluation for Israel 2021/22* (Haifa: Maritime Policy & Strategy Research Center, University of Haifa, 2021), 228–242.

²¹ "[Testimony of the head of the IDF Intelligence Division, Maj. Gen. Eli Zeira, at the Agranat Commission](#)", sessions 17, 18, 19, December 12, 1973, IDF Archive, 91 [Hebrew]; Chief of Staff

book *The History of the Yom Kippur War*, based on research conducted under the IDF History Department:

According to an intelligence assessment from April 1973, around one third of the Egyptian Navy's vessels were usually undergoing maintenance, but in advance of a premeditated war, it was reasonable to expect that they would improve their seaworthiness and reach up to eight submarines and ten missile boats. Israel predicted attempts by the two navies [the Egyptian and the Syrian] to attack shipping lanes to Israel by blockading and striking ships, bombarding the coast, and trying to land Egyptian forces (the Egyptian fleet in the Mediterranean had ten landing crafts, with a total capacity of forty tanks).²²

In April and May, the Israeli military saw no concrete signs of war preparations, and as the Intelligence Directorate predicted, no war broke out.²³

The IDF Intelligence Directorate and the naval intelligence department: unequal partners

According to Gilboa, "the Israeli Navy's role in the IDF's overall operations was relatively small, and its status was low, but Aharon Yariv [the head of the Intelligence Directorate in 1964–1972—E.G.] knew to treat naval intelligence officers with respect and listen to them".²⁴ The commander of the Intelligence Directorate, Eli Zeira, claimed in his testimony before the Agranat Commission that he was responsible for research in the Navy and Air Force's intelligence departments.²⁵ In its annual intelligence assessment, the Intelligence Directorate presented an overall picture to the Chief of Staff, while naval and air force intelligence addressed the enemy in their respective maritime and aerial domains.²⁶ As for the process of forming this assessment, Brig. Gen. Aryeh Shalev, the head of the Intelligence Directorate's research department, argued that these assessments were drawn up in his department by pitting different opinions against each other and forming an assessment in conclusion. He claimed that the research department conducted open and democratic deliberations with the participation of senior and junior officers and a

David Elazar's remarks quoted by Israel Tal and Yair Tal, *Israel Tal: Chapters from the Yom Kippur War* (Rishon LeZion: Miskal and Hemed, 2019), 83–85 [Hebrew].

²² Elhanan Oren, *The History of the Yom Kippur War* (Tel Aviv: IDF History Department, 2013), 40 [Hebrew].

²³ Bar-Joseph, *The Watchman Fell Asleep*, 66–78.

²⁴ Gilboa, *Mr. Intelligence*, 239–241, 250 [Hebrew]; for more on the nature of the Intelligence Directorate's work see also: Ran, "Interview with Reuven Ashkenazi", 7–8 [Hebrew]

²⁵ "[Testimony of the head of the IDF Intelligence Division, Maj. Gen. Eli Zeira, at the Agranat Commission](#)", session 1, November 27, 1973, IDF Archive, 7 [Hebrew].

²⁶ Shalev, *Israel's Intelligence Assessment*, 209.

consensus was gradually formed. According to Shalev, no stenographic records were taken in the research department's assessment meetings. Aerial and naval intelligence officers participated in the research department's deliberations, and Shalev claimed that this created a degree of pluralism. Shalev noted the tight and important integration with the intelligence departments of the Navy and the Air Force. In his account, this became easier with naval intelligence after it relocated from Haifa to Tel Aviv in 1972. Naval intelligence wrote, or contributed to the writing of, Intelligence Directorate assessments about the maritime domain. Uri Meretz, who headed the naval intelligence research, also noted these positive relations and cooperation between naval intelligence and the IDF Intelligence Directorate.²⁷

Indications before the outbreak of the war: September–October 1973

An Israeli naval intelligence report published after the Yom Kippur War concluded that "from the latter half of September, the Egyptian Navy was making preparations to launch a war. These preparations had 'cover stories,' such as: 1) preparations for a multipronged tactical drill to be held by all branches of the Egyptian military between October 1–7; 2) certain preparations were linked to voyages by naval units from the Red Sea to Pakistan". The Israeli Navy detected the following preparations: changes in the state of readiness of military vessels; the arrival of special units to the Red Sea on October 2; naval preparations at foreign ports; work to get ships ready; a call-up of reserves starting on September 24; the mobilization of fishing boats for use by the navy; starting on September 25, an increase in the alert level for Egyptian naval units; on October 1, the declaration of the highest state of alert; and preparations for submarine voyages for renovation work in Pakistan.²⁸ According to this report: "Very little is known to us about the activities of the Syrian Navy and its preparations in the lead-up to the war, or about its deployment at the outbreak of hostilities".²⁹

²⁷ Shalev, *Israel's Intelligence Assessment* 9–11, 209–210, 33–34, 255, 292–297 [Hebrew]; for more on how the assessment was formed, see "[Testimony of the head of the research department, Brig. Gen. Aryeh Shalev, at the Agranat Commission](#)", session 22, December 16, 1973, IDF Archive, 1–6 [Hebrew]; for more on the cooperation with naval intelligence: *ibid.*, 31, 53–55, 63 [Hebrew]; Shalev's testimony, session 114, December 16, 1973 [Hebrew]; interview with Meretz, *ibid.*

²⁸ Israeli Navy HQ, Intelligence Department, Research Branch, "[Activities of Arab and superpower navies in the Yom Kippur War](#)", 1–2, XL–6–857, January 1974 [Hebrew]; see also Navy Captain (res.) Shlomo Guetta, "Unusual activity (including comms), final preparations and signs in the Egyptian Navy ahead of the Yom Kippur War", summary for research purposes [unpublished], October 8, 2022 [Hebrew].

²⁹ "Activities of Arab and superpower navies in the Yom Kippur War", 4 [Hebrew].

