

Agranat Commission of Inquiry Interim Report (April 1974)

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Chapter 1: Preface. 1. On November 18, 1973, the Cabinet adopted the following resolution: *Resolved*: A) That the following matters, namely: 1. The information, in the days preceding the Yom Kippur War, concerning the enemy's moves and his intentions to open war, as well as the assessments and the decisions of the duly authorized military and civilian bodies with regard to the aforementioned information; 2. The Israel Defence Forces' deployment for battle in general, its preparedness in the days preceding the Yom Kippur War and its actions up to the containment of the enemy B) That an Inquiry Commission shall be set up to investigate the aforementioned matters and report to the Cabinet. ...

Chapter 2: The Principal Conclusions of the Commission on the Subjects of Information, Its Evaluation and Readiness of the IDF. ... 10. The opening of the war by Egypt and Syria on Yom Kippur, October 6, 1973, at approximately 14.00 hours, took the Israel Defence Forces by surprise in that until the early morning hours of that day, the IDF's Supreme Command and the political leadership did not evaluate that total war was about to commence – and on the morning of that day, when it was already clear to them that the war would break out, the Supreme Command mistakenly assumed that it would break out only at 18.00 hours. Responsibility for these mistaken evaluations should be placed primarily on the Director of Military Intelligence and on his Principal Assistant in charge of the Intelligence Branch's Research Department, which is the only body in the country engaged in intelligence research. They failed by providing the IDF with totally insufficient warning: It was only about 4.30 a.m. on Yom Kippur that the

DMI on the strength of fresh intelligence that he had received, notified that the enemy would open war at 18.00 hours on both fronts. This brief warning did not allow for mobilization of the reserves in an orderly fashion, and involved the hasty mobilization of the land forces, contrary to the regular timetables and mobilization procedures. The additional error of four hours, between 18.00 and 14.00, further reduced the interval between the call-up of the reserves and the opening of fire by the enemy. This second error caused further, disruptions in the readiness of the regular forces at the fronts and their correct deployment, particularly on the Canal front. 11. There were three reasons for the failure of the authorities responsible for evaluation: Firstly, their obdurate adherence to what was known as “the conception,” according to which a) Egypt would not launch war against Israel before she had first ensured sufficient air power to attack Israel in depth, and in particular Israel’s principal airfields, so as to paralyse the Israel air force, and b) that Syria would only launch an all-out attack on Israel simultaneously with Egypt... This “conception” had, therefore, in practice become obsolete. Secondly, the Director of military Intelligence assured the IDF that he would be able to give advance warning of any enemy intention to launch all-out war in good time to allow for the orderly call up of the reserves. This undertaking was assumed as the firm foundation for the defence plans of the IDF. We find there were no grounds for giving the IDF such an absolute undertaking. Thirdly, in the days preceding the Yom Kippur War, the Intelligence Branch (Research) had received numerous warning

reports... The Research Divisions of the Intelligence and the Director of Military Intelligence did not correctly evaluate the warnings contained in these reports, owing to their doctrinaire adherence to the “conception” and the fact that they were prepared to explain the enemy deployment

along the front lines, which was without precedent in the size of the forces and in their orientation towards the fronts, on the assumption that all this testified only to a defensive deployment in Syria and the holding of a multi-arm “exercise” in Egypt, similar to exercises held there in the past.

For this reason the Director of Military Intelligence also displayed exaggerated caution in the circumstances by failing to take additional measures that were at his disposal and which might have revealed important complementary information. The enemy thus succeeded in misleading the IDF and taking them by surprise under the guise of an exercise supposedly taking place in Egypt. Only on the morning of Friday, October 5, did the confidence of the Intelligence Branch in the correctness of its evaluation begin to be shaken.... And yet the correct conclusion was still not drawn, and the summary of the evaluation of the Intelligence Branch continued to be: “Low probability” and even “Lower than low” probability of the enemy launching a war. Only early in the morning of Saturday, Yom Kippur, after further ambiguous reports were received, did the Director of Military Intelligence come to the conclusion that war would break out the same day. ...

