

Fifty Years in Retrospect

Shabtai Shavit, former director of the Mossad and head of its operations department in 1973

(During the war, Shavit served in "Sayeret Matkal" reserve unit)



Since the establishment of the State of Israel, only two wars posed an existential threat to the country. They were the War of Independence and the Yom Kippur War. The Six Day War in 1967 was an anomaly but not in the same category, mainly because it lasted less than a week.

Until 1979 existential threats to the State of Israel came from the first circle of states immediately surrounding Israel. Since Khomeini and the establishment of the Iranian Islamic Republic, the only existential threat has come from the second circle. Palestinian terrorism has not been an existential threat.

Shabtai Shavit, former head of the Mossad, [Wikipedia](#).

Israel's founding generation led the country in war until the Yom Kippur War, after which the reins passed to the next generation. The founders successfully eradicated the existential threat by combining war and peace, first, with Egypt, at the time "enemy number one," and then by crafting a peace agreement with Jordan. However, with the exception of the Abraham Accords, the leadership has been moving very slowly, struggling endlessly to stamp out terrorism, perpetuating the conflict with the Palestinians and keeping Iran's existential threat alive and well.

Were it necessary to summarize the intelligence contribution of the Mossad to the Yom Kippur War (insofar as space permits here), it would be the following: warning of an impending war, which began on Sadat's first day as president of Egypt at the end of September 1970. The Mossad's main EEI (essential element of information) was to monitor the two main variables of war: one, the enemy's **intentions**, and two, his **capabilities**. And with regard to both, the Mossad provided reliable intelligence between September 1970 and the outbreak of the war on October 6, 1973 and then throughout the war until October 25, 1973, when it ended. The intelligence was comprehensive in the following areas:

Removing the Israel-Arab conflict from its state of inertia with a limited war.

The Egyptian and Syrian determination to wage war.

Military action as part of a plan to acquire political support.

The détente (the thawing of relations between the United States and the Soviet Union) and its consequences for the conflict.

The goals of the war in Sadat's perception, and plans for further wars, on both fronts.

The strengthening of the Arab armies and closing the gaps in preparedness for war, both defensively and offensively.

The strategic aspects of preparations for war.

Alerts regarding when a war would break out:

Date One: The end of 1972, beginning of 1973. The date came and went, because the plans and preparations had not been completed and no preparations were reported on the ground.

Date Two: May-June 1973. That date also came and went because equipping the army and other preparations on the ground had not been completed. Moreover, the Soviet Union pressured Sadat to delay firing the opening shot until after the summit meeting in Washington in July 1973.

Date Three: September-October 1973. The timing was the direct continuation and eventuality of Date Two.

The Mossad also made important intelligence contributions during the war itself and in the negotiations for a ceasefire.

The Issue of "National Intelligence Evaluation"

In my opinion, the Yom Kippur War's most important intelligence lesson was the recommendation of the Agranat Commission to end the era of the lone "national intelligence evaluator," the IDF Directorate of Military Intelligence, and create pluralistic research and assessment. Following the commission's recommendations, the Mossad constructed research and evaluation capabilities to deal with IDF Directorate evaluations. At the same time, the Israeli Security Agency constructed research and evaluation capabilities in its areas of responsibility (the Palestinians, terrorism, espionage and subversion), and the foreign ministry was supposed to expand its research capabilities within its Center for Political Research.

The late **General Shlomo Gazit**, the head of the IDF Directorate after the Yom Kippur War, did everything in his power to preserve the Directorate's monopoly on national intelligence evaluation. Moshe Dayan.

Shabtai Shavit, former head of the Mossad who was appointed foreign minister in the Begin government in 1977, did not go out of his way to make the ministry genuinely influential in national intelligence evaluation. The issue of responsibility for it was raised after Rabin was elected prime minister in 1992.



Maj. Gen. Shlomo Gazit, former DMI (Malam Archive photo)



General Uri Sagi, as the head of the Directorate, and I, as the head of the Mossad, disagreed on the issue. The stalemate made me decide to bring the dispute to Rabin, who was both prime minister and defense minister. Sagi and I laid out our arguments, and Rabin decided that **regarding the issue of national intelligence evaluation, the head of the Directorate would be responsible only for the issue of providing warnings of war**. The military secretary recorded the summary, and copies were sent to the offices of the heads of the Directorate and the head of the Mossad.

Maj. Gen. Uri Sagi, former DMI, FaceBook.

To this day, not one person in the country, and certainly not one for whom the Yom Kippur War is part of their living memory, has overcome the trauma of the surprise attack. Among Directorate retirees there are those who are still trying to find evidence that the Mossad and not only the Directorate bore responsibility for the failure. The main thesis of my book, *Head of the Mossad* (published by Yedioth Ahronot, 2018), relates to the warning before the Yom Kippur War, and I wrote (page 255) that "the early warning was an ongoing issue, ever-present, that always had full analytical explanations. It had been gaining momentum for years, and peaked on the eve of the outbreak of the war."

Sadat came to power at the end of September 1970, less than two months after the cease-fire agreement that ended the War of Attrition. From the end of the year, he unequivocally stated that Egypt saw no chance of overcoming Israel's military or liberating the territories it had occupied through war. War, he said, was essential if it had the limited operative goal of ending the conflict, which had reached a stalemate. As the situation continued unchanged, he insisted on it even more firmly. History has shown he did in fact meet his public commitment to his stated position.