According to Gil Shapira, the IDF Lieutenant Commander who headed the Arab Navies section at naval intelligence before the war, he identified many signs of impending war over the course of September, including the transportation of anti-divers nets, naval mines, and a torpedo on trucks from Alexandria to the Safaga Naval Base on the Red Sea. Shapira was unable to convince his direct commander of the threat of war, so he bypassed him and took these alerts straight to the head of naval intelligence, Captain Lunz, and also presented him with a report about an officer on leave who was urgently summoned to his ship for what was supposedly a prearranged voyage.³⁰

Lunz said that in a meeting on September 30 with the Navy's intelligence officers, information on the Egyptian Navy's activities was presented, and they reached the conclusion: "It's war". Lunz proceeded to a meeting of the Navy's top officers, chaired by the commander of the Israeli Navy, Maj. Gen. Benny Telem, where he presented the assessment about a looming war. Lunz's deputy, Meretz, went to another meeting at the same time with the head of the Intelligence Directorate, Maj. Gen. Zeira. Navy Commander Benny Telem confirmed that the head of naval intelligence, Lunz, had given him a summary of the assessment that the Egyptian Navy was beginning a massive exercise but added that the fleet could easily shift onto a war footing.³¹

An article by Unit 8200's heritage department about the unit's contribution to the intelligence picture on the eve of the Yom Kippur War states that the Egyptian Navy and Air Force changed their readiness levels, opened command centers, prepared ships and planes for use, appropriated fishing boats in the Red Sea, sent liaison officers to the military's shared command posts, and cleared Soviet vessels from the Port of Alexandria. According to the article, the two intelligence organizations—Israeli naval intelligence and a unit within the Southern Command's intelligence department, responsible for monitoring and investigating Egyptian military activities—produced a different intelligence picture from the Intelligence Directorate, based on information from Unit 8200. But the chief intelligence officer of the Southern Command, Lt. Col. David Gdalya, accepted the Intelligence Directorate's assessment that this was just an exercise and prevented the report listing the signs of imminent war prepared by his subordinate, Lt. Binyamin Siman Tov, from being forwarded on.³²

³⁰ Interview with Gil Shapira, Rosh Ha'Ayin, September 21, 2022.

³¹ Ran, "Fifth Interview with Rami Lunz" [Hebrew]; "[Testimony of Maj. Gen. Binyamin Telem, commander of the Navy, at the Agranat Commission](#)", session 17, December 26, 1973, IDF Archive, [Hebrew].

³² Unit 8200 Heritage Department, "Unit 8200 and its contribution to the intelligence picture on the eve of the 1973 Yom Kippur War", *Mabat Malam* 90 (November 2021), 25–27 [Hebrew]. For an account of the events in the Southern Command's intelligence department before the war,

It is worth noting that the Northern Command's intelligence, headed by intelligence officer Lt. Col. Hagai Mann, similarly detected signs that Syria was preparing for offensive action. These assessments were dismissed by the Intelligence Directorate but were sent to the head of the Northern Command, Yitzhak Hofi, and influenced his reinforcement efforts before the war.³³

In a 2013 lecture about intelligence during the Yom Kippur War, Brig. Gen. (res.) Ephraim Lapid, a lieutenant colonel in the reconnaissance department during the war, noted "special credit to the Israeli Navy's intelligence, the only body in the intelligence community and the IDF that was ready for war and did not accept the Intelligence Directorate's assessment".³⁴

The naval intelligence officers in Unit 848's maritime network intelligence section detected some rare and unusual communications in the Egyptian Navy's systems, from the end of September till October 5. On October 4, section head Uzi Blutreich put out a message pointing out these unusual communication activities to the Navy's intelligence and the IDF Intelligence Directorate. This message came on top of the clues spotted in the maritime domain but did not lead the Intelligence Directorate to revise its assessment that these signs pointed to a military exercise, not a war.³⁵

According to Meretz:

Representatives of naval intelligence who regularly participated in the Intelligence Directorate's various forums presented in their remarks an up-to-date picture of the navy's activities. But the implication of all this information (i.e., war—E.G.) was rejected by the head of the Egypt desk in research (i.e., the research division) and by the heads of the Intelligence Directorate's Research Department, with the explanation that "you don't know the full picture" and also that "we have better information, which contradicts that conclusion".³⁶

see Zvi Neta, *Signs* (Rishon LeZion: Yediot and Hemed, 2022) [Hebrew]. Col. Yoel Ben Porat, the commander of Unit 848 (8200) during the war, also addressed the three reports in the maritime domain in his testimony before the Agranat Commission. Some of his remarks are censored. "Testimony of Yoel Ben Porat at the Agranat Commission", session 29, December 20, 1973, IDF Archive, 44–50 [Hebrew].

³³ Col. (res.) Hagai Mann, "[Northern Command intelligence in the period before the Yom Kippur War](#)", website of the Golda Meir Center for Leadership and Society [Hebrew].

³⁴ Ephraim Lapid, "The Intelligence Directorate failed in its primary mission, including reconnaissance", lecture at the Intelligence Corps conference on the Yom Kippur War, in Effi Meltzer (ed.), *Intelligence in the Yom Kippur War—40 Years Later*, 46–47 [Hebrew].