13. The mistakes of the Intelligence Branch were not the only mistakes disrupting the IDF’s moves at the beginning of the war. In addition, there were errors in the working of the state of readiness during the days preceding the war. There was an unjustified delay in the mobilization of the reserves. It is our opinion that, on the basis of the data in his possession, the Chief of Staff should already have recommended partial mobilization of the land forces at the beginning of the week preceding the war, to maintain the right proportions between the enemy forces, which were at full alert and prepared for action against us, and our own forces. At the very latest, he should have recommended – in view of

reports received – extensive mobilization on the morning of Friday, October 5, even assuming that the enemy’s intentions were still not clear at that time.

Secondly, we have found that, in total reliance on the Intelligence Branch’s assurance that it could always give the IDF sufficient warning for orderly mobilization of the reserves, no defence plan properly worked out in detail was prepared for the eventuality that the regular forces would have to check, on their own, an all-out attack by the enemy on the Egyptian and Syrian fronts simultaneously – with the IDF being caught by surprise as they were.

Thirdly, even after receipt of the warning on Saturday morning, the regular armoured forces on the Canal front were not optimally deployed in time, under the circumstances created, in accordance with the plan that existed for the defensive deployment of the regular forces. Furthermore, no clear directive was given that morning to the GOC Southern Command and from him also to the lower echelons, as to how they were to prepare for the attack, and a lack of clarity prevailed in issuing operational orders and ensuring their implementation. ...

Chapter 3: Conclusions and Recommendations of the Commission on the Institutional Level.... 17. We have learned from the evidence before us that there is a lack of clear definition as to the division of authority, duties and responsibilities concerning security matters amongst the three authorities dealing with these matters: the Government and the Prime Minister; the Minister of Defence; and the Chief of Staff, who heads the IDF; and in the determination of the relationship between the political leadership and the IDF High Command. Particularly vital is such a clear definition of authority in cases wherein the initiative lies in the hands of the enemy. Furthermore, we have found no explicit authority in the law

for the practice whereby the Chief of Staff is appointed by the Government on the recommendation of the Minister of Defence. The unclarity in all these respects is evidently of historic origin – dating back to the time when the late David Ben-Gurion served both as Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, and his strong personality affected the lack of definition on this important subject. One thing, however, is clear from the constitutional aspect. It has never been decided that the Minister of Defence is a “Super Chief of Staff” who is required to guide the Chief of Staff in the latter’s area of responsibility on operational matters, or a kind of supreme commander of the IDF by virtue of his being Minister of Defence. The inadequate definition of powers prevailing in the present situation in the field of security, the vital importance of which is unsurpassed, hampers the effectiveness of the work, detracts from the focusing of legal responsibility, and causes uncertainty and frustration amongst the public. ... 22. *Intelligence Community – Intelligence Evaluation*. A) As noted above, the factual situation on the eve of the Yom Kippur War – and over a period of many years before then – was that only one body in the intelligence community, namely, the General Staff’s Intelligence Branch, engaged in intelligence evaluation, research and evaluation of reports. This intelligence evaluation was, thus, the only one submitted to the Chief of Staff, the Defence Minister, the Prime Minister and the Cabinet. This system of evaluation in the intelligence community had grave reflections on the evaluation of the intelligence information by the governmental authorities on the eve of the war. ...

Chapter 4: Conclusions About Office Holders. 23. *The Director of Military Intelligence, Major-General Eliyahu Ze’ira*, testified before us very frankly and showed himself to be an officer of outstanding intellectual ability, enjoying great authority over his subordinates and

highly regarded by his superiors in the IDF and the higher political echelons. He had served in his position for only a year before the outbreak of the war, and was confronted with patterns of thought which were determined in the Intelligence Branch's research before his appointment. But he adopted the "conception," which, through its rigidity, deadened the necessary openness and the willingness always to contend anew with the information which flowed into the Intelligence Branch, and he even played his part in strengthening it. He displayed a prominent tendency to take unqualified decisions as an officer stemming from great self-confidence and readiness to act as final arbiter in Intelligence matters in Israel. ...