³⁵ Guetta, "Unusual activity", *ibid.*

³⁶ Meretz, "Naval intelligence in the Yom Kippur War", 50 [Hebrew]; Albert Sudai, head of the political desk at Branch 6, Egypt, in the IDF Intelligence Directorate, was concerned by the possibility of war, and from October 1, started examining the clues even though this was not his role. In his testimony

Brig. Gen. (res.) Aharon Levran, who served as the Intelligence Directorate commander's operations aide in 1973, confirmed Meretz's account in a conversation in 2022 and claimed that senior figures in naval intelligence were not privy to Marwan's information and worked by the book, following the clues that led to their conclusion about war.³⁷ According to Gilboa, himself a major in the Intelligence Directorate in 1973, "the Intelligence Directorate's officers looked down condescendingly at those in the Navy—those who'd failed in '67, who understood nothing outside their own 'bathtub,' who were incapable of seeing the overall picture".³⁸ In Meretz's account, the Intelligence Directorate's rejection of the naval intelligence assessments detailing the clues about war pushed the Navy's research officers to double-check themselves and take an even closer look. They concluded that the "Tahrir 41" drill was a deception. According to Meretz, Israeli naval intelligence did not address in its assessments the Intelligence Division's conception that Egypt would not launch a war until it possessed long-range weapons (planes and surface-to-surface missiles); instead, it focused on warning about war in the maritime domain.³⁹

Documents prepared by naval intelligence before the war

In a special naval intelligence dossier distributed on October 1, 1973, to Israeli Navy command with the heading: "High Alert and Maneuvers in Egypt", it was written that Egypt had launched an exercise involving all branches of its military that day, noting:

This is the first time since the War of Attrition that the Egyptian Navy has conducted a comprehensive maneuver in both theaters simultaneously. This maneuver is part of a large-scale, multi-pronged exercise. In the course of the exercise, readiness levels have been raised to the maximum and several units have taken operational readiness steps, apparently fearing Israeli activity, and we may expect heightened sensitivity in Navy units".

Paragraph 7 noted:

before the Agranat Commission, he noted the clues he spotted in the maritime domain in addition to other signs on land. "[Testimony of Albert Sudai, head of the political desk at the Egyptian branch, at the Agranat Commission](#)", session 30, December 20, 1973, IDF Archive, 7 [Hebrew].

³⁷ Phone call between Col. (res.) Shlomo Guetta and Brig. Gen. (res.) Aharon Levran, September 2022, the content of which was communicated to me.

³⁸ Gilboa, "Naval intelligence warned", 50 [Hebrew].

³⁹ For more on the conception about Egypt that the IDF Intelligence Directorate adhered to, see: Eli Zeira, *Myth vs. Reality in the Yom Kippur War—Failures and Lessons* (Yediot Books, 2004), 109–117; Joseph, *The Watchman Fell Asleep*, 84–87; for more on naval intelligence, see Meretz, "Naval intelligence in the Yom Kippur War", 48 [Hebrew].

"there are no signs that behind this multi-branch Egyptian activity lie hidden operational intentions, and in our assessment, it is only an exercise. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the changes in deployment, heightened readiness, activation of the logistics systems, and reserves have brought the Navy to a position that allows for a rapid transition to operational activity.⁴⁰

A document titled "Weekly Summary—Arab Navies for the week between September 25 and October 3" circulated in the Israeli Navy on October 3 provided detailed information about the activities of the Egyptian Navy and observed: "The activities undertaken thus far in the exercise are intended to shift the Navy's infrastructure (organization of manpower, preparation of vessels, arrangement of defenses for bases, preparation of cooperation mechanisms with other branches of the military) to a condition that makes it possible to launch an offensive. This situation has clear implications for the possibility of a rapid transition to genuine operational activities".⁴¹ This wording was the closest to a warning about war to have appeared in Israeli Naval intelligence documents.

In Meretz's account, Israeli naval intelligence's research officers wrote unequivocal dossiers that included the word "war", but Lunz instructed that this word not appear at all—and it was removed. Lunz explained in his testimony before the Agranat Commission that since the Intelligence Directorate had assessed that war would not break out, he tried "to introduce the sense to the units" without using the word "war" explicitly.⁴²

The signs detected in the Egyptian Navy were attributed by the Intelligence Directorate to an Egyptian war exercise, and an intelligence dossier from October 5 claimed that "the detection of activity by Israeli naval and aerial forces on October 4 (as part of a naval exercise) caused increased concerns in the Egyptian Navy. In response, security measures were heightened". This explanation—an exercise, and later Egyptian concerns about Israel—negated the alarming message of the report's clues about Egyptian naval activity which were included in the report.⁴³

Under the headline "Signs That Did Not Match the 'Exercise' Explanation", the Agranat Commission report stated:

⁴⁰ Lt. Col. Moshe Barnea, Head of research branch, Special Intelligence Dossier on the High Alert and Maneuvers in Egypt, October 1, 1973, IDF Archive, file 272–383/1975 [Hebrew].

⁴¹ Weekly Summary—Arab Navies, 40/73, for the week between September 25 and October 3, 1973, IDF Archive, file 272–383/1975 [Hebrew].

⁴² Meretz, "Naval intelligence in the Yom Kippur War" [Hebrew]; Interview with Meretz, *ibid*; Gilboa, "Naval intelligence warns", *ibid*. [Hebrew]; Lunz's testimony, 44, 75–76 [Hebrew].

⁴³ Bar-Joseph, *The Watchman Fell Asleep*, 167–168.

The Navy HQ was concerned about the irregular activity of the Egyptian Navy. A report from September 28 spoke of a voyage by two frigates from Safaga in the Red Sea to Port Sudan, as their crews were urgently summoned to return to their ships (testimony of Col. Lunz, head of the naval intelligence department). This report had such an impact on Captain Lunz who told the commander of the Navy that he felt it showed that the Egyptian Navy could pivot to war. But he did not propose to issue an alert to civilian shipping. Consequently, on October 3, the readiness level was heightened in the Israeli Navy. The Egyptians also made preparations to mobilize twenty fishing boats. Two Egyptian destroyers docked at Port Aden were placed on alert to sail out to sea within six hours. The Intelligence Directorate noted in a dossier from October 1 that "this is the first time since the ceasefire that the Egyptian fleet has conducted a large-scale exercise on two simultaneous fronts". But, it continued and reasoned, "it appears that this exercise is part of the multi-branch drill and it is possible that in this context, there will be a drill shifting the fleet into emergency mode—including readiness to launch vessels to sea". On October 4, the commander of the Navy was once again put at ease by the Intelligence Directorate's reassuring assessments, and he put the Navy back on regular alert (testimony of Maj. Gen. Telem).⁴⁴

The evacuation of the families of Soviet advisors and the departure of the Soviet fleet from Egyptian ports: the Soviet Union received the first report from Sadat about the imminent start of a war only on October 4, and it was surprised. The Soviet advisors in Egypt and Syria had been helping to prepare their militaries for war, but they had not been told about the date or the plans. Assad, it seems, gave the Soviets a more detailed report about his war plans. In response to this information, the Soviet Union decided on October 4 to evacuate its advisors' families from Egypt and Syria. The evacuation was carried out on October 5, mostly by air but also by sea. Likewise, the order was given for the Soviet fleet to depart from Egypt's ports. Unit 848, which intercepted communications, picked up on information about this hasty evacuation of the Soviet advisors' families and reported it to the Intelligence Directorate's research department. Officers from Branch 3, the Intelligence Directorate's branch that focused on superpowers, had claimed in April 1973 that the Soviet Union had no interest in an Arab military initiative and that the Soviets could take several steps to deter one, including the removal of their naval units from the ports of Alexandria and Port Said. But when information arrived in October about the departure of these Soviet vessels, the Intelligence Directorate was hesitant to flag it up as a sign of impending war and proposed alternative explanations, such as a possible rift between the Soviet Union and Egypt.

⁴⁴ Commission of Inquiry—Yom Kippur War, Additional Partial Judgment: Reasoning and Additions to the Partial Report from 9 Nissan 5734 (April 1, 1974), Vol. I, Jerusalem, 5734/1974 [henceforth: Agranat Commission Report], 120–121 [Hebrew].

The head of the Intelligence Directorate, Eli Zeira, was asked by the Agranat Commission about the information about the Soviet fleet's departure from Egypt's ports and noted: "That was an exceptional but not unambiguous sign of war". He claimed that at the time, the assessment was that there might have been a dispute between the Russians and the Egyptians, or that the Russians were concerned a war might be brewing.⁴⁵ Lieutenant Rebecca Katz, who was responsible for monitoring foreign fleets at the naval intelligence department, emphasized this information about the Soviet fleet's departure in meetings and in a paper circulated on the morning of October 5; she said she knew that war was about to erupt.⁴⁶

On the night of October 5–6, Ashraf Marwan, in a meeting with Head of the Mossad Zvi Zamir, provided the conclusive report about Sadat's intention to launch a war on October 6. In the same meeting, he also supplied information about the transfer of civilian airplanes and several old and vulnerable Egyptian naval ships from Egypt's ports to Port Tobruk in Libya thirty-six hours before the start of the offensive, so that Israel would not target them. By the time of this report, several destroyers and other ships had already reached Tobruk. It was Marwan himself who coordinated this transfer with Libya's ruler, Muammar Ghaddafi. Israeli intelligence knew that these were steps toward war. Marwan also reported that there was no intention to land Egyptian forces by sea.⁴⁷

The Intelligence Research division discussions before the war

As noted, Shalev spoke of the open debate before the consolidation of the Intelligence Directorate's assessment and of the involvement of the Navy and Air Force's intelligence departments. In later years, Shalev wrote in his book about the process by which this assessment was put together:

⁴⁵ Pesach Malovany, *Red Flag above the Red Sea* (Israel: Effi Meltzer, 2017), 263–277, 453–454 [Hebrew]; Bar-Joseph, *The Watchman Fell Asleep*, 133–139, 144–147, 153–159, 168–172, 247–249; "Testimony of the head of the IDF Intelligence Division, Maj. Gen. Eli Zeira, at the Agranat Commission", sessions 17, 18, 19, December 13, 1973, IDF Archive, 72–73 [Hebrew]; Victor Israelyan, *Inside the Kremlin during the Yom Kippur War* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 1–19.

⁴⁶ Interview with Meretz, *ibid*; Gilboa, "Naval intelligence warns", 51 [Hebrew]; Navy HQ, naval intelligence branch in coordination with Branch 3 and Branch 6, [Immediate Naval Intelligence Dossier, 87/73](#): Departure of Most Soviet Naval Vessels from Egyptian Ports, October 5, 1973, IDF Archive, file 272–383/1975.

⁴⁷ Yossi Melman, "Our loyal traitor", *Haaretz* weekend supplement, January 17, 2020, 16–26 [Hebrew]; the wording of the report communicated by Zamir from Marwan appears in *Mabat Malam* 82 (October 2018), 53–57 [Hebrew].

According to restrictions put into place by the "Junction" (HaTzomet – the Mossad body responsible for handling agents) during the years before the Yom Kippur war, information from exceptionally sensitive sources was circulated to a select number of research officers. Such information was viewed by officials dealing with Egypt, including: the Research Department director and his deputies for assessment and operations; the directors of the Egypt section and its political desk; director of the superpowers section and his desk director; head of the basic research team; and the intelligence officer of the air force and his director of research.⁴⁸

Shalev did not mention naval intelligence as part of this limited group who were in on the secret, and they were indeed not part of the discussions. Shalev also wrote in his book: "Although this cannot be regarded as a direct cause of error in the intelligence assessment, it is desirable – despite important consideration of the security of senior sources – to increase the number of officials privy to this information by including additional section directors within the research department. This would facilitate the participation of many more research officers in assessment discussions based on these unique sources. These officers would be able to express their positions, to debate, and to voice different and contradictory opinions, and in this way establish pluralism within the research arena".⁴⁹ The senior status of the Intelligence Directorate researchers who were privy to the information from the top agent Ashraf Marwan, and perhaps also from other sensitive sources, explains their dismissiveness toward the attempts made by naval intelligence and the commander of the Israeli Navy to present their information and assessment that war was to be expected.