Our opinion is that in the light of his serious failure Major-General Zeira can no longer continue to serve in his position as Director of Military Intelligence. 24. In the hands of *Brigadier-General Arye Shalev*, as assistance to the Director of Military Intelligence in charge of

research, was concentrated the subject of research and evaluation in the Intelligence Branch – that subject in which the Intelligence Branch failed so grievously. He had served in this capacity, previously under the title of Head of the Research Department, for a long time, since September- October 1967. He played an important part in moulding methods of research, analysis, evaluation and preparation of the information for distribution from this department in recent years.

According to his testimony before us his approach to the "conception" was flexible: he was prepared to assess its fundamental validity from time to time. But from the documents produced by his department and from statements made by him during various discussions, it is clear that his evaluations never deviated from the framework of the "conception." He bears heavy responsibility for the most grievous mistake of the department he headed and we therefore believe that he cannot continue

to serve in the Intelligence Branch. ... 28. *The Chief of Staff's Responsibility*: We have reached the conclusion that the Chief of Staff, Lt.-General David Elazar, bears personal responsibility for what happened on the eve of the war with regard to both evaluation of the situation and the question of the IDF's preparedness. We state this with particular regret as it involves a soldier who has served the State with devotion and distinction for many years and has splendid achievements to his credit during and before the Six Day War. ... In the light of what has been stated above we regard it as our duty to recommend the termination of Lt.-General David Elazar's appointment as Chief of Staff.

30. *Personal Responsibility at the Government Level*. In determining the responsibility of the Ministers for acts of commission or omission in which they played a personal part it is our duty to stress that we deemed ourselves free to draw conclusions on the basis of our findings only so far as direct responsibility is concerned. We did not consider it to be our task to express an opinion as to the implications of their parliamentary responsibility. ... 31. (1) With regard to the question of the Defence Minister's direct personal responsibility, we must point out that in this partial report we are considering only the subjects of the information and the state of readiness and the Defence Minister's part therein. ... (3) We have carefully considered these matters and reached the conclusion that, by the criterion of reasonable conduct required of the bearer of the post of Minister of Defence, the Minister was not obliged to order additional or different precautionary measures [to] those recommended to him by the General Staff of the IDF, according to the joint assessment and the advice of the Director of the Military Intelligence and the Chief of Staff.

32. With respect to the Prime Minister, what we have stated above (para. 30) as regards personal responsibility at Cabinet level likewise holds good. ... It is greatly to the Prime Minister's credit that, under the circumstances, during the emergency of Saturday morning, she made

proper use of the authority vested in her to make decisions. She decided wisely, with common sense the speedily in favour of the full mobilization of the reserves, despite weighty political considerations, thereby performing a most important service for the defence of the State.

Conclusion. 33. In concluding this partial report, the Commission considers itself bound to reiterate that, despite the fact that it has not yet concluded the hearing of testimony on ever matter relating to the conduct of the war up to conclusion of the containment stage, it is already in possession of much evidence clearly attesting that in the Yom Kippur War, the IDF was

confronted by one of the most difficult challenges which could possibly confront any army – and emerged victorious. Despite the difficult initial position from which the IDF started out in the war, and despite the errors committed at this stage – partly detailed above, and partly to be detailed in the reasoning on this report – not only did it succeed in mobilizing the reserves at unprecedented speed, with all their complex formations, but at the same time it also blocked the massive invasion of enemy armies which had planned and trained for this onslaught over many years and, in the opening stages, had enjoyed the benefit of surprise. The IDF's success was secured at the cost of heavy and irreplaceable casualties, and thanks to the supreme heroism of all ranks, the endless powers of improvisation of its commanders, and the stability and strength of its basis organizational structure. These facts reinforce the Commission in its opinion that not only does the IDF possess the capacity to absorb criticism and draw the painful conclusions implied, but that it will thereby increase and enhance its strength.