Other officers in the Intelligence Directorate noted that anyone who voiced a contrary assessment—that war was possible—was excluded and criticized.⁵⁰ The Agranat Commission report pointed to a culture of adaptability and one might add, self-censorship in the Intelligence Directorate: even researchers with their own independent assessments, Albert Sudai, head of the political desk in the Egypt branch in the Intelligence Directorate and Lt. Col. Yaari, the head of the Syria branch in the Intelligence Directorate, who were more concerned about the possibility of war, became more cautious after presenting

⁴⁸ Shalev, *Israel's Intelligence Assessment*, 212.

⁴⁹ Shalev, *Israel's Intelligence Assessment*, 212. According to Shalev's testimony, the Air Force's intelligence was hugely influential because of the importance of the balance of power between the Israeli Air Force and its Arab counterparts. Shalev, *Israel's Intelligence Assessment*, 3–4, 34–35.

⁵⁰ "[Testimony of Lt. Col. Aviezer Yaari \(head of the Syria branch at the IDF Intelligence Directorate\) at the Agranat Commission](#)", sessions 31, 35, 38, IDF Archive, December 27, 1973; testimony of Albert Sudai, *ibid*; lecture by Col. (res.) Zussia Kaniezer (head of the Jordan branch at the IDF Intelligence Directorate before the war) to an intelligence officer course: [Zusia Kanizher—The Warning of the Research Division in the Yom Kippur War](#) (video).

their assessment and having it thrown out by the research department, and they refrained from presenting an unequivocally contrary assessment.⁵¹ It is possible that a similar pattern also affected naval intelligence officers, who after having their assessment in AMAN's research department discussions about the Egyptian Navy's readiness for war rejected, took a step back.

In an interview with Aviram Barkai in December 2013, Intelligence Directorate chief Eli Zeira was asked about the assessment presented by the head of the naval intelligence department, Captain Lunz, about the Egyptian Navy's readiness for war. Zeira claimed that he could not remember a conversation in which Lunz told him that he disagreed with the Intelligence Directorate's assessment or any warning about war from the naval intelligence department. Lunz stated in his testimony before the Agranat Commission that he had exchanged a few words with the head of the Intelligence Directorate in the corridor.⁵² Shalev claimed in his own testimony before the Agranat Commission that he could not remember any of the participants in the assessment meetings saying that war was coming. He recalled only Sudai, who wanted to speak with him.⁵³ Lt. Col. Yona Bandmann, who headed Branch 6, the Egyptian branch in the Intelligence Directorate, was asked at the Agranat Commission about the report about the destroyers, and he was challenged with information that the navy's chief intelligence officer had told him that this was unusual. Bandmann claimed that Lunz had not pointed this out in their research forum.⁵⁴ Lunz noted that he had raised the unusual information about the sudden summoning of naval crews for a "planned" voyage through his deputy, Lt. Col. Meretz, who attended the Intelligence Directorate's discussions, and that it had not been accepted by the Intelligence Directorate.⁵⁵ Gilboa wrote: "How is it possible to explain that on that very Thursday, Lunz himself says in a meeting chaired by Brig. Gen. Aryeh Shalev, the head of research at the Intelligence Directorate, that the list of signs pointing

⁵¹ Agranat Commission Report, 158–160.

⁵² Aviram Barkai, *The Wings of Error* (Ramat Hasharon: Intelligence Heritage Center, 2014), 19–21 [Hebrew]; Lunz's testimony, 34–35, 75.

⁵³ Shalev's testimony at the Agranat Commission, December 16, 1973, session 22, p.5. In his book, Shalev addressed the claim that the intelligence services had not considered the diverse opinions of investigators, noting First Lieutenant Siman-Tov from Southern Command; Albert Sudai, the head of the political desk at the Egypt branch; Lt. Col. Yossi Zeira from Unit 848; and Yoel Ben Porat, the commander of Unit 848. As for the last two, Shalev claimed that they did not present an assessment that war was coming. Shalev, *Israel's Intelligence Assessment*, 190–193. Shalev did not mention naval intelligence or Lunz as presenting an assessment that war was coming.

⁵⁴ "Testimony of Yona Bandmann at the Agranat Commission", January 6, 1974, 65,70–72.

⁵⁵ Lunz's testimony, 20–26, 81.

to war in the Egyptian Navy is complete [i.e., have been identified] and these remarks find no written expression in the naval section in the Intelligence Directorate's daily dossier?"⁵⁶

Analysis

In this section, we will analyze the factors that made the naval intelligence department, of all intelligence agencies, be the one to assess that war was about to break out, and how this assessment was received by the IDF Intelligence Directorate and the Israeli Navy.⁵⁷

The deception that was exposed

The Egyptian chief of military operations, Gen. Gamasy, noted in his memoirs several deception operations taken by the Egyptians to mislead Israeli intelligence. Concerning the maritime domain, he wrote that Egypt coordinated in advance the departure of two destroyers for repairs in a friendly Asian country (i.e., Pakistan), and that on their way they would visit the naval bases at Port Sudan (in Sudan) and the Port of Aden (in Yemen). This voyage, with these stopovers, was planned so that on the morning of October 6, the destroyers would find themselves in the Bab el-Mandeb Straits and in a position to fulfill their mission of blockading the Straits upon the eruption of war. The commanders of the destroyers were given sealed envelopes, and during their voyage, they opened them and discovered that their task was in fact to obstruct Israel's naval lines of communication lanes in the Bab el-Mandeb Straits.⁵⁸

A golden clue? According to Lunz, all the signs in the maritime domain bar one could have been interpreted as consistent with an Egyptian exercise. The one exceptional clue was that after the report about the planned departure of two submarines escorted by a frigate from Safaga for repairs in Pakistan, another report arrived that the frigate's crew members had been urgently summoned at night for the voyage. That raised suspicions in the Israeli naval intelligence department, because if the voyage had been planned in advance, then why had its crew members needed to be summoned at short notice? In his testimony before the Agranat commission and in a later interview, Lunz emphasized this report as the main piece of information that exposed the deception scheme that the Egyptians had built, as if they were merely planning an exercise, and led him to tell the commander of the Israeli Navy that war was coming. Meretz, Lunz's deputy, claimed that

⁵⁶ Gilboa, "Naval intelligence warns", 50–51 [Hebrew].

⁵⁷ Bar-Joseph, who analyzed the failure of the IDF Intelligence Directorate, pointed to a series of organizational factors and highlighted the impact of personality-based, psychological factors among some of the top brass. See Bar Joseph, *The Watchman Fell Asleep*, 235–251.

⁵⁸ Mohamed Abdel Ghani El-Gamasy, *The October War: Memoirs of Field Marshal El-Gamasy of Egypt* (Cairo: American University in Cairo, 1993), 136, 139, 195, 215–216, 222.

there were many telltale signs of war and that he did not attach any special significance to this particular piece of information.⁵⁹

The early warning potential of the maritime domain

Lunz said in an interview in 1995: "For some reason, in most of Israel's wars, the warning came from the sea. It seems that the preliminary orders that naval units must execute are easier to decipher, or take longer, and in this war, too, we came to the decision that war was about to break out before the rest of the system".⁶⁰ As noted earlier, as early as May 30, 1967, on the eve of the Six-Day War, Israel's naval intelligence had come to the conclusion that the Egyptian Navy was ready for war. Since naval vessels, ships, and submarines demand high levels of maintenance and are often being repaired or maintained, they need to be specially put into use in order to become operational. Likewise, there are lengthy preparations that must take place for a ship to sail out to sea and reach its theater of operations before a war. Sadat wrote in his book that "the countdown had started earlier—ten days before Zero Hour. At that point our naval units had sailed out to take their combat positions. Each naval unit was given sealed envelopes containing operation instructions which were not to be opened until a certain code word had been received".⁶¹ The Egyptian chief of staff, Saad el-Din Shazly, wrote in his book about October 1:

But our final step that day was the irrevocable one. Our submarines sailed to their appointed battle stations. The captains did not know their mission: their sealed orders were not to be opened until a few hours before H-Hour. But there was no fail-safe procedure. From the moment they sailed, the boats were forbidden to use their radio. There was no way whatever of recalling them or cancelling their mission. With their sailings, though the crews did not know it, the war had effectively begun.⁶²

There is a certain discrepancy in the timelines, but in both reports, it was the Navy that went to war first. Israeli naval intelligence identified the preparations for the voyages at the end of September, the destroyers on October 1 and the submarines and accompanying frigate on October 2.⁶³ Given the particular characteristics of a navy's preparations for war, monitoring the maritime domain may provide an early warning about impending war (Fig. 4).

⁵⁹ Lunz's testimony at the Agranat Commission, 74–79; Ran, "Interview with Lunz", 22 June 1995, 2 [Hebrew]; interview with Meretz, *ibid.*

⁶⁰ Ran, "Interview with Lunz", 22 June 1995, 1 [Hebrew].

⁶¹ Anwar Sadat, *In Search of Identity: An Autobiography* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 246.

⁶² General Saad El-Shazly, *The Crossing of Suez* (London: Third World Centre for Research and Publishing, 1980), 142.

⁶³ Navy HQ, "Activities of Arab and superpower navies in the Yom Kippur War", 1–2 [Hebrew]; Guetta, "Unusual activity", *ibid.* [Hebrew].



Fig. 4: A Romeo-class submarine, of the sort sold by the Soviets to Egypt and used in the Yom Kippur War to block shipping in the Red Sea (source: Naval Intelligence Directorate, Wikipedia)

The organizational aspect

The Israeli Navy's chief intelligence officer is professionally subordinate to the chief of the Intelligence Directorate, but in the chain of command, he answers to the commander of the Navy. Lunz testified that once the chief of the Intelligence Directorate, Eli Zeira, determined that AMAN's assessment was that there would be no war, he felt that he could not contradict him in writing and therefore scrubbed the word "war" out of the naval intelligence department's documents. It appears that Lunz did not take determined action to convince the top brass of the Intelligence Directorate that his own assessment was correct. He focused on transmitting information and assessments to the commander of the Navy, with the aim of convincing him that war was coming. The commander of the Israeli Navy, Maj. Gen. Benny Telem, noted that he met the head of the Intelligence Directorate by chance and spoke with him about Lunz's assessment, but the intelligence chief rejected it, and Telem accepted his view. Later, after more information piled up, the Navy commander accepted Lunz's assessment and prepared for war, as of the morning of October 5.⁶⁴

The Agranat Commission's report claimed that "it was hard for intelligence officers outside the research department to argue with it and with the head of the Intelligence Directorate about the validity of its assessments", because the Intelligence Directorate

⁶⁴ Telem's testimony at the Agranat Commission, *ibid*; Telem, "Missile Boat Battles in the Yom Kippur War" in Benny Michaelson (ed.), *The Yom Kippur War: Seminar—Issues in Israeli Security 1998* (Reut: Effi Meltzer, 2013), 520–521 [Hebrew]. Interview with Brig. Gen. (res.) Gavi Naveh, bureau chief of the commander of the Israeli Navy during the war, Kfar Saba, July 28, 2022.

was the only center for military intelligence assessments in the country and alone decided what intelligence material would be circulated and who would receive it (besides certain sources belonging to Mossad). According to the Commission: "Thus the opinion of the Intelligence Directorate and its research department took over all branches of the intelligence services. For example, we have already noted that the head of the naval intelligence department, Captain Lunz, was concerned about the irregular movements of the Egyptian Navy in the Red Sea, but nothing came of it, because his concerns failed to penetrate the Intelligence Directorate's research system".⁶⁵

The Israeli Navy and Air Force's intelligence departments are frequently mentioned in the same breath as two intelligence bodies with relative autonomy from the Intelligence Directorate. But the difference between them on the eve of the Yom Kippur War was that the naval intelligence department, which was not fully privy to information from sensitive sources and closed forums, compiled an independent—and correct—assessment about the outbreak of a war, whereas the Air Force's intelligence, which was fully privy to all the information and meetings, supported the Intelligence Directorate's mistaken assessment.

Bar-Joseph, whose research emphasizes the personal, psychological dimension, distinguished between theory-guided officers, such as Zeira and Bandmann, and data-guided officers, such as Lunz, Unit 848 operations officer Shabtai Brill, and Syria branch head Yaari, who reached different professional conclusions, but whose professional status did not allow them any substantial influence over the dominant intelligence position.⁶⁶ As we have seen, the Israeli naval intelligence department, as an organization, reached its own assessment about war. Lunz, as the head of this organization, presented this assessment to the Intelligence Directorate and commander of the Israeli Navy, but he exercised self-restraint and tried to maneuver his way through the writing of his assessments because he was professionally subordinate to the head of the IDF's Intelligence Directorate.

Discrepancies between spoken and written accounts

Gilboa noted an inconceivable discrepancy between what the Israeli Navy's intelligence officers were saying in person and what they put into writing.⁶⁷ As we have seen, Lunz prevented his subordinates from explicitly referring to war in documents while trying to send the message that war was coming without using the word itself.⁶⁸ Sudai claimed in his testimony before the Agranat commission that "freedom of opinion in discussions—that

⁶⁵ Agranat Commission Report, pp.160–161 [Hebrew].

⁶⁶ Bar-Joseph, *The Watchman Fell Asleep*, 99–101, 248–251.

⁶⁷ Gilboa, "Naval intelligence warns", *ibid.* [Hebrew].

⁶⁸ Lunz's testimony, 44 [Hebrew].

exists. But in writing, there's the consensus. You can't write something that isn't accepted".⁶⁹ This approach, of writing the "research view", reflecting the position of the system and striving for consensus, explains how and why contradictory information and assessments, such as that of the naval intelligence department, were softened or did not receive expression in official intelligence documents. This discrepancy made it possible for the Intelligence Directorate's heads to claim after the war that they could not recall any intelligence officers presenting contrary assessments, making it difficult to examine the claims of naval intelligence officers and others that they did so or raised questions in meetings.

The maritime domain as a secondary domain

Despite the fact that in both the 1956 Suez War and the 1967 Six-Day War, the primary *casus belli* came in the maritime domain, with the closure of the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping,⁷⁰ the IDF nevertheless considered this domain of secondary importance and did not perceive the naval intelligence department—nor did this department seem to perceive itself—as a provider of strategic intelligence.

Likewise in 1973, the maritime domain was not expected to play a central role in any future war, and the IDF Intelligence Directorate was preoccupied mainly with the threat from Egypt and Syria's air and ground forces. There nevertheless remained a possibility for action in the maritime domain with the outbreak of the war, including offensive activities. According to Mohamed Fawzi, the Egyptian minister of defense, Admiral Mahmoud Fahmy, the commander of the Egyptian Navy until 1972, had plans to deploy naval commando forces against the ports of Haifa and Ashdod, which were scrapped by Sadat. Likewise, there was a plan for an amphibious landing on the Rumani Coast, which the Egyptian military trained for but which was also canceled. The Israeli Navy was aware that Egypt had plans for amphibious landings, but not that it had canceled them, and it deployed forces in anticipation.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Sudai's testimony, 7. See also remarks of Maj. Moshe Shemesh in Shalev, *Israel's Intelligence Assessment*, 247.

⁷⁰ There were of course other factors in both wars. On the issue of the Straits of Tiran, see Shalev, *Israel's Intelligence Assessment*, 15–18; Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War* (New York: Presidio Press, 2003), 11, 82–126.

⁷¹ Chapters of the book by Mohamed Fawzi, a former Egyptian minister of war, about the October 1973 war were published in the *Alshara'ah* newspaper in Lebanon, 080888–241088, special publication, Hatzav, 23.04.89/843/013, The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, Tel Aviv University; Pesach Malovany, *Mabat Malam* 82 (October 2018), 41 [Hebrew]. For more on the Rumani Coast landing, see Col. (res.) Shlomo Guetta, [The Egyptian Amphibious Landing that Never Happened in the October 1973 War, the Ramadan War](#), The Yom Kippur War Center, September 2022 [Hebrew].

As we have seen, the Mossad's agent, Ashraf Marwan, provided information in April 1973 about Egypt's intention to blockade the Bab el-Mandeb Straits as part of its war plans. The blockade of the straits played an important role in the Egyptian war plan, with the aim of refuting Israel's claim that its control of Sharm el-Sheikh guaranteed freedom of navigation.⁷² Former IDF Chief of Staff Yigael Yadin, who sat on the Agranat Commission, noted the early warning potential of information in the maritime domain. He pointed to information from May indicating that two destroyers would blockade the Bab el-Mandeb Straits, and he inquired whether the mention of these destroyers in October should have attracted the attention of the army's research officers.⁷³ Similarly, in the two days preceding the war, Israel received information about the departure of two Soviet vessels from Egyptian and Syrian ports, on top of the information about the aerial evacuation of the Soviet advisors' families. Nevertheless, it seems that the Intelligence Directorate attached little importance to these signs of war in the maritime domain.

The Egyptian Navy did not go to war alone

Instead of the early warning information, clues, and the Israeli Navy's assessment of the Egyptian fleet's readiness for war providing grounds for reexamining the Intelligence Directorate's assessment that this was only an exercise, the prevailing consensus ("The Conception", in Israeli parlance) was that Egypt's own assessment was that it was not ready for war—and this conception served to negate the naval intelligence department's information and assessment about war.⁷⁴ A similar process unfolded when information about the Syrian Army's readiness for war was dismissed (as opposed to the Syrian Navy, about which there was no information), since in the prevailing conception, Egypt was not ready for war—and Syria would not go to war without Egypt.

The impact of the naval intelligence department's assessment on the Israeli Navy's readiness for war

The Israeli Navy, which failed in the Six-Day War, had embarked on a protracted process of force buildup, consolidating its combat doctrine, and preparing for the next war. Its units, and especially the Shayetet 13 marine commandos, but also the missile boats

⁷² Joseph, *The Watchman Fell Asleep*, 127–129 [Hebrew]; Shmuel Bar, *The Yom Kippur War Through Arab Eyes* (Tel Aviv: Ma'archot, 1986), 30–32, 70–71 [Hebrew].

⁷³ Yadin's questions during Bandmann's testimony; sections were censored and are missing. Bandmann's testimony, 70–72.

⁷⁴ Telem claimed in 1998, regarding his conversation with Zeira: "That's how I interpret what he said: Listen, the Navy's a small entity. Your signs, that's not something the IDF can accept". Telem, "Missile boat battles", 520–521 [Hebrew].

and landing craft, had taken part in many operations in the War of Attrition and in the Lebanese theater, amassing combat experience and confidence in their abilities.⁷⁵ This process placed the Israeli Navy, on the eve of the Yom Kippur War, at a heightened level of readiness, regardless of the immediate intelligence warning. Moreover, unlike the IDF's ground forces, the Israeli Navy does not rely on reservists for its combat forces but rather mostly on its standing force, with only limited call-ups of reserves for vital technical roles. Such a mobilization was conducted in a selective way on October 5, despite the absence of any authorization for it.⁷⁶ The naval intelligence early warning on September 30 contributed to boosting the navy command awareness of the possibility of the outbreak of war. The commander of the Navy, Maj. Gen. Telem, raised its readiness level on October 3 but lowered it again on October 4. Telem noted in his testimony before the Agranat Commission that he had accepted the head of the Intelligence Directorate's assessment and that the Navy did not operate in a vacuum, functioned in a particular framework (namely the IDF and the General Staff), and did its best to work accordingly. The Israeli missile boat exercise on the night of October 4, which had been planned in advance, also contributed to the Navy's readiness. Following fresh information from Lunz, on the morning of October 5, Navy commander Maj. Gen. Telem asked to cancel a planned visit to Haifa and convened a meeting where he gave instructions to prepare for war. According to Lt. Col. Yitzhak Davidi, the head of the Navy's operations branch during the war, in the two days before the war, the sense at the Navy's HQ was that a war would definitely break out. On Friday night (October 5), Davidi personally phoned every commander of a Navy unit or base and explained that his readiness cable was serious, and that this was a genuine alert for war.⁷⁷

Conclusion

On the eve of the Yom Kippur War, Israeli naval intelligence focused on monitoring the signs of impending war coming from the Egyptian Navy, and it came to the conclusion that the Egyptian Navy was ready for war and indeed would go to war. These signs and the naval intelligence department's assessment were rejected by the top brass of the IDF Intelligence Directorate, who claimed that they had additional information that Egypt did not intend to go to war. In light of this, Captain Lunz, the head of the Israeli Navy's intelligence department, refrained and prevented his subordinates from explicitly

⁷⁵ Chaim Nadal, *He Who Dares, Wins: Special and Integrated Aerial and Naval Operations of IDF Forces Between the Two Wars* (Ben Shemen: Modan, 2015), 198–234 [Hebrew].

⁷⁶ Interview with Gavi Naveh, *ibid.*

⁷⁷ Lunz's testimony, 24–34 [Hebrew]; Maj. Gen. (res.) Benny Telem, "Missile boat battles", 520–521 [Hebrew]; Gilboa, "Naval intelligence warns", 51 [Hebrew]; telephone interview with Yitzhak Davidi, August 29, 2022; interview with Gavi Naveh, *ibid.*

warning about war in the organization's intelligence dossiers, but he continued pushing the message that war was coming to the commander of the Israeli Navy. This, together with the unique features of the Israeli Navy, made an important contribution to the Navy's readiness for war.

One core lesson from the Yom Kippur War was the need for research pluralism, additional organizations capable of conducting research and providing the Intelligence Directorate with additional assessments, and also freedom for junior officers and researchers to voice their opinions. The Israeli naval intelligence department's experience helps to illuminate this point. Meretz noted in his article from 2013 that the Israeli Navy's intelligence officers were professionals, which allowed them to form an independent assessment that deviated from the consensus, but they also had been trained to be disciplined and to accept their superiors' assessments. In his opinion, there was insufficient determination to present the naval intelligence department's contrary assessment. This, in his account, is the primary lesson from the case of Israeli naval intelligence during the Yom Kippur War.⁷⁸ The question is how a balance may be struck between the autonomy and independence of research bodies, such as naval intelligence, on the one hand, and the need to keep them involved in a way that expresses contrary opinions and allows them to influence the broader intelligence community, on the other. This study has also flagged up the fact that the departure of Egyptian submarines and ships was the first stage of the Yom Kippur War, which underscores the potential of the maritime domain to provide warnings about impending war, an issue that demands further research. It also demands an examination of the question whether this conclusion is relevant regarding the threats with which the State of Israel is presently confronting, such as Iran and its proxies.

⁷⁸ Meretz, "Naval intelligence in the Yom Kippur War", 51 [Hebrew].

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